ETHNICITY ON THE LINE:

THE CASE OF MIXTECO WORKERS IN TIJUANA'S LABOUR MARKET

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the changing social identity of a Mexican indigenous immigrant community in Tijuana, Mexico, against the backdrop of rapid export-oriented industrialization along Mexico's northern border. The group of indigenous immigrants in question are the Mixtecos from southern Mexico, who began to settle in Tijuana in the early 1960s. Living for the most part in impoverished urban settlements or *colonias*, Tijuana's Mixteco community has been undergoing a process of change associated with the functional role Mexico's northern border is playing within the global economy. In recent years, this community has gained access to employment within Tijuana's maquiladora industry, the driving force behind the local labour markets. This study explores how Mixtecos' involvement in this labour market is having an impact on their ethnic identity. Based on qualitative research and fieldwork conducted in Tijuana, this dissertation finds that, while members of Tijuana's Mixteco community have been gradually drawn into to the maquiladora labour market, they have, in fact, been reconstructing their ethnic identity. Because of the demands of the industry and of Tijuana's socio-cultural milieu, Mixtecos who have gained access to maquiladora employment have been concealing their ethnicity, while adopting non-indigenous *mestizo* traits and assuming class rather than ethnic positions. Throughout this process, Mixteco factory workers have been retreating from their ethnic community to focus on individual and family affairs. These findings thus depart from the well-established scholarly literature dealing with Mixteco out-migration which argues that, in the displaced context outside the Mixteca heartland, Mixteco immigrants in northern Mexico and the U.S. have acquired an ethnic-based identity, forged on shared culture and on common negative experiences. Throughout this dissertation, ethnicity is viewed in line with the constructivist paradigm that conceives ethnicity as a dynamic form of social identity arising from particular structural circumstances and specific contexts. The examination has thus required attention on different levels of analysis, from a macro perspective dealing with the structural conditions explaining the expansion of capitalism in Mexico, the Mixteco out-migration, and the disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples in Mexican society, to a micro inspection of the everyday social interactions of Mixteco women and men in specific settings (i.e. the factories). This dissertation therefore expands the literature on the Mexican maquiladoras, which has given only slight attention to matters of ethnicity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first exploratory ideas leading to the design of this study concentrated on assessing whether social networks were playing any role in supporting the expansion of maquiladora industrialization in northern Mexico. The main focus was on social networks organized on the basis of kinship, ethnicity or regional affiliation in order to assess whether the maquiladora industry has relied on them to raise local capital or draw labour. With those general ideas in mind an exploratory visit to Tijuana, the large maquiladora centre adjacent to the U.S. border, exposed me to an urban environment fitting, at least at first sight, with what Louis Wirth's described in terms of 'urbanism as a way of life.'[1] Tijuana's large size, its rapid pace of life, along with its high population density, fragmented urban form, and social and cultural heterogeneity created an initial ambiance of sheer anonymity characterized by fleeting, impersonal interactions. With an apparent absence of personal acquaintanceships among its residents, Tijuana seemed to be the wrong place to look for social ties of any sort. Nevertheless, with the critique to Wirth's thesis in mind,[2] which instead of anomie stresses the vitality of primary group affiliations, and the significant role social ties play in organizing urban life, I decided to

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[1] Wirth contended that social interactions in the city are based on departmentalized, fragmented roles leading to impersonal, transitory, superficial relations among urban residents, thus encouraging disregard to kin and other forms of primary group affiliations. See Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1938).

[2] See Marvin B. Sussman *et al.*, "Kin Family Network: Unheralded Structure in Current Conceptualizations of Family Functioning," *Marriage and Family Living* 24, no. 3 (1962); Aida K. Tomeh, "Participation in a Metropolitan Community," *Sociological Quarterly* 8 (1967); Susan Emley Keefe, "Urbanization, Acculturation, and Extended Family Ties: Mexican Americans in Cities," *American Ethnologist* 6, no. 2 (1979).

focus on Tijuana's immigrant communities in search of collective affiliations. This decision led me to a group of Mixteco *indígenas*[3] from southern Mexico, who in Tijuana have become a vibrant and organized community. I first encountered members of this community as many other visitors of Tijuana do: in the streets of Tijuana selling trinkets to tourists near the downtown core. This encounter subsequently led me to the impoverished *colonias*[4] where they live, and to address a different set of questions as presented below. These questions refer to the process of social change the Mixteco community in Tijuana is experiencing as a result of maquiladora industrialization, which by transforming the local labour markets is also changing the way of life of immigrant Mixtecos. They were addressed using a qualitative research method based on interviews and observations. The outcome is this dissertation, which explores the changing social identity of a proletarizing population in the context of Mexico's maquiladora industrialization, and is set against the backdrop of rapid urbanization along the U.S.-Mexican border at the turn of the twentieth century.

I became more aware of the impact changes in the local labour markets are having on Tijuana's Mixteco community during a visit to one of the colonias where dozens of Mixteco families live in poverty. At the *Colonia Pedregal de Santa Julia*, a predominantly Mixteco shantytown, I observed a woman looking intently at a busy thoroughfare. She was standing at the edge of a hill overlooking Tijuana's sprawling west, minding two young children playing nearby. She was wearing a long skirt over polyester pants and a magenta sweater on top of a bright blouse. With her bright clothes,

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[3] In order to avoid using the pejorative terms Indian or *Indio*, in this study I opted to use the Spanish term *indígena* or the equivalent but less precise English term 'indigenous' interchangeably to refer to people identified by themselves or others as Amerindian.

[4] *Colonias*, Spanish for urban and suburban neighbourhoods.

long hair, and a grey shawl covering her shoulders, she conformed to what most *mestizo* locals believe is the stereotypical indigenous woman. She appeared detached, ostensibly marginalized from Tijuana's wider society, as she gazed at the incessant activity in the city beneath. I listened to her speak Mixteco with the two children playing nearby. When I greeted her in Spanish she looked puzzled and, apparently anxious, she walked away. One of the children explained me that her mother speaks only Mixteco. The other child joined the brief exchange and told me they were waiting for their father, a construction workers who was about to come home from work. The children joined the mother and all walked towards a cluster of shacks. It was afternoon, and across the road I saw a group of young women and men descend from company buses and rickety collective taxis. I had seen them before. They were maquiladora workers in their way home from the morning shift in the factories. As they got off the buses and taxis they rushed up the steep ramp that leads to the *Colonia Obrera Tercera Sección,* the oldest and largest Mixteco settlement in Tijuana. A few walked alone but others formed small groups, chatting on their way up the ramp. The women dressed smartly with tight jeans and make-up. The men wore baggy denim trousers and T-shirts. Among the group there were young Mixtecos but from afar it was difficult to differentiate between Mixtecos and the *mestizos* walking alongside. In contrast to the Mixteco women I was observing on the hillside, these young Mixteco women and men appeared to participate in Tijuana's economy. With their demeanour and appearance they appeared to be embracing the mainstream ways of Mexico's *mestizo* majority.

This moment in the lives of urban dwellers, captured during fieldwork in Tijuana in 2002, provokes a number of questions regarding the social and economic conditions of

indigenous immigrant communities in Mexico's urban centres. There are questions about the reasons propelling indigenous peoples from their home communities and about the types of opportunities they are seeking in northern Mexico, which this dissertation addresses using the extensive literature on the subject. The miserable conditions of immigrant *indígenas* in Mexican cities, which the woman and her children illustrate, have also invited numerous examinations of the structural circumstances preventing these people from fully participating the mainstream economy and society. This dissertation builds on these studies but focuses primarily on the seemingly contrasting experiences of women and men, such as those I observed coming back from a day at work in the local factories. If these maquiladora workers were indeed of indigenous descent, as I believed they were, their involvement in the local economy required explanation, in particular if contrasted with the exclusion from the formal economy and mainstream society other Mixtecos in Tijuana were experiencing. What structural circumstances explain these women and men's participation in the local economy? Is ethnicity a factor in explaining their involvement in the maquiladora industry? How are they dealing with their ethnicity within and outside the factories? From the distance, the maquiladora workers I observed walking towards their households did not display ostensible identifying markers of ethnicity. Perhaps they had ceased to be *indígenas* prior or during the process of taking up factory employment. If they were no longer *indígenas*, their experience at the factories would not be different from that of other young workers whose experience has been discussed extensively in the vast maquiladora literature.

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In any case, the presumption that they had become *mestizos*[5] (either objectively or subjectively) cannot be directly derived from anthropological and sociological work dealing with issues of migration and urbanization involving Mixteco immigrants in northern Mexico. What the literature on Mixteco immigrant communities in northern Mexico and the United States consistently reports is the emergence of a newfound sense of ethnic identity among Mixtecos and other indigenous immigrants. These groups of immigrants are taking up wage employment in agribusinesses and participating in formal and informal urban occupations in both countries. Nonetheless, the relevant literature reports that engaging in these activities has not prevented indigenous workers from reproducing cultural and social practices that are meaningful in reasserting their ethnic identity. Moreover, there are numerous studies indicating that common ethnicity has been a factor in the formation of organizations of indigenous agricultural workers and urban dwellers aimed at confronting exclusion and exploitation in both Mexico and the United States. Is the participation of Mixteco immigrants on the maquiladora labour markets about to change all this? Is maquiladora employment obliterating ethic identities and therefore eroding the immigrant Mixtecos' capacity to act collectively on the basis of common indigenous identity?

This dissertation builds on the observation that the labour market for Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana is changing, gradually drawing members of Tijuana's Mixteco community to take up jobs at the local maquiladoras. This obsevation, later confirmed

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[5] As Hugo N. Nutini notes, the term *mestizo* is a rather imprecise category yet complementary to the term *indigena*, with both being part of a single sociocultural continumm. There is, however, an entire range of meanings associated with the term *mestizo*: "a mixture of Indian and European; various degrees of admixture of Indian and European; phenotypic Indians who have culturally acquired mestizo status" among other denominations operating at the local, provincial, and national levels. See Hugo G. Nutini, *The Mexican Aristocracy: An Expressive Ethnography, 1910-2000* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), pp. 52-53.

through interviews with maquiladora managers and Tijuana's Mixtecos, forms the basis for this examination, which explores the terms of involvement of Mixteco *indígenas* in Tijuana's maquiladora driven labour market and the implications of this process on Mixteco identity. In this study I thus establish that Mixteco workers in Tijuana were first excluded from the maquiladora labour market for reasons that have to do with their condition as *indígenas*, but they were later included to meet increasing demand for labour. Having established that Mixteco involvement in Tijuana's labour market followed a pattern of exclusion-inclusion, I then focus on the terms of inclusion. Specifically, I assess the significance of ethnic-based networks in assisting Mixtecos to find maquiladora employment, and the implications that working at the factories have in reinforcing or obliterating a separate Mixteco identity. In this regard, I argue that Mixteco social ties are significant in assisting members of the community to find employment only when familiarity with the urban environment is limited, typically involving recent immigrants. Moreover, I hypothesise that ethnic-based relations within the factories are not salient because in the factories Mixteco deconstruct their ethnic identity in order to comply with the requirements of the maquiladora order, and to negotiate their position within Mexico's inter-ethnic hierarchy as reproduced inside the factories.

In this study, ethnicity is conceived in line with the 'constructivist' paradigm that views ethnicity as a form of social identity acquired in relation to one another, and arising in particular contexts.[6] In this conceptualization, ethnicity is constructed during a social process, with individuals and groups asserting their own ethnic identity in response to structural conditions and changing relational circumstances. In contrast to the view of

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[6] Frederik Barth is the name more often identified as the precursor of the constructivist view of ethnicity. See Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, 1969).

'ethnicity as primordial,' which focuses on ancient inherent traits and specific socio-cultural attributes for each ethnic group,[7] the constructivist perspective conceives ethnicity as situational and subject to change at both the individual and collective levels.[8]

The constructivist or instrumental paradigm helps understand the variability of ethnic attachments observed among immigrants in receiving societies, and is best suited to explain situations in which ethnic identity adjusts to changing circumstances.[9] This is the case with the Mixteco community in Tijuana, which is subjected to powerful assimilation forces while members adjust to change strategically, in the context of shifting structural circumstances and new relational experiences. By adopting this constructionist perspective I thus trace a process of change from a situation where ethnicity is significant in framing social relations to another where the class position becomes an important element in social interactions.

Organization of the study

This study incorporates issues of structure as well as agency in the analysis. The structural perspective is necessary to explain the position of the Mexican *indígenas* in society and their role in the economy. In Mexico there is coincidence between the position of the *indígenas* at the bottom of the socio-economic structure and their lowly status within the inter-ethnic stratification hierarchy that lingers since colonial times. Chapter 2 thus discusses the historical and structural circumstances explaining the

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[7] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[8] Richard Jenkins, "Ethnicity Etcetera: Social Anthropological Point of View," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 4 (1996).

[9] See for example William L. Yancey *et al.*, "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation," *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 3 (1976).

economic and social disfranchisement of the *indigenas*. It focuses on the historical role of the state in incorporating Mexico's indigenous population to the capitalist system and to a nation where being *mestizo* is the norm. In particular, Chapter 2 highlights the historical significance of ethnic relations *(mestizos-indigenas)* in Mexico, and the coexistence of an expanding class system with an enduring inter-ethnic stratification hierarchy. The incorporation of the indigenous peoples to the capitalist system is framed within specific state policies that created the conditions for the reallocation of indigenous populations to urban areas and agricultural regions under capitalist development. The historical background in this chapter is thus accompanied with a discussion of theoretical approaches addressing the structural determinants of Mexican internal migration and urbanization and introduces the changing paradigms dealing with these processes.

Chapter 3 introduces the Mixteco peoples, the Mixteca heartland in southern Mexico, and the geography of Mixteco out-migration. It also addresses the structural conditions and social determinants driving thousands of Mixteco women and men to distant locations, specifically northern Mexico. There has been considerable scholarly attention to this process and numerous studies that this chapter discusses. What is particularly relevant about this body of literature is that the cultural and social dimension of Mixteco migration to northern Mexico is emphsized, in particular, the role of ethnicity and agency in mediating the migratory process. One of the key conclusions of this body of literature is that in northern locations ethnicity emerged as a significant self-identity from opposition and conflict. The argument is that in northern Mexico and the United States exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion by the non-indigenous reinforced ethnic consciousness among Mixteco immigrants.

Chapter 4 focuses on Tijuana itself and has three objectives; first, to provide a broad description of the research site; second, to position Tijuana's community within Tijuana's urban milieu, the city's economy, and the local social hierarchy; third, to identify the structural conditions leading to the convergence in Tijuana of foreign maquiladoras and Mixteco immigrants. In this chapter the inequality of Tijuana's urban form, the intense social polarization of the city, and the subordination of the urban space to the requirements of economic exchange with the U.S. are used to illustrate the structural conditions that afflict Tijuana's Mixtecos. In Tijuana, discrimination against Mixtecos and the wretched urban space they occupy are indications of their inferior status within the local class structure. They also hold the lowest slots within Tijuana's labour market hierarchy. These conditions render vulnerable the Mixteco community in Tijuana, mark the involvement of Mixteco women and men in the local labour markets, condition their experience at the maquiladoras, and help explain the outcomes most relevant to this discussion: the decreasing significance of ethnic identity among this group of Mixtecos. The chapter draws on primary data collected through observation during fieldwork conducted in Tijuana, and secondary sources.

Chapter 5 reviews a cross section of the vast body of literature dealing with Mexico's export-oriented maquiladora industry. Through the examination of the literature, the intent of this chapter is to bring to light the theoretical bases guiding the debates on this industry. While the bulk of the literature reflects the long-standing debate about the merits of export-oriented industrialization in Mexico, the scholarly work on the maquiladora experience necessarily merges with discussions of gender relations, migration, Mexico-U.S. relations and the borderlands region in general. Emerging out of

these studies is a vast canvas displaying a plurality of theoretical views and empirical cases. However, Chapter 5 also seeks to highlight the maquiladora literature's lack of concern for issues of ethnicity, and the failure to recognize the growing participation of indigenous Mexicans in the maquiladoras. Bridging this gap in the literature is one of the intended contributions of this study.

Chapters 6 and 7 report the bulk of the empirical findings of fieldwork in Tijuana. Consistent with the qualitative nature of the investigation, both chapters are presented as a narrative that incorporates the accounts and opinions of long-term Mixteco residents in Tijuana, Mixteco women and men with working experience in the local industry, as well as maquiladora managers and entrepreneurs. Each chapter has a different focus but the narrative is interrelated. There are several objectives I seek to accomplish as the narrative unfolds, first, to map out a pattern of social change associated with the deepening urbanization of this community of indigenous Mexicans to trace the sequence of events and structural conditions driving Mixteco men and women to the maquiladora industry in Tijuana; second, to revisit the role of social resources such as assistance from fellow Mixtecos in the course of migration, during the settling down period in Tijuana, and in finding work in the city; third, to provide context by incorporating the voices of informants as they discuss relevant aspects of Tijuana's labour force formation, the Mixtecos' involvement in factory employment, household strategies among Mixtecos, and the relationship between Mixtecos and *mestizos* in Tijuana.

During fieldwork, the first research efforts were geared towards identifying changes in the employment pattern of members of the Mixteco community in Tijuana and why. There is substantial evidence in scholarly reports indicating that Mixteco immigrants

account for a significant share of waged labour at commercial agriculture operations in northern Mexico and the United States. Studies dealing with the Mixteco community in Tijuana specifically inform about the widespread participation of its members in the local informal sector, and report they commonly take up low paying occupations at the fringes of the formal economy: construction work, gardening, housekeeping. In this body of literature there is no discussion and only scant reference about members of this community participating in Tijuana's all important maquiladora labour market. This was intriguing because, about the same time the first Mixteco immigrants were settling in Tijuana on a more or less permanent basis (during the 1960s), maquiladora industrialization along the U.S.-Mexican border was rapidly expanding. One of the standard premises supporting the vast maquiladora literature is that the proliferating factories in the region required low-skilled workers for the labour intensive operations foreign firms were decentralizing to off shore locations, including Tijuana. What prevented the Mixteco immigrants from joining the maquiladora workforce had to do with reasons explained in Chapter 6. Research findings presented in that chapter confirm that maquiladora employment has been relatively recent addition to the employment alternatives opened for Tijuana's Mixtecos, because during the early stages of maquiladora expansion members of this community were largely excluded from the industrial labour markets. This exclusion ended when the industrial demand for labour increased during the 1980s. Nevertheless, growing Mixteco participation in Tijuana's maquiladora labour market is having an important implication for the long-term sustainability of this immigrant community: the erosion of the mechanisms that link individuals with the community, specifically their ethnic identity, which was critical in

the consolidation of the Mixteco community in Tijuana. Chapter 8 discusses this process through the voices of those directly involved: Mixteco men and women, and the *mestizo* management of Tijuana's maquiladoras.

Appendix 1 describes research and data collection methods used during fieldwork in Tijuana.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the historical circumstances and structural conditions explaining the position Mexican *indígenas* occupy within the socio-economic scale and the inter-ethnic hierarchy. The historical background in this chapter focuses on the approaches the Mexican state has taken to deal with Mexico's heterogeneous population, specifically with regard to indigenous peoples. Here we review state-led efforts to incorporate Mexico's indigenous population into a national project that supported the expansion of the capitalist economy and conceived a homogeneous *mestizo* society. This project involved economic and cultural policies that affected the welfare of the indigenous peoples and their relation with the rest of society, the *mestizo* majority in particular. Among the implications of persistent attempts to modernize the Mexican economy are the movement of indigenous populations from their ancient communities to urban areas and agricultural regions under capitalist development. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the various approaches addressing the structural determinants of Mexican internal migration and urbanization and introduce the changing paradigms dealing with these processes.

2.2 Nation-building and Mexico's ethnic question

In the task of nation-state building, Mexico's *cuestión étnica* has challenged the succession of post-independence political leaders in this country. The ethnic question refers to the set of issues and complexities the heterogeneous ethnic composition of the country poses for economic and social development. Prominent among these issues is the quandary of how best to conciliate the interest of the nation with those of the indigenous minorities (see Table 1), an assignment that for the most part has historically given priority to the objective of consolidating a modern independent nation (through such means as developing a dynamic capitalist economy) to the detriment of Mexico's indigenous population.

Table 1. Mexican population, indigenous peoples, 1990-2000

	1990	1995	2000
Total population	81,249,645	91,158,290	97,483,412
Indigenous population	8,550,989	9,167,488	12,707,000
As percentage	10.5%	10.0%	13.0%

Source: Secretaría de Desarrollo Social. *Programa Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2001-2006*. México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 2001.

The Mexican state has taken several approaches in dealing with Mexico's ethnic question since independence from Spain in 1821. While changing in emphasis according to political views of policy-makers and historical circumstances, there has been nonetheless a great deal of continuity of ideas framing state policies with respect to the

ethnic question for most of Mexico's post-independence period. The common denominator is the goal of creating a racially and culturally homogeneous society propitious for the consolidation of the nation and the subsidiary objective of developing a modern capitalist economy. The set of ideas and approaches gearing towards this goal are generically known as *indigenismo*, a term that encapsulates the intellectual frameworks and state policies regarding the indigenous population, specifically between independence and its waning years as official policy in the first part of the twentieth century.

The empirical reference of *indigenismo* is the *indígena*; however, it is through *mestizaje* (the racial and cultural blending of the indigenous and the white populations) that the racial and cultural homogeneity that *indigenismo* has sought and encouraged was to be procured. It follows that the *mestizos*, and not the *indígenas*, were the embodiment of the type of society the Mexican state envisioned. In this design of society, the indigenous peoples, together with their culture, were to be assimilated into a national project that equated being Mexican with being *mestizo* (Lomnitz-Adler 1995).

The systematic implementation of *indigenista* policies reached its peak in the years that followed the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), when indigenismo became the official orthodoxy of post-revolutionary governments. Withered away following changing social condition in Mexico during the second half of the twentieth-century, *indigenista*-type policies nonetheless had a lasting impact on Mexico's economy, society and culture.

2.3 Liberalism and capitalist expansion

Understanding the way the Mexican state dealt with the ethnic question in the process of nation building and in relation to economic development requires attention to the influence of the Enlightenment, and the liberal ideas that informed the thinking of insurgent leaders during the course of Mexico's independence, as well as the political views of post-independence policy-makers.[10] After independence from Spain in 1821, the newly formed Mexican state severed ties with the former colonial metropolis. Nevertheless, the ideological break with European values was weak as the political ideals of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe lingered in the minds of the emerging ruling class in independent Mexico (Bollinger and Lund 1982). There is indeed continuity between the liberal ideas of the enlightened Spanish Constitution of 1812, which embraced the democratic doctrine of popular sovereignty, and the liberal principles that were to prevail in Mexico's political and economic life during the nineteenth century.

In accord with the Spanish Constitution of 1812, which granted equal legal rights to all colonial subjects, Mexico's constitutive documents incorporated a comparably egalitarian definition of citizenship that eradicated *de jure* the caste-like system that prevailed for most of the colonial period.[11] After Mexican independence, the *indígenas* were granted all citizenship rights in the new country. However, they were also given to

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[10] For a discussion of the influence of the Enlightenment in Latin America's independence movements see Charles C. Griffin, "The Enlightenment and Latin American Independence," in *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, ed. Witaker (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1961). For a review of Mexican liberalism in nineteenth-Century Mexico see Charles A. Hale, "Jose Maria Luis Mora and the Structure of Mexican Liberalism," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1965); Luis Chávez Orozco, *Las Instituciones Democráticas de los Indígenas Mexicanos en la Epoca Colonial* (México, D.F.: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1943).

[11] The colonial period's caste-like system divided the population among politically dominant Spaniards and Creoles, the intermediate *mestizos*, and the indigenous people at the bottom of the social structure.

assume all the duties that the Mexican nationality demanded. Legal equalization thus meant the disappearance of the *indígena* as such under the law in favour of the more encompassing notion of Mexican citizen, which included all nationals regardless of race (Chávez Orozco 1943; Ferrer Muñoz 1998). Eliminating legal distinctions between races also meant the abolition of the privileges that paternalistic colonial legislations granted to the indigenous peoples, as these special rights conflicted with the egalitarian principles of the new state (Ferrer Muñoz 1998). Legal equality notwithstanding, after independence the power relations in Mexico remained biased against the economically disadvantaged *indígenas*, whose living conditions eroded further when the welfare-like privileges they had obtained during the colonial times were removed.

The Mexican liberals, who took the lead in establishing the instruments of government in the new country, steered in favour of freeing the nation from the colonial regime of corporate privilege and the entities that represented it. This task was crucial to nation building because at the end of the colonial era Mexico remained a jumble of corporate entities (*haciendas*, indigenous communities, the Church and its ecclesiastic provinces), and regional interests mediating between the state and its members (Adams 1967). Hale (1965: 203) noted that after independence, "the fueros of Church and army and the *espíritu de cuerpo* that led a significant number of men to identify themselves with some corporation or other and only vaguely with the nation" remained. Thus, it was the liberals' view that all these corporate and territorial cleavages hindered the consolidation of the independent state, and posed limits to the advancement of modern capitalism and the laissez-faire regime liberal thinking promoted.

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In the liberal design for the newly independent country, the national project was to build a modern, progressive nation where juridical uniformity and secularization would secure the citizens' exclusive allegiance to the civil state (Hale 1965, 1968). Accordingly, throughout the nineteenth century, Mexican liberals' influence in the affairs of the state would succeed in undermining the economic and political significance of the Catholic Church, the indigenous corporate communities, and the influence of regional interests. The intended objective was the consolidation of the nation-state by dismantling the old colonial regime while removing obstacles inhibiting the advancement of capitalism. Only the *hacienda* system was left intact and poised to become a leading sector of the economy by the turn of the century.

The task of tearing down the corporate structures inherited from the colonial order, and the efforts to undermine vested regional interests lasted most of the nineteenth century, and involved bitter rifts between the state and stakeholders as well as recurring civil wars implicating liberals and conservative foes. By 1867, however, the Mexican liberals had become the prevailing political force in the country[12] and were well positioned to pursue their economic and political agenda. To implement their vision of society, "in which small property holders would triumph under a regime of equal rights, individual opportunity, and administrative uniformity" (Hale 1965: 217), the liberal governments advanced legislation that required the disentailment of corporate property. The legislation,[13] which targeted Catholic Church property (and the Church's power more

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[12] This was particularly the case following the end of the military French Intervention (1855-1867) that the Mexican Conservatives supported, and the overthrow of the short-lived French-backed government of Maximilian of Hapsburg (1864-1867) by liberal factions.

[13] *Ley Lerdo* (1856)

generally), was also intended to dismantle the system of indigenous communal land that the colonial era patronized.

In line with liberals' advocacy for property rights of the individual, and laissez-faire for the economy, disentailed Church and indigenous communal land was incorporated into the land market through trading or direct redistribution in favour of individuals (indigenous or otherwise). But the result was a massive transfer of land from the Church and impoverished small landholders to wealthy *hacienda* owners that peaked during the 'order and progress' dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911). The boost that the *hacienda* system received through the absorption of traded land was further augmented by means of incorporating to the hacienda labour market the growing landless class (with a large indigenous component) that displacement from disentailed lands helped engender. Disentailment of corporate properties also facilitated the zealous expansion of the railroad system, a key component in the modernization project of Mexico's late nineteenth-century liberal government that dictator Porfirio Díaz embodied.[14] With the improvement of the internal transport system, and the foreign investment the Díaz's regime attracted through concessions and political stability assurances, the Mexican economy at the end of the nineteenth century was rapidly expanding (Raat 1973). However, against the backdrop of fervent modernization there remained several contentious aspects of Mexico's ethnic question that the country's Europeanized white and *mestizo* elites continued to ponder. At the centre of these deliberations was the question of whether the *indígenas* had the capacity to embrace the Western civilization; or more specifically, whether the indigenous Mexicans (and their culture) were

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[14] See John H. Coatsworth, *Growth Against Development: the Economic Impact of Railroads in Porfirian Mexico* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981); Robert W. Randall, "Mexico's Pre-Revolutionary Reckoning with Railroads," *The Americas* 42, no. 1 (1985).

compatible with the demands of the western-oriented modernization project launched during Porfirio Díaz's lengthy dictatorship. Participants in the debate were "government officials, lawyers, educators, littérateurs, journalists, and clergyman" (Powell 1968: 22), who addressed Mexico's ethnic question in reference to enduring nationalistic and liberal positions, and the rising influence in Mexico of positivism and social evolution theories (Stabb 1959).[15] The terms of the debate and accompanying discourse, unearthed from policy documents, congressional documents, periodicals and Mexican literature informing various influential studies, show how the indigenous peoples were seen (unless assimilated) as a burden for development and modernization. Powell (1968: 21) provided examples: writing in the 1980s Mexican philologist Francisco Pimentel wrote that the *indígenas* must "forget their customs and even their language, if that were possible" to spare Mexico from the burden of racial diversity." In turn demographer Antonio García Cubas was in 1870 writing about "the decadence and degeneration in general of the [indigenous] race and the few elements of vitality and vigor that it offers for the Republic's progress..." Paradoxically, these kinds of views were generally maintained despite widespread acceptance that the fusion of the *indígena* and Spanish races were the basis of the Mexican personality. In the prevailing rationale in late nineteenth-century Mexico, where the influence of positivism and evolutionism was significant, *mestizaje* was seen in racial, evolutionary terms, as a goal to attain in the task of strengthening the Mexican race and best prepare it for the challenges of modernization; the underlying

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[15] The influence of positivism and social evolution theories in Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth-century has long been established. See for example Leopoldo Zea, *El Positivismo en México: Nacimiento, Apogeo y Decadencia* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1968). There is, however, disagreement on the extent of its influence, and on the positivist credentials of some of its alleged followers. For a discussion see William D. Raat, "Leopoldo Zea and Mexican Positivism: A Reappraisal," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 1 (1968).

assumption being that the *indígena* was inferior and needed to be converted into a superior being: the *mestizo*.

While racial diversity was seen as an obstacle for progress, the improved physical and mental traits attributed to the *mestizos* was hailed as a solution by the ruling classes (Stabb 1959). But there were also deliberations about whether transforming the *indígena* into modern men was feasible, and whether the modernization of the country could wait for them to change. In late nineteenth-century Mexico's approach to address the ethnic question thus swung between calls to escalate European colonization, and demands to direct efforts to transform the indigenous peoples into modern men (Powell 1968). In practice, however, Díaz's regime sought the deterioration of the *indígenas'* social and economic condition. Near slaves in the hacienda system, the indigenous population helped sustain years of rapid economic growth under Díaz.

At the onset of the twentieth century, however, the pace of the economy subsided. Falling world prices for Mexican commodity exports (henequen, cotton and industrial minerals), declining productivity in key sectors of the economy (agriculture, manufacturing, mining), and financial constraints undermined the economy's ability to grow (Vernon 1963). The structural problems slowing down the economy were rooted in Díaz's modernization drive and the imbalances in the economy and society two decades of rapid economic growth had created. Raat (1973) notes for example the diverging interests between the traditional-minded *hacienda* owners producing on the basis of cheap labour and traditional methods of land utilization, and profit-minded landowners who converted agricultural lands into sugar plantations, or produced cotton in the large irrigated lands government infrastructure opened for production in northern Mexico.

While the latter producers attracted labour by increasing wages, the former resented the wage hikes given the labour intensive agricultural methods they used. Conflict also arose between foreign investors and Mexican elites who questioned the modernization project's reliance on foreign capital. An issue particularly contentious was the government's plans to nationalize key sectors of the economy as advocated by influential factions within Díaz's regime. Labour unrest in industrializing and rapidly growing urban areas accompanied similar discontent in the countryside, where agricultural workers in the hacienda system demanded higher wages and better working conditions. Protracted strikes in the textile and mining sector during 1906-1907 violently confronted the government and the working class. The middle and upper classes, including intellectuals and students, also began to question the legitimacy of Díaz's regime in view of the government's attempts to confront mounting social challenges through political suppression and social control.

With the economy faltering, the cohesion of the regime eroding, the ties between foreign and domestic elites weakening, the working classes rioting, and the middle and sectors of the upper classes withdrawing their support, Díaz' thirty-six years long rule came to an end. The demise of Díaz's regime ushered in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), which implicated several antagonistic factions within Mexican society. Divided along ideological lines, the various revolutionary factions nevertheless coincided in the need to bring about a new social and political order.

2.4 The State and post-revolutionary *indigenismo*

When the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution ended in 1920, the victorious factions were necessarily confronted with the task of rebuilding the nation-state. After a decade-long civil war, the triumphant revolutionary leaders embarked upon reuniting the nation and this demanded addressing Mexico's ethnic question. The revolution added new variables to the task. In particular, there was the political (yet at the early stages symbolic) emergence of the *indigenas* as political constituency. The increasing political significance of the indigenous people derived from their widespread support for the revolution, and their direct involvement in the armed conflict seeking agrarian justice (not indigenous rights) on the side of the revolutionary armies. There was therefore correspondence between the types of vindications the indigenous groups that supported the uprising expected and the social agenda of the revolution, land reform in particular. What remained to be defined was the role of the indigenous peoples in the type of society the revolution had promised.

The Revolution's zeal for nationalism and modernization, and its promise of social justice guided the task of rebuilding the nation and necessarily influenced the state's approach towards Mexico's indigenous population. With nationalism, modernization and social justice as guiding principles for policy and government rhetoric, the post-revolutionary state confronted the ethnic question by introducing a new brand of *indigenismo* "that celebrated the ancient Indian past as the source of the Mexican nation... and acclaimed them for the first time as an integral part of the modern nation" (Dawson 1998: 280). As part of a state sponsored effort to create a new symbolic imaginary for the country that was both post-revolutionary (i.e. modern and righteous),

and characteristically Mexican, the Mexican state, with the participation of leading intellectuals and artists, began to eulogize the cultural values and social practices of the *indígena* as sources of national identity.[16]

The main architects and early proponents of post-revolutionary *indigenismo* were anthropologists Manuel Gamio and Antonio Caso, philosopher José Vasconcelos, and essayist Andrés Molina Enríquez, whose views influenced governmental policies and Mexico's artistic and political discourse well into the twentieth century.[17] These early post-revolutionary *indigenistas* agreed that economic and social progress remained an uncompromising goal for the nation to pursue, and asserted that the condition of the indigenous peoples was one of backwardness but not inferiority. With varying emphasis, there was also agreement that *mestizaje* was fundamental for the nation's well-being, and that the social and economic standing of the indigenous peoples had to be revalued. Vasconcelos[18] and Molina Enríquez (1989) called for deepening *mestizaje* while recognizing the indigenous content would bring both strengths and weaknesses to a superior mix. Caso (1965) and Gamio (1940) contended that the indigenous peoples needed equal social and economic opportunities to fully participate in the mainstream

[16] For this purpose the Mexican government commissioned murals on public buildings, which still today last as good examples of the official *indigenista* discourse so ubiquitous in twentieth-century Mexico. The murals, which were commissioned to muralist Diego Rivera and other prominent artists, display idealized images of the *indígena* as the main protagonists of Mexico's past and future. For a discussion of *indigenista* discourse and its contradictions in Mexican literature and cinema see Anne Doremus, "Indigenism, Mestizaje, and National Identity in Mexico during the 1940s and the 1950s," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 17, no. 2 (2001).

[17] Manuel Gamio and Andrés Molina Enríquez both were established scholars prior the Revolution but their views remained influential after the armed conflict ended. Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos were active participants of an influential group of young intellectuals (*El Ateneo de la Juventud*) that before the Revolution called for the end of Díaz's regime, the nationalization of the economy, and the abandonment of Positivism as the guiding principle of Mexico's cultural and educational policies under Díaz. For a discussion of the waning influence of Positivism in early twentieth-century Mexico see Elizabeth Flower, "The Mexican Revolt Against Positivism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 1 (1949).

[18] Especially in "La Raza Cósmica" and "Indología" (Chapter 'El Hombre'). Refer to José Vasconcelos, *Obras Completas* (México, D.F.: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957).

mestizo society, thus urging to set free the *indígenas'* economic potential through education (Spanish language in particular), specialized technical training, and the provision of infrastructure and health services in the isolated indigenous communities. Nonetheless, the underlying objective remained forging a nation based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural unity[19], which was a task requiring not only *mestizaje* but also disseminating among *indígenas* the concept of nationhood:

> [w]e consider it essential that the indigenous community gain an awareness of belonging to a vaster social organization, that of the Mexican nation[20]

For these *indigenistas*, modernization and nationhood were to be built on the basis of racial homogeneity (*mestizo*), a lingua franca (Spanish), and a single encompassing national culture (Mexican-*Mestizo*) proud of its indigenous heritage. In the *indigenista* project, the assimilation of the indigenous communities through state intervention provided the means to achieve social justice and the modernization and nationalistic objectives of the Revolution:

> As a policy, indigenism consists of a governmental decision, expressed by means of [...] legislative and administrative acts, which has as its objective the integration of indigenous communities into the economic, social, and political life of the nation[21]

According to the prevalent post-revolution *indigenista* view, historic neglect, not biology, explained the social and economic ills of the indigenous population, whose culture was to be adapted to the requirements of modern society:

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[19] See in particular Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria* (México D.F.: Editorial Porrua, 1960), first published in 1916.

[20] Anthropologist Alfonso Caso, a leading *indigenista* and government official, quoted in Richard N. Adams, "Nationalization," in *Social Anthropology*, ed. Nash, Handbook of Middle American Indians (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 477.

[21] Alfonso Caso, quoted in Robert H. Ewald, "Directed Change," in *Social Anthropology*, ed. Manning Nash, Handbook of Middle American Indians (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 491.

What is needed is to transform the negative aspects of the indigenous culture into positive aspects, and preserve what is positive and useful in the communities of the indigenes – the sense of solidarity and of obligation to mutual assistance, their popular arts, their folklore (Caso 1965: 236).

A key difference between early twentieth-century *indigenista* thought (Caso's and Gamio's in particular) and that of their late nineteenth-century predecessors is that the former played down biological criteria for racial classification (yet retaining racists assumptions) in favour of emphasising social and cultural considerations in policy recommendations (Dawson 1998; Knight 1990). Emphasis on culture and social conditions rather than race provided the government justification to intervene, as social and cultural factors could be preserved or altered in the best interest of the nation. For that effect during the 1920-1940 period the Mexican government established a number of institutions to deal with indigenous affairs (in matters of education, preservation of indigenous heritage, land distribution),[22] and also to extend aspects of Mexico's mainstream national culture to the indigenous population.[23] The intended objective was to turn *indigenismo* into policy, and integrate the *indígena* to the mainstream society in accordance with the state's modernization project. Thus began a process that Ewald (1967) discussed in terms of 'directed change,' whereby the state actively and purposely intervened to transform the culture of the indigenous population, and introduce 'modern traits' in their livelihood. The preferred avenue to achieve cultural change was education

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[22] Many of these institutions were created or directed by prominent *indigenistas*, including José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Caso, Manuel Gamio, Moisés Sáenz, and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán among others.

[23] The institutions included the following (foundation date in brackets): *Misiones Culturales* (1922); *Casa del Estudiante Indígena* (1927), *Departamento Autónomo de Asuntos Indígenas* (1936); *Departamento de Educacion Indígena* (1937), *Instituto de Antropologia e Historia* (1938), and *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (1948) among others. See Alexander S. Dawson, "From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the 'Revindication' of the Mexican Indian, 1920-40," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998).

through proliferating rural schools and Spanish language instruction in indigenous communities, which was an objective consistent with the ambitious literacy program the government launched in the 1920s.

Efforts to integrate Mexico's indigenous population into the mainstream society stepped up during the Cárdenas presidency (1936-1940) and throughout the 1940s as Mexico's modernization project gained momentum. During the Cárdenas presidency there were attempts to improve the material standing of the indigenous communities with one eye set on social justice, and the other on modernization. Cardenas' years in office also sought consolidate the indigenous peoples' role as political clienteles for the state:

> Building on a discourse which had already created a basis for valorizing the Indian as a national model, [during the 1930s] Indigenistas began describing Indians as mobilized, political, and prepared to be productive citizens...the dominant strain within *Indigenismo* was connected to Cardenista nationalism and favoured a mobilization of Indians within a clearly defined corporatist national community [...] While the conservative Catholic campesino remained a source of disdain, the 'modernist' campesino, with Indian, *mestizo*, or mulatto heritage, emerged for the first time as a Mexican ideal (Dawson 1998: 299-300).

As *campesinos* (peasants) but not as *indígenas,* Mexico's indigenous population thus became gradually incorporated into the corporatist structure of the state. Nevertheless, the fate of the *campesinos* was eventually subordinated to the key objective of Mexico's modernization plans: industrialization.

2.5 Industrialization, the agricultural sector and the ethnic question

With the goal of modernizing the economy via industrial growth, during the 1940s the Mexican state escalated efforts implementing import substitution (IS) policies.[24] Import substitution industrialization matched well with the state's nationalist project because it granted protection to domestic industry seeking to achieve autonomous industrial development. Nevertheless, the IS model would also affect the welfare of the peasant population and its large *indígena* component. It would also trigger significant migratory flows involving rural and indigenous populations seeking work in urban centres, and in the commercial agriculture operations IS promoted.

In the design of Mexico's import substitution model the Mexican agricultural sector was assigned the role of securing sufficient foreign currency to support the initial import substitution phases (Zazueta 1989). The agricultural sector was therefore expected to prevent foreign currency outflows by producing the otherwise imported foodstuffs that the growing urban population demanded. Simultaneously, in order to generate the foreign currency needed to launch import substitution, the state aggressively promoted export-oriented agriculture. Restructuring the agricultural sector in support of import substitution industrialization required the active participation of the state, which then invested significantly in agricultural infrastructure, provided farm credits, made the necessary legal reforms, regulated foodstuffs markets, and distributed land (Zazueta 1989).

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[24] Import substitution (IS) models rests on the expectation that protecting industry from foreign competition will encourage the emergence of local industries. Import substitution strategies call for the temporary protection of 'infant industries' until they are strong enough to compete with well-established manufacturers in the international markets. As part of this process, the IS model allows for an industrial trade deficit to emerge during the early stages of import substitution, when industrial capital imports are still high. Optimally, trade surpluses in the primary sector are able to finance the trade deficit in industry. For a discussion of the import substitution experience in Mexico see René Villarreal, "The Policy of Import-Substituting Industrialization, 1929-1975," in *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, ed. Reyna and Weinert (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977).

However, infrastructure investments (dams, irrigation channels, electricity and roads) and support mechanisms (e.g., finance capital, subsidies) were unevenly distributed across Mexico's regions, land tenure regimes (*ejido*[25] versus private), type of producers (subsistence versus commercial), and land types (irrigated versus rain fed). Hewitt de Alcántara (1976) noted, for example, that during the 1940-1950 period sparsely populated regions in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas in north and northwestern Mexico received the bulk of the economic and financial benefits the state granted to modernize the agricultural sector. These are regions that would eventually attract thousands of indigenous immigrant workers from Mexico's south, Mixtecos from Oaxaca in particular (see chapter 3). Moreover, Mexico's irrigated lands, where private ownership and commercial agriculture was widespread, also received substantially more support from the state than the subsistence producers operating in *ejidos* and rain fed lands (1975). This strategy to modernize Mexico's agriculture in support of import substitution was successful to the extent that the countryside made significant gains in food production (through the promotion of agribusiness), attracted foreign investment, generated foreign exchange via agricultural exports, and provided low unit cost food for the urban population and the industrial workforce. But the uneven distribution of support mechanisms and investments created a dual-track agricultural economy. On the one track, there was a thriving, modern capital intensive, privately-run commercial sector in the irrigated lands. On the other track there was a backward, subsistence agricultural economy languishing in rain-fed regions, lacking adequate infrastructure and sufficient capitalization.

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[25] In Mexico, agricultural land expropriated from large private holdings and redistributed to communal lands after the Mexican Revolution. Under the *ejido* system the government owns the land.

Among the implications of such differentiation in Mexico's agricultural economy, Esteva (1975) highlighted the transfer of surpluses from the peasant population to commercial agriculture in the form of inexpensive labour via migration. Under IS industrialization and the sectoral imbalances it generated, country folk abandoned (on temporary or permanent basis) their undercapitalized landholdings to seek employment in commercial agricultural operations. Other impoverished migrants crowded the rapidly growing urban Mexico while the industrial sector failed to generate employment opportunities at the pace needed to absorb the labour force released from agriculture. An important part of the migrant contingents involved indigenous peasants.[26]

By the mid-1960s Mexico's industrial sector had yet to reach the level of efficiency necessary to compete in the international markets and was unable to generate export revenues and employment opportunities (Villarreal 1977). In turn, the agricultural sector had lost the ability to generate foreign exchange surpluses due to flagging agricultural exports and increasing foodstuff imports (by-products of dwindling investments in the rural sector that slowed down growth in the agricultural sector). Facing productivity constraints, soaring foreign trade deficits, and increasing unemployment, the Mexican state gradually changed the economic model from relative autarky to export-led growth (Newell G and Rubio F 1984). A clear indication that the growth model was changing was the rapid expansion of the maquiladora industry in northern Mexico.

As the crisis of Mexico's countryside unfolded, a growing concern for the countryside and the rural condition began to emerge among policy makers and scholars. On the academic front, greater concern over the economic and social situation of the

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[26] Next Chapter (3) elaborates on rural-rural and rural-urban migration by discussing the case of indigenous Mexican immigrants in northern Mexico working at commercial agriculture operations or in an assortment of urban occupations in cities along the U.S.-Mexican border.

peasantry (with its large *indígena* component) found expression in new approaches to look at Mexico's lasting ethnic question, and to examine the implications of migration and urbanization among the indigenous population. Thus, critical examinations of the dominant *indigenista* approach, and its penchant for planned incorporation of the *indígena* into mainstream capitalist society, surfaced during the mid-1960s. A case in point is the revisionist perspective embraced by the Declaration of Barbados I (1971),[27] in which a group of anthropologists rejected the concept of a unified national culture that the *indigenista* discourse proclaimed.[28] According to this view (often referred to as ethno-populist[29]), integration schemes of the type official *indigenismo* attempted in Mexico threatened the cultural integrity of the indigenous communities. As an alternative, its proponents called for the preservation of the indigenous minorities in their remote corporate communities, with their identity, their system of internal organization, and their customs unchanged;[30] the best way to achieve this objective being autonomous development via the empowerment of subordinated ethnic groups.

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[27] Two international conferences were held in Barbados (1971, 1977) bringing together anthropologist and indigenous representatives from Latin American countries to discuss the ethnic question in the region. For the text of the Barbados I declaration see Miguel Alberto Bartolomé *et al.*, "The Declaration of Barbados: For the Liberation of the Indians," *Current Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (1973).

[28] See for example Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, "El Etnodesarrollo: Sus Premisas Jurídicas, Políticas y de Organización," in *America Latina: Etnodesarrollo y Etnocidio*, ed. Bonfil Batalla, Ibarra, and Varese (San José: Ediciones FLACSO, 1982); Stefano Varese *et al.*, "Restoring Multiplicity: Indianities and the Civilizing Project in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (1982).

[29] As in Héctor Díaz-Polanco, "Indigenismo, Populism, and Marxism," *Latin American Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (1982).

[30] Critics highlight the proclivity among ethno-populists to idealize the positive features of the indigenous communities (harmony, solidarity, integration), which they proceed to contrast with the destructive and degrading capacity of capitalism, leading them to reject the notion of integration into the capitalist system. See Ibid.

Although interest on issues of autonomy of indigenous minorities was later revitalized following the *Zapatista* uprising in Chiapas in 1994,[31] the most influential theoretical alternatives to official *indigenismo* came from studies that questioned the assumption that inter-ethnic relations in Mexico were culture-based. Clarke (1996) pointed out that even within the ranks of official *indigenismo* the emphasis shifted to issues of domination and class differentiation. Clarke was referring to the work of leading *indigenista* Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, and his book *Regiones de Refugio*. [32] In this study about Mexico's 'regions of refuge' (as Aguirre Beltrán called the remote mountainous highlands sheltering enduring indigenous language enclaves), inter-ethnic affairs were already discussed in the context of relations of domination involving subordinated *indígenas* and superordinated *mestizos*. Yet the nature of the relations of domination involving *mestizos* and *indígenas* was more systematically elaborated in the critique to official *indigenismo* that González Casanova (1965) and Stavenhagen (1964)[33] introduced in the 1960s.

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[31] See Héctor Díaz-Polanco *et al.*, *Mexico Diverso: El Debate por la Autonomía* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2002); Consuelo Sánchez, *Los Pueblos Indígenas: del Indigenismo a la Autonomía* (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1999).

[32] Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Regiones de Refugio* (México: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1967).

[33] Reprinted in Irving Louis Horowitz, ed., *Masses in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 235-288. Subsequent references to this study are made using this 1970 reprint.

2.6 Internal colonialism

Mexican anthropologist-sociologist Stavenhagen (1970) and sociologist González Casanova (1965) used the notion of internal colonialism[34] to draw parallels between the relations of domination and exploitation that prevailed during the colonial era in Latin America, and comparable situations persisting in the region. In contrast with *indigenismo*, which focused on non-exploitative relations and cultural aspects, in the theory of internal colonialism the central argument is that in present day politically independent societies, capitalist development is reproducing, at the intra-national level, relations of domination and exploitation reminiscent of the colonial period. The reproduction of these types of relations is made possible because of deep-seated patterns of political control, unequal exchange, dependence, exclusion and discrimination first established during the colonial era. In this sense, internal colonialism is an extension of imperialism and therefore, both Gonzalez Casanova and Stavenhagen discussed capitalist expansion taking into consideration past imperial-colonial relations.

In a definition of internal colonialism later elaborated by Johnson (1972), the internal colonies are described as those populations within a nation "who produce primary commodities for markets in metropolitan centers, who constitute a source of cheap labor for enterprises controlled from the metropolitan centers, and/or who constitute a market for the products and services of the centers." Johnson added that the economic role of the internally colonized peoples is imposed through exclusion and discrimination in the political, cultural and institutional domains the dominant group controls. Such oppression is however established on the basis of "racial, linguistic and/or

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[34] Stavenhagen uses the terms 'colonialism' and 'internal colonialism' interchangeably.

marked cultural differences as well as difference of social class" between subordinated and dominated groups, and carried out through economic and institutional mechanisms run from the internal metropolises (Johnson 1972: 277). These mechanisms are diverse but González-Casanova (1965) grouped them into three categories. First, there are the relations of dependence resulting from the monopolistic control of credit, commerce and trade by "dominant centres" (or metropolises) to the detriment of isolated indigenous communities (the internal colonies) lacking efficient means of communication and a diversified economy. Through unequal exchange, speculation, and usury, the metropolises de-capitalize the internal colonies, trigger indigenous out-migration, and reinforce relations of dependence between the dominant *mestizos* and the subordinated *indígenas*. Secondly, there are the relations of production and social control the dominant classes use to exploit the indigenous population. These production relations include pre-capitalist forms (slavery and feudalism), which coexist with abusive wage labour relations or the widespread provision of gratuitous "free" domestic services. The exploitative nature of these relations is nevertheless reinforced through mechanisms of social control including social fragmentation (via differential salaries), various forms of discrimination (social, linguistic, juridical, political, etc), and political displacement. Lastly, in a third category González-Casanova grouped the influence that culture and living standards have in perpetuating internal colonialism. Specifically, he cites the widespread use of deficient agricultural and extractive techniques among *indígenas*, the poor quality of the land they typically own, and their limited access to services. These factors, together with the encroachment of traditional (i.e. "backward") cultural practices

among *indígenas*, conspire, in Gonzalez-Casanova's view, to keep the indigenous communities oppressed.

Stavenhagen (1970) used the concept of internal colonialism to discuss the co-existence of "two kinds of population, two different societies: Indians and Ladinos."[35] He argued that these two societies should not be analyzed in cultural terms but rather in the context of a single socio-economic structure in which the two ethnic groups perform different roles. He defended this approach under the argument that the *mestizo* (or ladino) societies are not autonomous cultural worlds but instead two integrated socio-economic structures sharing "an intercultural region where Indians and mestizos coexist." Stavenhagen agreed with Wolf (1960) in that the condition of the *indigena* is not to be found in a discrete list of social traits, or in certain cultural patterns but in structural relationships and historical processes. But in contrast to Wolf, who focuses on the structure and history of corporate indigenous communities, he is concerned with a broader spatial and conceptual notion: the intercultural region where the indigenous and *mestizo* populations interact. Spatially, this intercultural region is "an urban complex mainly inhabited by a Ladino population and surrounded by Indian communities which are its economic and political satellites." Conceptually, it refers to the complex inter-ethnic relationships linking the predominantly *mestizo* metropolises and their indigenous rural satellites, which are framed within the historic domination of the cities over the rural communities. As such, these complex relationships are lasting expressions of the subordination of the *indigenas* vis-à-vis the *mestizo* that dates back from colonial times (Stavenhagen 1970: 236-239).

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[35] The geographical focus in Stavenhagen's study is the Maya region of Altos de Chiapas (Mexico) and Guatemala. The author thus uses local terminology to refer to the *mestizos*, who in the Altos de Chiapas region are called *ladinos*.

Stavenhagen further argued that the political, religious, and social powers residing in the cities since the colonial era are still exerted over the satellite communities through monopolistic practices, and the mediation of the institutional complex, which remains biased against the indigenous communities. It follows that the relationships that link the (predominantly *mestizo*) metropolises and the (predominantly indigenous) satellite communities are best characterized as colonial. Nevertheless, in the complex system of social relations that characterize the region under his consideration, internal colonial relations are only part of a changing pattern of social and economic relations. There are also class relations that gain significance over internal colonial relations as economic development proceeds.

2.7 Class and ethnicity in Mexico

As part of his discussion of internal colonialism in Mexico, Stavenhagen (1970) identified situations of social class differentiation in Mexico at the level of agricultural production, [36] land tenure system,[37] production relations,[38] and the commercial relations that link the indigenous rural communities with the regional metropolises. It is in the unequal nature of the commercial relationships, however, that Stavenhagen finds the most relevant explanation of social class differentiation and the condition of dependence

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[36] In the predominantly agricultural region he studies, Stavenhagen finds the Ladinos producing exclusively for the market (thus obtaining profits that accumulate into capital) while the *indigenas* are primarily subsistence farmers occasionally selling small surpluses to sustain consumption but in amounts insufficient to accumulate capital.

[37] The liberalisation of the land market, introduced by Liberal regimes in the nineteenth-century, made private ownership the prevailing land tenure system in the region and divided the population into a predominantly *mestizo* landholding class and a predominantly indigenous landless group.

[38] The majority of the farming population is composed of wage labourers, for the most part *indigenas* that, dispossessed from their land, were placed in a class situation through salaried work.

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in which the *indígenas* find themselves. A result of the historic distribution of power in favor of the *mestizos*, the inequality in which these relationships take place negatively affects the interests of the indigenous communities, particularly through monopolistic practices: "commerce at the regional urban complex is so organized that the Indian always leaves behind his small monetary income. He sells cheaply and must buy dearly" (Stavenhagen 1970).

In his discussion Stavenhagen argued that when the class system (socio-economic stratification) first develops in postcolonial states it overlaps with the phasing out of an inter-ethnic stratification system retaining the characteristics of the colonial situation (i.e. the dichotomization between *indígenas* and *mestizos* in every area of social, economic, and political life). Thus, in postcolonial, heterogeneous societies, social class differentiation is not only established through objective variables such as income, property, and standard of living; the subjectivity associated with the value system of each population group plays a role in stratification by attaching meaning to ethnic characteristics, culture or race for example. In the case of the Mexican region Stavenhagen examined:

> Ladinos hold a higher position not only in the objective scale of socio-economic characteristic, but they also consider themselves, qua Ladinos, superior to the Indians. They are contemptuous of the Indian as such. The latter, on the other hand, are conscious of their social and economic inferiority. They know that traits which identify them as Indians place them in a position of inferiority with respect to Ladinos. Even while stratification is presented as a scale or continuum, it in fact functions socially as a system with only two strata which are characterized in cultural and biological terms (Stavenhagen 1970: 262).

It follows that in societies with indigenous populations like Mexico's, there is coincidence between the position of the *indígena* in the socio-economic scale (where they

occupy the lower slots), and their place at the bottom of the ethnic stratification hierarchy, which renders the ethnic characteristics of the indigenous people's inferior with respect of those of the *mestizos*. Nevertheless, Stavenhagen emphsized that it is the cultural *indígena*, who is at the bottom of the inter-ethnic strata. He recognized that racial criteria are lesser factors in the stratification process due to widespread racial intermixing, which makes almost impossible to classify the population on physical basis as the sole criterion. Instead, cultural factors are relevant because they dichotomize *mestizo-indígena* relations in line with differences in the value systems of the two communities. Among the cultural factors differentiating the *indígenas* "in the first place comes language and dress, but there is also self-identification and personal identification by others (Stavenhagen 1970: 263). Thus, inter-ethnic differentiation occurs despite objective socio-economic convergence (measured in terms of income, property, etc.) between the two groups.

According to Stavenhagen, socio-economic upward mobility among *indígenas* entails participation in the capitalist economy and the accompanying class system. As upward mobility in the class scale proceeds, and the *indígenas*' participation in the capitalist economy deepens, their structural or socio-economic subordination lessens. But ascending in the socio-economic hierarchy is not enough to improve the low standing of the *indígenas* in the inter-ethnic stratification scale. For that to happen they need to master Spanish and dress like *mestizos*. Even then the *indígenas* will not bridge the social distance that separates them from the *mestizos*. To Stavenhagen, that could only occur if the *indígenas* distance themselves from the cultural system that reigns in the indigenous

communities through, for example, permanent and long distance migration (Stavenhagen 1970).

While the theory of internal colonialism deals primarily with the various relations of exploitation and domination in heterogeneous societies, a problematic assumption is that ethnic and cultural groups in these societies are devoid of internal class differentiation. Commenting on this matter, Kay (1989) argued that the internal colonialism approach, particularly in Gonzalez-Casanova's elaboration, obscures social class divisions within ethno-cultural groups; a significant weakness when taking into consideration contemporary Latin American societies where class stratification cuts deeply across the *mestizo* population and, to lesser extent, among *indígenas*. In Kay's opinion, it is more appropriate to speak of class relations rather than colonial relation in countries like Mexico, where the capitalist mode of production is predominant, and where significant sectors of the population are subject to relations of exploitation notwithstanding ethnic background. Kay acknowledged, however, that even in situations where class relations supersede internal colonial relations, the notion of internal colonialism remains useful in situations where extra-economic coercion is brought in. When this political dimension is added, inter-ethnic relations become relevant to the extent that they play the function of ideological domination in support of exploitative exchange relations. This is the main argument in the work of Bartra (1974), who elaborated on the extra-economic mechanism that, at the ideological level, are at work to reproduce capitalist production relations in Mexico.

According to Bartra (1974), the Mexican *indígenas* are fully integrated into the capitalist system (as peasants or workers), and therefore the wretched conditions of the

indigenous population have to be discussed in the context of exploitative production relations. Because the cultural and economic peculiarities of the indigenous society have been so deeply obliterated or redefined by the capitalist system, Bartra argued the *indígenas* in Mexico are extinct as social entities. Nevertheless, he makes the case that the continuing existence of the *indígena* at the ideological level sustains ideologies that the dominant classes use to intensify exploitation, facilitate political control, and curb conflict between classes. These ideologies include a wide range of attitudes and initiatives towards the *indígenas* that range from discrimination to progressive liberal ideas (as in *indigenismo*) that share the objective of bourgeoisie domination. Bartra's argument is that by discriminating against the indigenous population, the dominant classes create an ideal type characterizing the *indígena* as an inferior being, lacking the intelligence or the skills needed to fully integrate to the mainstream society. With this image, the bourgeois classes conceal the exploitation characteristic of capitalist production relations in order to explain poverty among *indígenas* in cultural and racial terms. In this sense, the *indígena* becomes the symbolic representation the state needs to justify the deployment of its bureaucratic-administrative apparatus at the national level in support of the capitalist system. Bartra's conclusion is that in Mexico the state supported capitalist expansion through the *indigenista* policies aiming at the incorporation of the indigenous people into capitalist society. Thus, with the argument that *indigenista* polices sought improvements among *indígenas* and their physical environment, the *indigenista* technocrats (teachers, administrators, technicians) were given the assignment of introducing to indigenous regions the ideologies (modernization), the knowledge

(Spanish language), and the infrastructure (roads, etc.) that best served the interest of capitalist expansion (Bartra 1974).

Bartra's argument is aligned with Marxist versions that are dismissive of ethnicity on the grounds that the state, viewed as a tool of the capitalist classes, creates differences between the working class in order to erode class solidarities.[39] Nonetheless, when Bartra proclaimed the extinction of the *indígena* he did not include any discussion about any form of struggle from the part of the indigenous peoples to resist incorporation to the capitalist system. The same can be said of Stavenhagen (1970), who predicted the demise of the *indígenas* as cultural groups during incorporation to the class system, but devotes scant attention to issues of indigenous resistance to assimilation and annihilation during his discussion of internal colonialism.[40]

Recent Mexican history and scholarly work suggest, however, that announcing the demise of the *indígena* was premature. The 1994 *Zapatista* uprising in Chiapas and numerous less conspicuous ethnic (i.e. indigenous) based social movements in Mexico[41] are clear signs that the *indígena* cannot be dismissed as social and political category. Rather, indigenous activism is a reminder that the *indígena* is not extinct and an indication that ethnicity still reinforces a separate identity among certain groups of Mexicans. But if ethnicity is relevant to reinforce indigenous identity the next question should ask what ethnicity is about in contemporary Mexico.

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[39] See for example E. Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market," in *The American Working Class: Prospects for the 1980s*, ed. Horowitz, Leggett, and Oppenheimer (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979).

[40] Stavenhagen later addressed issues of resistance and indigenous militancy. See Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Challenging the Nation-State," *Journal of International Affairs* 45, no. 2 (1992).

[41] See examples in Victor de la Cruz, "Reflexiones acerca de los Movimientos Etnopolíticos Contemporáneos en Oaxaca," in *Etnicidad y Pluralismo Cultural: La Dinámica Étnica en Oaxaca*, ed. Barabas and Bartolomé (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990).

Establishing clear differences among the Mexican population along ethnic lines is problematic. Differentiating between *indígenas* and non-*indígenas* is challenging because of the historically intense cultural, economic, and social interaction between the indigenous communities and the rest of the population. These interactions are part of the relentless incorporation of the Mexican *indígena* to the capitalist system, the result of the state's efforts to assimilate the indigenous people to the mainstream *mestizo* society, and the outcome of steady indigenous migration to the melting pot of Mexico's cities. Walton (1975) was unconvinced that culturally distinct groups such as *mestizos* and *indígenas* can be defined with precision at the operational level. He contends that pristine distinctions between ethnic groups in countries like Mexico are problematic because racial and cultural borders between *indígenas* and *mestizos* are extremely fluid. Factors such as widespread bilingualism among indigenous language speakers, and the adoption of Spanish as single language by the generations succeeding monolingual speakers of indigenous languages are making cultural distinctions between *mestizos* and *indígenas* difficult to establish.

At the theoretical level, differentiation between *indígenas* and *mestizos* in regional terms or according to other criteria such as modes of production easily leads to what Cook and Joo (1995) discussed in terms of "simplistic superimpositions of two problematic dichotomies." On one of these dichotomies, the conceptual divide is between the *mestizo* mainstream society and the *indígenas* living in remote corporate communities. On the other, the split is between the capitalist market economy and the peasant subsistence economy. Cook and Joo illustrated the empirical fragility of these dichotomies making reference to the presence of petty commodity production and small-

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scale capitalist accumulation in peasant communities, and the extent these economic processes cross cut the ethnic *mestizo-indígena* divide. Moreover, they identified that in the interaction between *mestizos* and *indígenas* in southern Mexico (Oaxaca's central valleys specifically) neither group systematically asserted a specific ethnic identity at the inter-village or regional level. For these reasons Cook and Joo were sceptical about the applicability of the designator *indígenas*, especially as an exclusive identity.

Cases of inter-rural and rural-urban migration involving indigenous groups taking up waged employment also point to vanishing spatial, economic and cultural borders between what is characteristically *indígena*, and what pertains to the *mestizo* and national society. At the same time, however, the literature on migration and urbanization processes in Mexico (selectively reviewed in the following chapter) discusses how ethnic identity is emerging from situations of conflict or in opposition to other groups at urban or rural locales outside the sending indigenous communities. Moreover, in addition to the *Zapatistas* in Chiapas and other ethno-political movements in rural Mexico, civil organizations representing indigenous migrants, and organized on the basis of their ethnicity, are actively seeking an array of objectives in urban and semi-urban centres in Mexico as well as in the United States (see also Chapter 3).

The erosion of objective differences between *indígenas* and non-*indígenas*, which occurs against the background of persisting claims to *indígena* identity in Mexico, is therefore lessening the empirical significance of primordial definitions of ethnicity, which involve inventories of fixed and distinctive socio-cultural attributes for each ethnic group. With identity politics in Mexico on the rise (as best exemplified by the *Zapatista* uprising), and the revitalized sense of *indígena* identity among rural and urban

immigrants in northern Mexico and the United States (as discussed in Chapter 3), contemporary scholarly perspectives on Mexico's ethnic question are adopting a constructivist approach to ethnicity.

2.8 Ethnicity as social construction

The view that ethnicity is constructed emerged in contraposition to the primordial paradigm, which defines ethnic groups as distinctively different groups of people having innate cultural traits and distinctive socio-cultural attributes and outlooks. This constructivist approach assumes that ethnic attachments are subjective, and arise within particular contexts and fluctuating existential circumstances. According to this perspective, claims to ethnic identity are a matter of agency and structure, with individuals or groups asserting their ethnicity in response to relational experiences in changing political-economic conjunctures.

The constructivist paradigm developed as part of the scholarly response to the urban crisis in U.S. society, which began to surface in the late 1960s, and involving the mixing of racial conflict with poverty related riots and political mobilizations along ethnic lines. This crisis suggested that the melting pot model of the U.S. society was not proceeding as predicted, thus calling for a revision of the assimilationist thesis that the Chicago School of sociology had advanced. For this reason, most of the relevant literature building the notion that ethnicity is a social construct surfaced in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s.

Although largely contradicting the Chicago School of sociology and its assimilationist thesis, the constructivist paradigm nevertheless builds on insight members of the Chicago tradition first presented. Focusing on the case of urban areas in the United States, the Chicago School of sociology pioneered the argument that immigrants transplant cultural traits and institutions from their country or region of origin to the receiving society.[42] Members of the Chicago School also observed the proclivity of new immigrants to cling to their cultural heritage and ethnic relations. In this regard, Park and Thomas (1927) argued that ethnic attachments help the newly arrived build sufficient personal confidence to best cope with the competitive urban environment of U.S. cities, as well as the challenges of participating in a capitalist economy. Studying the case of Polish immigrant families in the U.S., Thomas and Znaniecki (1927) emphsized the importance of networks of solidarity that the Polish immigrant community established to deal with economic distress. Among this group of immigrants the family was the basis for community solidarity. Thomas and Znaniecki also observed that, upon migration to cities, family solidarity wanes. They concluded that this is the result of urban environments fostering individualism among city dwellers. In turn, individualism leads to trans-generational changes in the structure of the immigrant family, decreases from larger (extended) to smaller (nuclear) units. Wirth (1938), another leading member of the Chicago School, argued that the ecological characteristics of large cities are contributing factors in the gradual assimilation process of immigrant communities. In Wirth's view, the population size and density of large cities, the transitory character of highly urbanized areas, and the social heterogeneity characteristic of sprawling urban settlements reduce the quality of interpersonal relationships, thus creating the conditions for individual

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[42] See Robert Ezra Park *et al.*, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York: Harper & brothers, 1921)

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alienation and the erosion of collective identity. Wirth conceded that certain forms of ethnic ascription are lasting features of urban societies, as in the case of the Jewish ghettos he studied.[43] Nevertheless, he concludes that such communities are bound to disappear with the gradual breakdown of the cultural and social barriers separating the ethnic group from the larger society. As these barriers collapse through such processes as exogamy, the internal cohesion of the ethnic community weakens and assimilation proceeds.

As illustrated in Park's assimilation cycle, members of the Chicago School argued that immigrants would inevitably lose their ethnic culture in the melting pot of American society. In his four-part model of assimilation, Park (1950) posited that for new immigrants, assimilation begins on first contact with the original ("native") residents of the host society. This initial contact leads to conflict and competition between natives and immigrants over cultural values, resources and opportunities. Eventually, however, conflict and competition recede as immigrants begin to adapt to the host society. According to Park's model, the immigrant's total absorption into mainstream society accounts for the closing stage of the assimilation cycle.

The Chicago School preceded analyses that focused on culture difference, ethnic pluralism and the persistence and salience of ethnic-based forms of social stratification. The persistence of ethnic ascription among immigrants in the U.S. and the recognition that assimilation was not progressing according to the melting pot model led American scholars to focus on ethnic pluralism rather than assimilation. The pluralist thesis, which the work of Abramson (1973) and Greeley (1974) exemplify, insists on the significance of persisting (pre-immigration) cultural traits in determining patterns of social behaviour

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[43] Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1928)

and group affiliation among immigrants. According to the pluralist approach, cultural heritage constitutes a key variable in explaining religious choices, attitudes towards marriage, residential segregation, associative practices and even political behaviour among immigrant groups in U.S. cities.

The significance of culture as indicator of ethnicity has been questioned in conceptualizations that view ethnic ascription as the result of a dynamic social process. Barth (1969) defined an ethnic group as a community sharing cultural values and traditions. However, he stressed that it is through interactions with other groups that ethnic identities are established. In Barth's conceptualization, interactions between culturally different groups are dynamic, and therefore ethnic borders are constantly being redefined. Ethnicity is therefore not so much about culture but about a process where people, through interactions with others, establish criteria for determining ethnic group membership or exclusion. Likewise, Yancey *et al.* (1976) questioned the explanatory power of cultural origins as determinants of ethnic ascription among immigrants in urban America. They suggested that, instead of emphasising matters of cultural heritage and social conditions in the sending societies, analyses of ethnic ascription among immigrant communities should pay more attention to the structural conditions immigrants face in the receiving societies. Yancey *et al.* hypothesised that in the host societies the behaviour of immigrants and their descendants varies significantly in relation to structural circumstances which act to either generate new identities or reinforce existing ones. These structural circumstances include an assemblage of historical, ecological, economic, industrial and technological factors that explain the formation and persistence of ethnic communities. Yancey *et al.* suggested that immigrants with common geographical and

cultural origins tend to concentrate in certain occupations, either because of specific working opportunities available at the time of arrival and/or because of immigrants' occupational skills matching those in demand. Furthermore, these authors see changing technologies of industrial production and transportation as significant factors influencing the relative concentration and autonomy of ethnic settlements. This is because changes in production and transportation technologies affect patterns of industrial location and therefore influence residential choices among new immigrants, who are often forced by economic pressures to live close to their place of work. Yancey *et al.* also related such patterns of residential and occupational concentration with the development of group consciousness and the emergence of a sense of community among immigrants. They argued that sharing occupational and residential areas, immigrants have similar lifestyles and class interests, which facilitates group ascription and fosters a sense of community.

While Yancey *et al.* contend that the development and persistence of ethnicity in urban settings is dependant upon structural conditions, Levine (1977) suggests such explanation is narrow and should be expanded to include social interaction between individuals. Levine's main proposition was that ethnic identity is constructed and objectified "by interacting individuals whose social constructions fundamentally affect the course which ethnic emergence takes" (Levine 1977: 822). Accordingly, it is the interplay of the self-definition of members of interacting groups that determines ethnic boundaries. For this reason, Levine argued, "studies of ethnic formation must take social interaction, the negotiation of identities [...] centrally into account" (Levine 1977: 822).

Recognizing the structural determinants of ethnic ascription, Patterson (1975) argued that the context in which people find themselves sets the basis for ethnic identification. In

his view, specific and immediate circumstances explain why certain groups maintain their ethnicity and why ethnicity becomes a basis of mobilization. Among immigrants, migration entails a change of context, but changing jobs or neighbourhoods within the same country or city also involves participating in new social contexts, influencing individuals' decisions to emphasize certain assumed cultural, national, or somatic traits as their most meaningful basis of primary or extra-familial identity (Patterson 1975). Thus, Patterson argued that ethnic groups are rational social agents capable of adjusting their collective ascription (normally with the aim of securing economic and political gain) according to shifting circumstances and the demands new contexts pose. In this perspective, ethnic-based political or social organizations make good strategic sense because ethnicity commands loyalty and a common bond, or as Bell (1975: 169) noted, "combines an interest with an affective tie". As such, ethnicity can be used strategically in dealing with the state, the key arbiter of economic welfare and political status (Glazer *et al.* 1975).

With its capacity to concretize notions of sameness and difference, ethnicity has the potential of fragmenting class solidarities. Bonacich (1979) contended that ethnicity accentuates working class differentiation in segmented labour markets with a significant immigrant component, aggravating the ensuing antagonism between higher-paid (non-immigrant) labourers and lower-paid (immigrant) workers clashing over divergent interests. Laclau (1990) also views the emergence of class consciousness unlikely given the highly fragmented social identity that characterizes contemporary societies, thus suggesting that class and ethnicity are competitive ascriptions. Katznelson (1981), however, showed that class and ethnicity are not exclusionary identities. Studying the

historical development of community politics in U.S. cities, Katznelson showed that urban dwellers began to assume dual class and ethnic roles in local politics following the establishment of the factory system. He argued that the consolidation of the factory system in the nineteenth century resulted in the physical separation of home and the workplace, dividing cities into residential and work districts. With work and residential districts apart, two domains of social ascription began to emerge. While at work, in the industrial districts, workers assumed class positions even if narrowed down to the labour concerns workers' unions represented. However, away from work, at home, with their ethnic community, the dominant forms of social ascription turned ethnic and territorial: back in the residential districts workers ceased to be 'workers,' assumed an ethnic affiliation, and organized accordingly. Katznelson's analysis underscores the notion that in most societies ethnicity and class are no longer matters of absolute ascription and highlights the fluidity of social identities. It also incorporates the notion that ethnicity is a social construction emerging out of structural, contextual and relational circumstances.

Discussing ethnicity in Mexico, Cook and Joo (1995), however, noted that assuming ethnicity as a social construction makes it a purely subjective and instrumental phenomenon reduced to an identity "used in different ways by people in various situations, usually to stake a particular claim."[44] Yet in order to ammeliorate this conceptual problem they advised associating any analytically meaningful concept of ethnicity (as constructed) with "distinctive and objective cultural content that is meaningful to and practiced by insiders and observable by outsiders" paticularly language and other identifying markers operating to reinforce separate identities (dress,

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[44] Lynn Stephen, *Zapotec Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), Quoted in Scott Cook and Jong-Taick Joo, "Ethnicity and Economy in Rural Mexico: Critique of the Indigenista Approach," *Latin American Research Review* 30, no. 2 (1995), p. 50.

customs, kin-based institutions of solidarity and social reproduction, etc.)(Cook and Joo 1995: 52). Further, they suggest that inquiries into ethnicity be concerned with "how and why presumed ethnocultural identities or affiliations originate and are represented within complex structures of asymmetrical relations" while taking into consideration that "it is possible to designate many rural Mexican individuals accurately as having hyphenated identities – *indígena* and *mestizo* or Mexicano" (Cook and Joo 1995: 35). Central to this possibility are the changing features of Mexico's social geography that reflect persisting patterns of dynamic internal and international migration, sprawling urbanization, and rapid industrialization.

2.9 Migration, urbanization and the internationalization of production

The socio-economic characteristics of Mexico's countryside and rapid urbanization in urban areas fitted well with the explanation of migration that modernization theory advanced at the peak of its influence in the 1950s and 1960s. In modernization theory, migration is an individual decision made against the background of persistent "push factors" in laggard, poverty-stricken regions, and recurrent "pull factors" in developed, most often urban, areas (Wilson 1993). Modernization theory assumes the notion of a spatial polarity between backward (underdeveloped, rural) and modern (developed, urbanized) societies. Within this spatial spectrum, the progression from backward to modern lifestyles is linear and deterministic, requiring rural immigrants to adjust their way of life to the demands of the urban environment. When these immigrants are *indígenas*, modernization theory advocates and expects the adaptation/assimilation of the

indigenous peoples to the urban, modern realm.[45] In this sense, modernization theory is consistent with one of its most important influences: Redfield's folk-urban continuum model.[46]

In Redfield's model, progressive individuals from the countryside bridge the rural and urban domains by migrating to the urban areas. In the process, rural migrants adapt to the urban environment and adopt the modern values of receiving societies. Eventually, change takes place among rural folk when these modern values are transferred back to the sending communities through the mediation of returning migrants. In this framework, the locus of development and underdevelopment, tradition and progress, is clearly defined through distinctions between city and countryside. Butterworth (1962) adopted this framework in his study of the urbanization process in Mexico. Consistent with modernization theory, his unit of analysis is the individual (or family) and his analytical field the dichotomy of traditional (rural) and developed (urban) societies. He focused on rural indigenous immigrants' adaptation to the urban environment and the rewards they obtain upon migration: employment, access to health services, education, etc. He concluded, however, that socio-economic advancement among indigenous immigrants is not the result of migration itself, but the outcome of individuals' efforts to adapt to the requirements of urban living (i.e., by learning new skills and modern values).

Nevertheless, anthropological research conducted in developing countries during the 1950s and 1960s began to undermine the validity of key notions informing modernization theory and Redfield's model. Specifically, empirical evidence emerged undermining the

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[45] See Douglas Butterworth, "A Study of the Urbanization Process among Mixtec Migrants from Tilaltongo in Mexico City," *América Indígena* 22 (1962); Douglas Butterworth, "Selectivity of Out-migration from a Mixtec Community," *Urban Anthropology* 6 (1977).

[46] Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1941)

view that cities and the countryside were polar opposites. At the same time, numerous studies surfaced highlighting the shortcomings of emphasizing individual over collective agency, as modernization theorists did. Lewis (1952), found that rural-urban migration in Mexico was not associated with disorganization, individualization, the breakdown of family life, or the lost of rural social and cultural values among immigrants (as was the case among urbanized farm families in the U.S. according to Louis Wirth and the Chicago School[47]). Echoing Lewis' "urbanization without breakdown" thesis, Mangin (1967; 1970) observed that in the sprawling urban shantytowns of developing countries, living conditions resembled those of impoverished rural settings. Similarly, Mangin (1965) and Doughty (1970) showed how indigenous Peruvians from highland communities recreated ancient cultural practices in Lima's urban setting. Orellana (1973) reported similar findings in his study of urbanization processes in Mexico involving indigenous migrants. Collectively, these studies brought about two main conclusions. The first was that urbanization is not a simple, universally similar process but rather assumes different forms and meanings, depending upon historic, economic, and cultural circumstances. The second conclusion is that in certain societies, immigrants maintain social proximity with kin and hometown folk at both ends of the migratory spectrum: in the sending communities and in the receiving urban centres. These studies, however, establish the importance of social ties during urbanization using modernization theory lens: social networks are important to the extent that they assist the successful adaptation/assimilation of rural immigrants to the urban environment.

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[47] See also Herbert J. Gans, "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Revaluation of Definitions," in *City Ways: A Selective Reader in Urban Anthropology*, ed. Friedl and Chrisman (New York: Crowell, 1975).

During the 1970s dependency theorists challenged modernization theory's claims that migration would improve the social and economic conditions of people in developing societies. Introduced by André Gunder Frank (1967) and highly influential in Latin America,[48] dependency theory minimizes the cultural dimension of the modern versus the traditional in favour of emphasizing the structural relationships of dependency between regions. Dependency theory follows a chain of dependency through a vertical model where smaller cities and the countryside are satellites of the larger metropolises within the same country; in the same fashion, countries in the periphery are dependent outposts of the core (developed) nations. The central dependency theory tenet is that underdevelopment is the cumulative effect of surplus extraction from the periphery to the core developed areas. Mechanisms of surplus extraction are in operation at both the national and international levels and work to the detriment of the periphery. Key such mechanisms are internal migration from the rural areas to the national metropolises, and international migration from the periphery to the core nations. It follows that peripheral regions play the role of labour reserves for the core areas, which receive lasting influxes of economic surplus from the periphery.

Dependency theory's emphasis on the extraction of surplus throughout a vertical model of dependency relations nevertheless neglected horizontal economic, political and social relationships at the local level (Kearney 1986a). The theory of internal colonialism as elaborated by Stavenhagen and Gonzalez-Casanova addressed part of this problem: it focused on mechanisms of surplus extraction at the regional and community level but maintained the vertical, metropolis-satellite design of dependency theory. Moreover,

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[48] See for example Fernando Henrique Cardoso *et al.*, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

dependency and internal colonialism theories focused on the outflow of economic surplus from the peripheral to the core areas, overlooking the impact of flows of capital and goods in the opposite direction. World systems theory corrected this unidirectional perspective by adopting the more comprehensive view that capital, labour and commodities flow in all directions throughout a global capitalist system. By conceiving an international capitalist system in constant flux, world systems theory departed from the static framework of dependency theory that envisioned "an entrenched and essentially unalterable system of exploitation" (Portes 1978: 9) perpetuated in the periphery. It also provided a framework to account for the increasing flow of investments from the core to the peripheral regions, in particular towards the agricultural and urban areas of developing countries. Central to world systems theory is the notion that the capitalist system maintains its vitality by means of the division of labour taking place between the core nations (that concentrate higher-skill and capital-intensive production) and nations in the periphery and the semi-periphery (that concentrate low-skill and labour-intensive production) (Wallerstein 1974).[49] But what makes this division of labour work to the benefit of the capitalist system are the different kinds of labour and forms of labour control found in the core and periphery. Unlike workers in the core nations, in the periphery and semi-periphery needy workers accept low wages that stay minimal because labour representation is weak, allowing capitalists to appropriate a larger surplus.

Both world systems and dependency theories were influential in explaining the relation between migration and the considerable foreign investments that Mexico's agriculture and industry received in the context of import substitution industrialization

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[49] With more diversified economies, more skilled workforce and stronger states the semi-peripheral nations are less dependent on the core than peripheral ones.

(1940s-1980s).[50] World systems theory in particular was key to the understanding of export-oriented industrialization in Mexico that began in the 1970s (see Chapter 5). But with their emphasis on structure these theories neglected the role of culture and agency in the development process. With growing concerns over the implications of rapid urbanization in industrializing societies, during the 1960s emerged new perspectives generating horizontal models of social, economic, and political relations that incorporated both culture and agency.

2.10 Poverty and agency

In developing countries experiencing industrial and urban growth, the proliferation of urban slums that the low paid and the sub-employed inhabited made evident that the benefits of industrialization and economic growth were not trickling down to large segments of the population. Against the background of deepening import-substitution industrialization in Latin America (particularly in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico), and the escalating urban growth the region experienced during the 1950-1970 period, the growth of shantytowns gave empirical support to emerging theoretical perspectives revolving around the concept of "urban marginality." At issue were the capacity of the urban industrial complex to provide employment and services to the growing urban labour force, and also the trajectory of the urban labour markets. On the economic side, the urban economies were seen as complex systems connecting the modern sector with

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[50] See Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, *Modernizing Mexican Agriculture: Socioeconomic Implications of Technological Change, 1940-1970* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1976); Steven E. Sanderson, *The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture: International Structure and the Politics of Rural Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

expanding informality and growing low productivity occupations (Santos and Gerry 1979). Moreover, urban marginality theorists contrasted the growth of the marginal classes with the emergence of a comprador class and blue-collar occupations in the context of peripheral capitalism. But the disparities between the two classes were still largely explained in dependency theory terms, situating the Latin American cities within the centre-periphery relationship, and conceptualizing the urban marginal population as an industrial reserve army of labour.[51]

While urban marginality was concerned with the structural conditions of poverty and exclusion, it also addressed issues of agency and culture. Specifically, urban marginality theorists reacted against the notion that marginality resulted from a 'culture of poverty,'[52] which arguably prevented the integration of the urban underclass to the value orientations and behavioural patterns of modern society. Instead, urban marginality theorists stressed the significance of culture and traditional social practices in mediating the urbanization process. The focus thus shifted to establishing the mechanisms of articulation between the shantytowns settlers and the urban system, and between the cities and the countryside. Inquiring into how the urban marginal folk survive, Lomnitz (1975) reported that shantytown dwellers were dependent on urban networks of kin, hometown folks and neighbours to exchange goods and services outside the formal economy. In turn, Bromley (1978) focused on the multiple linkages between the formal and informal economies, identifying the significance of social networks in articulating both sectors. Such networks

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[51] See José Nun, "Superpoblación Relativa, Ejercito Industrial de Reserva y Masa Marginal," *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología* 5, no. 2 (1969); Aníbal Quijano, *Dependencia, Urbanización y Cambio Social en Latinoamérica* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1977).

[52] See Oscar Lewis, *Five Families. Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959). For a critique to Lewis' culture of poverty thesis see Helen Saffa, "The Poor are Like Everyone Else, Oscar," *Psychology Today* 4, no. 4 (1970).

were also found to be important factors in mediating the migration process (Lomnitz 1976).

While emphasising culture and agency, the cultural dimension in the theory of urban marginality is discussed with rural-urban, modern-traditional referents in mind. Ethnicity is largely omitted from the discussion, as the stress is on class (the urban army reserve of labour versus white collar elites), occupational (informal versus formal), and spatial (shantytowns versus suburbia) forms of exclusion. Nonetheless, Kearney (1986b) would later take up the notion that the urban and the rural, and the modern and the traditional are articulated through mechanisms involving social networks to discuss ethnicity and migration. Kearney also discussed the social, historical, and cultural basis of Mixteco migration to California. In this study, which gave birth to contemporary scholarship on Mixteco migration, Kearney developed the concept of "articulatory network" to argue that social networks are "articulating" California's capitalist agricultural economy with the pre-capitalist mode of production prevailing in Mexico's Mixteca region. Kearney discarded the notion that there is a unitary capitalist system, as conceived by dependency and world systems theories. Rather, he echoes anthropological research conducted in the 1970s,[53] which showed that dominant capitalist structures coexist with and even strengthen pre-capitalist modes of production. Kearney opted for the concept of articulation to stress the social network's role in facilitating "the flow of persons and the 'circulation' of cash, commodities, labour power, and information" (Kearney 1986b: 79). At the same time, by using the social networks framework he emphasises the role of agency and the cultural determinants of the migratory process. Kearney's work thus falls

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[53] Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal, and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Alan de Janvry *et al.*, "The Dynamics of Urban Poverty in Latin America," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 4 (1977).

within a body of scholarly work that views migration as a socially driven process. This perspective is grounded in the notion that migration is not only the movement of individuals responding to differential economic opportunities between locations (place of origin versus destination), but also an organized endeavour rooted in social and economic arrangements (Roberts 1974) as well as in culture and history (Kearney 1986a).[54] Driven by structure or agency, one of the outcomes of persisting internal and international migration in Mexico during the last decades is the changing geography of Mexico's population, which is shifting towards the north, in the direction of the U.S.-Mexican border. Along with the redistribution of the Mexican population came the rapid industrialization and urbanization of Mexico's northern border cities.

Armstrong and McGee (1985) argued that each society finds its own trajectory of national, sectoral and urban development through the interaction between its internal situation (political institutions, cultural behaviour patterns and values, class relations and structures) and the processes of capital penetration from outside. Moreover, they view cities as theatres of accumulation (i.e. the *locus operandi* for transnational capital) and centres of diffusion of the lifestyles and consumer habits of modern industrial society. In the following chapters I discuss relevant aspects of Mexico's internal situation and discuss how they interact with the process of capital penetration from the outside via maquiladora industrialization. Tijuana is the theatre of accumulation where the Mixteco people encounter the modern industrial society.

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[54] The work of Massey *et al.* (1987) discussing the social basis of Mexican migration to the U.S. is an influential example of this perspective. This collaborative report shows how networks of social relationships bonded by kinship, friendship, and *paisanaje* (same community folk) support the flow of people, goods, and information between Mexican sending communities and the United States. See also Douglas S. Massey *et al.*, "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 4 (1997).

CHAPTER 3

MIXTECOS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the Mixteco peoples and relevant aspects of their culture and social organization. Using secondary sources, specifically scholarly work documenting the Mixtecos' experiences as migrants, workers, and political agents, I also seek to highlight the vulnerability and dispossession that accompanies the incorporation of these indigenous people into the capitalist system and Tijuana's harsh urban environment. Because for the majority of Mixtecos participation in the capitalist economy entails migration, this chapter focuses on Mixteco migration to northern Mexico, which is relevant given the geographical focus of this study. Thus, in this chapter I discuss the structural condition of Mixteco migration, and address the social determinants of the migratory process, specifically the role of ethnic based social networks and grass roots organizations in supporting the Mixtecos to achieve migratory aims, secure jobs, and articulate collective demands.

Building on existing scholarship on Mixteco migration to northern Mexico and the U.S., in this chapter I highlight several related themes germane to this study: first, the conditions of exploitation and vulnerability that accompany the incorporation of the Mixteco peoples into the capitalist system via commercial agriculture in western North America, and second, the Mixteco people's reliance on social resources in the course of

migration and during the urbanization process, and the role of collective agency in defending their labour and human and civil rights on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, and third, the circumstances that led to the contingent construction of a newfound ethnic identity among the Mixteco people outside their home communities.

3.2 The Mixteca Region and the *Ñuu Savi*

The Mixteca region is one of the poorest and most ecologically devastated parts of Mexico. It covers roughly an area of 20,000 square kilometres that lies in the western part of the Mexican state of Oaxaca, extending without clearly defined limits to the neighbouring states of Guerrero and Puebla (Map 1). In the Mixteca region there are dozens of municipalities inhabited primarily by the *Ñuu Savi* (People of the Rain) or Mixtecos, descendants of a major Mesoamerican civilization. Contemporary Mixtecos thus share a common cultural heritage, and a distinct language, Mixteco.[55]

The Mixteca breaks into three culturally and ecologically distinct zones (The *Mixteca Alta* or Upper Mixteca, the *Mixteca Baja* or Lower Mixteca, and the *Mixteca de la Costa* or Coastal Mixteca). With borders in the coastal areas, and with its territory extending across valleys and mountain ranges up to altitudes of 1,400 meters above sea level, the Mixteca region offers great biodiversity despite large patches of soil erosion. With the population in the region best described as multiethnic, the Mixtecos living in the

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[55] The Mixtecos speak one basic Mixteco language; nonetheless there are many different Mixteco village based variants or dialects, complicating at times intra-ethnic communication.

area coexist with several other ethnic groups.[56] The multiethnic characteristics of the region pose difficulties in establishing clear political, economic and geographical borders within which the Mixteco people live. For example, there are municipalities in the Mixteca region where the Mixtecos are the majority but different ethnic groups outnumber them in other districts. Nevertheless, the state of Oaxaca accounts for the bulk of municipalities where the majority of the population recognize themselves as culturally Mixtecos: 117 municipalities that include 1459 communities or villages where the Mixteco language is predominant (Barabas and Bartolomé 1999).[57]

At the time of the Spanish conquest the Mixteca region was densely inhabited, with a population estimated at over one million people (González Licón 2001). According to census data (which is based on linguistic criteria), in 2000 there were an estimated 445 thousand Mixteco-speaking people over 5 years of age,[58] with the majority living in the Mixteca region. Barabas and Bartolomé (1999) noted, however, that the number of those who identify themselves as Mixtecos is considerably larger than the Mixteco-speaking population. This disparity is an indication of the changes the Mixteco community has experienced over time in matters of language. Nowadays, in the Mixteca region Spanish is widely spoken and bilingualism is common among Mixtecos. The use of Spanish is related to the historical interaction between the Mixteco peoples and the non-indigenous at various levels since the Spanish conquerors settled in the Mixteca region in the sixteenth century. Since colonial times, Spanish has been the language of the dominant

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[56] Ethnic groups other than the Mixtecos include: Chocholtecas, Triquis, Ixcatecos, Popolucas, Nahuas, Amuzgos, Tacuates.

[57] In the state of Oaxaca the Mixtecos form one of the largest indigenous groups, second in population after the Zapoteco peoples.

[58] Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, *Programa Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas 2001-2006* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 2001).

classes, and among the *indígenas* speaking Spanish carries implications of social mobility. For that reason the native languages have been gradually abandoned in favour of Spanish. There are other practical reasons for the Mixtecos to opt for Spanish. Since colonial times, first the Spaniards and then the *mestizos* have controlled the regional commercial centres, making Spanish the language of trade and the lingua franca for the multiethnic region. Yet the systematic promotion of Spanish as the single official language by the Mexican government has much to do with the declining use of Mixteco among Mixtecos. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Mexican government actively promoted the use of Spanish as part of the *mestizo* conception of the nation and to expedite the incorporation of the *indígenas* into the mainstream capitalist society. Instruction in public schools in the region was thus traditionally given in Spanish or the school system relied on bilingual teachers to assist the spread of the official language.

3.2.1 The Mixteca region and the social organization of Mixtecos

Kinship is the basis of the social organization among Mixtecos. The nuclear family is the basic social unit and patriarchy is what determines authority and gender relations within households. In the Mixteca region, married children live with their parents, although normally the expectation is that they will have their own house within the same plot (Ravicz 1965). Within the family, labour is organized by gender. Typically, women are in charge of housework (cooking, sewing, etc.), childcare, and other activities including making handcrafts or grazing animals, and men take up the tasks in the fields and other arduous chores. Moreover, it is common among children of either sex to get

involved in such activities as grazing animals or the carrying of firewood and water to their households (Caballero 2002).

In villages across the Mixteca endogamy is common and maintained largely through arranged marriages (Barabas and Bartolomé 1999). Although there are variants across the Mixteca region, it is customary for Mixteco parents (mother and father) to decide on spouses for male children in complex negotiations with the families of prospective brides. Courting often occurs at an early age and weddings often take place when couples are seventeen or eighteen years old, although in some part of the Mixteca younger unions are accepted by the community and tolerated by the authorities (Ravicz 1965). During marriage negotiations elder members of the nuclear and extended families of both parties play an important role in deciding such matters as the amount of the dowry the bride's family is to receive before a marriage agreement is settled (Ravicz 1965).

Marriages establish formal bonds between families sanctioned by the extended families during elaborate prenuptial protocols and the wedding itself. Barabas and Bartolomé (1999) noted that marriages form part of the system of alliances that is fundamental to the configuration of the Mixteco society. Alliances among individuals and families are also developed by means of establishing *padrinaje* (godparenthood) and *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship between parents and godparents) relations, which extend and reinforce the kinship system. Retaining a religious connotation, *compadrazgo* and *padrinaje* relations are lasting expressions of the syncretism that resulted from the Spanish colonization and the christianisation that accompanied it. Common among indigenous communities in Mexico, they involve complex, enduring mutual rights and obligations between godchildren and godparents, and between parents and godparents.

Formal in manner, interactions between members of the *compadrazgo* system entail respect as well as loyalty, and promote the establishment of solid mechanisms of cooperation between ritual kin and across the community (Maldonado 1999).

Mixtecos are required to partake actively in the social life of the community through long established practices. Men and women need to get involved in the *tequio*, which is an expression of the community's solidarity that entails participation in local endeavours (public works, projects by neighbours or family) through contributions in labour or kind. At a more formal level, men in the villages are required to take up responsibilities in the civil-religious *cargo* system. As part of Mixteco conception of community life, adults are expected to get involved in religious festivities and the local government hierarchy. Forms of participation in the civil-religious *cargo* system vary across the Mixteca. In general, however, a different group of men is periodically charged with the responsibility of performing religious or civil duties. Men are called upon to serve without remuneration as municipal authorities. In the religious complex, a key *cargo* or post is that of *mayordomo* or sponsor, who finances religious festivities with the coordination of *cofradías* or congregations in charge of overseen celebrations in the religious calendar. In the Mixteca, each community has its own patron saint venerated on an established date every year. Prior to the festivities the community typically selects a *mayordomo* to assume the responsibility of the expenses and organization of the events celebrating the patron saint. Patron saint and other religious festivities are a key element in the reproduction of indigenous identity not only because they build on and maintain the communities' social structures. Religious festivities also serve to periodically reinforce local belief systems, to bring absentees back to the community, and to showcase esthetics

and artistic forms (Flores 2000). For the individual, involvement in community affairs is not only expected but also sought as a source of prestige among Mixtecos. Moreover, when taking up either religious or civilian duties individuals reaffirm their membership in the community, with all the rights and obligations it entails. While for the individual the financial burden of accepting civil-religious responsibilities is often important, for the community the *cargo* system works as a way to balance social and economic differences among its members. It also works as a mechanism to blend the system of public authorities (mayor, councilmen) with traditional community authority figures, particularly the elderly, who accumulate status and prestige (hence respect and authority) through life-long involvement in civilian and religious *cargos* (Ravicz 1965).

3.3 The geography of Mixteco migration

Across the Mixteca, subsistence agriculture and cattle raising, small-scale forestry, and petty commodity production (based largely on palm weaving) sustain the region's economy. The narrow economic base of the Mixteca region, chronic unemployment and decreased access to land due to soil erosion are factors contributing to sustain the long tradition of out-migration among Mixtecos (Kearney 1986b). But while the economic conditions of the Mixteca are generally precarious, Flores (2000) noted that out-migration is concentrated in 71 municipalities located in the western tip of the state of Oaxaca, where soil erosion is greatest.

Historically, the geographical scope of Mixteco migration has changed according to shifting labour markets. At present, however, Mixteco migrants are for the most part

heading north, in the direction of Mexico's northwestern states, the U.S.-Mexican border region, and across the national limits into the United States.

Figure 1. The Geography of Mixteco Migration, Mexico and the Mixteca Region

Tijuana

United States of America

Nogales   Cd. Juárez

Baja
California   Sonora

Sinaloa

Gulf of Mexico

N
W   E
S

Puebla

Guerrero
Oaxaca   Chiapas   Belize

Guatemala
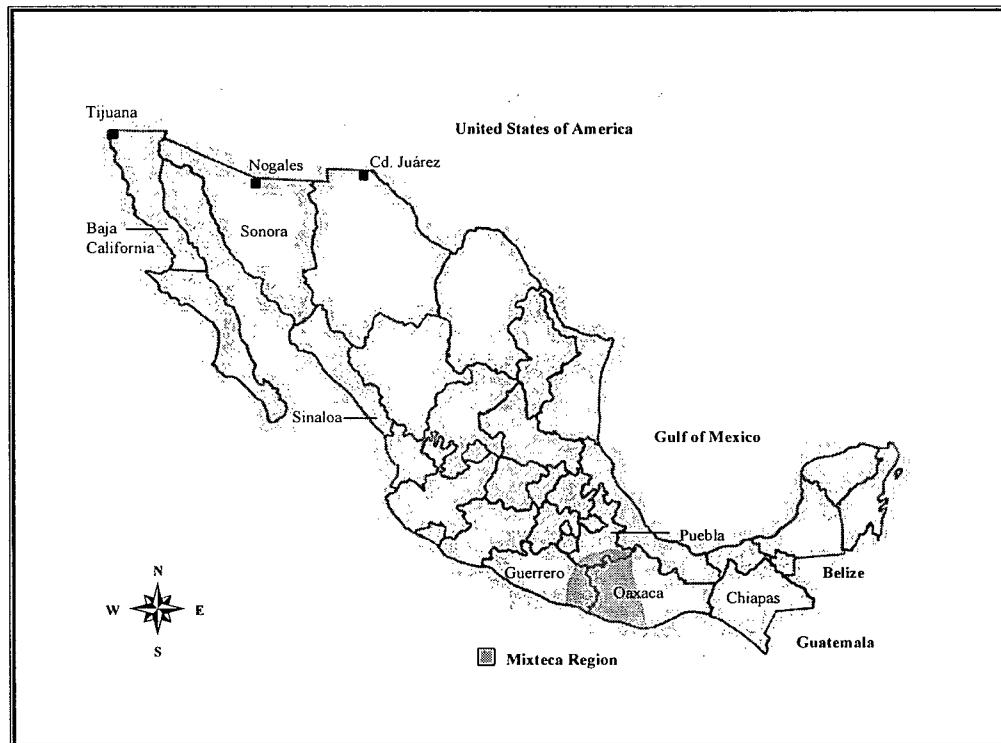
Mixteca Region

Source: author's rendition

Kearney (1986b) situates Mixteco migration to Mexico's northern border region and the United States in the latest of various migratory stages that began in the pre-Columbian era, when Mixteco migrants first ventured to areas adjacent to their home communities. In a later stage, during the first part of the twentieth century, Mixteco migration flowed largely into the commercial agricultural operations along the Gulf of

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Mexico, where Mixteco wage labourers were in charge of sugar cane harvesting, and into urban areas in south and central Mexico.

The outer frontier of Mixteco migration was expanded in the second half of the twentieth century when demand for wage labourers in north western Mexico and the United States increased. The first incentive for Mixteco migration northwards was the "*Bracero*" guest-worker program[59] that the United States and Mexico formalized in 1942 to meet the demand for agricultural workers in southern California and other southern states.[60] With the migratory route to the north open by the "*Bracero*" program, during the mid 1950s Mixteco migration began to flow to northwestern Mexico, where export-oriented agriculture attracted seasonal workers. First the demand for labour came from cotton producers in the northwestern state of Sonora. But major irrigation projects in the states of Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California set the basis for large-scale production of fruits and vegetables for export markets, thus attracting seasonal Mixteco workers to such regional centres as Culiacán (Sinaloa), and more recently San Quintín (Baja California). Following the expansion of Mixteco migration to Mexico's northwest, ethnic enclaves emerged in the area as Mixteco households relocated near the agricultural centres, and in border cities, particularly in Tijuana and Nogales.

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[59] *Bracero*: term derived from *brazo*, Spanish for arm. It was coined in the context of labour agreements between Mexico and the U.S. (1942-1964) and refers to a legally contracted Mexican farm worker in the U.S. When the agreements were discontinued the term *bracero* had already become in Mexico synonymous with a Mexican man or woman working in the U.S.

[60] The first of these agreements (The War time Mexican Labour Program) was established in 1942 and lasted until 1947. After the war ended, the U.S. demand for Mexican labour remained high due to the expanding economy of the southwestern states. In 1948 a second temporary labour agreement was reached between Mexico and the U.S. using the first as a blueprint. It was in effect until 1951 but subsequent renewals prolonged the framework for importing Mexican labour to the U.S. until 1964, when the *Bracero* Program was officially terminated. See also Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971).

There are also Mixteco immigrant settlements in California[61] as a result of the latest

stage of Mixteco migration that began in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, when labour

contractors in the citrus industry took crews of Mixteco pickers across the U.S.-Mexico

border (Kearney 1986b). More recently, Mixteco migrants have ventured further north,

approaching the Canadian border meeting the demand for agricultural workers in Oregon

and Washington State (Stephen 2001).

3.4 Structure and agency in Mixteco migration

Butterworth (1962) adopted a modernization theory perspective in his study of the

urbanization process in Mexico, where he explains Mixteco out-migration as a market

mechanism driving manpower from the impoverished Mixteca region to industrializing

urban centres (i.e. Mexico City) where employment opportunities were on the rise.

Butterworth focused on the changes the Mixteco migrants experience during insertion

into the urban environment. For that he contrasts aspects of life among Mixteco migrants

in Mexico City with the traditional way of living in the sending community. He

suggested that steady employment among immigrant Mixtecos, access to education for

their children, and good health in the community signalled socio-economic advancement.

In his view, the immigrants' successful adaptation to city life is a matter of individual

agency, and their ability to learn new skills and values while maintaining strong

emotional ties within the family, with fellow hometown migrants, and with their village

back in the Mixteca. In Butterworth's analysis, the immigrants' experiences at the

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[61] In San Diego County and in towns along the San Joaquin Valley in central California, particularly Arvin, Madera, Fowler and Selma. See Carol Zabin, *Migración Oaxaqueña a los Campos Agrícolas de California*, Current Issue Brief (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1992).

workplace are not discussed. Rather, the focus is on what was seen as the desirable, expected outcome in the lens of modernization theorists: the successful adaptation of rural immigrants to the modern realm of the cities. There is, therefore, not a discussion in relation to any form of resistance to adaptation or about the mechanisms at work to assimilate the immigrants into the "modern" society. Similarly lacking is an assessment of the social costs involved as assimilation proceeded or how collective agency contributed to the process. Orellana (1973), however, introduced collective agency and began to deal with the role of culture in his study of urbanization in Mexico. Specifically, he examined the formation of a Mixteco association in Mexico City. First launched as a neighbourhood association, this organization provided newly arrived Mixteco migrants with a territorial base for community solidarity as well as access to housing and employment. The structure of the association, which incorporated features of the civil-religious *cargo* system prevalent in the Mixteca region, suggested that migration studies needed to incorporate agency as well as the social and cultural determinants of the migratory process. Kearney (1986b) incorporated these variables in his discussion of the social, historical, and cultural basis of Mixteco migration to California. In his view, this articulation is mediated by culture and is grounded in larger structural contexts at the two ends of the migratory route.

Following Kearney's lead, during the 1990s numerous studies began addressing the case of Mixteco immigrants and their experience as agricultural workers or urban dwellers. Situated in the context of U.S. bound migration and covering a wide range of issues, these studies look at cases set in agricultural fields in Mexico and the U.S., in urban environments in northern Mexico, and in the transnational space this indigenous

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community is beginning to occupy through social, economic and political endeavours straddling the Mexican-U.S. border. Existing literature on Mixteco immigrant workers include macro studies dealing with migratory patterns and farm labour markets in Mexico and the United States (Zabin 1992; Zabin and Hughes 1995), and case-specific analyses addressing the working conditions of Mixteco workers (Velasco 2000a), issues of gender and household strategies among Mixtecos (Velasco 1995), grass roots organizations involving indigenous migrants (Rivera-Salgado 2002), and ethnic identity (Kearney 1995, 2000; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Stephen 1996). A common denominator in these studies is the conclusion that migration created the conditions for the emergence of a new sense of ethnic identity among immigrant wage labourers and urban dwellers. With a review of these studies, the following sections discuss how common ethnicity bound Mixteco immigrants together to confront the challenges of migration, urbanization, and incorporation into the capitalist economy.

3.5 The Capitalist Connection and Vulnerability

State support and foreign capital invested in extensive irrigated landholdings propelled large-scale export-oriented agricultural operations in the Mexican states of Sonora, Sinaloa, and Baja California Sur. Nevertheless, it is the labour force of indigenous workers (with Mixtecos being the most numerous) that makes the agribusinesses of the region competitive in foreign markets. This labour force grew gradually, built larger with immigrant workers that were part of a broader trend of Mexican northbound migration. Regarding the process of labour force formation in the

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region, Zabin and Hughes (1995) argued that large investments in Mexico's northwestern states cemented a pattern of staged migration that allowed indigenous workers from southern states to sojourn while working in commercial agriculture in Mexico before entering the U.S. From the standpoint of immigrants, phased migration lowers the risks and costs of migration because it grants migrants the opportunity to accumulate information, contracts, savings, and skills along the way (Zabin and Hughes 1995). Over the years, however, at each stage of the migratory route, a highly vulnerable indigenous population has settled on a more permanent basis. This is the case of the Mixteco community at San Quintín valley[62], a labour intensive export-oriented horticultural centre in Baja California Sur. Nagengast and Kearney illustrated the exploitative working conditions of the predominantly indigenous workforce at San Quintín:

> [M]en, women, and children plant, tie, prune, weed, spray, irrigate, handpick,
> and stack vine-ripened tomatoes… (Nagengast and Kearney 1990: 78).

Workers are hired without job contacts for periods matching seasonal needs. They are paid below the minimum agricultural wage, and get accommodation in crowded, guarded camps with limited, inadequate services (Velasco 2000a). In these camps, dwellers are mostly Mixtecos living in squalor, separated from the *mestizo* workers who are given superior housing facilities (Nagengast and Kearney 1990). In the fields at San Quintín, indigenous and *mestizo* workers are not treated equally either. Contractors assign different tasks to each group of workers, giving the *indígenas* the most arduous chores and the better paid, less strenuous packaging duties to the *mestizos* (Velasco 2000a). This

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[62] The San Quintín Valley extends over 37,000 square kilometers in the northwestern Mexican state of Baja California and is located 300 kilometers south of Tijuana and the U.S. border.

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differentiation highlights the Mixtecos' inferior status within the production process, which mirrors the *indigenas'* lowly social standing in the broader society.

In the United States, the indigenous agricultural workers are valued for their hard work and willingness to follow the agricultural cycle. Zabin (1997) reported that by gaining access to networks of Mixteco migrants, Californian agricultural growers secure a continuous flow of males of prime working age who migrate, for the most part, without their families. These young Mixteco males play the same role of granting competitive advantages to California's agriculture:

> A workforce of lone males offers tremendous advantages to employers because the workers not only are extremely productive, they are also generally willing to work long and flexible hours and to accept poor living conditions close to the fields (Zabin 1997: 350).

In California, Mixtecos and other Mexican indigenous immigrants, not the Mexican *mestizos*, take the lowest waged agricultural jobs, where they lack work benefits but must nevertheless pay surcharges for transportation and housing (Zabin 1992). They are amongst the poorest workers in the U.S., earning less than the minimum wage and living in makeshift outdoor camps sheltered by abandoned vehicles, cardboard shacks, or even holes dug by the workers (Nagengast and Kearney 1990). Moreover, the intensity of job competition among migrants, the short-term nature of jobs, and language barriers amplify the disadvantageous position of indigenous workers in the U.S. labour market (Zabin and Hughes 1995).

Cultural aspects also influence the vulnerability of the indigenous migrants in both Mexico and the U.S. Native speakers of one of the many variants of the Mixteco language, Mixteco workers find themselves at a disadvantage in the agricultural labour

market in Mexico and the U.S. because they lack the ability to communicate effectively in either Spanish or English. Although Spanish is widely spoken among Mixtecos, their command of the language is often limited, forcing them to rely on bilingual middlemen who intervene in the hiring process but without representing the best interests of the indigenous workers (Velasco 2000a). In the United States, immigration and border policies further increase the defencelessness of Mixteco men, woman and children, creating what Stephen (2001) described as a hostage population of undocumented workers. Reporting on the case of Mixteco farm workers in Oregon, Stephen noted that increasing policing at the U.S.-Mexico border is curtailing the ability of undocumented workers to go back and forth to Mexico, thus making available a stable pool of labour to supply the agricultural economy. At the border, "[as] indios, Mixtecs are especially vulnerable to extortion and exploitation by border guards, municipal and state authorities, and gangs of ordinary criminals" (Nagengast and Kearney 1990: 79). At the work place, hounded by the immigration authorities and intimidated by their illegal status in the U.S., the undocumented workers are compelled to hold on to lower paid agricultural jobs and accept substandard work conditions (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Stephen 2001).

Kearney (1991; 2000) noted that at the roots of Mixteco vulnerability at both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border is the Mixteco's uncertain status within society, since they are denied the option to exist as normal citizens in either Mexico or the U.S. This is because in Mexico the Mixtecos are not only stigmatized as *indígenas* but also deprived of the alternative of remaining in their communities or in their country because of economic necessity. Upon migration to the U.S. they are beyond the reach of the cultural and political hegemony of the Mexican nation-state but other factors impinge in their cultural

and economic vulnerability. In the U.S. they become ostracized aliens unprotected by the legal framework. Kearney's conclusion was that among indigenous migrants, when responding to their uncertain status within society, ethnicity has emerged as an alternative to nationalist consciousness.

It is in the context of great vulnerability that ethnic consciousness has emerged among Mixteco immigrants to confront the challenges posed by migration and urbanization on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. But the vulnerability the Mixtecos endure has specific political, economic and social determinants that define the expressions of ethnic identity. For this reason, among Mixteco migrants, ethnic affiliation comes along with struggles for human, economic and labour rights, and takes the form of organizations rallying support for specific political and economic objectives.

3.6 Migration and ethnic identity

In the Mixteca region there is a strong sense of community-based identity. In contrast, ethnic-based identity is rarely salient. Mixtecos "think of themselves first and foremost as residents of a given pueblo far more than belonging to a political district, ethnic group, state, or nation" (Spores 1996: 33). This sense of intense local affiliation and identity has been historically reinforced by political-administrative fragmentation, endogamy within communities, communal land ownership, obligatory communal labour, and centuries old boundary disputes with analogous adjoining communities (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Spores 1996). But in the Mixteco enclaves along western North America, ethnicity has emerged as a "self-conscious sense of peoplehood" (Kearney

2000: 177), visible through cultural expressions and Mixteco participation in agricultural unions, voluntary associations, grass roots movements, and bi-national political organizations. Through collective action, these indigenous migrants are putting together a broad agenda that includes human and cultural rights issues as well as welfare and religious-political concerns in the sending communities in Mexico.

The emergence of such a self-conscious sense of peoplehood among Mixteco labourers is closely related to their ability to recreate cultural practice and continue with traditions outside their communities of origin, which in turn depend on their ability or the possibility to maintain linkages with the community.[63] Nagengast and Kearney (1990), however, viewed the emergence of Mixteco ethnicity in northwestern Mexico and U.S. as a "highly contingent" process set into motion by migration and the Mixtecos' incorporation into the capitalist organization of production. Throughout the migratory route, in the new locations where the Mixtecos are settling, community-based cleavages and linguistic differences among the Mixteco migrants gradually wither as new kinship ties are hatched, novel 'traditions' are established, and new solidarities are developed (Lestage 2002). Influencing these changes are the realities of migratory life, where such practices as community-based endogamy are difficult to sustain, and customs are adapted to incorporate new influences or to adjust to the limitations set by the new context (Lestage 1999). Furthermore, outside their home communities in the Mixteca region, Mexico's predominantly *mestizo* population reinforces the ethnic identity of the indigenous migrants by detaching themselves from the indigenous "other". Expressions

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[63] For a discussion of the role temporary migration plays in reinvigorating Mixteco culture and traditions among immigrant labourers see Juan José Atilano Flores, *Entre lo Propio y lo Ajeno: La Identidad Etnico-local de los Jornaleros Mixtecos*, Migración Indígena (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 2000).

of this detachment are outright discrimination and vilification against the *indígenas*, who are, paradoxically, oftentimes glorified as quintessentially Mexican (Martínez Nova 2003; Nagengast and Kearney 1990).

Exploitation and abuse are also catalysts for ethnic based resistance and political action. This argument is illustrated in various scholarly reports that chronicle how indigenous migrants have responded to exploitative working conditions, harassment and discrimination through collective action. The settings for indigenous agency and the emergence of ethnic consciousness among Mixteco migrants are the agricultural fields of western Baja California, California, and Oregon, and the harsh urban conditions of border cities. Illustrative of this trend is the rise of Mixteco consciousness and activism in the San Quintín Valley, in the Mexican State of Baja California; the subject of several studies chronicling the labour unrest that in 1984 engulfed the valley under the Mixteco leadership of the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agricolas y Campesinos* - CIOAC[64] (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Nagengast *et al.* 1992; Velasco 2000a, 2002a; Wright 1990). What is distinctive about labour unrest at San Quintín is that ethnicity is a galvanizing factor. Given the ethnic composition of the work force, in San Quintín "growers are confronting labour unrest and workers not as workers but as Mixtecs" (Nagengast and Kearney 1990: 82) in a protracted conflict marred by violence and involving state-sponsored attempts to control and co-opt the unions as well other emerging ethnic organizations (Velasco 2000a).

In Tijuana, the Mixteco immigrant community has obtained infrastructure, schools, and welfare benefits through the active participation and mobilization of its members

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[64] CIOAC, a labour union independent from Mexico's then state-controlled *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (C.T.M.).

(Rodríguez 2000). Across the city, there are several neighbourhood associations representing Mixteco dwellers in the *colonias* with large Mixteco population. With Mixteco leadership, these associations seek improvements in the *colonias* through negotiations with local and federal authorities, and have succeeded in obtaining benefits (e.g, street pavement and schools). In colonias such as *Obrera Tercera Sección, Valle Verde* and *Pedregal de Santa Julia* there are schools for bi-lingual education where indigenous teachers provide leadership and the ability to link the community with local authorities. These neighbourhood associations are part of an array of grass roots organizations and networks of indigenous peoples in Tijuana supporting community initiatives and political projects at various levels. Women-led associations of street vendors that for the last two decades have engaged in negotiations with the local authorities for the right to sell in the streets of Tijuana are among the most conspicuous. There are also hometown associations that draw membership along village lines. Their role is to link villages in the Mixteca heartland with the Mixteco immigrant communities outside the region. Typically, the local authorities in the sending communities endorse the representatives of these associations in Tijuana, who are entrusted with the task of ensuring those away from the villages fulfill civil and religious obligations with their hometowns. These village-oriented associations are also expected to funnel resources collected in Tijuana to finance improvements and festivities in the sending community. All these local organizations connect formally but sometimes loosely with broader indigenous organizations that operate at the local, national, and bi-national level. Represented in Tijuana, organizations such as the *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional* (FIOB)[65] and the *Acadèmia de la Lengua Mixteca*[66] seek political or academic

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[65] The FIOB is a community-based non-governmental umbrella organization that brings together

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objectives with the participation of indigenous immigrants and their associations in both

Mexico and the United States.

The milestone of Mixteco participation in local political struggles was the formation

of the *Asociación de Mixtecos Residentes en Tijuana* (ASMIRT)[67] in 1984. ASMIRT was

the response of Tijuana's Mixteco community to police raids against street vendors,

mostly women and children, under the argument that they lacked vending permits.

Angered, Mixtecos from different *colonias* rallied in protest and secured the release of all

vendors taken into custody during the raids. The success strengthened the Mixteco

community, showed the potential of collective action, and led to the formation of

ASMIRT. A former member of ASMIRT's leadership describes the broader role the

association played within Tijuana's Mixteco community:

> The *Asociación de Mixtecos Residentes en Tijuana* became a sort of traditional
> authority for Tijuana's Mixtecos. It dealt not only with matters of indigenous
> representation or issues concerning street vendors, and the defence of fellow
> Mixtecos against police abuse [...] it also became a kind of arbitrator for inter
> community conflict.[68]

Links between ASMIRT and San Quintín's CIOAC union amplified the political

visibility of the Mixteco people in northern Mexico and signalled the emergence of what

Nagengast and Kearney call a pan-Mixteco identity "encompassing all the fragmented

identities into which post-conquest has shattered 'the Mixtec'" (Nagengast and Kearney

1990: 187). In 1986 ASMIRT succumbed to internal bickering and pressure from outside,

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individuals and several other indigenous organizations and communities in both Mexico and California.
See also Chapter 4.

[66] The Academy of Mixteco Language, seeks to promote the use of the Mixteco language and create a
grammar standard to all the different Mixteco dialects, among other objectives.

[67] Association of Mixteco Residents in Tijuana

[68] Tiburcio Pérez Castro, interview by author, 25 November 2002, digital recording.

presumably the state (Clark Alfaro 1991). Later, several other Mixteco organizations emerged in Tijuana taking up the same issues and concerns[69]. However, cooperation among these organizations is weak and some have been co-opted by local authorities and political parties.

In California and Oregon, the indigenous Mexican migrants have established links with farm worker unions either to obtain assistance on immigration matters or seeking to defend their labour rights through unionization (Stephen 2003). Like Mexican *mestizo* immigrant in the U.S.,[70] Mexican indigenous immigrants, notably Mixtecos, Zapotecos, and Triques have organized hometown associations geared towards supporting the sending communities (Stephen 2003). These associations have thereafter become visible expressions of indigenous self-differentiation and wellheads for political participation (Kearney 1991). An innovative feature of ethnic activism along the border is the deterritorialization of indigenous politics. This is the focus of studies by Kearney (1995; 2000), Rivera-Salgado (2000; 2002), and Velasco (1999; 2002) who discuss at length the formation of organizational alliances incorporating the political and cultural concerns of indigenous Mexicans at both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These organizational and political endeavours are largely discussed through the transnational approach, which emerged in the 1990s in response to the growing interest in cross-border processes as the global restructuring of capitalism intensified.

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[69] For a genealogy of Mixteco organizations along the U.S.-Mexico border see Laura Velasco, *El Regreso de la Comunidad: Migración Indígena y Agentes Étnicos. Los Mixtecos en la Frontera Norte de México* (Tijuana: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2002a).

[70] For a case study of Mexican *mestizo* hometown associations in U.S., see Carol Zabin *et al.*, "Economic Integration and Labor Flows: Stage Migration in Farm Labor Markets in Mexico and the United States," *International Migration Review* 29, no. 2 (1995).

3.7 Indigenous Transnational Communities

The reordering of capitalism following the end of the colonial era and the demise of Fordism entailed accelerating flows of investments, commodities, and labour across borders. Given the seemingly fading significance of national boundaries, theories dealing with transnationalism emerged in the 1990s as an attempt to reassess the scope of the nation-state. Against the backdrop of escalating cross border processes, transnationalism also sought to address the nature and capacities of those numerous communities, organizations, and processes transcending one or more nation-states (Basch *et al.* 1994).

While the operations of corporations spanning borders (the transnational corporations) are one of the central concerns of transnationalism, the analogous notion that communities transcend national boundaries (the transnational community) is also a key component of the transnational approach. According to this view, transnational communities are deterritorialized entities that inhabit a "transnational space" where the sovereignty of the nation-state is not clearly established. At the heart of the concept of transnational communities is the argument that people (i.e. transmigrants) "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlements" (Basch *et al.* 1994: 7). The result is the construction of a social field that preserves but also recreates communities and identities through economic, political, social, and cultural links spanning nations.

The literature on transnationalism builds on the case of the legal and undocumented workers in the United States to develop the notion of a transnational community. For Kearney and Nagengast (1989), the close ties that Mexican immigrants in the U.S. maintain to their home communities, reinforced by periodic return visits and cash remittances sent from the U.S., knit a transnational community that transcends the

Mexican-U.S. border. Influenced by the work of Michael Kearney, the broad study of Mixteco northbound migration thus adopted the transnational approach, shifting its empirical focus towards "the transnational context within which Mixtecs migrate and within which their identity is shaped" (Kearney 1995: 226). For example, Velasco (1999) focuses on transnational indigenous communities along the U.S.-Mexico border; Rivera-Salgado (2000) centres on transnational political strategies; and Besserer (1999) examines the concept of transnational citizenship in the context of 're-territorialized' Mixteco communities.

In this perspective, the border between the U.S. and Mexico frames the cultural, political and legal jurisdictions of these two nation-states, which the Mixteco migrants transcend. According to Kearney (1991; 2000), the indigenous Mixteco immigrants in the United States are disposed to live outside these jurisdictions for various reasons. On the one hand, there is the cultural and social ambiguity of the territory they inhabit. This territory is the U.S.-Mexico border region that fuses aspects of life and society from both countries. On the other hand, there is the ambiguous status of the Mixteco immigrants themselves, who are denied the option of existing as normal citizens in either Mexico or the U.S. In Mexico, they are not only stigmatized and vulnerable but also dissuaded from staying in their rural communities because of economic necessity. In turn, within the U.S., the legal framework is prejudiced against them and they are socially ostracized aliens who are also beyond the reach of the cultural and political hegemony of the Mexican nation-state. Kearney further argues that in these ambiguous terrains, indigenous Mexican immigrants have embraced their ethnic indigenous identity as an alternative to nationalist consciousness.

Kearney (2000), Rivera-Salgado (1999; 2000; 2002), and Velasco (2002) have further elaborated on how indigenous identity has been mobilized across the border

through the formation of grassroots organizations in the United States and in Mexico. The most visible and illustrative example of transnational political activism comes from the activities of organizations addressing problems indigenous migrants face in Mexico and the U.S. regarding labour, civil, and human rights issues.[71] The bi-national reach of these organizations is their more salient characteristic. This feature allows them to launch political initiatives in Mexico and the U.S. while drawing membership from both countries. The *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional* (FIOB)[72], for example, operates regional offices in both countries from its headquarters in California, draws membership from immigrants in Mexico's northern states and in western U.S. states, and undertakes projects in collaboration with other U.S. and Mexican partners in both countries (Rivera-Salgado 1999).

Ethnicity is however only one dimension of collective action among indigenous immigrants in northern Mexico. In Tijuana, for example, as the Mixteco population increased and became established, local Mixteco organizations began to echo the changes taking place in the community. As an expression of social change, an important characteristic of Mixteco organization is the leading participation of Mixteco women in the urban economy and local politics.

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[71] Notable examples are the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional (FIOB), the Organización Regional Oaxaqueña (ORO), and the Federación Oaxaqueña de Comunidades y Organizaciones Indígenas (FOCOICA). These organizations, launched throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, are in turn the offspring of past political activism involving Mexican and other immigrant communities in the U.S. Each has its own political and ethnic orientation, which is discussed at length by Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, "Cross-Border Grassroots Organizations and the Indigenous Migrant Experience," in *Cross Border Dialogues*, ed. Brooks and Fox (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 2002).

[72] The FIOB was established in 1994 as a coalition of indigenous organizations, communities, and individuals of Oaxacan descent. Yet its immediate forerunner is the Frente Mixteco-Zapoteco Binacional, formed in 1991 as a coalition of five indigenous organizations operating in California.

3.8 Mixteco women: migration, agency and patriarchy

The literature on Mixteco migration to the U.S.-Mexico border region has also paid special attention to issues of gender and females' participation in the economy and society. Velasco (2000b) argued, for example, that migration among indigenous women to the border region is closely linked to the migratory pattern of indigenous males. As the region began attracting indigenous workers from predominantly indigenous regions, males were the first to migrate (either as single men or as married men without families coming along). When migration became more permanent and the indigenous migrants settled alongside agricultural fields or in urban centres, families followed. With this pattern deepening over the years, the presence of indigenous women and children in the fields and border cities gradually became commonplace. Velasco (1996; 2000b) also discussed the experience of these Mixteco women in the various spheres (domestic, productive, political) where female agency is deployed. Along the lines of gender and development theory,[73] Velasco (1996) identified a series of different spheres of female action where the involvement of women takes diverse forms. Rejecting the idea of a dichotomy between the private and the public domains, she found that these Mixteco women superimpose the spheres of production and reproduction in complex ways and illustrates this pattern with the case of street vendors in Tijuana. For these Mixteco women, the Tijuana's streets and plazas are places to sell trinkets but also spaces of reproduction, where they take care for their accompanying children. At the household

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[73] The Gender and Development theory takes a holistic perspective looking at all aspects of women's lives. Central to its analytical approach is the notion that women are active agents of change and participants of the development process. Nevertheless, this theory recognizes that patriarchal relations operate within and across classes to oppress women. It follows that gender relations – not gender roles – are the focus of analysis. See Nalini Visvanathan et al., The Women, Gender and Development Reader (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood, 1997).

level, the money the Mixteco women Velasco studied earn selling in the streets is not only a key source of family income; it is also a way to ease the household's vulnerability associated with job instability affecting the male partners. At home, these Mixteco women plan and prepare the merchandise to sell in the days ahead. But unable to fully escape the various patrimonial mechanisms of subordination that frame their daily existence, they also take up most of the daily chores of household maintenance and reproduction. Subordinated to the authority of their husband, they feel compelled to ask for permission to leave, and a sense of inner conflict and culpability afflicts these women when leaving the household to work outside (Velasco 1996). Paradoxically, through collective action these same women have gained a position in Tijuana's urban economy and a role in local politics.

Female participation in Mixteco grass roots organizations in Tijuana dates back to the conflict between Mixtecos and the local authorities over the use of public space in the tourist district. Velasco (1996) and Clark Alfaro (1991) reported how female street vendors have successfully gained a noticeable position in the city's informal economy through active participation in negotiations with local authorities. With the support of the local Mixteco community, for the last two decades they have laboriously negotiated with the city's authorities for street vending permits for Mixteco women and jobs for males in the city's utilities and services departments. Seeking this objective they have founded several associations led predominantly by women but organized on the basis of common ethnicity. By so doing, they have also entered into new spheres of action: the Mixteco community and the political field. Yet in these spheres other mechanisms are at work to suppress them not only as women but also as workers and indigenous peoples.

3.9 Conclusions

Mexico's Mixteca region in southern Mexico is a multi-ethnic territory where the indigenous peoples are the majority. Given the numerical significance of the indigenous population, the region retains distinctive forms of culture and social organization best identified as pertaining to the indigenous peoples and not to Mexico's mainstream *mestizo*. Because of its faltering economy, migration is an integral part of the economic and social life in the region. Both men and women have a long history of temporary or permanent migration to other regions where the capitalist economy is more developed. Historically, the Mixteca heartland has thus served as a labour reserve supporting the expansion of capitalism in various locations throughout North America. Traditionally, however, surplus labour from the Mixteca (notably the Mixteco peoples) has matched the demand for labour in only two sectors of the capitalist economy: agriculture, and to lesser extent the service sector. But over the years, migratory patterns among the Mixteco peoples have adjusted to shifting conditions in the agricultural labour markets. As a result, the geography of Mixteco migration has extended considerably along with the expansion of the agricultural frontiers in Mexico and the United States. In Mexico, when major irrigation and infrastructure projects set the basis for the expansion of export-oriented agriculture in northwestern Mexico, Mixteco migrants tapped the demand for labour. In the United States, Mixteco workers are the latest in the succession of foreign immigrants meeting labour demands in the agricultural economy of western states. To fulfill this role, the Mixtecos need to travel thousands of kilometres from southern Mexico to the doorsteps of Canada.

First published in the 1960s, a significant number of scholarly reports have traced the Mixtecos through agricultural fields, labour camps, impoverished settlements, and city streets and plazas to examine their migratory experience. Reflecting the limited job options available to indigenous migrants, these studies focus largely on the Mixtecos' involvement in agriculture or the informal economy. Most examinations of Mixteco migration make customary reference to one of the structural determinants of the process: the narrow limits of the economy in the Mixteca region. Nevertheless, the scholarly literature on Mixteco migration can be broadly divided into two intersecting groups. One group focuses on structural determinants of Mixteco migration, the other on matters of culture and agency. Despite differences in perspective, several recurrent themes surface from these reports; first, the relentless incorporation of the indigenous peoples into the capitalist economy; second, the conditions of exploitation and vulnerability the indigenous workers confront at the receiving end of the migratory journey; thirdly, the deployment of social and cultural resources by indigenous migrants during migration and urbanization, which are taking the form of ethnic based organization articulating collective strategies and demands; fourthly, the emergence of a new sense of ethnic identity among the Mixteco people outside their home communities.

With subsistence agriculture being the prevailing economic activity in the Mixteca heartland, migration plays the role of linking the Mixteco people with the capitalist economy outside the region. The uneven expansion of capitalism in Mexico (discussed in Chapter 2) encouraged explanations of Mixteco migration in modernization theory terms. These explanations thus emphsized the structural "push" and "pull" factors driving migrants away from what modernization theorists regarded as "backward" (i.e. rural,

traditional) locations. Modernization theorists like Butterworth used a push-pull framework to explain Mixteco migration to Mexico City and, consistent with his modernization theory approach, argued the immigrants were in transition from backwardness to modernity. In reality, however, Mexico's modern capitalist sector failed to incorporate Mixteco surplus labour, which eventually joined the informal economy or crossed the border to the United States. Nevertheless the modernization theory perspective is relevant to other structural aspects of Mixteco migration. This is because the Mexican state helped create the structural conditions for Mixteco migration through national projects conceived in modernization theory terms, namely the state's drive to modernize the economy, and the *indigenista* project that sought to incorporate the *indigenas* to the capitalist economy. Thus, the Mexican state's attempts to modernize the economy explain the geographical shift in the pattern of Mixteco migration. First restricted to regions close to the Mixteca heartland, Mixteco migration later extended to western Mexico, where the state concentrated efforts to modernize the agricultural sector through infrastructure projects that deliberately attracted foreign investments. At the same time, efforts by the government to spread the use of the Spanish language among all Mexicans supplied some *indigenas* with a valuable tool to venture longer-range migration. These structural circumstances help explain the convergence of Mixteco labour and capital in Mexico's northwest, the U.S.-Mexican border region, and western United States. Other key factors include the *'Bracero'* guest-worker program that formalized the temporary flow of labour between Mexico and the United States, itself a testimony that Mexico's economy had failed to absorb the surplus labour the rural sector released.

Steady Mixteco migration northward during the second half of the twentieth century created a stable, reliable workforce for commercial agriculture in both Mexico and United States. Migration also sustained emerging immigrant communities that dotted the migratory route. But what characterize the lives of immigrant workers in both the fields and the enclave communities is the condition of exploitation and vulnerability they confront on a daily basis. Studies cited in this chapter dealing with the incorporation of Mixteco immigrant's accession to wage employment discuss the process largely in world systems theory terms, thus recognizing the multi-directional flow of capital, commodities, and labour across the border. Accordingly, the Mixteco workforce is conceived as a pool of labour, and migration and low wages as the mechanisms to transfer surplus to the core capitalist economy. But exploitative wage labour relations are only part of the explanation for the wretched conditions of Mixteco migrant workers in the agricultural fields in northern Mexico and the United States. At both sides of the border, abusive wage labour relations are reinforced through mechanisms of social control that create the conditions for the effective exploitation of indigenous workers. These include social fragmentation in the form of differential wages (*mestizos* versus *indigenas*) and outright segregation of the *indigenas*; various forms of discrimination; and political disfranchisement, particularly in the United States, where indigenous workers are often undocumented and therefore criminalized. Thus, while in the agricultural camps in northern Mexico class relations are clearly established, it is through the dynamics of inter-ethnic stratification that extra-economic coercion supports exploitative production relations. In Tijuana and other border cities the Mixteco immigrants making a living out of informal occupations are largely excluded from the

class structure. Nevertheless, their relation with the mainstream *mestizo* society is marked by their subordinated position in Mexico's lasting intra-ethnic stratification system. Racial prejudices, and the entrenched perception among local *mestizos* that the Mixtecos are a social liability thus contribute to create a vulnerable labour reserve in the urban centres.

Exploited and vulnerable, the Mixteco immigrants have nevertheless deployed social and cultural resources to accomplish important migratory objectives. This is a recurrent argument in studies examining the Mixteco diaspora, which for the most part focus on the social organization of migration, bringing agency and culture into the analysis. What these studies have established is that during migration the Mixtecos rely upon kinship and *paisano* networks to access critical information and assistance regarding work, accommodation, and travel arrangements. When migration to the cities is involved, the urbanization process is mediated with the assistance of similar social networks, fitting a pattern that urban marginality theorists observed among rural-urban migrants throughout Latin America. At the receiving locations, Mixteco immigrants have also given institutional forms to loosely structured social networks by organizing hometown or *pueblo* associations serving individual and collective objectives. Emerging in agricultural milieus or urban *colonias,* these organizations link the sending and immigrant communities, provide a base for community solidarity among immigrants, and serve as mechanisms to resist assimilation and exploitation. While building on traditional practices (such as the religious-*cargo* system common in the Mixteca region) and established social networks, these organizations have a distinctive ethnic representation. Often multi-ethnic but assertively *indígenas*, these organizations are not seeking to assist

assimilation. Rather, their objectives include the preservation of the indigenous heritage, the protection of human and labour rights, and gratification in the form of access to services and infrastructure. That is, the ethnic based organizations emerging at Mixteco enclaves across the migratory route are not solely reproducing cultural practices in the receiving locations but serving objectives germane to their condition as discriminated immigrants, exploited workers, harassed informal merchants, and criminalized aliens (in the U.S).

An important conclusion drawn from the Mixtecos' ability to act collectively is that a new sense of ethnic identity is bringing them together. In the Mixteco scholarship discussed in this chapter, ethnicity is not viewed as primordial in character and is therefore removed from the immobility associated with ancient and inherent traits. Instead, it is conceived as a form of social identity accomplished over historical time, and in response to structural conditions. It follows that ethnic consciousness among Mixteco immigrants emerged, or better, was constructed in response to a particular historical conjuncture: the expansion of the commercial agricultural frontiers in Mexico and the United States during the second half of the twentieth century. At the centre of the constructivist approach to ethnicity is the notion that ethnicity is socially constructed through the incorporation and adaptation of pre-existing group solidarities and cultural traits to a fluid group identity. With its emphasis on agency and ethnic solidarity, this approach positions the discussion of ethnicity and immigration against the assimilation model that predicts the inexorable disintegration of so called traditional communities and cultures through modernization.

But the Mixtecos' ability to act collectively outside the Mixteca heartland, and the contingent nature of their newfound sense of ethnic identity in receiving locations also raises questions about the limits of ethnic consciousness as circumstances change. Precisely because of the contingent, constructed nature of Mixteco ethnic consciousness outside the Mixteca region, the possibility that such newfound sense of ethnic identity would recede remains open. In contrast to the emerging sense of ethnic consciousness among Mixteco immigrants, the prospect of an eroding ethnic identity among Mixteco immigrants is an alternative outcome that has to be considered as the urbanization of indigenous migrants continues and the labour markets change.

In Tijuana and other border cities, long-term Mixteco residents as well as newly arriving Mixteco migrants are finding their way to the thousands of maquiladora plants clustered along Mexico's northern border. As they come into the assembly plants and join the workforce, the Mixtecos are opting out (at least temporarily) of agriculture, informality, and other low income occupations they have traditionally taken. By so doing they are entering the capitalist system through a door that takes them to the enclosed, rationally organized precincts of manufacturing production. At the same time, however, the same door takes them to a working and social environment where the dynamics of Mexico's intra-ethnic stratification system are reproduced. How are the combined forces of intra-ethnic differentiation and rationalized production playing out to redefine separate ethnic identities?

Discussing the changing labour markets in Tijuana, specifically the industrial labour market, in Chapter 6 I will report how labour shortages afflicting the maquiladora industry throughout the 1990s obliged maquiladora managers to hire workers of

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indigenous descent, including many Mixtecos. I will also argue that at the factories these workers are exposed not only to an untried working and social environment but also to assimilation forces challenging their ethnic identity and their ability to act collectively. These challenges are not fortuitious but associated with the changing nature of their involvement in the economy. While the nature of agriculture and urban occupations, particularly street vending, allowed for sizable groups of Mixtecos working together in a shared space and relative isolation, maquiladora employment is having the effect of dispersing the Mixtecos throughout the cities in an assortment of different plants. As part of the changes they confront, at the maquiladoras the indigenous workers are exposed to the production and managerial practices that best suit the firm's market and distribution strategies. These practices comprise well-defined expectations regarding the attitude and behaviour of workers not compatible with the most visible traits of Mixteco identity, notably language. Moreover, at the maquiladoras the Mixtecos come into daily coexistence with non-indigenous co-workers in a socializing experience uncommon in other occupations traditionally sought by Mixtecos. In the factories, the tensions inherent in the intra-ethnic stratification system thus become a variable in defining the indigenous workers' attitude towards their own ethnicity.

Moreover, from the perspective of the indigenous workers, the experience at the factory redefines the significance of individual versus collective objectives. In contrast with the shared objectives (e.g. seeking municipal permits for street vendors) present in occupations that assemble large groups of Mixtecos, at the maquiladoras the managerial discourse promotes the pursuit of individual objectives and suppresses non-production related goals. Through fixed working hours, various shift alternatives, and steady income

and petty benefits the maquiladoras offer a job alternative that allows the Mixteco worker to design a strategy to accommodate individual objectives. While these objectives are likely to be compatible with those of the worker's family, it remains to be assessed if they are also compatible with those of the larger Mixteco community.

CHAPTER 4

TIJUANA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is about Tijuana and seeks to describe the research site and the harsh urban context the Mixteco community under consideration inhabits. It introduces Tijuana through a description of its urban form and the role the city plays in linking Mexico and United States socially and economically. The following sections thus highlight several important features of the city's spatial structure: the inequality of its urban form, the intense social polarization of the city, and the subordination of the urban space to the requirements of economic exchange with the U.S. This is in order to illustrate aspects of the structural inequalities in Mexican society, and the position of the Mixteco community within Tijuana's urban milieu, the local economy and the city's social hierarchy.

In tandem with descriptions of Tijuana's urban form, this chapter seeks to trace structural changes influencing the local economy and its labour markets. This is with the aim of illustrating the functional role this city plays in linking Mexico and the United States economically and socially, explain Mixteco migration to this U.S. border location, and discuss the origins of the local maquiladora industry.

Lastly, Tijuana's Mixteco community is introduced against the backdrop of the urban space it occupies: local impoverished colonias, and city streets and plazas. In these urban spaces members of Tijuana's Mixteco community live and reproduce aspects of

their indigenous culture. But in the ample space of the city, Tijuana's Mixtecos are also discriminated against while making a living holding the lowest slots within the local labour market hierarchy; circumstances that illustrate their subordinated status within Mexico's class structure and inter-ethnic stratification system.

4.2 Tijuana

Tijuana is the westernmost city in northern Mexico (see Figure 2). It is a sprawling metropolis of over 1.2 million inhabitants located 17 miles south of San Diego, California, right at the Mexico-U.S. international border in the Mexican State of Baja California. The layout of the city rests upon a rugged topography delineated by narrow canyons, mountainous terrain and the course of the Tijuana River. The land is barren and devoid of adequate sources of water and building materials.

Tijuana has long been regarded as a sinful city crowded with bars and bordellos frequented by the curious and the reckless. But Tijuana is also an industrious community with a well-diversified economy. During the last three decades the leisure economy that cemented the city's sordid reputation has given way to a vigorous secondary sector driven by the maquiladora industry. As one of several maquiladora centres along the U.S.-Mexican border, Tijuana hosts maquiladora plants giving employment to workers from all corners of Mexico. Yet for the pedestrian visitor entering the city from the U.S. at the San Ysidro crossing point, the first encounter with a local is not likely to be with

one of the 150,000 workers employed at the local maquiladoras.[74] In all probability a Mixteco woman or child will approach the visitor first to offer an array of trinkets and trifles for sale. Such encounters between tourists and Mixtecos are a common scene at this exasperatingly busy border crossing.[75] At this point of the lengthy border between Mexico and the United States, dozens of Mixteco street vendors line their stands up to make a modest living out of the intense social and economic exchange between the two countries.

Figure 2: Tijuana and U.S.-Mexico border
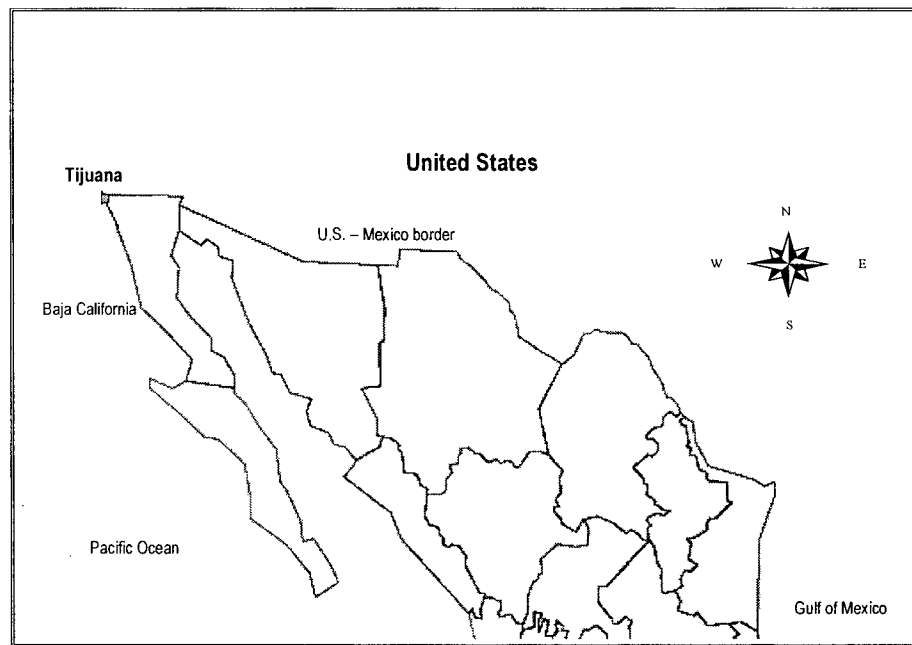
Source: author's rendition

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[74] INEGI, "Características de los Principales Municipios Maquiladores," in *Estadística de la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación* (December: 2002).

[75] For a discussion on Tijuana's Mixtecos and the tourist industry see Victor Clark Alfaro, "Los Mixtecos en la Frontera (Baja California)," *Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales* 10 (1991).

The convergence of maquiladora plants and indigenous Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana is the outcome of two parallel developments set in motion by the capitalist system during the second part of the twentieth century in Mexico. One of these developments is the insertion of Mexico's northern border into the sphere of global manufacturing through maquiladora industrialization. The foreign investment behind maquiladora industrialization in Tijuana began to flow in the 1970s, bringing hundreds of maquiladora plants now scattered throughout the city. The other development is the expansion of commercial agriculture in northern Mexico and southwestern United States demanding immigrant labour to sustain operations. As reported in Chapter 3, immigrants from the Mixteca region have met such demand since the 1940s after the first 'Bracero' guest-workers program started to drive migrant labour to Mexico's northern areas. The Mixtecos living in Tijuana have their roots in the Mexican states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, over 3000 kilometres south of the Mexican-U.S. border. Like the investments behind the hundreds of maquiladoras scattered throughout the city, the Mixtecos came to Mexico's north attracted by the opportunities the local economy and the nearby border offers.

4.3 The border economy and urban change

A solitary minaret fits uncomfortably in Tijuana's cluttered cityscape. The tall, decaying structure is an odd match for the twin glass high-rises built decades later a few blocks up the road. These ostensibly disparate structures are nevertheless landmarks of two salient periods of the local economy. The tiled minaret was a detail of the architectural fantasy of the famed *Casino de Agua Caliente*, a legendary attraction

opened in the 1920s during Tijuana's heyday as a tourist destination. The twin glass towers were built in the 1980s, when Mexico's maquiladora industrialization gained momentum. The minaret is now a relic of the time when Tijuana was glamorous and Hollywood's stars and hopefuls flocked to the local casinos, bars and spas. In contrast, the twin glass towers are full of activity catering to the local business community, providing office space to multinational corporations, consulting firms, and numerous other businesses servicing the local maquiladora industry. Tijuana's cityscape also features a truly iniquitous landmark, the steel fence that the U.S. government built hoping to curb undocumented migration. But despite this fence, it is the borderline that makes Tijuana attractive for visitors and foreign investors alike. The border that delimits the city is what explains its economic and political significance. This is because the border creates opportunities for those crossing to the other side – either side – where they can take advantage of the potential opened by different economic, political and legal systems.

4.3.1 The border and the origins of the local economy

When the US-Mexico War ended in 1848, a new border was drawn between the two countries. At that time Tijuana was only a remote hamlet 3000 kilometres away from Mexico City. But the new border gave significance to the northwestern corner of the downsized Mexican territory where the city grew larger. In 1874 the establishment of a Customs Office gave administrative relevance to this remote settlement (Piñera and Ortiz 1989a). It was only a matter of time before trade between communities from both sides of the border gave economic importance to the Customs outpost and the settlements around it. During the 1890s things changed little in Tijuana and the city's population grew

slowly. At the turn of the century only 1,000 people lived in Tijuana (Griffin and Ford 1976), but the prohibitionist movement that swept the United States in the early 1900s began to change the pace of Tijuana's urbanization, setting the local economy onto a new course.

As the prohibitionist movement in the United States gained momentum, the enactment of the U.S. Volstead Act in 1919 that banned the production and sale of alcoholic beverages in the United States boosted the profitability of Tijuana's *cantinas* and saloons. These leisure establishments provided tax income to the city, and by increasing in numbers they also began to outline Tijuana's urban structure. Most entertainment businesses concentrated in the city centre close to the border crossing where a tourist landscape began to take form (Arreola and Curtis 1993; Verduzco *et al.* 1995). The close distance between the border crossing and the growing tourist district was an early indication that the urban structure was to be determined by the social and economic exchange between Mexico and the U.S.

The 1920s thus marked the start of Tijuana's golden era of the tourism and cemented its ever-lasting reputation as Sin City (Arreola 1996), but the local tourism industry began to wither with the repeal of Prohibition and the start of the Great Depression (Arreola and Curtis 1993). The final blow to Tijuana's golden age of tourism industry was the proscription of gambling activities in Mexico in 1935 (Piñera and Ortiz 1989b), which was enacted against the background of the new morality of post-revolutionary Mexico. The fading tourism industry had done little to attract Mexican labour, as most jobs were given to American workers who commuted from California

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(Ruiz 1998). Nevertheless, Tijuana's economy was about to rebound and the city's population was due to expand rapidly.

4.3.2 The allure of the border and population growth

Tijuana's explosive urban growth is part of a broader demographic trend characterized by the rapid population growth of Mexico's northern border during the second part of the twentieth century (see Table 2). This demographic pattern results from the steady migratory flows from Mexico's interior to the country's northern states, beginning in the 1940s.

At the onset of World War II, Tijuana's population was still under 20,000 and for most Mexicans it was no more than a remote outpost. Yet population growth in Mexico's border cities was first fuelled by the increasing demand for Mexican agricultural workers in the U.S. during the final years of World War II. The cross-border supply of labour from Mexico to the U.S. was formalized by means of successive agreements between the two countries, which are known generically as the "*Bracero* Program" (1942-1964). This guest-worker program had an important impact on Mexico's northern border-city growth. During the twenty-two years this agreement was in effect, millions of Mexican agricultural workers obtained labour contracts issued under the bi-national agreement. Yet the demand for labour under the *Bracero* program stimulated the stream of Mexican workers seeking employment in the U.S. In the process, the cities on the Mexican side of the border absorbed (temporarily or permanently) part of the flow. Consequently, during the years the program was in effect the population of Mexico's northern border cities

experienced a multi-fold increase. During that time, Tijuana's population grew from 21,977 inhabitants in 1940 to 340,583 in 1970 (Table 2).

The supply of Mexican workers proved to be in excess of the *Bracero* Program's established quotas and hundreds of Mexicans began crossing to the U.S. without proper documentation (i.e., work permits or immigration papers). This practice continued after the demise of the labour agreement, and the Mexican border cities carried on playing the role of migratory stations. By the end of the labour agreement in 1964, these cities began to absorb the returning *braceros* as well as the continuing flow of migrants seeking to cross to the U.S. undocumented. The population expansion of Mexico's border cities thus gained momentum.

Table 2. Population, Mexico and Northern Border Region, 1930-2000

Year	Mexico	Border States	Border Municipalities	Tijuana
1930	16,552,772	2,054,345	283,395	11,271
1940	19,653,522	2,617,623	412,813	21,977
1950	25,791,017	3,762,963	874,643	65,363
1960	34,923,129	5,541,100	1,573,892	165,690
1970	48,225,238	7,848,169	2,357,061	340,583
1980	66,846,833	10,691,887	3,134,307	461,257
1990	81,249,645	13,222,146	4,115,419	742,686
2000	97,483,412	17,104,496	--	1,274,240

Source: Data for 1930-1990 (adjusted for consistency) from Rene M. Zenteno and Rodolfo Cruz. "A Geodemographic Definition of the Mexican Northern Border." In *Demographic Dynamics of the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. John Robert Weeks and Roberto Ham Chande, 29-41. El Paso, Tex.: Texas Western Press University of Texas at El Paso, 1992. Data for 2000 from Consejo Nacional de Población. "Inidcadores Demográficos Básicos." 2003.

Two Mexican government policy initiatives contributed to the population explosion that Mexico's northern border region experienced past the end of the *Bracero* Program. The first was the short-lived National Border Program established in 1961. With this program the government recognized the importance of Mexico's northern region for the Mexican economy and initiated measures to encourage both industrial activity along the border and the expansion of agriculture. The National Border Program also included projects to revitalize the tourism economy of the region's towns through urban renewal and beautification (Dillman 1970a, b). It later grew into the Border Industrialization Program created in 1965. This new government policy introduced to Mexico's northern region the concept of offshore production with the goal of creating employment opportunities for the returning *braceros*. As it turned out, the long-term impact of the Border Industrialization Program on the region exceeded all expectations regarding industrial growth, employment generation and urban expansion. With the Border Industrialization Program in place, Mexico's northern border cities began to attract foreign investment and the maquiladoras Ultimately, the expansion of the maquiladora economy would also change the size, urban form and function of Mexico's northern cities.

4.4 The urban space: the profit-generating zones and Tijuana's *colonias*

Tijuana's proximity to the U.S. border is the key variable in defining the intensity of the social and economic linkages between this Mexican city and the United States. Traditionally close, these linkages are marked by Tijuana's dependency on the direction

the economy north of the border takes. The urban form and structure of the city mirrors this uneven relation. Its long-gone casinos, the scores of maquiladora parks that dot the city, and the infrastructure projects sustaining the city were built to meet specific demands of the U.S. economy and society. The same can be said about service establishments as diverse as bars and clinics that proliferate close to the border crossings to cater a predominantly American clientele. By meeting these demands Tijuana has sustained its economy, yet in the process the urban space became subordinated to the requirements of foreign consumers and capitalists, in detriment of the urban poor who live in the sprawling colonias.

4.4.1 The profit generating zones

Mexico's border cities share with other cities in Mexico's interior the sheer spatial inequality that characterizes the urban form of most cities in the rest of Latin America (Arreola and Curtis 1993; Griffin and Ford 1980; Herzog 1990). In Tijuana, as in other cities on the Mexican side of the Mexico-U.S. border, inequalities in land allocation segregate the urban space into high-yield areas (devoted to industry, commerce and the provision of services) and residential neighbourhoods characterized by sharp differences in the quality of housing and the availability of services and amenities. What characterizes the pattern of urban space configuration in Tijuana is its bias towards satisfying the spatial requirements of the continuing economic and social exchange with the U.S.

Tijuana's tourism, commercial and industrial activities concentrate in areas adjacent to the international border. At present, the core of Tijuana's tourist landscape remains very much in the same area as during the 1940s and 1950s. Although the type of clientele has changed over the years, the centre of the tourist quarter is still *Avenida Revolución.* On weekend nights, thousands of American teens cruise up and down it past countless bars, nightclubs, curio shops and shopping arcades. This busy strip full of attractions connects in the north with *La Zona Norte,* a district of dark, tawdry bars and rundown hotels on streets frequented by alcoholics, drug addicts and prostitutes. These establishments, like those at *Avenida Revolución,* have proliferated haphazardly. In contrast, with major commercial and industrial developments in other parts of Tijuana are the product of state participation and urban planning.

Urban planning in Tijuana was scant during most of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, during the last three decades all levels of government have been actively involved in reordering Tijuana's urban structure via planning and infrastructure projects. Thus far the outcome has been uneven. This is because the state has been proactive in developing profit-generating zones but lax in providing vital services for the low income settlements that dominate the city's landscape (Herzog 1990).

The first major attempt by the government to reorganize the land use configuration of Tijuana was a multipurpose project on the floodplains of the Tijuana River.[76] The project began in 1972 and best exemplifies the patterning of urban space use, distribution and acquisition that has given shape to Tijuana's urban structure. It involved a flood control channel and the development of 4.2 square kilometers into roads and space for

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[76] This urbanization project involved all levels of government but was largely driven by the Federal branch.

high-grade commercial, government, recreational and cultural use. But to begin the groundwork an extensive slum area known as *Cartolandia*[77] had to be removed. The slum first housed immigrants stranded in Tijuana during the *Bracero* Program but grew larger when aspiring undocumented workers use it as a springboard to cross the border. It was also a notorious eyesore that conflicted with the government plans to launch the city's tourism revival and its bid to attract foreign offshore industries. *Cartolandia* was eventually flattened 1973 and the slum dwellers reallocated to camps in the outskirts of Tijuana (Padilla 1989). [78] In 1976, the flood control channel and adjoining urban development were completed and the former slum site was turned into a neatly urbanized area safe of hazardous floods. This area is now known as the *Zona Rio*.[79]

While the *Zona Rio* has a commercial and real estate orientation, other parts of Tijuana have been developed through private and government involvement to accommodate the requirements of Tijuana's foreign-driven industrialisation. At the Mesa de Otay, a wide plateau to the east adjacent to the U.S.[80], a planning effort is evident in the grid of organized streets and avenues that give shape to the extensive housing and industrial park development of *Ciudad Industrial Nueva Tijuana*. Nearby, the new Otay crossing facility was built to expedite the commercial traffic between San Diego and the

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[77] *Cartolandia* derived its name form *cartón*, Spanish for cardboard, because the Cartolandia squatters used cardboard boxes to build their houses.

[78] The events surrounding the eviction of *Cartolanida* settlers sparked a conflict between the evicted and the local authorities. The protracted conflict led to the emergence of several grass roots organizations that demanded access to housing and urban infrastructure. For a discussion of Tijuana's urban social movements see José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, *Empapados de Sereno. El Movimiento Urbano Popular en Baja California (1929-1988)* (Tijuana, B.C.: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1991).

[79] Conveniently located near the San Ysidro border crossing, the *Zona Rio* offers upscale office space and restaurants, shopping malls and is the site of the City Hall and other government buildings. Its most recognizable landmark is an enormous sphere (known by the locals as *La Bola*) located in one of the tree-lined boulevards running parallel to the canalized Tijuana River. It is part of a grand cultural center and a symbol of modern Tijuana.

[80] The borderline bisects this Otay plateau. The subdivision in the Mexican side is called Mesa de Otay, but the U.S. part is named Otay Mesa.

industrial parks of the vicinity. Tijuana's airport facility is close by, flanking the international border at Mesa de Otay.

Nevertheless, when the first maquiladoras began to dwell in the cityscape in the 1960s, Tijuana was ill prepared to accommodate the rapid industrial and population growth that followed. Urban growth in Tijuana had so far proceeded without investments in land use planning, building codes, or zoning ordinances (Griffin and Ford 1976) and industrialization rapidly exposed the inadequacy of existing urbanization. The border limited the expansion of the city northward; thus it gradually extended eastward and westward across the flatland of the Tijuana River valley into hills and canyons. Towards the southeast, south and west of Tijuana the extremely rugged topography limits the availability of land for housing and industry. Nevertheless, the industrial sprawl proceeded in all directions. There are industrial parks of all sizes, scattered throughout the city in locations planned to be close to the arterial street network or the international border.

Medina (1992) identified two main concentrations of maquiladora plants in Tijuana. The most traditional maquiladora location in the city is at a corridor that extends through the Agua Caliente and Díaz Ordaz boulevards, the city's inner thoroughfares, and stretches to the outskirts of Tijuana, near the Rodríguez Dam. Because this corridor developed parallel to the expansion of the maquiladora industry in Tijuana, it hosts an assortment of plants representative of the changes undergone by the sector. The southeast of the city is the site of another large concentration of maquiladora plants (Medina 1992). The most conspicuous agglomeration in this part of the city is the *Ciudad Industrial Nueva Tijuana* but neighbouring industrial parks also congregate large and modern

maquiladoras producing capital as well as intermediate and consumer goods (Medina 1992). Other large parks, for example the *Parque Pacifico* east of Tijuana, and the *Parque Florido* on the highway to Ensenada cluster scores of plants.

The way Tijuana's urban structure expanded is closely related to the priorities set by the state. In 1984 public land tenure accounted for 36.6 percent of Tijuana's urban area and a single government agency[81] was in control of most of this land (Hiernaux 1986). Notably, this government agency held ownership control over two prime urban land reservoirs set aside primarily for commercial and industrial use. One of these areas was the formerly flood-prone plain turned prime urban land upon completion of the flood control channel (the *Zona Rio* and environs); another was the land allocated for the *Ciudad Industrial Nueva Tijuana*, the industrial park and housing development near the international border at Mesa de Otay.

Government control over a vast area of urban terrain not only influenced the market value of land in the city. It also encouraged the expansion of the city towards areas unsuitable for urban development (Hiernaux 1986). In 1984 only 74.83 percent of Tijuana's city area was on suitable urban terrain[82]. The remaining area featured steep topographic slopes, making sewerage and water supply difficult and costly (Ranfla and Alvarez 1989). Urban settlements in these high gradient areas expose large segments of

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[81] The agency being *Promotora para el Desarrollo Urbano de Tijuana* (PRODUTSA), created in 1981 by Mexico's Federal Government, which held control of it until 1990, when it was handed over to the Government of the State of Baja California.

[82] Land adequacy figures from Arturo Ranfla *et al.*, "Expansión Física, Formas Urbanas y Migración en el Desarrollo Urbano de Tijuana 1900-1984," *Ciencias Sociales* 3, no. 2 (1989) Figures are based on the Plan de Desarrollo Urbano del Centro de Población de Tijuana, SAHOPE, 1984; suelo urbano.

the local population to the risk of landslides and other hazards, particularly mudslides and flash floods,[83] afflicting Tijuana's populous *colonias*.

4.4.2 Tijuana's *colonias*

Prior to 1950, Tijuana's urbanized area extended no further than four kilometres from the city centre (Ranfla and Alvarez 1989) and the rugged terrain surrounding the Tijuana River valley was scarcely populated. Only a handful of *colonias populares* or low-income neighbourhoods surrounded the city's core. This began to change in 1955 when the government authorized the first *fraccionamientos* or real estate developments, thus inaugurating Tijuana's suburban expansion (Piñera and Ortiz 1989a).

Nowadays, a salient feature of urban Tijuana is the visibility of its dozens of *colonias populares* or low-income neighbourhoods. This is because the local topography creates the effect of showcasing the *colonias* and the city's poorest squatter communities. From the vantage point of almost any street intersection, rows of uneven streets and clusters of low-quality housing can be seen in the distance up on the hills or down the canyons that define the city.

The names of Tijuana's *colonias* are conveniently displayed in the dashboard of rickety station wagons, the main means of transportation for Tijuana's working class. Always jam-packed, these collective taxis route through often steep, unpaved roads that give access to Tijuana's low-income areas. The majority of these *colonias* grew large without the benefit of urban planning and expanded with a rationality of a different sort.

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[83] For a categorization of the risks associated with extreme weather conditions in Tijuana see Alain Winckell *et al.*, "El Niño in the City: Vulnerability Assessment in Tijuana during the Winter of 1997-98," *Geofísica Internacional* 43, no. 3 (2003).

Many grew out of *reacomodos* or reallocations of squatters from high-risk areas to safer lands spared of the hazards of floods or mudslides. Other settlements became *colonia*s after protracted conflicts between groups of squatters and landowners. Yet all likely expanded through slow, drip-like land invasions by relatives or fellow townsmen of the first settlers.

High concentration of urban land ownership, speculation and the allocation of the city's most suitable land to commercial and industrial use limited the availability of legally titled land to absorb the continuous migratory flows. Mounting difficulties to assimilate urban growth became evident with the proliferation of spontaneous irregular housing settlements; the wretched evidence of the highly segregated urban structure that characterizes this city.[84] Alegría and Ordóñez (2002) reported that in 2002 there were in Tijuana approximately 12,258 hectares held irregularly. In this vast area lives overcrowded an estimated 62 percent of the city's population,[85] housing is generally precarious and access to sewerage and piped water inadequate (see Table 3) despite the fact that in the irregular settlements live an estimated 57 percent of those employed in the municipality (Alegría and Ordóñez 2002).

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[84] There are estimates that the tenancy status of at least 57 percent of all occupied housing in Tijuana was initially irregular or unlawful. While there has been an effort on the part of government agencies to provide land tenure rights to tenants, the process proceeds slowly and behind schedule. As a result, large patches of the urban area remain occupied by settlers without right or title. See Tito Alegría *et al.*, *Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra y Consolidación Urbana en Tijuana, B.C.* (Tijuana: Tijuana Trabaja, A.C., 2002).

[85] Population density in these settlements is 64 inhabitants per hectare compared to 51.7 in Tijuana as a whole. Demographic data from Ibid.

Table 3. Housing Characteristics in Irregular Settlements in Tijuana, 2000

Characteristics	Percentage / Total Dwellings
Houses with substandard roofs	73
Houses with substandard walls	50
Single room dwellings	24
Houses connected to public sewerage system	67
Houses connected to public piped water system	64

Source: Tito Alegría and Gerardo Ordóñez, *Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra en Tijuana, B.C.* (Tijuana: Tijuana Trabaja, A.C: 2000).

In Tijuana, as in other urban areas of Mexico and Latin America, access to housing in low-income *colonia*s and squatter communities depends on self-help practices involving family and neighbours (Hiernaux 1986). The topography in this border city poses, however, an unvarying challenge for these efforts. The steep slopes that afflict the local terrain call for the frequent use of used tires to build retaining walls or makeshift stairs to access the plots. Extensive use of scrap wood and metal, and all sorts of discarded material imported from the U.S. complements the inventory of building supplies in the *colonias*. On the whole, the uneven terrain, the use of an assortment of recycled construction materials and the shabby adoption of building techniques used north of the border (Hiernaux 1986) add a distinctive touch to Tijuana's chaotic, hybrid cityscape.[86] But despite this anarchy, with the passage of time, squatter settlements and unplanned colonias in Tijuana have evolved into more stable communities or "zones of *in situ* accretion" featuring housing of widely different types, sizes, and quality (Griffin and Ford 1980). In these zones public services are fully or partially available, land tenure is

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[86] See Ernest C. Griffin *et al.*, "Tijuana: Landscape of a Culture Hybrid," *Geographical Review* 66, no. 4 (1976) for a discussion of what makes Tijuana characteristically hybrid.

largely regularized, and they tend to host more stable urban communities made out of immigrants. These immigrant communities help knit Tijuana's social fabric by bringing together groups of individuals with common values and culture within the shared space of the city. Some communities are more visible than others but each contributes with its own lot to the city's eclectic flair and tumultuous atmosphere. A good example is Tijuana's Mixteco community.

4.5 Immigrant Communities: Tijuana's Mixtecos

A magnet for immigrants from all corners of Mexico, Tijuana is the home of numerous immigrant groups that form distinctive communities. These communities are more visible in the local *colonias*, where dwellers from certain regions or towns in Mexico's interior seek to crowd together. A case in point is the Mixteco community of indigenous immigrants from southern Mexico clustered in several of Tijuana's *colonias*.

The Mixtecos began to arrive in Tijuana around 1960 as an offshoot of Mixteco migration to agricultural estates in northern Mexico. As reported in Chapter 3, thousands of migrants settled for work in the agricultural camps of San Quintín and Ensenada south of Tijuana. Others succeeded in crossing the border to work in the agricultural fields of California. Yet, groups of Mixtecos also settled in Tijuana in the hopes of eventually crossing to the U.S. for work (Young 1994). Most of them were Mixtecos from the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Once in Tijuana they shifted from agriculture to urban occupations.

The most affluent of Tijuana's Mixtecos commute to San Diego's environs where wages are considerably higher. But those unable to cross the border stay in Tijuana living in poverty, exposed to the harsh urban conditions described in the previous sections. The largest concentration of Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana is at the *Colonia Obrera*. Located at a hilly site in Tijuana's sprawling eastside, this *colonia* is also the hub of Mixteco activity in the city. The first Mixtecos to arrive were immigrants displaced from other irregular settlements in Tijuana circa 1959. Four decades later, the *Colonia Obrera* is in the process of *in situ* accretion, and a stable Mixteco community gives a distinctively southern feel to its dusty streets and open markets. Access to the *colonia* is via a steep ramp that leads to a paved, lit street that cuts across the neighbourhood. In this main street there are modest convenience stores, small businesses and public telephones. There are also an assortment of houses of all kinds and shapes, and two schools that offer bi-lingual education (Mixteco-Spanish) to the *colonia*'s indigenous dwellers. On Tuesdays the main street is busy, packed with an open market that makes available foodstuffs from the Mixteca region. There are also food-stalls selling traditional Mixteco dishes swarmed by customers. Patrons speak Mixteco among themselves and some of the women wear long skirts and the colourful shawls recent immigrants and older Mixteco women use customarily. But not everyone in the market is there to buy; visiting it is a social occasion for groups of women and men to gather, chat and gossip.

The majority of Mixtecos living in this *colonia* come from Oaxaca's Mixteca Baja (Lower Mixteca) region. Clark (1991) identified Mixteco dwellers representing thirty-one Oaxacan villages and two levels of social affiliation:

> At the community level there is a distinguishable unity that revolves around their ethnicity, about being Indian; and within [the community], there is some degree of division along village lines, that becomes of secondary importance when [unity] is about defending the interest of the [larger Mixteco] community (Clark, 1991: 13).[87]

In the *Colonia Obrera*, as well as in other Mixteco settlements in Tijuana, community of origin is a relevant consideration in the allocation of plots and the agglomeration pattern of houses. There are therefore clusters of houses wherin dwell Mixteco families from the same municipality, district or village. There are such community clusters within *colonia*s and also throughout the various Mixteco settlements in Tijuana. For example, while in the *Colonia Obrera* the majority of Mixteco residents come from the Silacayoapan district and the town of San Jerónimo Progreso in Oaxaca, the neighbouring *Colonia Pedregal de Santa Julia* houses settlers from San Andrés Peras, another town in the Mixteca region.

As in all communities in the Mixteca, Tijuana's Mixtecos organize to celebrate the festival of the Patron Saint of their home communities in the Mixteca. Other religious festivities common in the Mixteca region, notably the *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), which was relatively foreign to Tijuana before the influx of indigenous immigrants, are widely celebrated by Tijuana's Mixtecos. For that they set up traditional altars for remembrance of deceased relatives in their homes and at community settings, schools in particular. These celebrations, together with *compadrazgo* events and happenings such as weddings and christenings bring Mixtecos together in gatherings where hometown affiliation remains important. In the *Colonia Obrera*, the oldest and more stable Mixteco settlements in Tijuana, the continuing flow of indigenous immigrants reinforces cultural practices and prevents phasing out the use of Mixteco

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[87] Translation by author.

language and other expressions of Mixteco culture. As Clark (1991) noted, the atmosphere at the *Colonia Obrera* in Tijuana resembles that of the Mixteco villages in southern Mexico:

> [Dwellers] speak Mixteco; listen to autochthonous music; make handcrafts, celebrate the festivity of the Day of the Death... organize the *mayordomía* for Our Lady of Las Nieves; participate in the *tequio,* and practice traditional medicine; there are healers and midwives and they use the *temazcal* (steam bath)... the *compadrazgo* networks are extensive and closely knitted, thus facilitating reciprocal support and assistance in case of need.[88]

In this urban community there were also those better off Mixtecos employed in California's agriculture and service economy whose greater income allowed for improvements in their homes in the *colonia.* Income disparities among the Mixteco community of the *Colonia Obrera* become evident in the differentiated quality and style of dwellings. In the main street and also in some of the side streets there are properly built and well painted houses where the more affluent live. However, there are also shacks and brick houses in the steep trodden passages leading to the lower part of the *colonia.*

The *Colonia Obrera* has the largest concentration of Mixteco settlers but there are at least 15 Mixteco clusters in the city at destitute *colonias* where public services are in short supply.[89] For the largely illiterate, often monolingual Mixtecos living in these colonias, Tijuana's urban economy for long offered only a few employment alternatives. Men were usually employed as gardeners and construction workers, and women have

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[88] Translation by author. Note: The *temazcal* is an ancient spiritual practice, a ritual for healing and purification.

[89] Victor Clark Alfaro identified eleven Mixteco 'micro communities' in the following *colonias*: *Obrera Tercera Sección, Hidalgo, Anexa México, Centro Urbano 70-76, Libertad* and *Reacomodo Sánchez Taboada.* See Victor Clark Alfaro, "Los Mixtecos en la Frontera (Baja California)," *Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales* 10 (1991) In the course of fieldwork in Tijuana I identified Mixtecos in the following *colonia* as well: *Valle Verde, Pedregal de Santa Julia, Caminito Verde,* and *División del Norte.*

gained a reputation as hard-working housemaids. Nonetheless, the Mixtecos of Tijuana, particularly the women, are better known as street vendors selling trinkets in the tourist core. At the small Santa Cecilia square a couple of dozen of Mixteco women keep stands to sell souvenirs and other trinkets to American tourists. Many other Mixteco women and their children sell their wares on the nearby streets in a circuit that starts right at the San Ysidro border crossing. The Mixtecos have been in the area for many years and some have already fixed spots to sell; others still roam around, chasing clients from one street to another. The least established only have bubble gum to sell. The most deprived just beg for money. All of them form a distinctive group, and what sets them apart is that they tend to stick together wearing colourful clothes and speaking their native Mixteco language with their kinfolk.

Clark Alfaro (1991), Martínez Nova (2003), and Velasco (1995; 1996; 2000b) provided accounts and evidence of the hardships these indigenous women have endured to make a modest living out of the local tourism economy. They reported that police and city inspectors, responding to pressure from established businesses, harass (and in the past jailed) Mixteco street vendors who lack adequate permits. But these events also cast light on the culture of exclusion that separates the Mixtecos from the rest of society. Local authorities and the middle classes perceive these indigenous street vendors as vagrants that give a bad name to Tijuana and the country. Martínez Nova (2003) elaborated on how the *mestizos* represent Tijuana's Mixtecos through stereotypes and categories effectively excluding them from the mainstream *mestizo* society. In Tijuana (and other parts of Mexico), indigenous women that sell or beg in the streets with their children are called 'Marias,' a nickname the Mixtecos consider an insult. But more than

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an insult, the term is a powerful representation that brands them as outsiders and deviants from the mainstream gender norms and values. In this contribution, she illustrates how the local media use this representation in articles where descriptions of the indigenous vendors, she concludes, boil down to the following assumptions and misconceptions:

> 'Marías' are deviants who carry out an illegal activity (begging) while pretending to be vendors; Marías are bad mothers who profit from their children, and, 'Marías' stand out in the urban landscape because of their ethnicity (Martínez Nova 2003: 255).

The experience of these women best illustrates the social and cultural vulnerability of the indigenous immigrants in Mexico's urban areas, aggravated by the traditionally scarce employment opportunities they have. But the expansion of Tijuana's labour market is introducing changes in this community. Together with the expansion of the maquiladora industry, the employment pattern of Tijuana's Mixtecos is shifting away from agriculture and informal or semi-informal occupations to factory work at maquiladoras assembling electronic components, consumer goods such as television sets, cell phones, toys, or any other of the hundreds of maquiladora products shipped out for export every day. Nevertheless, the maquiladoras are not for every Mixteco but for the young, and the relatively more educated and urbanized. In their mid-twenties, some of them are recent immigrants; others are second generation Mixtecos born in Tijuana during the maquiladora boom that transformed this border city during the last three decades.

4.6 Tijuana and the maquiladora industrialization

About the same time the first Mixtecos were settling in Tijuana's *Colonia Obrera*,
the maquiladora industry began to expand. It was during the 1960s, and the free trade
zone regime already in place along Mexico's northern border (allowing duty free import
and export of goods), provided a basic framework for the first maquiladoras to get
started. Nevertheless, maquiladora industrialization in the region consolidated after the
Mexican government launched the border industrialization programs mentioned above,
which sought to attract foreign export-oriented industries to generate employment for
returning *bracero* workers.[90]

The Border Industrialization Program promoted offshore production along the
Mexican side of the border, and established specific legislation that set the rules for the
nascent industry. Under the Maquiladora Program, assembly plants based in the Mexican
side of the Mexico-U.S. border were allowed to temporarily import − duty-free −
supplies, parts, machinery and equipment to manufacture in Mexico goods and services
as long as they were subsequently exported. The program also benefited from U.S.
legislation that taxed only the value-added portion of goods and services produced
abroad. In turn, Mexico's northern border cities offered to foreign corporations the
possibility of cutting labour costs at a location of unrivalled proximity to the great U.S.
market. These advantages were particularly appealing for firms operating in highly
competitive markets and tight profit margins that eventually opted to set up operations
along the U.S.-Mexican border.

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[90] The '*Bracero*' guest-worker agreement between Mexico and the United States was terminated in
1964. As a result, thousands of Mexican temporary workers in the United States returned to Mexico
seeking work.

Tijuana would attract the bulk of the foreign maquiladora investments together with Ciudad Juarez, Mexico's northern border region largest city. The maquiladora boom would bring some degree of prosperity to Tijuana as employment became abundant and the low wages paid to workers began fuelling the local economy. The first entrants to Tijuana's maquiladora economy were American capitalists attracted by the wage differentials between the U.S. and Mexico. The output of these early maquiladoras was unsophisticated, made out of partly-finished goods and components, and low-end consumer electronics. [91]

At the onset of the maquiladora expansion, the assembly plants employed the local labour force but the growth of the sector eventually exceeded the local labour supply. Workers from Mexico's interior matched the demand for labour (Anguiano 1998), but immigration also added pressure on Tijuana's population and on the availability of urban space. In 1970 the local population was 340,583 inhabitants (see Table 2) and its urban area had extended to approximately 6,500 hectares (Padilla 1989).

During the 1980s and 1990s Mexico's maquiladora industry gained momentum and new plants were established throughout the border almost by the day. The new entrants were not only American firms but also Japanese, Korean and European corporations eager to access cheap labour near the U.S. markets. The profile of the maquiladoras gradually changed as well. The maquiladora plants became more sophisticated technologically and began producing finished goods as well as higher-end products (Carrillo and Hualde 1997). In the process Tijuana became a major manufacturing centre and the host of approximately 22 percent of Mexico's maquiladoras (INEGI 2002), most of them in the apparel, the consumer electronics and the auto-parts sectors.

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[91] Enrique Mier y Terán, interview by author, 13 May 2003, Digital recording.

But the qualitative changes in the maquiladora industry also brought changes to Tijuana's landscape. While the first maquiladoras where small plants often poorly lit and lacking adequate ventilation, the industrial landscape of the maquiladoras evolved into a wide range of facilities including large industrial complexes and far-reaching industrial parks that often feature large, sleek plants (Betsky 1991). Often these industrial parks are found in terraced hillsides where modern industrial facilities and carefully landscaped parking lots lay side by side to the impoverished *colonias* that sprout up on hills, canyons and crevices. There are also maquiladoras scattered in the *colonias* and *fraccionamientos* home of the industrial labour force (Barajas and Kopinak 2003).

The intertwining of Tijuana's residential and industrial land use has important negative implications for the sustainable future of the city due to the proximity of industrial hazardous waste to local populations. Kopinak and Barajas (2002) reported that in Tijuana the maquiladoras generating the most hazardous wastes, and assessed as the riskiest in terms of their environmental and health impacts[92] are not only among the largest maquiladoras in terms of employees, but they are also clustered next to densely populated areas with the highest concentration of children under the age of fourteen.

While lack of urban planning and adequate legislation has contributed to Tijuana's urban disequilibria and environmental predicaments, the rapid expansion of maquiladora

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[92] Under Mexican law, corrosive, reactive, explosive, toxic, inflammable, and biologically infectious (CRETIB) wastes are deemed as hazardous. The main date source in Kopinak's and Barajas' study are reports of hazardous waste generation in Tijuana in 1998 submitted to Mexico's Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources by local industries generating the following substances deemed hazardous under CRETIB's criteria: spent oils, pitch or tar, heavy metal slag, liquid waste, spent solvents, and corrosive substances. Plants generating more than five types of hazardous wastes under CRETIB's criteria, with high concentrations of these wastes in the workplace, high likelihood of chronic long-term effects on health caused by exposure, and with perceived slow and inefficient response in case of emergency were assessed as the riskiest according to Kopinak and Barajas. See also Kathryn Kopinak, "Environmental Implications of New Mexican Industrial Investment: The Rise of Asian Origin Maquiladoras as Generators of Hazardous Waste," *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* 15, no. 1 (2002).

industrialization is at the centre of the profound transformations taking place in this Mexican border city. These transformations are evident in Tijuana's changing built environment but also at the level of society, within the multitude of communities that shape it. In this border city, maquiladora industrialization is affecting the local society in ways that cannot be seen as disconnected from the cultural and ethnic diversity of the city. At the local maquiladoras there are workers from all corners of Mexico that live the experience according to their own cultural background and position within Mexico's uneven society. More often than not, Tijuana's segregated urban space makes the experience more difficult to endure.

4.7 Concluding remarks

In Tijuana, urban space is segregated along sectoral lines, with readily identifiable tourist, commercial and industrial districts. These areas are conveniently located close to border crossings and take up the most suitable urban land. Nevertheless, the segregation of Tijuana's urban space sets hurdles for social interaction at the city level. Locals normally stay away from the tourist district because most businesses and amenities there target the needs and budget of the foreign visitor. At the industrial parks only those related to production may have an interest in visiting the precincts. The city is also polarized along income lines as sharp income inequalities demarcate the use of the urban space. The commercial areas cater for specific income groups and wealth differences and selective location discourage cross shopping. There are also exclusive neighbourhoods

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housing the local elite classes that are serviced in sharp contrast with nearby low-income *colonias* lacking basic amenities and infrastructure.

In a city made up of immigrants and a large transient population, the sense of community is thinner than in the older, more stable cities of Mexico's interior. There are, however, instances where solid bonds among residents develop out of shared ethnic or geographical backgrounds. The Mixtecos of Tijuana are a relevant example of the type of immigrant communities that knit the social fabric of the city. As discussed in the previous chapter, shared ethnic background brought Mixtecos together to confront the challenges of urbanization with relative success. At the same time, however, their visibility made them the target of discrimination and exclusion. This is because the Mixteco's experience in this border city is also marked by their position within the broader society. Because they are *indígenas* they are discriminated against and excluded from the mainstream society. Largely poor and discriminated against, Tijuana's Mixtecos are vulnerable in most spaces where they relate with the rest of the local society.

With the number of Mixtecos joining the maquiladora workforce in Tijuana on the rise, the vulnerability of the indigenous people of Mexico as they incorporate to the mainstream economy becomes all the more apparent. At stake in the inexorable incorporation of the Mixtecos into Mexico's largely urban, industrial economy is the resilience of their sense of community and the social capital that has in other instances helped them confront the challenges of poverty and exclusion. The following chapters discuss these issues in greater depth.

CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MEXICO'S MAQUILADORAINDUSTRY: AN OVERVIEW

5.1 Introduction

Mexico's export-oriented maquiladora industry has attracted considerable attention among the academic community since the first industrial establishments began manufacturing goods for export along the U.S.-Mexico border. Interest in this industry escalated rapidly and the outcome is a wealth of research and numerous publications dealing with a wide range of aspects of this industry and its implications. In the 1970s, a scattered body of literature first addressed the case of this industry in the context of the U.S.-Mexico relations. But it did not take long before the academic community began to address emerging empirical questions and new theoretical concerns. As the maquiladora literature expanded various thematic lines began to consolidate during the 1980s.

While the bulk of the literature reflects the long-standing debate about the merits of export-oriented industrialization in Mexico, the scholarly work on the maquiladora experience merges with discussions of gender relations, migration, Mexico-U.S. relations and the borderlands region in general. The outcome is a complex canvas giving access to a plurality of theoretical views and empirical cases as well as diverse research approaches. But despite its sheer size the maquiladora industry treats workers in the

industry as *mestizo* Mexicans.[93] Despite notable exceptions discussing non-Mexican cases,[94] the literature on Mexican maquiladoras fails to recognize that in this industry ethnicity is relevant. Given the significance of ethnicity in Mexican society discussed in the previous chapters, this omission is unwarranted.

With this shortcoming comes also a disconnection between the literature on the Mexican maquiladoras, and the long tradition of scholarly work on ethnicity and industrialization.[95] The role of immigrant ethnic communities in the development of industrial sectors has been part of the examination of labour force formation, workforce segmentation, and wage differentiation in various geographical settings.[96] Ethnic entrepreneurship has also explained the emergence of industrial sectors drawing labour and capital from ethnic-based networks among immigrants.[97] Overall, in studies with such a focus, ethnicity is treated as a variable to explain the rise or relative value of immigrant labour. When linked to ethnic criteria, explanations of immigrant labour thus range from those who see it as endowed with inborn aptitudes or culturally given skills in demand in the receiving society, to those that emphasize the role of networks and informal recruitment practices in the development of ethnic niches in certain industries. Because immigrant workers are characteristically needy and disadvantaged, willing to

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[93] See for example Melissa Wright, "Maquiladora Mestizas and a Feminist Border Politics: Revisiting Andzaldúa," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998).

[94] See Liliana R. Goldin, "Identities in the (Maquila) Making. Guatemalan Mayas in the World Economy," in *Identities on the Move: Transnational Processes in North America and the Caribbean Basin*, ed. Goldin (Albany, N.Y.: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1999) and Luis Reygadas, "¿Identidades Flexibles? Transformaciones de las Fronteras de Clase, Etnia y Género entre Trabajadoras de Maquiladoras," in *Sociología de la Identidad*, ed. Chihu Amparán (México: Miguel Angel Porrúa Grupo Editorial, 2002).

[95] See John R. Commons, *Races and Immigrants in America* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1967); John E. Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town, 1870-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

[96] See Nancy L. Green, "Women and Immigrants in the Sweatshop: Categories of Labor Segmentation Revisited," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 3 (1996).

[97] See Roger Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York's Garment Trades* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

take low paying, semi-clandestine jobs, there is also concern about the kind of fragile labour force that ethnic minorities make.[98] Oftentimes, however, immigrant workers are praised for drawing on their cultural and social resources to confront their sometimes illegal or disenfranchised status in the host society. These concerns are largely missing in maquiladora studies. Nevertheless, the literature review that follows aims at explaining the process of capital penetration from outside that transformed Tijuana's labour markets via maquiladora industrialization. Issues of labour unionism, gender and maquiladora modernization are also discussed in order to illustrate structural circumstances that affect workers at the factories.

5.2 The internationalisation of manufacturing production

World systems theory and the New International Division of Labour (NIDL) literature were early influences on the maquiladora studies that proliferated when Mexico's northern border began to participate in global manufacturing production during the 1970s. World systems theory conceives of an international capitalist system in constant flux. It takes the view that the global capitalist system is divided into production and consumption zones where capital, labour and commodities flow in both directions. Within the world systems framework, production zones are typically those where labour is cheaper (the periphery and semi-periphery) and thus attractive to capital. In turn, consumption zones are those where income is high and demand for goods and

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[98] See Aristide Zolberg, "International Migration in Political Perspective," in *Global Trends in Migration: Theory and Research on International Population Movements*, ed. Keely, Tomasi, and Kritz (Staten Island, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies, 1981).

commodities vigorous (the core industrial countries). With this spatial framework available, and given the increasing volume of capital and labour flows between core and peripheral nations, other theories began to address the implications of the internationalization of capital and labour. A case in point is the NIDL literature, which focuses on the internationalization of the market for labour and the specific roles of *core* industrial nations versus those in the periphery and semi-periphery.

NIDL theorists[99] take the view that the market for labour internationalizes through production arrangements involving the core industrial nations and a handful of countries at the periphery and semi-periphery.[100] In these arrangements the core industrial nations decentralize the low-tech segments of production to newly industrializing countries where a large pool of labour and lower wages generate cost advantages. The low-cost, low-tech goods produced in the peripheral countries are then exported at competitive prices to core industrial nations where their low cost of production ensures competitive consumer prices. These production arrangements thus assist corporations in the core industrial nations to maintain market shares and profits.

Both the world-systems theory and the NIDL literature stress the fact that developing countries participate in global production from a position of dependence, contributing only with an export platform where labour is exploited in exchange for low wages. This line of argument, and its emphasis on dependent and exploitative production arrangements, reverberated in an important segment of the maquiladora literature, which

[99] See Folker Fröbel *et al.*, *The New International Division of Labour: Structural Unemployment in Industrialised Countries and Industrialisation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[100] While the NIDL literature emphasized the 'decentralization of industry' to developing countries, other studies discussed the same phenomenon stressing the 'de-industrialization' of the core industrial nations. For an example of the latter see Barry Bluestone *et al.*, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

took the course of highlighting the inequalities inherent in the internationalization of industrial production. For example, in an early contribution, Fuentes and Ehrenreich (1983) placed the assembly operations of the maquiladoras within the low-tech, labour intensive precincts of the global factory. Echoing world-systems and NIDL arguments, they concluded that low wages are the main reason companies move to developing countries like Mexico, where a reserve army of female labour is at the disposal of MNCs. The availability of cheap labour in the periphery and semi-periphery is, however, only part of the incentive to decentralize manufacturing production to countries in these areas. Central to NIDL theory is the thesis that characteristics of the labour force are equally important, hence the preference for female labour, which is assumed to be docile and non-militant. Another incentive to move production to the developing world is that inadequate labour legislation in these societies ensures weak labour representation for the benefit of decentralizing firms. Concern for the labour conditions in export processing zones has therefore been at the centre of research on Mexico's maquiladoras, which addresses at length issues of labour representation and female employment in this industry.

5.3 Labour representation and the maquiladora industry

Reference to weak labour representation in the maquiladora industry is a standard feature in most comprehensive studies dealing with this industry[101]. But there are a

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[101] See for example Devon Gerardo Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: CMAS Books, 1997), Leslie Sklair, *Assembling for*

number of more specific studies of Mexico's labour movement that give a thorough account of the state of labour representation in the maquiladoras. In the work of Quintero (1996; 1997) and Carrillo (1994) there is consensus that workers' militancy has been part of the development of the maquiladora industry from the onset. But rather than contradicting the non-militancy thesis that is central to the NIDL literature, in these studies the emphasis is on explaining how militancy was tamed through a state-sponsored solution of the labour question favourable to the foreign investors. This solution included ad-hoc labour legislation for the maquiladora industry; reliance on government-sponsored local labour relations boards (for disputes resolution that often sided in favour of the employers); and the emergence of a new breed of unionism that sided with the argument that employment generation outranked the preservation of historical gains of Mexico's labour movement. On these matters, Quintero (1996; 1997) discussed how Mexico's labour movement was reorganized to accommodate the demands of the internationalization of industrial capital. She focused on the peculiarities of labour union organization along the U.S.-Mexico border, and concluded that, in the maquiladora industry, union representation is not homogeneous.[102] Noting differences across Mexican states along the border associated with specific regional circumstances, the type of maquiladoras involved, and the historic trajectories of local unions, Quintero classified union types into two groups: traditional and subordinated unions. The traditional form of unionism refers to union organizations with an established track record in the region and

Development: the Maquila Industry in Mexico and the United States (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies UCSD, 1993).

   [102] On the regional dimension of Mexico's unions see also: Maria Eugenia de la O, "La Modernización y la Cultura de la Corresponsabilidad en la Industria Maquiladora," in *Cultura y Trabajo en México*, ed. Guadarrama (Mexico, D.F.: Juan Pablos Ed., 1998).

some degree of legitimate representation.[103] During the years of expansion of the maquiladora industry (1980s – 1990s) these unions maintained links with the then state-controlled union bureaucracies. Nevertheless, the unions sought to accommodate the needs of the maquiladoras with the demands of the workers through collective bargaining. In Tijuana, however, the type of unionism that prevails is of the subordinated type.[104] In this variant of maquiladora unionism, the labour unions are not accountable to workers in any form whatsoever, privilege the involvement of government sponsored local labour relations boards for mediation and dispute resolution,[105] demote collective bargaining, and seek no involvement in decisions regarding productivity requirements (Quintero 1996; 1997).[106]

5.4 Female Labour

The assessment of the consequences of factory employment for women's lives is among the most prolific lines of inquiry in the literature on maquiladoras. The interest of what maquiladora employment means for the predominantly female labour force in

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[103] According to Quintero, this form of unionism is found in maquiladora centres in the border region, including Matamoros, Reynosa, and Nuevo Laredo among others.

[104] This type of unionism is also prevalent in Cd. Juarez, the other major maquiladora center along the border.

[105] In Mexican labour law labour relation boards are called (in Spanish): *Juntas Locales de Conciliación y Arbitraje*

[106] Within this range of union types there has been room for labour militancy and conflict between unionized workers and the maquiladoras. See Jorge Carrillo, *Dos Décadas de Sindicalismo en la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación: Examen en las Ciudades de Tijuana, Juárez y Matamoros* (México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa; M.A. Porrúa, 1994). In this contribution, Carrillo reviews two decades of union militancy in the maquiladoras against the background of the modernization of this industry. The study stresses the link between the qualitative changes in the industry and greater instability in the maquiladora labour market. Together with the introduction of more advanced technologies and changes in the occupational structure at the maquiladoras (in favour of the more skilled and greater number of males), the study reports greater incidence and virulence of labour conflicts. Labour militancy is illustrated with a list of 142 cases of maquiladora-labour conflicts between 1969 and 1986.

export-processing zones unfolded in the 1970s. At that time, the increasing employment of women in industry, and specifically in export-oriented operations in developing countries, challenged the view long held by development theorists and feminists, that women were systematically marginalized from industrial employment in these societies.[107] As the ensuing debate about the implications of female participation in export-oriented industrialization deepened, publications in Mexico during the 1980s began to share the concern for women at work at the maquiladoras. In an influential Mexican contribution to the early maquiladora literature, Carrillo and Hernández (1985) reported that there are disproportionate numbers of female workers in Mexico's export oriented industry. The explanation these authors gave to this trend was that females were preferred as workers because of women's disposition to accept conditions that men would be less inclined to tolerate. In turn, Iglesias (1985) in *La Flor más Bella de la Maquiladora* recounted the everyday life of ten female maquiladora workers in Tijuana in the 1980s. What these accounts highlighted is the condition of insecurity and instability as a constant feature in the lives of these women. Vulnerable to the maquiladoras' proclivity to leave without due notice, and avoid proper labour representation, these women are also solely dependent on maquiladora wages to survive. The possibilities for improvements in their working lives are limited. Iglesias concluded that work specialization and the fragmentation of production processes characteristic of maquiladora production obscure the worker's understanding of the total process. Oblivious to the intricacies of the production process, and entangled in a whirlwind of

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[107] As an illustration see Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), Diane Elson *et al.*, "Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers: An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing," *Feminist Review* 7 (1981), Irene Tinker *et al.*, *Women and World Development* (New York: Praeger, 1976).

endless work, the women's prospects for advancement at the maquiladoras are bleak. Without expectations at the workplace, female workers often opt for another job in the maquiladoras, where they will soon find themselves stagnant again (Iglesias 1985).

Taking a feminist perspective, numerous other contributions to the maquiladora literature followed suit and made important theoretical contributions. In particular, they helped establish that in the maquiladoras female labour stretches the comparative advantage of low-paid labour by such means as the non-militancy, docility and manual dexterity of female workers.[108] Other studies adopted a gender perspective[109] to situate the condition of exploitation and subordination afflicting female maquiladora workers within broader structural limits. Fernandez-Kelly's influential report on women and industry in Mexico's northern border best exemplifies this trend. In *For We are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier,* Fernández-Kelly (1983) focused on structural conditions within the Mexican society to help explain issues of exploitation at the work place. She thus contended that assembly work at the factories is not so much a key to personal autonomy for female workers but rather a situation that reflects women's subordinate domestic status. According to this argument, women enter factory employment not as autonomous individuals but as subordinated members of

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[108] See for example Diane Elson *et al.,* "Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers: An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing," *Feminist Review* 7 (1981). Reiterative references to the patience, attention to detail and dexterity attributed to women at work in industry made these studies vulnerable to criticisms on the basis of ideological bias. See Linda Y.C. Lim, "Women's Work in Export Factories: The Politics of Cause," in *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development,* ed. Tinker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). This study points to the ideological prejudices often too evident in the feminist literature dealing with women's experiences in factory employment. The author thus warns about the trap of using stereotypes and expresses her concern of the extent that the 'nimble fingers' of the female maquiladora workers had become the clichéd image portraying the young, exploited woman of the developing world. In a related issue, there is also the view that the modernization of the maquiladora industry is having the effect of making ideological biases redundant, particularly against the evidence of improving working conditions at the maquiladoras. See for example Jorge Carrillo, "Desideologización de los Estudios sobre Maquiladoras," *Frontera Norte* 2, no. 3 (1990).

[109] According to Young (1997), adopting a gender perspective means focusing on a 'fit' between family, household (or the domestic life), and the organization of both the political and economic spheres.

households that are dependent on their wages. With no option but to endure the abusive working conditions female workers are then oppressed both at the workplace and the household.

Following Fernández-Kelly's lead, numerous studies extended the research on the maquiladoras into explorations of the structural roots of women's discrimination and subordination in Mexican society. Conducted largely by women, these studies explored the various locations of patriarchal relations in Mexican society, particularly the households and the maquiladoras.[110] Common among the findings of these studies is the suggestion that the integration of women into the capitalist economy has not challenged the patriarchal structures of production and reproduction in Mexico. Tiano (1994), for example, suggested that for some women wages provide the means to struggle against domestic patriarchal relations but fail to provide the means to confront patriarchal relations in the public domain. Cravey (1997; 1998), however, provided evidence that female employment in the maquiladoras triggered an intense renegotiation of gender roles at the household level. With a different focus Melissa Wright (1997b) addressed the important issue of gender identity in her analysis of Mexican women working in the maquiladoras. Directing attention to the ideological representation of female workers through discourse, M. Wright's argument was that the historical representation of

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[110] See for example Altha J. Cravey, "The Politics of Reproduction: Households in the Mexican Industrial Transition," *Economic Geography* 73, no. 2 (1997), Altha J. Cravey, *Women at Work in Mexico's Maquiladoras* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), Soledad González *et al.*, eds., *Mujeres, Migración y Maquila en la Frontera Norte*, ed. Mexico (México, D.F.: 1995), Kathryn Kopinak, "Gender as a Vehicle for the Subordination of Women Maquiladora Workers in Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 22, no. 1 (1995), Susan Tiano, *Patriarchy on the Line: Labor, Gender, and Ideology in the Mexican Maquila Industry* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), Kathryn B. Ward, *Women Workers and Global Restructuring* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1990), Joanne Wright, "Deconstructing Development Theory: Feminism, the Public/Private Dichotomy and the Mexican Maquiladoras," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (1997), Melissa Wright, "Crossing the Factory Frontier: Gender, Place, and Power in the Mexican Maquiladora," *Antipode* 29, no. 3 (1997).

Mexican female workers is tied into the dominant Western discourse that neglects women's contributions to development.[111] In turn, Joanne Wright (1997a) argued in her study of feminism, development theory and the maquiladora industry, that there is a gender bias entrenched in the mainstream development theory, and concluded that development theory is a fundamentally gendered discourse that undervalues women's role in the development process.

5.5 Migration and the maquiladoras

The link between migration and the maquiladora labour market is the focus of attention in studies dealing with the changing economic and social conditions along the U.S.-Mexico border. In this relationship migration is a function of a labour market that responds to the demands of the maquiladora industry.[112] Because maquiladora related migration is often dealt with as being part of the larger trend of Mexican U.S.-bound migration, specific analyses addressing the migration-maquiladora connection are underrepresented. What is often found in the specialized literature is the thematic convergence of labour market issues, migratory matters, and regional (i.e. Mexican-U.S. border) concerns. This pattern is evident in the collection of articles dealing with women, migration and maquiladoras at Mexico's northern border that Gonzalez et al. (1995)

[111] Directing attention to the ideological representation of female workers through discourse, M. Wright explored the journey of a worker's subversion of the ideological representation of 'Mexican Woman' through the story of a maquiladora female worker.

[112] See Maria Eugenia Anguiano, "Migración a la Frontera Norte de México y su Relación con el Mercado de Trabajo Local," *Papeles de Población* 17, no. julio-septiembre (1998), Maria Eugenia Anguiano, "Migración y Mercado Laboral en la Frontera Norte de México," *Cooperación Internacional* 5, no. 8 (2002); Mitchell A. Seligson et al., *Maquiladoras and Migration: Workers in the Mexico-United States Border Industrialization Program* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1981).

brought together. In the border cities of northern Mexico where this collection focuses, the border itself is a key determinant of decisions regarding employment and residence. In her contribution to this collection Woo (1995) discussed the daily commuting of Mexicans from border cities to the United States for work, even if that entails crossing the border without proper employment permits. Not only individuals but also families interact with the border through continuous crossings. This is their way of dealing with the fact that households are divided because members work on different sides of the border (Ojeda 1995). The border, however, also imposes limitations and, for thousands of Mexicans, crossing the border is an insuperable undertaking. The maquiladoras at the Mexican side of the border therefore remain an important employment alternative for locals and migrant workers alike. Mexican northbound migration also opened the possibility of discussing the border experience is terms that reflects Mexico's cultural and ethnic diversity. In the same collection, Velasco (1995) adopted this approach in her study of Mixteco women living along the Mexican-U.S. border. Velasco examined the role of these women as social and economic agents, actively participating in migration decisions, and in devising income-generating strategies for the benefit of their migrant families.

The Mixteco women that Velasco studied are border city dwellers at the fringes of the capitalist economy. They are street vendors customarily excluded from participating in Tijuana's labour markets, especially that of the maquiladora industry. Recently, however, changes in the maquiladora labour market have allowed members of the Mixteco community to gain access to the local factories. This is often the case among the grown-up children of Tijuana's Mixteco street vendors, and also among recent

immigrants from Mexico's Mixteca region working in the maquiladoras. Specific knowledge about their experience working in Tijuana's factories is not available in the existing literature dealing with the Mexican maquiladoras. Raygadas (2002), however, dealing with the problematic construction of separate identities in the context of maquiladora employment in Mexico and Guatemala, provided relevant insights. In particular, he addressed the influence of factory employment in redefining the symbolic frontiers built between social classes, ethnic groups, and gender categories. A review follows.

5.6 Ethnic and class identities in the maquiladoras

Reygadas (2002) examined the experience of a Maya woman at an apparel maquiladora in Guatemala City. She appreciates some of the benefits maquiladora employment offers. Her income in the factories is steady, particularly as compared to the erratic earnings she used to make selling handcrafts. Adapting to factory work was not easy but she became accustomed to it and is determined to seek some form of career advancement in the maquiladoras. At the same time, however, she wears traditional indigenous clothing at the factory. Other *mestizo* workers talk to her about the convenience of wearing mainstream western clothes but she opts to reaffirm her ethnic identity wearing her Maya dress. Life in the city also required adaptation but this Maya worker nevertheless maintains close contact with relatives she often meets to make and

sell handcrafts. Echoing Nash (1958) in his influential book *Machine Age Maya*,[113] Reygadas contended that for the indigenous woman in his study, life in the city and work at the maquiladoras means greater contact with different world views and values systems: "[she] participates in both the indigenous and Mestizo worlds, while at the same time combining the factory logic with that of family handcraft production" (Reygadas 2002: 143). He thus argues that, although subjected to various tensions at work and at the city, the Maya woman's ethnic identity was not obliterated. Reygadas concluded that in certain circumstances the indigenous cultures can be reproduced in the context of urban life and factory work, where the indigenous reconstruct their ethnic identities based on new experiences. Such circumstances appear to be less favourable in the most advanced forms of maquiladora production, where the management's goal is to create an alternative identity: that of a loyal worker convinced of the benefits of working at the factories.

Would the Guatemalan women in Reygadas study be allowed to wear her traditional Maya costume (or other external expressions of ethnic identity) in the relatively more complex maquiladoras in northern Mexico? The answer is no. Without specifically addressing this question or the case of indigenous workers in Mexican maquiladoras, Reygadas nevertheless offered some clues as to why this would be the case. Discussing the case of a Mexican *mestizo* woman in a modern maquiladora that applies advanced managerial methods in northern Mexico, he commented on the firm's attempts to prevent linkages among workers and to suppress the emergence of collective identities other than that of belonging to the maquiladora. Workers' loyalty is sought via an assortment of

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[113] Nash's summarized argument in his own words: "Today, in the highlands of Guatemala, a people still speaking Quiche, the women yet in costume, the world view of spirits and saints largely intact, have learned how to coexist with a factory regime." In Manning Nash, *Machine Age Maya* (Menasha, Wis.: American Anthropological Association, 1958), p. 1.

paternalistic measures, and through a discourse that emphsizes cooperation and shared achievements between workers and management; the ultimate objectives being the obliteration of class identities and the elimination of conflictive relations between the firm and its workers. It follows that separate class or ethnic identities conflict with the smooth operation of the capitalist system; yet the intensity of efforts seeking to restrain these identities varies according to the complexity of manufacturing production. A revision of the state of manufacturing production in the maquiladora industry is therefore necessary to discuss issues of ethnicity in the context of export-oriented industrialization in Mexico.

5.7 Maquiladora modernization

A tributary of the maquiladora literature has specifically dealt with matters of maquiladora modernization. Generally adopting a positive reading of the maquiladora experience, these studies have a tendency to focus on issues of technical and managerial change, and draw from various theoretical perspectives. Dating back from the infant years of the maquiladora industry in Mexico, the rather managerial understanding of the internationalization of production, as found in the work of Vernon (1966), Drucker (1979) and Barnet and Müller (1974), began to influence studies of export-oriented industrialization in developing countries. This body of scholarly work offers the view that internationalization of production is a strategic process offering advantages for both developed and developing countries. Vernon (1966) argued that multinational corporations (MNCs) needed to decentralize production to developing countries in order

to maintain a competitive edge in the production of mature products involving standardized technologies. Vernon thus outlines what was to be known as the Product Life Cycle theory, which relates the costs and profits of corporations to the various life phases of manufactured goods.[114] Building on this perspective Drucker (1979) examined the mechanisms MNCs use to keep up with competition throughout the life cycle of products. In particular, he focuses on the workings of intra-industry trade and production-sharing agreements, which by the 1970s were already common procedures among MNCs. Mapping these mechanisms assisted examinations of how developing countries could best benefit by the spread of technical innovations and the development of forward linkages with the local industries.[115]

These perspectives brought insights to the maquiladora literature that helped develop a line of inquiry exploring alternatives to upgrade manufacturing production in countries at the receiving end of industrial decentralization. In an early example of this perspective Grunwald and Flamn noted the need to find ways to "smooth the way to more sophisticated co-production stages between industrial and developing countries" through the active participation of MNCs (Grunwald and Flamm 1985: 250). Seeking to identify the actual and potential gains associated with the maquiladora industry, many other studies began to take the analytical focus in the direction of spill-over effects (skills

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[114] In the Product Life Cycle theory the key argument is that pioneer producers face high development costs and little profits until demand for new products is created. Profits reach a peak as costs progressively drop and producers sell without competition. Yet in the mature phases of the industry, when technologies are readily available to all producers and markets are well known to all competitors, the pioneers face the market challenge of cost-cutting latecomers. As the products mature profits shrink because technologies become available to cost-cutting competitors. At this mature phase of the product the pioneers' profits would continue to fall unless they take advantage of their marketing and managerial savvy to find their way to the markets the cost-cutting latecomers are not yet able to access. In a later phase latecomers are finally able to challenge the pioneer's hold of these market, forcing the pioneers to cut production costs by shifting production to developing countries for further export to affluent markets at competitive prices.

[115] Barnet and Müller (1974) contended that such benefits could only be achieved by taming the power of MNCs through regulation and wise policymaking.

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upgrading, technology transfers) associated with the technology and production methods that support offshore manufacturing.

The majority of these studies surfaced in the 1990s. Following years of rapid growth, at the turn of the 1990s the maquiladora industry was already well established in Mexico but questions abounded with respect to the track record of the sector. In particular, there were renewed concerns about the ability of the maquiladora sector to secure technology transfers and industrial upgrading. In view of growing economic ties between Mexico and the United States there were also questions regarding the future of the industry. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was an important issue at that time and its significance was reflected in the maquiladora literature as well. Studies engaged in the NAFTA debate made frequent reference to the maquiladora experience as a way of stressing the pros and cons of the trade agreement[116]. But as NAFTA materialized the concerns gradually shifted towards the state of Mexico's industrial capabilities and the related issue of how Mexico's industry could upgrade into advanced manufacturing in the context of North American integration. This new focus required an appraisal of the depth of technological and organizational change taking place in the sector. An early finding was the heterogeneity of the maquiladora industry: Taylorist and Fordist practices with flexible production methods where shown to co-exist. Even individual firms often mixed the latest microelectronic and robotic technologies with labour intensive manufacturing.

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[116] For pre-NAFTA discussions on the implications of the North American Agreement for Mexico and the Americas see Victor Bulmer-Thomas *et al.*, *Mexico and the North American Free Trade Agreement: Who will Benefit?* (London: MacMillan, 1994), Gary Gereffi, "Mexico's Maquiladora Industries and North American Integration," in *North America Without Borders: Integrating Canada, the United States, and Mexico*, ed. Randall, Konrad, and Silverman (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1992), Ricardo Grinspun *et al.*, *The Political Economy of North American Free Trade* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

Koido (2003) explained the heterogeneity of the sector as a result of the wide variety of production strategies multinational firms adopted in Mexico.[117]

During the 1990s, the extent to which the maquiladora industry had adopted flexible production methods became a yardstick to measure technological and organizational change in the sector.[118] Discussing the Latin American experience implementing flexible production methods, Carrillo (1995) noted that just-in-time (JIT) and total quality control (TQC) methods have been disseminated and put into practice in Mexico's maquiladoras since the mid-1980s. Wilson (1990) also reported that, at the turn of the 1990s, the adoption of flexible production methods was common practice among Mexico's maquiladoras. Nevertheless, she later concluded that the rise of flexible maquiladora producers "has created so far a caricature of flexible production" (Wilson 1992: 71). In view of the assorted profile of the industry these studies highlighted, Alonso and Carrillo (1996), and Carrillo and Hualde (1997) developed a typology seeking to capture the heterogeneity of the sector. They identify three generations of maquiladoras. First generation maquiladoras are labour intensive assembly operations lacking technological sophistication. The competitive advantage of these maquiladoras is the low wages paid to the predominately female, unskilled workforce. In turn, second generation maquiladoras rely more on technological applications and engage in continuous rationalization of production methods and tasks. Automated production lines are widespread and

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[117] For example, leading Japanese, U.S. and European manufacturers of color TV converged in Tijuana but adopted different production strategies. While some firms transferred to Mexico the labour intensive segments of production, other firms began producing higher-end colour television sets; high value added components and even new products (satellite information receptor-decoders and computer monitors).

[118] The inquiry into the nature and implications of flexible production has several related variants. In one of the variants flexible production is systematized under the name of "lean production" and the emphasis is on the managerial characteristics of the model. Lean producers deploy teams of multiskilled workers throughout the organization, and use flexible, often automated machinery while carefully targeting minimum levels of on site inventories. See James P. Womack *et al.*, *The Machine that Changed the World* (New York: Rawson Associates, 1990).

production involves a greater (but still limited) number of skilled workers and engineers. Lastly, third generation maquiladoras take up autonomous design and research and development responsibilities and purposely develop networks of suppliers and indirect contractors[119].

First generation maquiladoras were the subject matter of influential maquiladora studies reviewed above. For the most part these studies adopted a generally critical view of the implications associated with export-oriented industrialisation.[120] In contrast, the maquiladora managers and Mixteco workers that inform this study work for the most part in establishments best described as second generation maquiladoras. They work in modern facilities producing a wide array of goods. The following chapters discuss what it means for Mixteco women and men to work in these factories.

5.8 Concluding remarks

The heterogeneity of the maquiladora labour force is often obscured by aggregates used to characterize it. A favourite aggregate is the enduring characterization of the workforce as a pool of cheap labour, which dates from the times when world systems theorists began discussing the cost-cutting strategies of firms fleeing the industrialized nations. Gender theorists firmly established the female features of such pools of cheap

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[119] The Delphi-General Motor complex in Cd. Juárez and the Samsung industrial centre in Tijuana are notable examples of third generation maquiladoras. See Jorge Carrillo, "Políticas Industriales y Estrategias Corporativas: El Sector Automotriz y Electrónico en Juárez y Tijuana," *El Cotidiano*, no. 86 (1997).

[120] For example María Patricia Fernández-Kelly, *For We are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Norma Iglesias, *La Flor más Bella de la Maquiladora: Historias de Vida de la Mujer Obrera en Tijuana, B.C.N* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1985); Jorge Carrillo *et al.*, *Mujeres Fronterizas en la Industria Maquiladora* (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1985).

labour but elaborated less in other aspects of maquiladora labour force segmentation. The same habit of aggregation is true of other tributaries of the vast maquiladora literature, prone to maintaining the deep-seated view that in the maquiladoras, workers are made of unskilled "*mestizo*" women. Nevertheless, the social fabric in the maquiladoras is far more complex and richer than the stereotypical female workforce depicted in early studies. The workforce remains predominantly female, true; but the sheer size of the industry, the diversification of output, and the expansion of tasks have required many more men in the assembly lines. Moreover, at the maquiladoras there are workers from all corners of Mexico, thus bringing about a geographically and culturally diversified labour force. The experience of Mixteco workers working at the maquiladoras examined in this study seek to shed new light on this industry and the implications of factory employment for Mexico's indigenous population.

CHAPTER 6

FROM EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION:
INDIGENOUS WORKERS, TIJUANA'S LABOUR MARKET, AND
THE MAQUILADORA INDUSTRY

6.1 Introduction

A key premise in this study is that Mixteco women and men are joining the
maquiladora workforce in northern Mexico. Thus, with empirical data collected during
fieldwork research conducted in Tijuana, Mexico between September 2002 and May
2003, this chapter traces employment changes among Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana.
The objective in this chapter is to establish that factory work is increasingly common
among members of this community while identifying the sequence of events and the
structural conditions driving Mixteco men and women into the maquiladora industry in
Tijuana.

This chapter shows that during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s the
expansion of the maquiladora industry made possible the changing employment pattern
Tijuana's Mixtecos are beginning to experience. With the growth of the maquiladora
sector came a corresponding change in the local labour market that opened the factory
doors to previously excluded Mixteco women and men. As they began working at the
maquiladoras, they became a fitting workforce that adapted well to the requirements of
factory work.

The Mixtecos' transition from exclusion to inclusion in the maquiladora labour market is presented in the following paragraphs in the form of a narrative that incorporates the views of Mixteco residents in Tijuana as well as maquiladora managers and entrepreneurs interviewed during fieldwork[121]. Throughout the narrative special emphasis is given to issues of labour force formation in the maquiladora industry in order to explain, from the demand side, the circumstances that led to the employment of Mixtecos in the factories, and to show the transition from a predominantly *mestizo* workforce to another involving indigenous workers in increasing numbers.

6.2 Mixteco immigrants and Tijuana's labour market

Outside the Mixteca region, Mixteco migrants have traditionally sought work in agriculture at large commercial operations in northwestern Mexico and the U.S. In urban centres, however, Mixteco immigrants find it more difficult to get employment because many lack formal education and the ability to transfer skills from agriculture to urban occupations. The Mixteco community in Tijuana is not the exception. The several thousands of Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana support themselves and their families through a narrow range of occupations, mostly low paid jobs or small scale commercial ventures in the informal sector that generate scant earnings. Most of them live in poverty and are confronted with the continuous challenge of gaining access to the labour market.

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[121] All data presented in this chapter and the next were obtained through direct observation and individual interviews as described in the methodology section in Appendix I. Names of Mixteco informants are pseudonyms when a first name only is used in the text and in the corresponding reference. However, when first and last names are included in the references, these are informants' real names.

A local Mixteco leader, who heads a bilingual primary school for residents of the impoverished *Colonia Valle Verde*,[122] is familiar with the narrow options the Mixtecos have in the local labour market:

> [In Tijuana,] the majority of Mixteco women work somewhere. When they complete primary school many end up in the factories, others stay at home working, and those that don't know how to read and write sell gum or handicrafts in the street, they are street vendors... There are also men [working in the maquiladoras] but few because they say wages are low there, so they try instead construction work, or rather opt to go to the United States for seasons. That is what I observe the [Mixteco] community does.[123]

But commuting across the border is not an option for the majority of Tijuana's Mixtecos who stay on the Mexican side. For them gaining access to the local labour market is challenging because their options have been traditionally limited: construction work, gardening, housekeeping, and street vending. Josefína, a Mixteco woman who sells trinkets near *La Línea*[124] recalls the difficulties the Mixteco immigrants faced in finding work prior to the expansion of the maquiladora industry:

> [Mixteco] men looked for work but they wouldn't get it easily until we got ourselves the task of getting together, as a group [of Mixtecos], with the schoolteachers, with those in the *colonia* [Obrera Tercera Sección] and formed a group, an association of Mixtecos. We then began to demand work for our *compañeros* and [street vending] permits for those *compañeras* that didn't know anything, because there were people over thirty, forty years old that were like blindfolded because they didn't know how to read. For them we got [street vending permits].[125]

Josefína leads a cooperative of about one hundred Mixteco street vendors, mostly women. The cooperative's membership, however, is going through changes. This is

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[122] The Mixteco residents in this *colonia* come for the most part from the Mexican state of Guerrero.
[123] Gonzalo Montiel, interview by author, 22 November 2002, digital recording.
[124] *La Línea* is what locals call the U.S.-border crossing. Translates literally as The Line.
[125] Josefína, interview by author, 5 April 2003, digital recording.

because the local labour market has gradually opened more employment opportunities for the Mixteco community. An indication that the labour market is changing is the profile of the street vendors who fit tightly along the pedestrian bridge that the members of Josefína's cooperative occupy. Most are middle-aged women although there are a few mature men and several young children. But there are seldom young working age Mixtecos. Josefína explains the reason:

> There are few of our children here [because] they work [...] they work in the factories. But others are studying, they go to high school or university, there are many studying [...] Men are three or four, [they are the] husbands of our *compañeras*, because most men work for the municipality, in Parques y Jardínes [Tijuana's municipal landscaping department] but now many are working in the maquiladoras.[126]

The need to survive and the desire to achieve family objectives, including education and house ownership, are driving young Mixtecos to the local factories. Josefína elaborates on the reasons maquiladora employment is being added to the income-generating strategy of Mixteco families:

> As the situation stands, with salaries at the minimum, the truth is that they are not enough, so the son has to get work in the factory to help his father, because there is the electricity, [and] the water [that have to be paid], and [prices] are going up a lot, so we find ways for the son to contribute.[127]

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[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

6.3 The maquiladora industry and Mixteco employment patterns

Mexican government census data on the subject of maquiladora employment is not disaggregated into ethnic categories. Similarly, statistics available through maquiladora organizations do not account for ethnic differences among the workforce. This omission highlights the state's historic efforts to stress homogeneity over diversity when dealing with its citizens. All workers are assumed to be Mexicans, and identifying their ethnic breakdowns would be inconsistent with the state' historic mission of building an ethnically homogeneous society. At individual firms, ethnic differentiation among workers is not a matter of record either. None of the thirteen maquiladoras visited during fieldwork leading to this study maintained such records. On paper all workers were Mexicans and therefore assumed to be *mestizos*. The task of establishing whether maquiladora employment is common among Mexico's indigenous peoples thus required different sources. The option of undertaking a comprehensive survey to estimate the ethnic background of maquiladora workers was beyond the means of this research project. Alternatively, the approach used (detailed in the methodology appendix) to obtain an indication of how widespread maquiladora employment is within Tijuana's Mixteco community relied on observation and in-depth interviews with thirty-six Mixtecos residing in Tijuana and thirteen maquiladora managers.

Observation began in October 2002 at Tijuana's *Colonia Obrera Tercera Sección*, the centre of Mixteco activity in the city. During several afternoons, standing near the ramp that gives access to this *colonia*, I observed groups of young men and women coming back home from work. The fact that many of them descended from buses transporting maquiladora personnel suggested that they were maquiladora workers.

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Others got off rickety taxis and city buses shortly after the end of the morning shift at the maquiladoras. Residents of this *colonia*, with whom I talked informally during those days, corroborated that the majority of these young women and men were indeed maquiladora workers coming back home. Later, during individual interviews conducted in this *colonia*, long-term Mixteco residents confirmed that young Mixtecos in the neighbourhood were part of the party of workers I observed return home from work at the factories. These informants knew that many young Mixtecos were taking up maquiladora jobs and mentioned during the interviews names of relatives and neighbours working in the factories. During the same research period I also interviewed members of Tijuana's Mixteco community living in other parts of the city. All of them were aware that there are many Mixtecos working in the local maquiladora industry.

Among the thirty-six Mixteco residents in Tijuana interviewed during fieldwork in Tijuana (September 2002- May 2003) there was a group of twenty-four Mixteco men and women with working experience in Tijuana's maquiladora industry who provided more specific information about the employment pattern of Tijuana's Mixtecos. They also elaborated on the extent of participation in factory work for the Mixtecos. In the course of individual interviews, these informants were asked about the occupations of parents, siblings, partners, and working age children. They were also prompted about the occupation of any other Mixtecos mentioned during the course of the interview, which would typically include distant relatives, friends, acquaintances, and neighbours. Answers to these question provided insights into the changes the Mixteco community is experiencing, particularly regarding employment choices and job patterns.

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6.3.1 Mixteco employment

"There were at least one or two [Mixtecos]" in each of the various maquiladoras Darío ever worked in.[128] This pattern appears not to be unusual in Tijuana's maquiladoras; other Mixteco women and men with working experience in the maquiladora industry confirmed that it is common to find factory workers with roots in the Mixteca region. Fifteen out of the twenty-four informants in the group of informants with working experience in the maquiladoras indicated they had come across other Mixtecos while working in the factories. Moreover, ten informants within this group indicated having a close Mixteco relative working in the maquiladora industry. In some cases the close relative was either a partner or a working age child. In the case of informants living with a Mixteco partner,[129] the spouses were employed as construction workers (3 males), supermarket attendant (1 male), maquiladora worker (1 female), and shoe repair shop worker (1 male with previous maquiladora experience). In the three cases where couples had children, the jobs of their working age children suggest that maquiladora employment is becoming a common option among young Mixtecos living in Tijuana. This is the case of a female informant's son who works in the maquiladoras during the long summer school breaks; another female participant in this study had a daughter working in a local factory as well.

These findings suggest that members of Tijuana's Mixteco community are gradually changing their employment pattern taking up maquiladora jobs. The Mixteco as factory worker is nevertheless an image that conflicts with that traditionally associated with this

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[128] Darío, interview by author, 6 April 2003, digital recording.

[129] Nine informants in this group lived with a partner at the time of the interview but only in six cases the partner was Mixteco.

group of indigenous Mexicans, who are customarily represented as wage labourers in agriculture, manual workers in urban centres, and street vendors in the informal economy.

At the same time, however, information obtained from the same group of informants points to the persistence of these traditional forms of employment among rural and urbanized Mixtecos, thus suggests that maquiladora work is part of an emerging pattern. Indeed, when the same group of informants was asked about the occupation of siblings and other more distant relatives, the responses confirm that Tijuana's Mixtecos have a narrow range of employment options only marginally expanded to include maquiladora work. Construction work, agriculture (both in Mexico and the U.S.), factory (maquiladora) employment, landscaping, housemaids and street vending were occupations carried out by brothers. On the other hand, sisters were predominantly housewives, housemaids, maquiladora workers or street vendors. Other Mixteco relatives, including aunts or uncles, and cousins or nephews were working in agriculture, informal jobs, housekeeping, and industry (at the local maquiladoras). The narrow employment options among Mixteco immigrants become more evident when generational differences are taken into consideration.

6.3.2 Generational employment difference among Mixtecos

The younger, recent immigrants from the Mixteca as well as second generation Tijuana Mixtecos are finding their way to the maquiladoras. This is an employment option their parents did not have when they were younger. Indeed, the Mixteco women and men with working experience in the maquiladora industry that informed this study

are having a rather different employment trajectory than their parents. In most cases, the parents of this group of informants were predominantly rural and removed from factory employment. These generational differences in employment pattern are part of the changes migration out of the Mixteca region is bringing about. While in the Mixteca region, the primary occupation among fathers was agricultural work and among mothers, it was housekeeping. But when parents were involved in migration to urban areas, occupations changed accordingly. After migrating to urban centres, males shifted to such occupations as construction work and gardening; females remained at home as housewives, took up housemaid jobs or street vending. Maquiladora employment was not an option because they were excluded from factory work for reasons that have to do with the maquiladora labour market and the ideological representation of the *indígena* as unfit for factory work. The following sections elaborate on what excluded the previous generations of Mixtecos from factory employment, and on the factors that eventually opened the maquiladora doors to Mixteco workers.

6.4 Ethnic exclusion in Tijuana's maquiladora labour market

One of Tijuana's first maquiladoras manufactured hair clips. Production required basic technology and workers needed few basic skills. The rationale behind the decision to set up shop in Tijuana was simple: lower comparative wages. Wages in Tijuana were lower than in neighbouring San Diego, where the finance capital for this maquiladora originated. Tijuana's location near the border provided an enormous logistic advantage that many other maquiladoras would seek years thereafter: a location near the consumer

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markets with enough workers to manufacture goods at low wages. Hundreds of foreign investors would later identify other advantages associated with the decision to move production to the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexican border: labour organizations were weak, the state discouraged labour organizations, labour and environmental legislation were inadequate or poorly enforced, and labour was in good supply. But for the hair clips manufacturers the main issues at the time had to do with wage levels and labour supply. It was 1960 and a young entrepreneur was in charge of setting up the plant for business. Soon he realized that finding local workers was not difficult:

> I put up a poster to hire workers. Two days later there was a huge line up of people waiting. I hired all the workers I needed without problems. All of them were locals [...] a couple of years later I had four hundred people working [...] all women [...] we are taking about decent women who did not want to work as waitresses but did not have the [formal] education to work as secretaries or at another office job [...] all had at least one or two years of secondary school [...] and with so much demand for work I could afford to choose.[130]

What the then emerging maquiladora industry offered to the local women was an alternative to the jobs traditionally available in the tourism industry, which was tainted with the bad reputation of Tijuana's notorious sex and alcohol trade. These women also made a good match for this maquiladora because manufacturing hair clips was a labour intensive operation and, from the viewpoint of the investors, female dexterity was a key ingredient for optimizing the manufacturing process.[131] Such abundant female and *mestizo* workforce sustained the early expansion of the maquiladora industry. It also informed the early feminist literature reviewed in the previous chapter that argued that it

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[130] Enrique Mier y Terán, interview by author, 13 May 2003, Digital recording.
[131] Ibid.

was the non-militancy, docility and manual dexterity attributed to female workers what amplified the comparative advantages of off shore production.

Nevertheless, the maquiladora labour market has changed ever since the first plants set up shop in Tijuana. Female labour remains significant but changes in the industry (the production of bulkier goods, for example) are modifying the composition of the labour force by increasing the percentage of male workers (MacLachlan and Aguilar 1998). The regional composition of the workforce also changed following years of rapid industrial growth. Abundant at first, the supply of local labour in Tijuana tightened as the industry expanded. Labour shortages nonetheless eased when immigrant labour from Mexico's interior entered the pool of labour. First came workers from neighbouring states and with them in the industry the regional composition of the maquiladora workforce started to diversify accordingly. But it took time before the maquiladora industry in Tijuana began to hire the impoverished southern rural immigrants stranded near the U.S. border.

At the onset of the maquiladora industry, and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s few workers from Mexico's southernmost states were hired or ventured to work in the maquiladora industry. In particular, indigenous workers were excluded from the maquiladora workforce. The entrepreneur who in 1960 opened the hair clips factory[132] elaborates on the changing regional composition of the maquiladora workforce and the exclusion of indigenous workers:

> [During the early years of the industry] almost no one came [from southern Mexican states such as Oaxaca or Chiapas]. There were few [of them] that came [to Tijuana] to work as housemaids but not to work in the maquiladoras... they did not look for it [...] It is different now. Now they are integrating into the maquiladora [industry] perfectly. But in the seventies, perhaps still during the eighties, people [from the

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[132] A prominent maquiladora real estate developer when the interview was conducted.

south] but above all those of indigenous background, would not dare to work in the maquiladoras. They preferred to work as housemaids.[133]

But for the first Mixteco settlers in Tijuana who came from Oaxaca or Guerrero states, taking up non-factory jobs was not a matter of preference. It was rather the result of being excluded from the maquiladora labour market. For them, factory employment was not a viable option because landing a job at the maquiladoras "was difficult, there were [unattainable entry] requirements," explains Josefina, the Mixteco woman introduced above who sells trinkets near *La Linea*. When she migrated from Oaxaca in the early 1980s, she tried to get a job at the maquiladoras but failed. Several interrelated reasons explain the exclusion of Josefina and other Mixtecos from the industry. These include: oversupply in labour market, the ideological devalorization of the indigenous worker, and the historical disfranchisement of Mexico's indigenous peoples.

6.4.1 Mixteco workers and labour market exclusion

Tijuana's location, on the route of well established migratory flows (south-north, Mexico-U.S.), was a contributing factor in sustaining the supply of labour the expanding maquiladora industry needed. When the first maquiladoras began to establish along the U.S.-Mexican border, the region was already a magnet for immigrants from Mexico's interior (see Chapters 3 and 4). Thus, in the early years of maquiladora industrialization in Tijuana the size of the available pool of labour not only kept wages low. Labour surpluses also gave the industrialists latitude in delineating the maquiladora workforce. Thus, the maquiladoras opted to set hiring qualifications above the actual requirements of

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[133] Enrique Mier y Terán, interview by author, 13 May 2003, Digital recording.

the assembly operations. A maquiladora human resources manager elaborates on the labour market during the early years of maquiladora expansion:

> During the eighties, when the maquiladora industry was taking off [entry requirements] were very strict. There were so many people without work or so many people immigrating and willing to work at the maquiladoras that the firms could afford to be selective.[134]

Selectivity in the hiring process in fact marginalized the less educated rural immigrants but favoured labour from the predominantly *mestizo* regions of Mexico, where education and urbanization levels are comparatively higher.

6.4.2 Disenfranchisement

Given the excess supply of labour, during the early years of the maquiladora industry the historically less urbanized and educated *indígenas* were excluded from working at the factories. Working at the maquiladoras was not only a matter of female dexterity or having nimble fingers. Other important requirements for entry included secondary or high school diplomas as well as birth certificates, government issued identification cards, and proof of local residency. These hiring practices excluded the disenfranchised rural immigrants who lacked documents proving modern citizenship. A maquiladora manager at a large maquiladora manufacturing television sets elaborates on how the lack of basic identification documents excluded indigenous workers from the factories:

> Initially [during the early years of maquiladora industrialization the indigenous immigrants] did not think about coming to the maquiladoras because [they knew] that at the maquiladoras they would be asked for an official identification and they would not have it. They would leave their towns without documents of any sort.

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[134] Alejandro Guerra, interview by author, 8 May 2003, digital recording.

Perhaps [they would migrate only] with a little note with the telephone number or the address of someone they knew in Ensenada or in Tijuana, but it was all they would bring. That is a classic [situation].[135]

Josefína, the Mixteco street vendor introduced above, experienced such forms of exclusion:

I came [to Tijuana] without any documents and then also without any schooling. I didn't go to primary school [...] I applied [for maquiladora jobs] but I didn't get any [...] few women with primary school got in. But the people who came from the South that didn't know anything wouldn't get work. Only the young women who finished primary school here [in Tijuana] got entry. They managed to fit in, but us, coming from there [the South], did not get any [factory job].[136]

But deficient schooling and lack of documents proving they were part of Mexico's modern society explain only partially the exclusion of indigenous workers from the factories. They were also left out because they were not seen as fit for maquiladora employment.

6.4.3 Ideology

Long lasting prejudices about the *indígenas'* capacity to embrace modern traits permeate Mexico's mainstream *mestizo* society. In contemporary Mexico, the type of negative preconceptions the *mestizo* elites in the nineteenth century uttered about the *indígenas'* innate skills and cultural capacities remain deep-seated in society. The indigenous Mexicans are at the bottom of both the class and inter-ethnic hierarchies and there are continual reminders of their subordinate social status. In the particular case of the Mixteco community in Tijuana, the powerful image of destitute Mixteco women

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[135] José Ibarra, interview by author, 14 May 2003, digital recording.
[136] Josefína, interview by author, 5 April 2003, digital recording.

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begging or selling trinkets in the streets reverberates at the local factories, where they were for long seen as unfit for factory employment. A Mexican white manager in charge of hiring workers at a local maquiladora recounts one of the urban legends explaining the origins of Tijuana's Mexico street vendors. Sharing the opinion of other locals, she believes the Mixteco women (known scornfully as "Marias") selling goods in the downtown core were brought from the south to do factory work but went adrift when they failed to perform:

> That is how the plague of the Marias came about [...] and now you cannot go out [to the streets] because you run into them all the time [...] they have other aspirations and a mentality that is not compatible with what the maquiladoras require.[137]

The thought of an "indigenous worker" subverted the long held roles the *indígenas* have been given to play in the Mexican economy. An *indígena* at the factories was indeed unanticipated as they were expected to be peasants, day labourers, home maids, or the kind of urban marginals that the Mixteco beggars personified. What changed in society or the economy that gave them access to the factories?

6.5 The maquiladora labour market

The rapid expansion of the maquiladora industry during the 1990s (and notably during the years immediately prior to and after the signing of NAFTA in 1994) opened the factory doors to workers with an assortment of backgrounds and diverse qualifications. With the labour surplus faltering, the local maquiladoras sought workers

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[137] Anonymous, interview by author, research notes.

aggressively and lowered entry requirements. During times of higher labour demand, the larger firms hired additional recruitment personnel and set up hiring centres throughout Tijuana to lure workers.

Other firms sent buses down to Mexico's southern states to sign up workers. Labour demand at that time was so high in Tijuana that the running joke among maquiladora managers was that they would hire anyone able to prove they were alive. A maquiladora manager described the labour market at the peak of the maquiladora expansion as overheated:

> The [labour] demand was such [during the 1990s] that we took anyone [...] what we wanted were people, workers because there was a work overload. We took them in without any kind of filter.[138]

It was at this juncture that the least educated rural immigrants from Mexico's southern states began to gain recurring access to maquiladora employment, thus subverting the notion they were peasants or service workers at the fringes of urban economies. Through the voice of a maquiladora manager:

> In 1994 it was like a huge explosion because thousands came [to Tijuana], particularly from Chiapas [...] before, it was not common to see people from Chiapas around here. You could find people from Oaxaca, because they normally come to work in the fields, they are good at that, they work in agriculture, and also in industry but it takes them longer to learn. It also takes time from those from Chiapas to learn but once they do they work well. They are not conflictive people and they don't give you problems.[139]

These workers from southern states are predominantly indigenous but at the maquiladoras their ethnicity is not a matter of record:

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[138] Alejandro Guerra, interview by author, 8 May 2003, digital recording.
[139] José Ibarra, interview by author, 14 May 2003, digital recording.

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At the plant we do not identify them as indigenous people [...] but yes, there are many, there are lots of them.[140]

Hiring immigrants from southernmost Mexican states not only eased Tijuana's tight labour market but also gave relief to the maquiladora industry in other areas. Afflicted with persistently high turnover rates, hiring immigrants from remote rural areas had a stabilizing effect on the workforce. Unable to afford in time and expenses the gruelling journey to their home states and then back to Tijuana, workers from southern regions were more likely to stay at work longer. A human resources manager at a maquiladora explains:

> The further they come, the lower the turnover [...] my theory is that those who come from nearby places, close to Baja California, are more likely to return to their home state so they come and go [...]. [In contrast] it takes three or four days to travel to Oaxaca or Chiapas.[141]

On top of the advantages for the maquiladoras that most of the indigenous workers come from afar, there is another attribute making them well appreciated at the factories despite long standing perceptions that they were unfit to work there: they matched the type of conforming workforce that best serves the interest of the maquiladoras. Along with the regional diversification of the maquiladora workforce came differences in attitudes towards work among workers from different regions. Such differences were not overlooked at the factories: workers from predominantly *mestizo* states, notably Sinaloa in northwestern Mexico, are regarded at the maquiladoras as conflict prone. In contrast, workers from the south are considered hard working and compliant. Specifically, workers from Oaxaca and Chiapas (states with the largest population of indigenous people in

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[140] Ibid.

[141] Calixto Marmolejo, interview by author, 12 May 2003, digital recording.

Mexico) have gained a reputation of being docile and diligent. Two managers from different maquiladoras agreed on the characteristics of southern workers:

> [Workers from Oaxaca are] submissive. They create fewer problems and they work hard. If you ask them to do this or that, they are never going to say no or question [the instruction]. If you tell them that they are being moved to another area, they go and move; or [if you ask them] to learn something new, they go and learn it.[142]

> I have seen that people from Chiapas are very good at working... they have many limitations because they haven't got access to formal education. But they are willing to work, to progress [...]. [They] are not very open, a bit humble, but if you talk to them one to one, it works out well [...] very timid, that is what they are.[143]

Immigrant workers are characteristically needy and disadvantaged and the implication for the employer is that the immigrant workforce is willing to take low paying jobs and work hard to carry on in the host society. Because of their vulnerability immigrant workers are typically docile, thus expanding the possibilities of exploitation and surplus extraction. But the docile workforce argument applies not only to immigrants. It has been one of the standard explanations of the maquiladoras' preference for female workers (see Chapter 4). Conveniently, female immigrants account for the majority of maquiladora workers. Managers at the factories have come to realize, however, that workers' regional and ethnic backgrounds matter when value added for the industry is at issue. Given similar qualifications, at a maquiladora in Tijuana specializing in repairing power-generating turbines, workers from southern states make a better hiring option than workers from predominantly *mestizo* states:

> [I would choose] one thousand times [workers] from the interior, from Chiapas or Oaxaca over those from Sinaloa [...] I would say the people from Sinaloa make the worst workers. They want everything quick but working hard is not their thing. And

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142 Alejandro Guerra, interview by author, 8 May 2003, digital recording.
143 Calixto Marmolejo, interview by author, 12 May 2003, digital recording.

they are the most likely to quit; to leave their work behind [...] they are a bit more conflictive.[144]

Moreover, the assumption that the immigrant workers are endowed with inborn aptitudes or culturally given skills in demand in the receiving society has for long supported explanations about the value of immigrant labour. In the case of indigenous immigrants in northern Mexico, this assumption was applied in reverse order. Immigrant *indígenas* were excluded from the maquiladora labour force because their cultural baggage was seen as irreconcilable with factory employment. Paradoxically, they are now welcomed because that their cultural baggage is compatible with factory employment. At a maquiladora manufacturing television sets the *indígenas* penchant for cooperation and respectful relations at work is well appreciated:

> Group loyalty, which is of great value and that helps much. They see that one has problems and they give you a hand immediately, and they try to keep you going. They are very supportive, that is for sure [...] and the quality of the work they do [...] their punctuality and discipline. That is what gives them access [to the maquiladoras].[145]

The indigenous workers themselves also perceive these differences between the *indígenas* and the *mestizos*. María, a Mixteco maquiladora worker compares the *mestizos'* proclivity to complain all the time with the Mixtecos' approach to work:

> Those from there [the Mixteca region], we try to carry on working [...] we are good people and more noble [than the *mestizo* workers]. There are rarely bad people [among Mixtecos].[146]

Preference for indigenous workers cuts across gender as well. At a maquiladora manufacturing medical supplies the workforce is predominantly female. Because of the

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[144] Ibid.

[145] José Ibarra, interview by author, 14 May 2003, digital recording.

[146] María, interview by author, 17 April 2003, interview notes.

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nature of the product, workers are required not to use makeup and are expected to wear hairnets and uniforms (with trousers). Sexually transmitted diseases are also of great concern. According with the manager in charge of recruitment, because of these expectations women from the south made a better option than those from other states traditionally supplying workers to the factories:

> [Workers from Sinaloa] give you problems because of the way they are. For example, women are flirtatious... and then they create problems with the few men we have. Women from the south are not so much like that, their way of life is truly different [...] If I were given the option to choose where to hire from, I would not hire anyone from Sinaloa.[147]

Because they enter the labour market in a position of great vulnerability, the Mixtecos at the factories work hard. At the factories, they are also regarded as less conflict prone and willing to comply. For all these reasons they have gained a reputation as good workers and have been given greater access to the maquiladora labour market. Nevertheless, access to maquiladora employment has brought members of the Mixteco immigrant community in northern Mexico to a new juncture where they have to deal with the forces of assimilation to the mainstream society in a new, untried manner. In the following chapter, voices from the maquiladoras recount how Mixteco women and men have negotiated their incorporation into factory work in Tijuana.

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[147] Alejandro Guerra, interview by author, 8 May 2003, digital recording.

6.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter identified changes in the employment patterns among Mixteco immigrants in northern Mexico. In the case of Tijuana, with maquiladora industrialization came a profound restructuring of labour market positions at the local level, propelling young women to the factories and shifting the bulk of employment opportunities from tourism and services to industry. Initially, the Mixteco community in Tijuana was excluded from these changes and remained confined within a narrow range of occupations. Nevertheless, during the late 1990s, young Mixteco men and women began finding jobs in the local maquiladoras without much difficulty. Those who gained access to maquiladora employment were usually second-generation Tijuana Mixtecos or young newcomers seeking employment in the city.

The incorporation of Mixteco women and men to factory employment had to do with matters of labour demand and supply rather than with exploitable biological or cultural traits often associated with immigrant labour. Predominantly rural, the Mixtecos did not bring any prior skills to the maquiladoras either. Although often they were seen as unfit for factory employment, the Mixtecos eventually gained access to the local maquiladora labour market because of the pressing demand for labour during years of industrial expansion. Thus, Mixtecos began replacing local and immigrant *mestizo* workers (albeit on a small scale) because of the maquiladoras' (i.e. the capitalists') continuous search for inexpensive labour. This search has brought ethnic succession to factories just as much as men have been exchanged for women (and vice versa), and home-grown by immigrant labour, and nationals by off-shore workers at the discretion of capitalist expansion.

CHAPTER 7

MIXTECO VOICES FROM THE MAQUILADORAS

7.1 Introduction

Working side by side at Tijuana's maquiladoras there are *indígenas* as well as *mestizos*, and each group experiences work at the factories in relation to individual and collective circumstances tied to historical and structural conditions. In the case of Mixteco workers, their experiences at work are shaped by the position *indígenas* have in Mexico's social and power hierarchies. What Mixtecos experience at the factories is also built upon the migratory and urbanization trajectories of the first Mixtecos lured to Mexico's north and the U.S. At the local maquiladoras there are therefore Tijuana-born Mixtecos as well as those that grew up in the city after their parents brought them to the U.S. border. There are also the young adults who followed suit and settled recently in this sprawling city seeking the employment opportunities they lack in the Mixteca heartland. Those who grew up in Tijuana and the newly arrived immigrants are necessarily different in terms of familiarity with the urban environment and the local culture. Nevertheless, both groups have in common strong cultural links and ethnic characteristics that make their experience in the maquiladora different from that of the *mestizo* workers.

Maquiladora employment among Mixtecos entails a transition from a recent past in agriculture or informal urban occupations. The transition for the newly arrived rural Mixtecos stretches out longer. Before knocking on the factories' doors for work they go

first through the process of migrating, settling down in Tijuana, and getting acquainted with the urban environment. Nevertheless, regardless of whether they are newly arrived or long-term residents, at the factories Mixteco workers need to address their own set of ethnic questions. This is because being *indígena* at the maquiladoras is problematic and indigenous workers need to accommodate accordingly.

What these comings and goings entail for Mixteco immigrants and for the wider Mixteco community in Tijuana are presented in this chapter through the voices of Mixteco men and women sharing their experiences as they joined the maquiladora workforce. The voices of *mestizo* maquiladora managers are spoken in the background and incorporated in a narrative divided into four parts.

The first part deals with the spatial and social dimension of Mixteco labour force formation in northern Mexico. With female and male voices, this section revisits the migratory and urbanization experiences of Mixteco residents in Tijuana. Unless noted, the voices are from informants with working experience in the local maquiladora industry. The emphasis is on structure and agency as the informants recount the reasons they (or their families) migrated to Tijuana, and comment on the social structure that assisted them to complete the journey. There is thus reference to the macro conditions driving migration out of the Mixteca region, and the role capitalist expansion in northern Mixteco plays in influencing the flow's course. But chronicles of the journey also describe the importance of receiving assistance from fellow Mixtecos during migration, and in the course of finding accommodation and work in Tijuana.

In the second part of the narrative the Mixteco informants discuss their incorporation to the maquiladora labour market. Their voices highlight the diminishing importance of

social ties among Mixtecos in finding employment in Tijuana. Seen against the backdrop of an expanding labour market, the incorporation of Mixtecos into the industrial labour market unfolds as an increasingly individualized experience. Reasons are the spatial distribution of the maquiladora industry in the city, and the specific dynamics of the maquiladora labour market allowing Mixtecos to find work without the mediation of the local Mixteco community.

At the factories, detachment between the community and the Mixteco workers has deepened over time. A reason for this is that, at the maquiladoras, Mixteco identity, deemed a key factor in bonding this immigrant community together, is obliterated by the interaction of two coexisting structures. The one structure is the maquiladora order that suppresses the emergence of separate individual and collective identities (class, ethnic) with the intention of maximizing the smooth operation of managerial and production methods. The other structure is the inter-ethnic stratification system that is reproduced inside the factories during the daily interaction between *indígenas* and *mestizos*. Thus, in the third section of this chapter Mixteco voices chronicle how the dynamics of inter-ethnic stratification operate inside the maquiladoras to suppress ethnic identities. The same voices also report how the rational maquiladora order acts to further obliterate separate identities. Opinions of *mestizo* maquiladora managers are brought in to complement the Mixteco accounts.

The narrative closes with Mixteco voices commenting on the implications of factory work in their everyday life, specifically in connection with attaining individual goals devoid of collective Mixteco purpose. The outcome appears to support the claim that factory work is detaching the individual from the Mixteco community.

7.2 The way north

Mixteco migration to northern Mexico is rooted in structural conditions driving women and men out of the Mixteca heartland and into locations elsewhere in Mexico and the United States. During migration, the Mixteco migrants face challenges and difficulties most are willing to confront because in the Mixteca region 3000 kilometres further south the land is poor, employment is perennially scarce, and education alternatives are in short supply.

Among the thousands of people migrating out of the Mixteca every year, many target Tijuana, responding to differential economic opportunities between locations (south versus north). In these structural terms a Mixteco community leader explains Mixteco migration to Tijuana:

> The insight I get from the [Mixteco] people, from what they say and talk about, [is that] Tijuana is a city full of opportunities [...] you are not going to starve here. It is a city where there is work, [paid] cheaply, yes, but there is work. If you can't work in the maquila you can work as a street vendor. You can work in other things, as gardener, but there is money. That's what I heard from the people. And they compare Baja California with the southern states and they say that survival there is more difficult.[148]

Two women, both with working experience at the maquiladoras, explain migration objectives common among Mixtecos and the structural conditions influencing the migratory outcomes:

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[148] Gonzalo Montiel, interview by author, 22 November 2002, digital recording.

Rosario

[Young Mixtecos] come here [to northern Mexico] to make money and help their parents, and then they go back. They don't come here to go to rack and ruin. Instead, they come with a mandate [...]. They come with the responsibility of helping their parents, that's what they come here for [...]. They have to help their home [back in the south]. That's the responsibility of all *oaxaqueños*,[149] a mandate that we get when we are children, which is about looking after the needs at home, and bringing money to the household... so the majority of the young [Mixteco] people that come here always send money home, to their parents.[150]

[In the south] there aren't enough opportunities to keep on taking care of the children, [or for them] to study. That's why we need to leave.[151]

Felisa

The reason we leave our town, our roots, is to reach out for a better future [...] we leave our towns because we are poor and we are here because we are poor [...] and more often than not we come with illusions in mind. We think 'I go somewhere and I will progress quickly because there are jobs' [...] that's in the mind of the people, and then one comes here and [the reality is that] finding work is difficult. [Also] many women come hoping to cross to the other side [to the U.S.] but then what happens is that they fail and they have to give up [crossing the border] and come to work in a maquiladora, or in the bus station cleaning, or anywhere else, in a restaurant, in McDonald's [...] But the problem is that here, in Baja California all workers, in the maquiladoras, in restaurants, in hotels, wherever, earn, unfortunately very little. Salaries are very low, I mean, not even the minimum wage sometimes. So, those of us that come from there [from southern Mexico], try to work very hard. But there is a lot of work for very little money.[152]

Rosario's motivations come across as an endorsement of the modernization theorists'

view that migration is a decision that progressive individuals make against the

background of "push and pull" factors differentiating locations.[153] Felisa, however, draws

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[149] *Oaxaqueño*: native of the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico, where the largest share of the Mixteco region is located.

[150] Rosario, interview by author, 17 April 2003, digital recording.

[151] Ibid.

[152] Felisa, interview by author, 12 December 2002, digital recording.

[153] For a profile of Mixteco migrants that draws on modernization theory see Douglas Butterworth, "Selectivity of Out-migration from a Mixtec Community," *Urban Anthropology* 6 (1977). In this article, Butterworth highlights the individually driven aspects of migration, and finds that the wealthier, more

attention to the fact that migration may well not proceed in linear and deterministic terms as modernist theorists expected. Immigrants in purportedly modern localities do not often find the 'progress' and well being the modernists heralded. Both women, however, underscore the structural determinants of migration: in their decision to migrate they acted in response to the differential economic opportunities Tijuana and the Mixteca region offer.

Nevertheless, as established in Chapter 3, Mixteco migration to Tijuana is also a socially driven process articulated through social networks linking the Mixteca region with labour markets in U.S. border cities. News about Tijuana and the employment opportunities that the city offers is spread through word of mouth to communities throughout the Mixteca region in southern Mexico. There is always a Tijuana based friend, a relative or a *paisano* bringing the news back to the Mixteca that in this rapidly growing city employment is plentiful. This social structure allows prospective emigrants as well as Mixtecos en route to the border, and settling immigrants in northern sites, to gather critical information, receive assistance, and obtain advice from fellow Mixtecos during the various migratory stages. In this respect, the migratory experiences of Mixteco women and men employed at the factories match those of labourers in agricultural centres in northern Mexico and the U.S. reported before. In fact, for many Mixtecos maquiladora work is yet another stop along the capitalist circuit that has driven them to agricultural fields and urban centres across Mexico and the United States.

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educated, bilingual (Spanish-Mixteco) *indigenas* are normally willing to take the risk of migrating to the urban areas because they are the most open, adaptive individuals. In contrast, those who stay are not only the poorer, less educated, monolinguals, but also the more traditionally minded: "the meek, the community-oriented, the less ambitious and adventurous, the rigid conformists." p. 138.

7.2.1 The long route: along the capitalist circuit

Discussing migratory flows between the Mixteca region (where subsistence agriculture prevails) and California's capitalist economy, Kearney (1986) suggests that social networks articulated these two modes of production. The migratory and job patterns among Mixtecos chronicled below suggest further complexities: Mixteco northbound migration is also articulating the commercial agricultural economy in northern Mexico with the maquiladora industry along the U.S. border. This is because migrants often engage first in waged employment in commercial agriculture in northern Mexico, and later in maquiladora employment in Tijuana. What remains unchanged, however, is the key role social networks play in assisting emigrants to complete the route.

Nicanor and Darío

Brothers Nicanor and Darío have lived in Tijuana since the late 1980s. They were born in the Mixteca region in Oaxaca but as children both were already working in the agricultural fields of northern Mexico. Their father led the way as he worked in Ensenada (near Tijuana) during the harvesting season, sometimes taking his wife and older children with him. Nicanor is the older of the two. He was in grade eight when his father died, leaving the family in poverty.

> I wanted to continue studying but it was economically impossible, so I had to leave and work to support myself, [also] because we were five in the family and there wasn't enough for all.[154]

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[154] Nicanor, interview by author, 13 April 2003, digital recording.

After his father died, Nicanor, his mother, brother Darío and a younger sister decided to go to Ensenada to seek work. They got there with no work and without accommodation arrangements. Because employment was readily available in the commercial agricultural operations in Ensenada Valley, soon they found work picking onions, tomatoes, and chillies. Work dried up at the end of the harvesting season and the family went back to the Mixteca. Yet, they would go back to the Ensenada Valley to harvest for a number of years until Tijuana became an alternative place to migrate. Nicanor was the first to migrate to Tijuana at age seventeen. He chose Tijuana because people from his hometown were saying that in Tijuana "there was a lot of cash, that there was work."[155] A cousin encouraged Nicanor to migrate and together they went to Tijuana in 1989. When he arrived, Nicanor stayed with an uncle who helped him find a gardening job. During his first years in Tijuana he also did construction work but eventually found his way to the maquiladora industry. He worked at the factories for a few years but later took up a job at a small shop where he makes orthopaedic devices. Darío also moved to Tijuana following his brother Nicanor. At that time Darío was thirteen years old, but despite his age, a relative in Tijuana helped him find work at a construction site. After a few months, Darío returned to Oaxaca where he went back to school. During the summer breaks, however, he would return to Tijuana to earn some money working in the maquiladoras. He continued to work in the maquiladoras seasonally until 1997, when he began instruction to become a bilingual (Mixteco-Spanish) teacher. He succeeded but not before working in a few more maquiladoras while getting teachers' training.

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[155] Ibid.

Many Mixtecos living near the U.S.-Mexican border share Darío's and Nicanor's meandering path to Tijuana. Itineraries often involve urban areas rather than agricultural fields.

Margarita and Rosario

Years before migrating to Tijuana in 1992, Margarita spent time in Mexico City where she made some income cleaning houses. In Mexico City she met her Mixteco husband and later both decided to move to Oaxaca City where they lived for four years. In Oaxaca City Margarita stayed at home while her husband worked as a builder. The decision to migrate to Tijuana came after they learned about Tijuana's booming labour market through Margarita's sister in-law. Margarita's husband migrated first, working in Tijuana seasonally as a construction worker. Later, in 1992, Margarita joined him but both planned to stay in Tijuana for only a few years. Nevertheless, the plans changed following Margarita's first pregnancy. Distance and the cost of transportation to Oaxaca were also factors influencing their decision to stay in Tijuana. Now Margarita works in the maquiladora industry while her husband continues to do construction work.

Rosario, her husband and children migrated to Tijuana when she was 30 years old, but the route to the north began for her at age 13, when she left for the first time the town of Zaragoza in the Mixteca region seeking work. She migrated first to Mexico City where she worked sitting children before returning to Zaragoza a year later. Back in her hometown she married a Mixteco man, but lacking employment opportunities both migrated to Mexico City. When life in Mexico City turned even more challenging as the family expanded, Rosario and her husband returned to southern Mexico. Again, lack of

employment forced them to consider another migration attempt out the Mixteca. Northern Mexico turned into an option as they heard from townsfolk that employment was plentiful in Tijuana:

> We heard people talking. Many of our town folk came here [to Tijuana], and then we opted to come by our own. We came here alone.[156]

It was 1990 when Rosario and her family arrived in Tijuana with little knowledge about the city. They knew there was a family from Zaragoza living in Tijuana but their whereabouts were vague. When found, this Mixteco family provided them with accommodation and soon afterwards Rosario's husband began working at a construction site. She also found a housemaid job that she kept for six years. In 1996, however, she finally joined Tijuana's maquiladora workforce.

7.2.2 Non-stop to Tijuana

The consolidation of stable immigrant communities in Tijuana, the expansion of the local urban economy, and the continuing role of social networks in articulating migratory flows are factors facilitating direct migration between the Mixteca region and Mexico's northern border. This migratory pattern is illustrated through the voice of a maquiladora worker:

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[156] Rosario, interview by author, 17 April 2003, digital recording.

<u>Tomás</u>

Tomás migrated to Tijuana at age 18. At that time he had just finished high school (grade 12) and had failed to gain admission to an agricultural university in central Mexico. While his plans were to attend university, he lacked any short-term options other than migrating to Tijuana. He went to Tijuana together with other friends who were in the same situation. It was Tomás' first experience in a city after spending all his life in his hometown. He heard about Tijuana from older friends in his hometown who worked in the maquiladoras during the long summer school breaks. Back in Oaxaca they spread the word that finding work in Tijuana was easy. "[Those stories] motivated us and we got the idea of coming [to Tijuana] to find out on our own."[157] Before Tomás and his friends migrated to Tijuana, all of them planned to get a maquiladora job. Nevertheless, as soon as he arrived, other Mixtecos referred Tomás to a construction site, where he got his first job. Unable to cope with the strenuous effort that construction work required, he later switched to a maquiladora that manufactured electronic components, where he worked up the ladder to a supervisory position. He has worked in the same maquiladora ever since he began working at the factories. Nevertheless, his trajectory at the factory was interrupted for a couple of years while he joined his father-in-law in California. Working at a construction business in California, he saved enough money to buy a plot in Tijuana and build a house after his return to Mexico in 2001. Back in Tijuana, the maquiladora labour market was more difficult to access and he struggled to find work. Nevertheless, he was eventually reinstated in a similar position at the same electronics components factory he was working in before.

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[157] Tomás, interview by author, 13 April 2003, digital recording.

The involvement of Tomás in Tijuana's quasi-informal construction sector prior his incorporation to the maquiladora industry alludes to the complexity of Tijuana's urban economy, which fits with Santos' and Gerry's conception of the urban economies as complex systems connecting the modern sector with expanding informality and low productivity occupations.[158] The job pattern of Tijuana grown Mixtecos presented below also illustrates the articulation between the urban and informal economies as immigrants shift jobs back and forward from one sector to the other, seeking to get a foothold in the local economy.

7.2.3 Tijuana Grown Mixtecos

Lucía

Lucía was born in Tijuana. Her parents had migrated out of the Mixteca region (Oaxaca) to make a living. First they went to Mexicali, near Tijuana, to seek work in agriculture:

> There was no food to eat there [in the Mixteca region], they had to cultivate the land but sometimes it didn't yield anything and [they ended up without money], so they came [...]. When my father came he went to the fields in Mexicali to work. He came to work with my mother, with all the family, my grandparents, all of them.[159]

After three years in Mexicali, Lucía's parents moved to Tijuana where they learned from a relative how to mow lawns and prune plants. A year later, however, they went back to their hometown in the Mixteca with savings to invest in the land they owned. But

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[158] Milton Santos *et al.*, *The Shared Space: the Two Circuits of the Urban Economy in Underdeveloped Countries* (London: Methuen, 1979).

[159] Lucía, interview by author, 20 March 2003, digital recording.

when the land failed to yield, they returned to Tijuana and resumed their gardening jobs. Lucía's brothers now help their parents in the gardening chores.

Lucía's contribution to the family's income began when she was a child, selling trinkets to tourists on the streets with her aunt. As a young adult she joined the maquiladora labour force, working at a factory for several years. Nevertheless, in 2003 she resigned from one maquiladora job in the hope of finding a better factory to work at. But twenty-years old Lucía had spent several months without work, unable to get another job at the factories due to sluggish demand for labour. Despite the shrinking opportunities, she was determined to find another job in Tijuana because she sees no reason to continue the migratory path her parents began in the 1970s. If she fails to find work at the factories Lucía believes she would join her cousins at "La Línea" (the border crossing), where they sell wares to incoming visitors.

Ernesto and Camilo

Brothers Ernesto and Camilo began working at the local maquiladoras after spending their childhood in the streets of Tijuana selling gum and flowers to passers-by. They were brought from the Mixteca region at a young age. Ernesto was about three years old and came together with his mother and Camilo to join his father, who was already working in California but wanted the family reunited. The father had migrated to the north in the 1970s because "[in the south] the economy was not good for [the family] to live."[160] He has been commuting to California for years to work as gardener, while back in Tijuana his wife complemented the family's income selling trinkets near Tijuana's tourist core.

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[160] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.

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Ernesto and Camilo joined their mother and worked in the streets until both began working at the factories. For Ernesto, going back to the streets to sell goods is always an option to fall back on if he ever loses his maquiladora job. In contrast, Camilo may attempt to cross the border to the U.S. as he has done in the past without success.

7.2.4 The U.S. option

Crossing the border to the United States continues to be an aspiration among Mixtecos in Tijuana. Many of them use their time spent working at the maquiladoras to plan and to save money to cross the border. This is the case of friends Manuel and Julián, who had a few different jobs in Tijuana before making concrete plans to cross the border undocumented.

<u>Manuel and Julián</u>

Both are from the same town in the Mixteca region in Oaxaca but Manuel was the fist to migrate in 1998. At that time he was 18 years old and had little information about Tijuana:

> The truth is that I didn't know what to expect in Tijuana, but friends of mine that had been here told me that there was work in Tijuana.[161]

When he arrived Manuel approached other Mixtecos from his hometown who helped him settle down. His first job in Tijuana was at a maquiladora but he switched to a construction site after a few months in the factory. He later tried another maquiladora but

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[161] Manuel, interview by author, 7 April 2003, digital recording.

resigned as plans to cross the border were underway. This would be his first attempt and he would try it with the help of a *coyote*[162] to smuggle him across the border. Manuel did not know any one in the United States but he was aware that many of his town folk were working there: "there are *paisanos* [hometown folk] there. I mean, let's see how we get there first and later we'll see how to fit in."[163]

Manuel's plans to cross the border were arranged in coordination with Julián, his twenty-two-year old friend from Oaxaca's Mixteca region. Julián migrated to Tijuana in 2002 because of the same circumstances that brought Manuel to the border: "[in the Mixteca] there is no work and if you find it, they pay very little."[164] Julián also chose Tijuana to migrate to following the advice of some of his Mixteco friends with working experience in the maquiladoras. Back in the south, these friends had told him that in Tijuana employment was abundant and better paid than in the Mixteca. After he arrived, a Mixteco acquaintance provided him with accommodation and a week later he began working at a supermarket. Tired of this work, Julián switched to a maquiladora where he worked for several months until he resigned days before attempting to cross the border. Julián and Manuel are single men and, unlike long-term residents in Tijuana, without firm roots and family in the city. These circumstances influenced their decision to cross the border and their approach to factory employment. For other Mixtecos, however, crossing the border is not an option they would readily take.

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[162] The smugglers of undocumented workers across the U.S.-Mexico border are known as *Coyotes*.
[163] Manuel, interview by author, 7 April 2003, digital recording.
[164] Julián, interview by author, 7 April 2003, digital recording.

<u>Irene</u>

For Irene, crossing the border to seek work is not an alternative. She has been living in Tijuana for twelve years ever since she migrated with her family. The family come from the state of Guerrero and, like the majority of those emigrating from the Mixteca region, Irene's family left the south for economic reasons: "we came to work; my parents came here [to Tijuana] because there is no work there [in the Mixteca region], only the harvest. There is no work."[165] Irene recently lost her job at a maquiladora. However, she is planning to stay in Tijuana and look for another factory to work in. She knows many other Mixtecos who have crossed the U.S. border seeking work but she is not planning to follow suit: "I am fine here [in Tijuana]. I plan to get a job in another maquiladora."[166]

There is no labour union at the factory Irene was working in and without a job the resources she is able to rally to find work and carry on with her life are limited. Her family is one resource, as she lives with her parents in the *Colonia Valle Verde*. There are also several other Mixteco families from the State of Guerrero in this *colonia* and some of them may be able to provide Irene basic support in case of need: "there is help [available within the Mixteco community] if there is a problem, there is help."[167] However, Irene knows that there are limits to such assistance:

> Sometimes there is not [support available]. They [the Mixteco neighbours] wouldn't help [...]. [In case of necessity] we don't know who to ask [for assistance], maybe to the [Mixteco community] leaders.[168]

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[165] Irene, interview by author, 28 November 2002, digital recording.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

Irene's situation calls attention to the vulnerability of Tijuana's Mixtecos and maquiladora workers. But her comments, expressed in broken Spanish, also underscore the significant role community solidarities play in confronting poverty and vulnerability.

Attention to networks of relationships and mutual assistance among urban dwellers has a long tradition in sociological inquiry. It dates back from the empiricism of the 1940s that questioned the long-held sociological notion that individuals and nuclear families are relatively isolated units in urban societies (as in the work of Simmel,[169] Wirth,[170] and Parsons[171] among others). This 'community approach' has been particularly useful in addressing issues of poverty and vulnerability in developing countries. Various studies on Mixteco migration to northern Mexico and the U.S. reviewed in Chapter 3 adapted this framework, focusing not on informal networks but on the ethnic-based organizations immigrants establish to confront exploitation and discrimination. With evidence that urban industrial complexes in developing counties were failing to provide employment for the growing urban labour force, studies using urban marginality theory and recent reformulations[172] have also turned their attention to the role of community solidarities in explaining how shantytown dwellers survive. But this framework is less useful in situations where the urban industrial economy is in fact providing employment for immigrant labour. As discussed in Chapter 6, this was the case of Tijuana in the 1980s-1990s, when excessive demand for labour opened the maquiladora doors to Mixteco workers. With low but steady maquiladora wages, members of Tijuana's

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[169] See Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971)

[170] Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1938).

[171] Talcott Parsons, "The Social Structure of the Family," in *The Family: its function and destiny*, ed. Anshen (New York: Harper, 1959)

[172] See for example Caroline Moser, "The Asset Vulnerability Framework: Reassessing Urban Poverty Reduction Strategies," *World Development* 26, no. 1 (1998).

community were making the transition from a situation of urban marginality to another less ominous (at least in the pecuniary sense) at the lower layers of the international division of labour. The following sections discuss some of the implications of this transition.

7.3 Looking for factory work in Tijuana

The Mixteco voices above highlighted the importance of ethnic-based social ties in mediating the migratory process. There was also reference to the role these social relations play in the course of the urbanization process, particularly during an initial phase, when the newly arrived get accommodation, directions about the city, and information regarding job alternatives from established Mixteco residents in Tijuana. Nevertheless, in the context of maquiladora industrialization in Tijuana, the labour market can operate in a manner that diminishes the significance of Mixteco networks in finding employment, a critical aspect of the urbanization process. The experiences presented below suggest two factors influencing this outcome: the expanding maquiladora labour market in Tijuana during the 1980s-1990s, and the spatial distribution of the maquiladoras throughout the city, itself a mechanism the industrialists use to draw on pools of labour.

7.3.1 The maquiladora flood

The expansion of the maquiladora industry, the ensuing proliferation of assembly plants in Tijuana, and the heightened demand for labour made maquiladora employment a commonsense job alternative for Tijuana's Mixtecos:

> There are maquiladoras all over the place. In my *colonia* there are many, many maquiladoras [...] there are many factories. In fact, Tijuana is almost flooded with maquiladoras so it is logical to look for work in a factory.[173]

With the maquiladoras being such a conspicuous presence in Tijuana's landscape, the implication for the long-term Mixteco residents in Tijuana is that the support of other Mixtecos in finding factory work becomes dispensable. For Mixtecos informants that grew up in Tijuana, having fellow Mixtecos or *mestizo* acquaintances at the maquiladoras was not important for getting employed in the factories. For them, finding a first industrial job was more about roaming the streets near the factories. Camilo and Ernesto, who grew up in Tijuana and spent their childhood selling gum and flowers in downtown Tijuana, the urban environment poses few challenges.

Ernesto

> One goes and looks for work. As people say, if you look you find. The first time I went to look for work... it went just like that, from one factory to the other. Area by area let's say... I went walking feeling at ease, going from one factory to another... door-by-door seeking work.[174]

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[173] Alicia, interview by author, 2 March 2003, digital recording.
[174] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.

<u>Camilo</u>

[I got work] just by looking around, going places to find it. There is a place where most of the maquiladoras are, so I went there to look [for work]. They gave me work right away [...] I asked for work and I got it.[175]

For the new Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana, finding work at local establishments is part of the broader urbanization process that normally begins with the support of ethnic acquaintances. However, the individual experiences narrated below suggest that, for the newly arrived, the support of Mixteco acquaintances in finding maquiladora jobs decreases in importance as familiarity with the location of factories proceeds rapidly.

Gerardo found a job in the industry soon after he arrived though a Mixteco relative working in a factory. But after he quit his first maquiladora job, he found another without any kin or *paisano* assistance. To find it he only needed basic familiarity with the urban context: "since there are many factories, I went by myself and found this job."[176]

Elvira also found her first maquiladora job through kinship relations:

What happened was that a cousin of mine was working there [in the maquiladora]; she is also Mixteca and from Oaxaca too. She was the one that told me they were hiring personnel, and that was it. She found me the job so I went working there.[177]

But when Elvira was laid off months later she did not require assistance to find other maquiladora jobs. After a short period at a second maquiladora, she found a third factory job by herself near her home:

[At the second maquiladora] I was suffering eyestrain because I was like six months in that factory [welding components]. But later I moved to another [maquiladora]

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[175] Camilo, interview by author, 16 March 2003, digital recording.
[176] Gerardo, interview by author, 28 April 2003, digital recording.
[177] Elvira, interview by author, 16 December 2002, digital recording.

near the *colonia*, because they began building factories close by. I was working at one that assembled parts for airplanes [...]. I saw when the construction finished and they set up posters seeking personnel, assemblers, so it was like that that I began working there.[178]

Conveniently located near the *colonias* home of the industrial labour force, the maquiladoras are often clustered in modern industrial parks. *Parque Industrial Pacifico*, a large industrial park in Tijuana's populous west is a case in point. This industrial park looms above hills and is flanked by several *colonias* including *Colonia Caminito Verde*, which extends down a rugged ravine where several Mixteco families live. Manuel, a twenty-year old Mixteco, lived in this *colonia* when he first came from southern Mexico. Upon arrival, hometown friends gave him accommodation and having the nearby Pacifico industrial park within walking distance facilitated his first attempts to find work:

> We used to live up there [at the top of a ravine], close to where the factories are, so we just went out right there, close by, to look for work.[179]

Later, when Manuel looked for a different maquiladora job, he only had to go outside, near the factories, to find it.

> [I found work] just by looking. I mean, often [recruitment] cars passed by, seeking personnel, and that's how I found another job.[180]

During times of high labour demand, the maquiladoras would seek workers aggressively, using various means to attract workers. With the use of flyers, loudspeakers, recruiting vehicles, newspaper adds, and signs posted outside the factories,

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[178] Ibid.

[179] Manuel, interview by author, 7 April 2003, digital recording.

[180] Ibid.

workers are attracted to the factories, making redundant the assistance of Mixteco acquaintances:

> Before, there was work all over the place. If you were walking [hiring crews would approach you and ask] are you looking for work? [...]. It happened to me several times.[181]

These individual experiences of long-term Mixteco residents as well as recent immigrants looking for maquiladora jobs signal the diminishing importance of the Mixteco community in assisting its members in a key aspect of urban life. The following section explains why this detachment deepens as members of this community experience work at the factories.

7.4 The limits of ethnic identity

The emergence of a Mixteco enclave in Tijuana has facilitated the reproduction of cultural practices and the reinforcement of a separate ethnic identity. But more than a case of 'urbanization without breakdown,' the urbanization experience of Mixtecos in Tijuana has been presented in the specialized literature as an example of how ethnic identities are constructed, arising in particular contexts and fluctuating existential circumstances. As discussed in Chapter 3 above, scholarly work on Mixteco northbound migration interprets Mixteco ethnic activism in northern Mexico and western United States in terms of a newfound sense of ethnic identity. Acquired in response to social interactions in specific political and economic conjunctures, this new sense of common

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[181] Darío, interview by author, 6 April 2003, digital recording.

ethnicity is considered contingent and circumstantial. I argue that Mixteco access to the maquiladora labour market is one of these conjunctures, creating conditions for new relational experiences within untried working environments: the enclosed, rationally organized precincts of the maquiladoras. As for the outcome, the Mixteco voices presented ahead suggest that in the context of Tijuana's maquiladora labour market ethnic identity is being deflected or deconstructed to suit specific social and economic circumstances.

7.4.1 Ethnic stratification

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Mexico the social interaction between the indigenous peoples and the *mestizo* majority is unequal and conflictive, with this kind of relationship rooted in the position each group has historically held in Mexico's class and power structures, where the *mestizo* has been the dominant group and the indigenous people the subordinated minority. When conflict surfaces the expressions range from subtle, persistent discrimination against the indigenous minority to the overt confrontation the *Zapatista* showdown in Chiapas best exemplifies.

In Tijuana, the relationship between the *mestizos* and the Mixteco immigrants is marred by expressions of this persisting conflict. A well-documented case is the long lasting dispute between Mixteco street vendors and local authorities over the right of the former to sell on the streets reported in previous chapters. The experience of Ernesto, who sold wares in the streets of Tijuana before joining the maquiladora workforce, illustrates the extent of the conflict:

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It was sad for many of us there [...] they didn't want Mixtecos there, in Revolución [Avenue...]. We were removed [by police] from the spots we occupied [...] we didn't have permits to sell [so] we sneaked in to sell without permit [...] but there were [other] street vendors that were selfish [and wanted the Mixtecos out...]. [The other street vendors were not Mixtecos] they were *gente de razón*[182] [...]. All it was because of racism [...] because we are from Oaxaca [...]. [In the streets] all Mixteco women are called Marias. They are called Marias because they are Mixtecas and they [the local authorities, the established businesses] didn't want them around [...] It was something very sad [...all those years] when I struggled a lot as a kid.[183]

The conflictive relation between the Mixtecos and the *mestizos* in Tijuana expresses itself in various forms and permeates all dimensions of life. Apart from his experiences as street vendor, Ernesto faced discrimination at the level of the family after he married a *mestizo* woman he met at the factories. Based on stereotypes and categories that represent the *indígena* as deviant, Ernesto's new family was prejudiced against him:

My wife is from Sinaloa and when we got together, my mother-in-law didn't like me because I am from Oaxaca. [She said] that all oaxaqueños are filthy and also drunkards [...] and their children dirty at all times [...] but thanks God I proved her wrong.[184]

At Tijuana's *colonias* the social distance between Mixtecos and *mestizos* take similar expressions of conflict. For example, Leonor, on her way from the factories often confronts the *cholos*[185] that plague Tijuana's impoverished *colonias*:

[There are problems between Mixtecos and *cholos*] because they don't like us, because we are Mixtecos and because we are not from here. [They say] we shouldn't

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[182] It is not uncommon to hear Mixteco people in Tijuana or the Mixteca region in southern Mexico refer to the *mestizo* majority as *gente de razón*, or people of reason. The expression denotes that the *gente de razón* are in contraposition to the Mixteco people, who thus see themselves as belonging to the ignorant classes, in need to use their hands and toil to make a living, often using a language of their own of little perceived use in the mainstream society. The use of this expression as well as its intended meaning capture the social distance between Mexico's indigenous people and the mainstream *mestizo* majority.

[183] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.

[184] Ibid.

[185] The word *cholo* means half-breed, like *mestizo* but in a more derogatory way. Used to label young male hoodlums.

be here [that] we should be there instead [in the south...]. They are thieves [...] and sometimes I get angry and I react [to their harassment] and tell them I don't care if they say I am a *pata rajada*,[186] because I am proud that I have never committed a theft and I tell them they have stolen something from everyone. That's what I tell them.[187]

Other Mixtecos, however, take a less confrontational approach to dealing with the fact that *mestizo* residents see them as strangers in Tijuana. Maria, who works in a maquiladora, has little contact with her non-Mixteco neighbours because "they are people with different ideas, from other states and with them there are only problems."[188] Another approach is to forego expressions of ethnic identity. Discussing whether his family follows Mixteco traditions during significant festivities, a Mixteco informant highlights the pressure *mestizos* put on them to assimilate to the mainstream society:

> We don't do anything [during the Day of the Dead festivities] because [my parents] want to change, abandon the traditions [these traditions] are not bad thing but it's something you can't do here because people would criticize [...] they would discriminate against you [...] they would say 'why are all these people doing that here? Why don't they go and do it in their towns?' and all that, so we prefer not to [follow Mixteco traditions in Tijuana].[189]

These kinds of situations, indicative of lasting inter-ethnic stratification dynamics, are reproduced inside the factories, where the *indigenas* find themselves exposed to close contact with *mestizo* co-workers and managers.

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[186] Expletive that makes reference to the rustic, often indigenous background of rural folks. Translates loosely as cracked, unkempt feet.

[187] Lucía, interview by author, 20 March 2003, digital recording.

[188] Margarita, interview by author, 17 April 2003, interview notes.

[189] Miguel, interview by author, 16 April 2003, digital recording.

7.4.2 The maquiladora order and the social structure

For the Mixtecos, factory work entails an experience in many respects different from the 'traditional' Mixteco occupations. Work in commercial agriculture and urban occupations such as street vending allows groups of Mixtecos to work together in shared spaces and relative isolation. In commercial agricultural fields in Mexico or the border, large crews of Mixtecos work alongside relatives and townsfolk. The fact that groups of Mixtecos work in crews in the fields and live together in camps facilitates the use of their own language, and the recreation of Mixteco traditions and practices. Similarly, in Tijuana, the Mixteco vendors who use streets and plazas to sell trinkets toil close to each other sharing similar objectives and tribulations. On any given day, they can be seen wearing distinctive clothes and speaking their own Mixteco dialect. In order to sell they need to interact with non-Mixtecos but they still remain close-knitted and organized in various Mixteco associations that represent their interests.

In contrast, at the maquiladoras the Mixteco workers are not simply dispersed throughout the city in different factories but also distributed inside the plants, split into crews, divided by tasks, and dispersed throughout the ordered production layout of the factories. Inside the factories, they are also exposed to new relational experiences, in close contact with a majority of *mestizo* workers. But because the maquiladoras are embedded in the social structure of the Mexican society, at the factories the dynamics of inter-ethnic conflict act to further deter the emergence of an indigenous identity at the individual and collective levels.

7.4.2.1 The maquiladoras, new relational experiences and the social structure

Maquiladora employment exposes the Mixtecos to daily coexistence with non-indigenous co-workers in the factories. The relations among workers within the maquiladoras are, however, firmly embedded in the aggregate of social relations that mould Mexican society. As a result, social tensions between the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the rest of the Mexican society are reproduced at the factories.

Felisa

The Mixtecos are treated [badly], discriminated against because of their speech, because [in the factories] there are many who cannot even speak Spanish. They come and speak Mixteco only, a different tongue. I mean they can't speak Spanish. That happened there, in the factory.[190]

Darío

I think in other maquiladoras [discrimination] can happen, against the *paisanos* or against other [indigenous workers because...] at the beginning, when we [first] come [to the maquiladoras] all shy, and all that, they shout 'he is from Oaxaca!' [They know] because we don't speak well, in this case Spanish, and because of our appearance, or I don't know why.[191]

During interactions with *mestizo* co-workers the indigenous Mixtecos would then keep their ethnic and regional background from being exposed:

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[190] Felisa, interview by author, 12 December 2002, digital recording.
[191] Darío, interview by author, 6 April 2003, digital recording.

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Lucía

I would not sit to chat with them [*Mestizo* female co-workers]. I would [in any case] change the subject when they ask me where I am from. I mean, I would let them talk instead of me doing the talking.[192]

Ernesto

[At the factories] I don't like to say that I am Mixteco... [Instead] I tell them: 'I am oaxaqueño, [perhaps] unfortunately, [but] I am oaxaqueño and I like to be oaxaqueño, if you don't like it, that's not my problem.'[193]

With the Mixteco language being an ethnic identifier, at the factories the indigenous

workers refrain from speaking their own dialect to avoid the scorn of *mestizo* workmates:

Lucía

People there [at the factories] make fun of you. They say things like 'oh, you are from there [the south]' and things like that. I mean, I am not ashamed of where I come from, but they outnumber me. There are many putting me down and I am alone.[194]

Darío

We chatted in Mixteco but sometimes we chose not to, because of the same [persisting situation that], the people, the other people [the *mestizos*], always takes it like 'so what [language] are they talking!' and then instead of being curious about it and ask questions, they tell you [things], they discriminate against us so we better not [speak Mixteco at the factories].[195]

The use of Spanish by indigenous workers does not prevent others to identify them

as *indígenas*. Other identifier markers of ethnicity such as appearance, demeanour, and

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[192] Lucía, interview by author, 20 March 2003, digital recording.
[193] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.
[194] Lucía, interview by author, 20 March 2003, digital recording.
[195] Darío, interview by author, 6 April 2003, digital recording.

speech expose them as non-*mestizos*. Poorly educated and with little or no exposure to industrial practices and urban facilities, the indigenous workers confront greater challenges to fit into the factories' social environment:

> [Working at the maquiladoras is demanding] when one has no social skills, when one is shy and doesn't know how to communicate, and when one can't understand or express oneself.[196]

At the administrative level, ethnic prejudices permeate the organizational structures, adding another dimension to the relationship between workers and management. Despite the managerial discourse that stresses equality among workers, the managers' attitude towards workers is infused with representations of the indigenous constructed outside the factories, in the every day relationship between the indigenous people and Mexico's mainstream *mestizo* society. The Mixtecos with working experience in the maquiladoras interviewed for this study gave mixed reviews on their relationships with supervisors, managers, and administrative personnel at the factories. The majority of these informants regarded their relationship with supervisors and administrative personnel as a function of management styles or personal rapport irrespective of class or ethnicity. However, there were also those who reported overt discrimination on the part of managers against indigenous workers:

Felisa

We were discriminated against because we were poor, and because we were indigenous people, and because they [the management] wanted to treat us the way they wished.[197]

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[196] María, interview by author, 17 April 2003, interview notes.
[197] Felisa, interview by author, 12 December 2002, digital recording.

<u>Maria</u>

There was and there is discrimination for those from there [the south, the Mixteca region] ... it's not that [managers and supervisors] discriminate against you openly but they do it, in the distance.[198]
The relationship between Mixteco workers and *mestizo* managers is at the crossroads

of class and ethnic relations. Managers and office personnel do not mingle with workers

as they see each other as strangers due to class differences. In this context, ethnicity

emerges as a dimension of class differentiation. According to maquiladora managers

speaking about Tijuana's maquiladora industry in general:

> Yes, [there is discrimination]. It is something that is there, and a fact everywhere. In all the firms [...] the people that work with the product, handling the product, refer to those that don't [handle the product] as them. And we do it the other way around. Those [in the offices] that don't handle the product refer to those that work in the floor, the technicians or workers as them, and events are organized separately, they don't mingle... On the other hand, you often find [that people in the factories use] those expressions that I detest, like 'oaxaquita'[199] or 'you Indian!'[200]

> There is quite a lot [of discrimination among office personnel, particularly] [...] against those [workers] that come from Chiapas, Veracruz, Tabasco, Oaxaca, and even Puebla, from places like that. Because of the way they talk, which is completely different, and that's enough [to escalate into scorn].[201]

Acts of discrimination may or may not escalate into conflict. Likely, those at the

bottom of the social hierarchy (i.e. the indigenous workers) may avoid conflict altogether:

> For example, if one says [mockingly] 'hey you, *chiapaneco*,'[202] [the worker] would move away quietly, without even replying.[203]

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[198] María, interview by author, 17 April 2003, interview notes.

[199] The expression *oaxaquita* is considered by Tijuana's Mixtecos as an insult. Literally, it means "little native from Oaxaca"

[200] Calixto Marmolejo, interview by author, 12 May 2003, digital recording.

[201] José Ibarra, interview by author, 14 May 2003, digital recording.

[202] *Chiapaneco*: native of the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico.

[203] Calixto Marmolejo, interview by author, 12 May 2003, digital recording.

For the indigenous workers, avoiding conflict is a strategy to fit in. The use of clothes conforming to the standard among workers is another. Noting the makeover the indigenous workers attain as time passes, the management at a maquiladora elaborates on what wearing clothes according to the prevailing social norm may accomplish:

> When they first come [to the maquiladoras, the indigenous workers] wear long unkempt hair and tight clothes, a bit ragged. They can't come in wearing *huaraches*[204] for safety reasons... but [as time passes] you begin to notice that they tidy their hair up, and they start to shave, and then they buy different kinds of clothing even if it is second hand. And then you begin to see how they transform into a different person... I think for them is a way to say 'I am wearing clothes like you, accept me', that's how I see it.[205]

Nevertheless, adding to the dynamics of inter-ethnic stratification, the regimented rational order in place in the maquiladoras operates to further deter the emergence of separate identites among workers.

7.4.2.2 The maquiladora order

As workers enter the realm of the maquiladoras, they come into contact with production and administrative structures where rationality is the guiding principle. Regardless of the sophistication of the industrial plant, each maquiladora applies the same guiding principle with varying degrees of complexity and proficiency. Inside the factories, the administrative hierarchies, employment categories, space partitions, administrative divisions, and crews support the production processes together with use of systems and technologies. Such organization unfolded before Tomás as he began working at a new maquiladora:

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[204] *Huaraches*: sandal-like footwear of common use among rural Mexicans.
[205] Calixto Marmolejo, interview by author, 12 May 2003, digital recording.

It was in 1992 when a more specific work system was implemented in the plant. Thus, divisions were created, such as the purchases department, the sales departments, the quality control departments, production... engineering, all that. [The plant] began to be divided, diagrams of how the firm was to be arranged began to take shape.[206]

This rational order works better without disruptions. Thus, with the intention of minimizing disruptions social relations at the factories are regulated. Efforts to curb labour unions at the maquiladoras are well known and have been widely reported (see Chapter 5). But social relations inside the factories are also regulated by other various means. During the hiring process workers are selected to ensure adaptation and compliance. A maquiladora manager explains:

> We know the kind of people we are looking for, [and therefore,] we would rather approach someone looking tidy [...] with a presentable appearance, without long hair, tattoos or unkempt looking because [people with such appearance] tend to be unstable and what we look for is stability at work. [Also] we often have a prototype, some idea about people from different regions. And the idea in this firm is to have a variety of individuals, not from one place of origin only, because they may group together and then is difficult to dissolve the group; [also] changing their ideas would be more difficult.[207]

Induction programs and the involvement of management in conflict resolution reinforce a highly regulated environment in the factories. Mixteco workers are thus groomed into a system of rules aiming at minimizing vertical and horizontal conflict in the factories. Discussing social interaction at the maquiladoras, Rosario shares her experience:

> We have a good relationship [among workers] because, when we are hired, we get the rules [stating] that we have to show respect for co-workers, [so] if there is any

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[206] Tomás, interview by author, 13 April 2003, digital recording.

[207] Abraham Ambrosio, interview by author, 13 May 2003, digital recording.

problem one must go with the supervisor or the *licenciada*[208] at Human Resources [to discuss issues and problems].[209]

At the maquiladoras, differentiation among the factories' diverse workforce is also minimized to ensure harmony and the ascendancy of managerial and production configurations over social structures alien to the factories. According to Mixteco maquiladora workers:

Leonor

There [at the factory], almost all the people are *compañeros* [co-workers], they [the management] doesn't make distinctions if you are from Oaxaca or Sinaloa; they don't.[210]

Elisa

There [at the maquiladoras] they accept all kinds of people. Your religion is irrelevant, your age, all those things are not important. Those are the rules they have in there.[211]

Moreover, the spatial and organizational partitions that separate workers into areas, crews, departments, and production lines establish a difficult to bridge distance among workers:

I was the only [Mixteco] and one other *compañera* [...] [but] she did not [have the opportunity to] talk to me because there were areas and she worked in another, and we didn't see each other much, not even in the evening [in the way out] because she used to take a different bus.[212]

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[208] *Licenciada* or *Licenciado*: someone with an academic degree.
[209] Rosario, interview by author, 17 April 2003, digital recording.
[210] Leonor, interview by author, 10 May 2003, digital recording.
[211] Elisa, interview by author, 6 April 2003, digital recording.
[212] Gerardo, interview by author, 28 April 2003, digital recording.

These partitions come in tandem with disciplinary measures and the managerial discourse that emphsizes the value of individual achievements rather than that of all-embracing collective accomplishment:

> They gave us talks and we were told the great value of oneself as a person, but not because we are men or women [but] because we are all equal.[213]

While the rational order impinges on everyone at the factory, there are aspects that affect the indigenous workers in particular. For example, at the maquiladoras, production and managerial practices comprise well-defined expectations regarding the attitude and behaviour of workers. These expectations are, however, often not compatible with the most visible traits of indigenous ethnicity such as language or, in the case of the less urbanized immigrants, clothing. At the factories, production requirements standardize the workforce with uniforms, specialized work gear, and other practical measures. At a maquiladora manufacturing medical supplies, the dress code and work gear requirements are strictly enforced. A manager in this maquiladora describes how workers are required to dress while at work:

> Here [in the factory] you cannot wear make-up, you cannot wear earrings, necklaces, or bracelets [...] long nails are not allowed either. If they wear skirts or shorts then they also have to wear long socks media [and] no high heels. [Forbidding the use of] high heels is for safety reasons, and the rest [of the measures] are to ensure the product's hygiene.[214]

Language is the single most important identifier marker operating to reinforce separate ethnic identities in Mexico (Cook and Joo 1995). But in the factories this marker is suppressed not only because of peer pressure. Their native language is also redundant

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[213] María, interview by author, 17 April 2003, interview notes.
[214] Alejandro Guerra, interview by author, 8 May 2003, digital recording.

because all workers are expected to communicate in Spanish with an acceptable level of proficiency in order to perform efficiently. Compliance with such requirement is ensured during the hiring and selection process:

> There are people, you know, that speak other [indigenous] languages and we even have them here [...] right now there should be [...] seven or eight that speak another [indigenous] language but speak Spanish very well. As long as they speak very good Spanish there is no problem... we have never hired [anyone unable to speak Spanish and], there has never come anyone [seeking work] that does not speak Spanish. If someone that speaks an indigenous language but not Spanish is hired, they are not going to understand the instructions and we are not going to understand them.[215]

A manager at a maquiladora elaborates on the hurdles indigenous workers typically face at the factories:

> [In dealing with indigenous workers] I have encountered problems on several occasions because... it turns out that they speak their own dialect instead of Spanish...they speak [Spanish] in a broken manner... that's one reason [leading to problems], the other is their educational limitations. Because if we talk to them about... for example interpreting layouts, or heat levels, or [expect them to] grasp what grades in metals are, it turns out that they don't know what you are talking about; but not because they don't speak Spanish but because they did not have access to education.[216]

Such challenges are magnified by the fact that for many indigenous immigrants the maquiladoras are truly alien:

> Honestly, the machines scared me [...] I said to myself 'how I am going to be able to handle these machines?' I never thought I could [they looked] so gigantic, really monstrous. I mean, I had never before in my life left [the village].[217]

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[215] Ibid.

[216] Calixto Marmolejo, interview by author, 12 May 2003, digital recording.

[217] Tomás, interview by author, 13 April 2003, digital recording.

Notwithstanding the challenges the Mixteco workers confront at the maquiladoras and the meagre income they receive for their toil, they use factory work as a way to attain certain benefits and to achieve individual and family objectives. As the Mixteco workers fit in the factory environment, their experience at the maquiladoras ceases to be marked by their ethnicity. Their experience and position within the factories thus become one gradually assumed in terms of class.

7.5 The individual

The types of work the Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana are able to get, in the factories or elsewhere, are likely to be low paid. But in the maquiladoras, fixed working hours, various shift alternatives, steady income, and other less tangible benefits give the Mixteco workers options when designing household strategies, and modest means to achieve other individual and family objectives. Factory work, in contrast to such occupations as gardening, street vending or housekeeping grant the Mixtecos access to Mexico's social security system:

> In the house [working as maid] I didn't get social security. Because of that I opted to join a maquiladora, because the social security offered more help [for the family].[218]

The possibility of obtaining work references to apply for U.S. travel visas, or the opportunity of working seasonally at Tijuana's maquiladoras to save money prior

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[218] Rosario, interview by author, 17 April 2003, digital recording.

attempts to cross the border are reasons that keep driving the Mixtecos to the maquiladoras:

> I also wanted to get my passport to travel [abroad] and [working in the factories] helps to get the passport [...]. What happens is that in order to get it I need to fulfill many requirements [...] but it helps when you have an income and time working at a firm, all that counts.[219]

Moreover, factory employment gives workers options in designing household strategies:

Rosario

> [I joined the maquiladoras because of] the working hours. I worked from five in the afternoon to two in the morning... so I could stay all day with the kids.[220]

Ernesto

> I changed [to the night shift] because the children were having problems at the school [...] they were too rebellious and having problems with the teacher in the school, so I changed [shifts] to keep an eye on them and see if the kids would do better in school.[221]

Managing shifts also allows Ernesto to share expenses and household chores with his wife, who works in a maquiladora but in a different shift. He takes the night shift and comes back home in the morning, taking over household chores from his wife:

> [After work] I take lunch to the kids at school. Because my wife works I stay at home to tidy the house up, so I tidy up the house, make my bed and all that. In the

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[219] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.
[220] Rosario, interview by author, 17 April 2003, digital recording.
[221] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.

afternoon, like at noon or about one [in the afternoon] I go to sleep so I can get up about six [in the afternoon], take a bath and go to work.[222]

But for him there is no spare time or money left to share with Tijuana's Mixteco community.

[During the weekends] I come home and relax or check what's to be done in the house. If there is [spare] money to spend we see what we can do otherwise we don't do anything.[223]

This pattern towards individualization, in which life is family-centred, and immigrants with rural backgrounds adapt to the urban environment, and obtain the rewards of individual choice, fit with the conceptualization of social behaviour modernization theorists advanced. However, in light of the experience of Mixteco maquiladora workers, modernization theorists are less credible in their claim that the transition from rural to urban environments entails socio-economic advancement. Maquiladora employment appears to have done little to change the well-being of the Mixteco workers in the direction of better housing, greater access to basic urban infrastructure and services, and economic security. The majority of those Mixteco women and men who provided information to this study about their experience at the maquiladoras shared wretched quarters with their extended family. With few exceptions, their homes were on difficult to access, unpaved, steep streets in impoverished *colonias* with limited access to public services. Salaries at the maquiladoras remain depressed for the Mixtecos and everyone else on the factory line. After eight years in the same factory

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[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.

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and despite being promoted to a skilled position, Ernesto still earned just $920 Mexican pesos[224] per week because his wage had not been revised for three years.

7.6 The community

The Mixtecos with working experience in the maquiladora industry who contributed through interviews to this study also reported little involvement in community initiatives and Mixteco organizations in Tijuana. This detachment from the community stands out against the many expressions of Mixteco associative agency reviewed in Chapter 4, and points to changes in the Mixteco immigrant community's ability to act collectively.

Among the various Mixteco groups in Tijuana, none has emerged because of the Mixtecos' involvement in the maquiladora industry. Similarly, no one of these groups is active in mediating the increasing participation of Tijuana's Mixtecos in this industry, or is yet representing Mixteco and other indigenous factory workers directly. What is more, the membership of Mixteco factory workers in organizations representing indigenous interests is negligible or not apparent. For example, maquiladora workers are missing among the rank and file of the FIOB,[225] arguably one of the most encompassing organizations involving indigenous workers in the region. With representation and active involvement in Tijuana, the FIOB draws its Mixteco members from outside the maquiladora workforce. According to the FIOB's General Coordinator, the organization's membership is formed as follows:

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[224] US$=83.60 or CAN$=123 (as of March 11, 2003)
[225] *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional.* See also Chapter 3 and footnote number 61.

Most of our members work in agricultural fields in the San Quintín Valley [and] there are street vendors from Tijuana. In the United States they also work in agriculture [and] there are also fewer members who work in urban areas doing gardening, [and] construction. In Oaxaca, most work their land; they are peasants [but] Mixtecos from the maquiladoras, no, they are not in our organization.[226]

Members of Tijuana's Mixteco community working in the maquiladoras are not oblivious to these changes:

I wish the Mixtecos were closer together because that way we would share our concerns and we would help each other for the betterment of every Mixteco. For example, I have seen on the news that there are groups of Mixtecos in Ensenada that get together. They get together and talk about the needs that each one has and the support they could get to help each other. But unfortunately that does not happen here in Tijuana anymore. Not here. Such communication has been lost.[227]

For members of Tijuana's Mixteco community, there are risks involved in the erosion of ethnic solidarity. In 2002, when fieldwork for this study began, Mexico's maquiladora industry was facing its first downturn in more than three decades. There were widespread factory closures as production was being shifted to China (the main concern in Tijuana's maquiladora circles at that time) while employment in the industry declined (see Table 4).

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[226] Rufino Domínguez, interview by author, 2 March 2003, digital recording.
[227] Ernesto, interview by author, 11 March 2003, digital recording.

Table 4. Maquiladora employment, number of workers, 1990-2003

Year	Mexico	Baja California
1990	418,035	81,697
1991	401,086	83,042
1992	465,112	89,372
1993	487,298	101,077
1994	522,345	111,216
1995	578,286	120,189
1996	694,296	147,568
1997	839,332	184,368
1998	942,088	200,167
1999	1,061,245	223,776
2000	1,198,935	258,398
2001	1,110,411	241,620
2002/p	998,991	202,162
2003/p	983,273	199,594

/p Preliminary data

Source: INEGI, "Empleo de la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación" In *Sistema Nacional de Cuentas Nacionales de México*, 2003.

The changing fortunes of the industry were also taking their toll among the Mixtecos working in the factories:

There were many [Mixtecos working in the plant] before, but they were laid off [...] we are less now.[228]

Those remaining in the factories were keeping their jobs as a payoff for their compliance and hard work:

[The Mixtecos] are the ones that still have work [despite widespread dismissals], because they are hardworking.[229]

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[228] Alicia, interview by author, 2 March 2003, digital recording.
[229] María, interview by author, 17 April 2003, interview notes.

Hard work notwithstanding, there is no certainty they will keep their jobs. Tijuana's maquiladora boom was largely built on the simple premise that production there was comparatively cheaper and trouble-free. This premise has not changed as global manufacturing continually seeks new and more profitable production outlets. With the ascendancy of China, India and other countries in the manufacturing circuit, the doors of Tijuana's maquiladoras may well be closed again for the Mixtecos. At this new conjuncture, the Mixteco workers may go back to the community. The Mixteco voices above suggest that some of them are weighing this option.

7.7 Conclusions

The accounts of Mixteco men and women dealing with the task of finding work at the factories helped identify the breaking point where the Mixtecos in Tijuana begin to dispense with some of the benefits obtained through previously defined group (ethnic, *paisano*, kin) solidarities. As industrialization in Tijuana advanced and the maquiladoras began to proliferate in the city, the Mixtecos living in nearby colonias became less dependent on fellow hometown folk, relatives, or kin to find work. Aggressive hiring practices on the part of the maquiladoras during periods of high labour demand had a similar effect, as finding factory work became within reach of more and more Mixtecos.

Once factory work is found, inside the factories the indigenous workers are exposed to the country's dominant social structures as embedded in the industrial precincts. The Mexican case under consideration revealed that the social relations at the maquiladoras incorporate the class divisions, ethnic cleavages, and socio-economic inequalities that

characterize Mexican society. It also showed that coexisting with these social arrangement there are production and managerial methods that discourage separate individual and collective identities. They are discouraged because separate identities, particularly those based on class and ethnicity, conflict with the smooth operation of production methods, and are therefore restrained through discourses and methods emphasising order, compliance, discipline and standardization. Under these circumstances, the Mixteco workers need to negotiate their incorporation into industrial employment with both the rational arrangements in operation at the maquiladoras and the demands of the social structure embedded in the factories.

In a position of great vulnerability and at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the Mixtecos employed at the factories work hard to participate in a power structure where they have no influence. They negotiate being accepted by avoiding conflict with co-workers and supervisors. With the same objective they comply with production and managerial demands imposed upon them, and for this reason they are seen as submissive, hence of practical use inside the factory. The use of clothes conforming to the *mestizo* standard is an expression of such negotiation to fit in. But complexion, demeanour, and speech cannot be easily disguised, and the indigenous workers are often subjected to discrimination by *mestizo* co-workers and administrative personnel. Cases of discrimination occur despite the managerial discourse emphasising equality. In order to avoid discrimination, the Mixteco workers are inclined to conceal their ethnicity by avoiding the use of their own language in front of the *mestizo* majority. Likewise, when dealing with *mestizo* co-workers they are likely to adopt a geographical characterization of origin instead of assuming an ethnic background. But even if the Mixtecos in the

maquiladoras were to openly assume their ethnic identity, the rational order that supports production in the maquiladoras would erode ethnic affiliations through atomization, dispersing individuals throughout spatial and organizational partitions: areas, crews, departments, and production lines. In short, assuming an ethnic identity inside the factories is something dispensable for the indigenous minority when negotiating their incorporation into industrial employment. In the process of becoming workers they are driven to downplay their ethnic identity, and abide to the regimented social environment that prevails inside the factories.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Anthropological and historical studies have conventionally adopted the notion that Mexico's society is a composite of *mestizo* and indigenous populations, with each group contributing distinctive ingredients to the nation's cultural mix. This idea of a *mestizo* society in coexistence with an indigenous counterpart has also been represented in different forms of discourse seeking to establish a national identity. At the same time, however, this *indígena-mestizo* duality has served as a means to apply systematic distinctions between ethically defined insiders and outsiders within Mexican society. The insiders are the *mestizos* who have traditionally occupied the higher positions in the nation's power structure and are generally higher up in the social hierarchy. They are also represented as the ideal type of Mexican nationals. On the other hand, the outsiders are the *indígenas* whose share of the national wealth and power has been traditionally precarious. This group has also been expected to comply with the *mestizo* norm if it wishes to avoid discrimination.

The persisting application of the *mestizos-indígenas* dichotomy in establishing systematic distinctions within Mexican society thus makes it relevant as an analytical reference despite some risks that may be involved. There is a risk when using the indígenas and *mestizo* categories in social analyses because these categories are so broadly defined. Indeed, such a dichotomous view of Mexican society fails to capture the racial and cultural complexity of the country. It excludes the small black minority while

grouping into a single category the mosaic of Mexico's indigenous peoples and their diversity of languages, phenotypes, and cultural expressions. It also lumps together under the *mestizo* category a whole spectrum of status groups, shades of skin colour, and regional cultures. Moreover, when using the *mestizos – indígenas* polarity as an analytical reference, analysts risk contributing to the perpetuation of ideologically charged distinctions that have served for the purpose of class oppression. Nevertheless, brushing aside this binary distinction because of such risks would prevent the analysis from reflecting the ideological and political dimensions linked to this dichotomy, which are relevant to understanding the social construction of ethnic boundaries.

Broad distinctions between *indígenas* and *mestizos* were emphasized during the assimilation project that the Mexican state aimed at the indigenous populations through various *indigenista* policies, as discussed in previous sections. Similarly, since Mexico's independence, an assortment of social movements and grass roots organizations have adopted the *indígena* banner to resist cultural assimilation and socio-economic exclusion. The *Zapatista* movement in Chiapas is a well-known contemporary example.

In this study about southern Mexican immigrants in Tijuana, the *mestizo – indígena* dichotomy was used because it remains meaningful to the Mixteco community in question and to the broader local society as well. While in this border city the most significant ethnic divide is likely between Mexicans and the thousands of foreigners visiting Tijuana at any given time, the empirical accounts presented in this study indicate that ethnic boundaries continue to be drawn by Mexicans in relation to other Mexicans. These boundaries are nevertheless continually established without scientific precision. What the voices of *mestizo* and indigenous participants reproduced in this study suggest

is that Mexican ethnic "others" are constructed through the association of broadly defined status group characteristics, certain generic phenotypes, and vaguely defined cultural traits. In the maquiladoras, managers interviewed generally assigned the *indígena* label to workers on the basis of their regional origin (southern Mexico), complexion (dark skinned), cultural traits and markers (use of indigenous languages, broken Spanish), and status indicators such as education level (low) and familiarity with the urban and factory environment (limited). Mixteco workers also reported that co-workers often used negative proxies for *indígenas* that emphasize the regional origin (e.g. *oaxaquitas, chiapanecos)* rather than the cultural traits of those so labelled. These epithets, along with *Marías* (commonly used in reference to street vendors and panhandlers found in downtown Tijuana), carry negative stereotypes relative to class, gender and race but their compound meaning helps to illustrate how, in Mexican society, the ethnic identity of the indigenous other is constructed by incorporating broad cultural, social, economic and geographical referents. Similarly broad in its configuration is the *mestizo* category, which also comprises status group criteria as well as cultural and racial referents assembled without precision. Thus, when a Mixteco informant used the expression *gente de razón* (people of reason) to mean *mestizo*, he was identifying the ethnic other on the basis regional, cultural, racial information, and on the basis of perceived or real status group differences between him and them. For him, the *gente de razón* were the already well-urbanized Tijuana residents, who lacked ostensible markers of indigenous identity, spoke Spanish fluently and had acquired a certain degree of formal education as well as some wealth.

A key criterion for the understanding the differences between *mestizos* and *indígenas* is the correlation between power, prestige and authority with the *mestizo* condition. Chapter 2 above discussed how this correlation was established at the ideological level on the basis of factual differences in political influence and socio-economic prominence between *mestizos* and *indígenas* throughout Mexico's independent period. With the demise of the colonial era, it was the emerging *mestizo* elite who succeeded the Spanish colonial rulers, and who established the terms of the relationship between the nation-state and its indigenous populations. Although the *mestizo* elites granted the indigenous population full citizenship following the demise of the colonial era, the *indígenas'* access to positions of power, prestige and authority has remained largely tied to their assimilation into a mainstream *mestizo* society relatively open to members of other ethnic groups through *mestizaje*.

The process of *mestizaje*, which the Mexican state actively encouraged through the various indigenista policies discussed in Chapter 2, proceeded relentlessly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in tandem with the expansion of capitalism throughout Mexico. Yet despite widespread *mestizaje* in Mexican society and general acceptance among the population that its national identity is Mexican, ethnicity remains a source of separate identity for groups that also identify themselves as *indígenas*. This is one of the main conclusions of the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, which deals with the case of the Mixteco migration to northern Mexico and to the U.S. A recurrent argument in this body of scholarly literature is that, in the displaced contexts outside the Mixteca heartland, immigrants from this region have developed a new sense of indigenous identity forged on the basis of common cultural references, regional affinities, and the disenfranchisement

they share in their host locations. The empirical cases in these studies focus largely on waged farm workers or *jornaleros* whose ethnicity has become an anchor for collective agency against labour and human rights abuses. Similar empirical studies dealing with the case of informal sector workers also highlight the role of ethnicity in galvanizing collective action among Mixteco immigrant women who have been exposed to persistent harassment and discrimination in Tijuana. This body of literature also emphasizes that social identity among Mixteco immigrants is dynamic, and changing according to varying circumstances in the host locations. The main identity change under discussion is linked to the transition from deep-seated village-based allegiances common in the Mixteca region (and other parts of rural Mexico), to the self-conscious sense of Mixteco identity emerging in the host locations, which is having the effect of bridging the disparate local idiosyncrasies of the sending communities. Other empirical studies reviewed above suggest that this transition is only a building block of a pan-ethnic identity that is emerging among indigenous immigrant groups facing similar challenges (exploitation, discrimination, harassment, criminalization) in northern Mexico and parts of the U.S.

Among the reasons Mixteco and other indigenous immigrants in northern Mexico and western U.S. have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention is that, on the basis of their newfound sense of ethnic identity, these indigenous groups have organized grass roots organizations seeking a broad agenda of social justice and cultural revitalization. These organizations draw their membership mainly from *jornaleros* and urban and semi-urban dwellers in border cities, and some of them are merging into coalitions operating at the local (village, labour camp, urban centre), national (Mexico or the U.S.) and transnational levels (Mexico and the U.S). These organizations have given empirical

support to the notion that ethnicity remains a source of separate identity among indigenous emigrants in northern Mexico and the U.S.

Nagegengast and Kearney (1990) explained the emergence of this newfound sense of Mixteco ethnicity as a highly contingent outcome of historical and structural circumstances that came about in the twentieth century during the expansion of commercial agriculture in western Mexico and California. Other structural and historical circumstances that these authors point to include are the historical disenfranchisement of Mexico's indigenous peoples, the economic neglect of the Mixteca region, and the expanding demand for labour in agricultural operations in western North America. As discussed at length in previous chapters, all these variables have set into motion migratory flows out of the Mixteca region into agricultural regions where there has been a high demand for labour. Subsequent conditions of exploitation and abuse targeted against disenfranchised immigrants have contributed to their increasing sense of ethnic belonging. This study followed Nagegengast and Kearney's lead in incorporating historical and structural variables within the analysis. Nevertheless, the discussion in this study took into consideration a different combination of structural circumstances, shifting the focus from agriculture to the expanding industrial labour market that maquiladora industrialization boosted along Mexico's northern border.

The theoretical argument that ethnic identities vary in relation to changing structural circumstances emphasizes the constraints and imperatives imposed upon social actors from without. In this view, ethnic identification is contingent on the economic, technological, ecological, legal, and local community conditions that individuals and groups find themselves in at a particular point of time. For example, structural

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circumstances may lead to conflict as is the case when scarce resources or lack of employment opportunities result in intergroup competition that then heightens ethnic identification within competing groups (Olzak and Negel 1986). Likewise, structural changes in technologies of production and transportation have the potential of modifying industrial location patterns and with it the occupational and residential choices of incoming immigrants. This is how Yancey *et al.* (1976) explained the concentration of ethnic groups in certain occupations and residential settlements across regions and cities in the U.S., which in turn was propitious for the emergence of ethnic group consciousness among immigrants living or working close to other fellow countrymen.

In the case of Mixteco immigrant workers in western North America, structural circumstances and situational conditions in host locations have created opportunities for them to reproduce, revitalize or recreate the cultural symbols and social practices that give meaning to claims of ethnic identity. These opportunities are at times created at the workplace depending on to the nature and type of occupation the immigrants take up upon resettlement. This proposition becomes evident through the experience of Mixteco agricultural workers and street vendors discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. Flores (2000), for example, discussed how seasonal immigrants are able to take up community obligations and participate in hometown festivities because they return to their Mixteca homeland at the end of their sojourns in the agricultural fields in northern Mexico. With the money they have earned in the agricultural fields, returning migrants are in the financial position to take on ritual *cargo* obligations and other commitments to their sending community. When longer-term migration has been involved (as when migrants follow the agricultural cycle from one location to the next), working conditions

and the way production is organized in commercial agriculture along migratory routes have also enabled Mixteco migrants to reproduce Mixteco cultural practices and lifestyles. As reported in the literature reviewed above, indigenous and *mestizo* workers are treated differently in labour camps are treated differently. Mixtecos are not only paid less, but they have also been segregated in separate fields and living quarters. Although designed as an extra-economic mechanism to further exploit indigenous workers, such segregation has had the effect of strengthening ethnic communities within the labour camps, where indigenous workers choose to speak their own language and reproduce other expressions of their indigenous identity. Similar circumstances have developed in the permanent settlements or rural *colonias* near the agricultural centres that have emerged after years of steady Mixteco migration. Contact with new Mixteco immigrants settling in the camps or in the rural *colonias* helps maintain links with kin and folk in the sending communities and with the lifestyles they knew in the Mixteca region. Likewise, in Tijuana the residential settlement pattern of immigrant Mixtecos, who live for the most part clustered in a handful of urban *colonias*, has also facilitated the preservation of a sense of community among them. Lestage (2002) noted that this ethnic cohesion has taken shape despite adjustments the Mixteco immigrants are making to their customs and traditions as they incorporate new influences and adapt to the limitations of their new context.

The type of jobs Mixteco immigrants in Tijuana have traditionally taken up in the city has also contributed to the reproduction and preservation of certain aspects of Mixteco culture and way of life.   With the majority of Mixtecos in this border city making a living out of the informal economy, or through an assortment of occupations at

the fringes of the service sector (e.g. construction workers and gardeners), these Mixtecos often find themselves working outdoors, in close contact with kin and hometown acquaintances involved in the same occupations, and with whom they engage in recreating aspects of their Mixteco culture and lifestyle. A well-documented example illustrating this pattern is that of Mixteco women selling trinkets in Tijuana's informal economy. For years these Mixteco women have been organizing their trade while communicating with each other in their native language, and helping each other mind the stands they use to sell their goods as well as the children they bring along (Velasco 1996, 2002b). Despite persisting prejudices about their appearance and indigenous background, these women do not attempt to 'pass' as *mestizos* as they conduct their daily affairs. In fact, they stand out in Tijuana's tourist core because they wear the colourful clothes Mixteco women commonly wear in the agricultural fields in northern Mexico.[230] More significantly, after years of conflict with established business owners and local authorities, these women have managed to consolidate their position within the local informal economy using their ethnicity as a resource, drawing support from the wider Mixteco community in Tijuana to organize ethnic-based associations representing their interests and to challenge local authorities over the right to sell on the streets.

Nevertheless, much has changed in the border region's economy and society since the first Mixteco immigrants began to settle in Tijuana in the early 1960s. Chapters 4 and 5 above discussed the structural transformations that began to take place along Mexico's northern border in the 1970s that are drawing the Mixteco immigrants to new experiences at work and within the city. Maquiladora industrialization is at the centre of these

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[230] The type of clothing Mixteco women use in the agricultural fields is an adaptation of the customs often used in the Mixteca region. The main difference is that in the fields women use trousers under the skirts to suit the conditions in the workplace.

transformations and this study has sought to acknowledge its impact on the Mixteco peoples, particularly in regards to job patterns, social identity and community organization. The influence of this new set of structural conditions on Tijuana's Mixteco community becomes evident when one analyses how employment patterns of Mixteco immigrants are related to the changes in Tijuana's economy. When the first Mixteco immigrants began to establish roots along the U.S.-Mexican border during the early 1960s, Tijuana had not yet become an engine of maquiladora industrialization. At that time, industrialization was incipient in Tijuana and there was little demand for the limited skills that the largely agriculturally oriented Mixtecos brought to the city. Their employment situation took a new direction when changes in production methods and transportation technologies propelled the restructuring of industrial production worldwide. With the technological capacity to de-link production into specialized (skill and knowledge intensive) and standardized (low-skilled, labour-intensive) functions, manufacturers under competitive pressure sought to move the latter processes to locations where new labour cost-cutting strategies could be best implemented. For over thirty years Tijuana has been a prime alternative for manufacturers who have been attracted by the important strategic advantages this border city offers: the low costs of Mexican labour and its prime location at the doorstep of large U.S. consumer markets. The inexpensive labour feature has had a direct impact on the employment pattern among Mixtecos because the maquiladoras are labour-intensive operations that demand semi- and low-skilled workers for their standardized production methods. In contrast with the heavy industry that Mexico and other Latin American countries promoted under import-substitution – which generally demanded semi-skilled workers – the lower skill

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requirements of the maquiladoras made this branch of industry well suited to those industrialists who may need to draw deep from labour reserves at times of labour shortages. Understanding this feature of the maquiladoras is critical because it explains the initial involvement of Mixteco workers in factory employment, a process that was explored in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6 it was noted that despite expanding industrialization along the U.S. border, there was a gap in time before Mixteco women and men began to work in maquiladoras. Such delay had to do with another set of structural circumstances that prevented Mixteco immigrants from having ready access to the industry: the historical disenfranchisement of Mexico's indigenous populations and the ideological representation of the *indigenas* as unfit for factory employment. Largely without formal education, and for the most part poor and highly stigmatized, Mixteco immigrants were effectively barred from Tijuana's maquiladora-driven labour markets for years. This exclusion ended when the labour market tightened during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, forcing the maquiladoras to draw deeper on urban and rural labour reserves to keep factories' outputs flowing. Second generation Tijuana Mixtecos, in some cases street vendors in the informal economy, were already available to join the ranks of the maquiladoras' workforce. With migratory networks linking southern and northern Mexico already well established, young women and men coming from the Mixteca region were also in the position to meet maquiladoras' labour demands.

Becoming part of the maquiladora workforce represented a change for Mixtecos in that they departed from their traditional role in the Mexican economy and urban labour markets. Thus, the implications of this new employment pattern among immigrant Mixtecos is observable within Tijuana's Mixteco community. At present, Mixteco

women are still selling trinkets to tourists in Tijuana's downtown core, but their work-age children are finding work in the local industry. Changes are indeed gradual and not affecting the community evenly. In Tijuana there are Mixtecos who are largely detached from mainstream society (such as the women with children introduced in the first paragraphs of this study), but there are others who are actively participating in the local economy and polity as *indígenas*. As discussed in paragraphs above, there are also members of Tijuana's Mixteco community retaining the use of their native Mixteco language and engage in cultural and social practices observed in the Mixteca heartland. Mixteco culture and way of life do still find expression in *colonias* where Mixteco immigrants live, especially in the *Colonia Obrera* during open market days, and in events Mixteco immigrants organize for family celebrations or community affairs. Moreover, for many members of this community ethnicity remains an anchor for collective agency. Fieldwork during this study corroborated the efforts of Mixteco leaders in organizing the local Mixteco community. Mixteco informants in positions of leadership, most of whom were veteran grass roots organizers (including school teachers and university students as well as less educated women and men), were all actively promoting the participation of fellow Mixtecos in various initiatives, specifically through neighbourhood associations, groups representing street vendors, and organizations such as the emblematic *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional* (F.I.O.B.) and the *Academia de la Lengua Mixteca*. But the enthusiasm of these Mixteco leaders, none of whom had experience working at the maquiladoras, seemed to contrast with the relative indifference with regard to Mixteco cultural and community affairs I observed among Mixtecos who had worked in the maquiladora industry. The ethnic identity of the Mixteco women and men exposed to

maquiladora employment appeared to be *on the line*; in other words, it remained ambivalent in that certain aspects of it remained vitalized while others were threatened or were even fading under the pressure of life in the city and work at the factories.

Indeed, during in-depth interviews with Mixteco women and men with working experience in the maquiladora industry, all expressed some form of affinity or connection to the Mixteco community. When asked if they were Mixtecos, all responded affirmatively despite the fact that, with the exception of the newcomers, the majority had not been in the Mixteca region for long time or were not even born there. For the most part these informants had no plans to go back to their home communities, particularly because of the distance involved, the expenses required, and due to the fact they had a steady work in Tijuana while southern Mexico lacked similar income opportunities. Furthermore, none of these informants was entirely alien to the Mixteco culture, and in fact, several of them could speak or understand the Mixteco language, or would hear it spoken at home or in the *colonias*. Moreover, they would occasionally participate, if invited, in social events organized by other Mixtecos if invited. There are, however, signs that suggest that Mixteco participants in Tijuana's maquiladora labour markets redrawing their ethnic boundaries and at times opting out of their ethnic identity. At the objective level, Mixteco participants in this study who worked or had worked at the maquiladoras resembled the *mestizo* living in Tijuana rather than the fellow Mixtecos working in the fields or in the informal sector in terms of appearance. This group of informants likely abandoned the use of typical Mixteco costumes (or had never used such clothes) before their first maquiladora work experience; however all appeared to have moved steps closer in adopting the *mestizo* attire working class locals commonly chose. The younger within

this group of informants wore clothes better described as characteristically *fronterizo* (greatly influenced by U.S. urban fashion due to high exposure and accessibility), which contrasted with the plain attire of their siblings that were not working at the factories. Older informants with working experience at the factories also dressed in a fashion similar to *mestizos* of the same age and income groups. Although it could be argued that using "desidentifiers," such as wearing mainstream clothes are strategies (ethnic 'opting out' strategies in any case[231]) individuals within minority groups use to deal with the stigma of group membership (Goffman 1963), the Mixteco voices presented in this study suggest that wearing mainstream clothes is only an objective expression of more significant adjustments in the way Mixtecos exposed to factory employment are approaching their ethnic identity and their relationship to the broader Mixteco community.

The Mixteco voices in Chapter 7 describe a working experience at the maquiladoras that comes across as significantly different from that of other Mixtecos in occupations traditionally accessible to members of this immigrant community. In contrast to the work experiences of Mixtecos in commercial agriculture or in the informal sector, indigenous workers at the factories are exposed to more intense interactions with *mestizo* co-workers and managers. They also work within highly regimented social and work environments unmatched by those faced by street vendors and *jornaleros*. These differences between types of occupations account for the contrasting possibilities for Mixtecos to reproduce and revitalize aspects of their culture. They also help explain the Mixteco factory

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[231] See Miri Song, *Choosing Ethnic Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003); Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture," *Social Problems* 41, no. 1, Special Issue on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America (1994).

workers' need to conceal identifier markers of their ethnicity while adopting *mestizo* traits. This is because the dynamics of ethnic stratification at work in Mexican society, which represent the *indígenas* as inferior and outside the *mestizo* norm, are reproduced on the assembly lines, influencing social relations at all levels. Thus, despite well-defined expectations on how social relations should take place within the factories, those who consider themselves *mestizos* continue to discriminate against the *indígenas*, who in turn remain stigmatized and stereotyped despite sharing the same class position with other workers. For this reason, during their daily interactions with *mestizo* co-workers and managers, indigenous workers continually negotiate the boundaries of their ethnic identity.

The notion that ethnic identities are negotiated falls within theoretical propositions that emphasize the situational and relative nature of ethnic ascription. Patterson (1975) and more recently Okamara (1981), Waters (1990), Nagel (1994) and Spickard and Burroughs (1999) have underscored that ethnicity is situational and changeable, subject to specific and immediate circumstances that vary over time. This view acknowledges that ethnicity can be of varying importance in social situations and assumes that individuals have some degree of freedom to over- or under-communicate their ethnicity to others (Eriksen 1993). What aspect of her/his ethnicity an individual communicates depends on calculations that take into consideration what her/his ethnicity means to others (the audience), its salience given the social context (its symbolic appropriateness), and its strategic utility in the setting where the interaction occurs (Nagel 1994). The inference here is that there are various levels or layers of internally[232] and externally[233]

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[232] Immigrant groups may internally decide on lumping together in the host society previously separate ethnic identities into a more encompassing one, thus leading to broader "national" or "panethnic"

defined ethnic identities individuals can choose from, depending on their situation and their audience (Espiritu 1992; Padilla 1986). Nagel (1994: 156) notes, however, that there are external forces, i.e. constraints from the wider society (e.g. bureaucracies or informal meanings and stereotypes) that limit the choices available to "socially and politically defined ethnic categories with varying degrees of stigma or advantage attached to them." These limitations thus drive or coerce individuals into placing more importance on certain identities than on others (Okamura 1981). These theoretical propositions help explain why and how the indigenous workers at the factories avoid being heard speaking their native language or being seen wearing clothes that would expose their ethnic background. Rather, in order to avoid exclusion and discrimination, they opt to speak Spanish at all times, choose to wear *mestizo* urban clothes, and prefer to introduce themselves as *oaxaqueños* (or any other similar regional category) instead of using the more stigmatized Mixteco label. These are strategies which the indigenous workers use to negotiate the boundaries of their ethnicity seeking to fit in while seeking to engage in social interactions without the distress of stigma.

At the factories, there is also an important variable framing the way indigenous workers deal with their ethnicity. This variable is the rational order organizing production at the factories, which works best without the kinds of disruptions ethnic or class conflicts can create. In the maquiladoras, there have been measures put in place to prevent the emergence of separate cultural, ethnic or class identities. The suppression of

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identities. See Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[233] Examples of externally ascribed ethnicities are the various "labels" used to categorize immigrants of Latin American descent in the U.S. (Hispanics, Latinos, Mexican-Americans, etc.). See Marta E. Giménez *et al.*, "The Politics of Ethnic Construction: Hispanic, Chicano, and Latino?," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (1992). Also Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

labour union militancy is the most documented example of such measures but there are also internal policies aiming to regulate social relations and individual behaviour through a discourse emphasising individuality and homogenization. While the maquiladora order applies to all workers, the evidence presented in Chapters 6 and 7 of this study suggests that it gives no concessions to individual or collective expressions of ethnic identity. Because of the requirements of production, in the factories indigenous languages and traditional clothes are, in fact, not allowed. At the factories, indigenous maquiladora workers use the Spanish language and wear uniforms or suitable clothes, not only as a calculated strategy to fit in but also because such are the requirements. This is an external factor unrelated to matters of stigma or discrimination but rather linked to issues of security, hygiene, and convenience during production. Nevertheless, it has the effect of blurring ethnic borders within the predominantly *mestizo* workforce. This is particularly the case with regards to the use of language. While in Mexico, remaining an *indígena* is closely linked to an individual's continual maintenance of a linguistic boundary marker (Cook and Joo 1995), this possibility is largely denied at the maquiladoras. Mixteco workers' inability or unwillingness to establish ethnic boundaries through the use of their native language also stems from the fact that linguistic markers were already tenuous by the time Mixtecos approached the maquiladoras seeking work. After all, the maquiladoras would not have hired them unless they were able to speak Spanish with some degree of fluency. Still, some of these Mixteco workers are often bilingual (Mixteco and Spanish). Others have either some basic knowledge of the Mixteco language or are frequently exposed to it at home through monolingual (Mixteco) relatives, often parents or elder kin. Because such exposure is denied at factories, the

maquiladoras further drive Mixteco workers from one linguistic-cultural category (Mixteco-*indígena*) to another (Spanish-*mestizo*). This transition has not only cultural but also class implications, given the interrelationship between class and ethnic criteria when establishing ethnic borders, as discussed above. Specifically, Chapter 2 discussed the high correlation between class membership and ethnic membership in Mexican society, with the *indígenas* generally at the bottom of both criteria. In Mexican society, however, movement across the ethnic boundary from indígena to *mestizo* is possible provided that the group crossing over (the *indígenas*) succeeds in acquiring cultural characteristics and class membership associated with the other higher status ethnic category (the *mestizos*). Although symbolic, the wearing of uniforms at factories, whenever required, signals the acquisition of class membership by Mixteco workers. Symbolism apart, class membership is reinforced by the Mixteco workers' everyday use of Spanish at the maquiladoras, and by the changes in their lifestyles, an aspect this concluding discussion now turns to.

The social identity that the Mixteco maquiladora workers are embracing outside the factories is progressively assumed through class membership rather than through ethnic ascription and community participation. Having established a labour relation with capitalists via maquiladora employment, Mixteco maquiladora workers' lives are now regulated by their everyday life at work in a manner that seems to be affecting their relationship with the broader Mixteco community. For maquiladora workers – Mixtecos or otherwise – there is a clear spatial division between home and work as all need to allocate time to commute from one space to the other. Duties and chores in each space are clearly differentiated, and the Mixtecos working at the maquiladoras are gradually

adapting their lifestyles and household strategies accordingly. Unlike the women selling goods in Tijuana's downtown core, Mixtecos at the factories cannot engage in childbearing at the workplace. As an alternative, these maquiladora workers are taking into consideration shift choices at work to design household strategies (with family members taking different shifts to organize household chores accordingly). Spare time is used to fulfill household responsibilities and whatever little time remains goes to leisure. Moreover, despite the fact that the maquiladora system suppresses class-consciousness and bypasses ineffectual labour organizations, Mixteco women and men actually view their employment as a means of achieving social upward mobility. Whatever is left from their meagre wages after paying bills for food, utilities and education sometimes goes to support family members back in the Mixteca homeland (as reported in a few cases during interviews), but most often goes towards consumption and savings. Furthermore, although they have little savings capacity, Mixtecos seem eager to buy a small plot to build a house (although the young and single prefer to use their disposable income to buy personal effects such as clothes and make-up).

It can be argued that despite the adoption of class leaning priorities and routines, Mixtecos could go back to their community and family in the *colonias* to revitalize their ethnic identity at both objective and subjective levels. Nevertheless, a discussion of whether this possibility remains open needs to consider the individual's level of attachment to the community where culture and ethnic solidarity are recreated. Taking the maquiladora worker's level of connection with the community is also relevant given the significance that collective participation has within the social organization of Mexico's indigenous groups. As noted above, community participation is an ancient

tradition among indigenous communities, which is taking contemporary modes, as in the form of militant involvement in the type of grass roots organizations mentioned recurrently throughout this study. Nevertheless, the Mixteco informants with working experience in the maquiladoras were not as keen to embrace active involvement with the broader community in matters of culture or common welfare, and for the most part abstained from participating in traditional and contemporary expressions of community involvement. Unlike the case of other Mixteco immigrants working in agriculture in northern locations (cf. Flores 2000) these Mixteco workers did not seek work at the factories as part of a strategy to fulfill obligations under the ceremonial civil-*cargo* system common in the Mixteca region. While few of them reported having contributed money to help improve their communities, they spent the bulk of their income on individual and family expenses. These informants were aware (with varying knowledge) that traditional forms of community cooperation and self-help, such as the *tequio*, are still practiced in Tijuana; however, they largely refrained from participating stating as reasons conflicting work schedules, lack of interest, or simply, unawareness. Ethnic, grass roots activism at local, regional and transnational levels, an expression of ethnic revival according to the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, also proceeded without the participation of Mixteco factory workers. Mixteco maquiladora workers interviewed for this study indicated (with one exception) that they were not affiliated with any indigenous grass roots organization operating in Tijuana. The leadership of the *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional* also confirmed during fieldwork that maquiladora workers are not represented by this leading organization of indigenous immigrants active along the U.S. border.

Lacking involvement in local ethnic organizations and initiatives can be interpreted as a breach of collective notions of ethnic identity. It can also be regarded as an indication that the ethnic community and the individual (in this case the Mixteco factory worker) are parting ways. The explanation this study provides for this emerging situation is that, within the context of maquiladora industrialization, the utilitarian value of the community is decreasing. In other words, with rapidly expanding labour markets, the survival of immigrant Mixtecos in the city has become less of a community affair. Nowadays, because of the availability of factory employment, members of Mixteco households are able to take up different shifts at the factories to balance child rearing and other household responsibilities. Meanwhile, the supportive role of the community in terms of income assistance, employment and welfare matters has become less critical for Mixteco maquiladora workers. For example, factory work provides some degree of certainty of individual or household income because, although meagre, the maquiladora wages are for the most part fixed and regular. Households can also earn double and sometimes multiple maquiladora incomes, as young working age children can join the factory payroll to help cover family domestic expenses. Thus, Mixtecos organize family income to cover living expenses while taking into consideration that work at the factories grants access to basic medical coverage through Mexico's social security system (a key reason Mixtecos opt to work at the maquiladoras).

The way urbanization has developed in Tijuana has also been a factor explaining the decreasing instrumental value of the community. Due to the expanding maquiladora industrialization, the functional fragmentation of Tijuana's urban structure has given way to the emergence of industrial areas often clearly demarcated as industrial parks.

Deliberately developed near residential areas for ready access to pools of labour, these maquiladora industrial parks are like lighthouses guiding would-be workers to the factories. As a result, Mixteco job seekers have been able to find work with relative ease and without the participation of the broader Mixteco community. Similarly, because maquiladora workers are hired on an individual basis, there has been less need for the individual to rely on ethnic networks to access the industrial labour market. With a steady, individually earned income and certain benefits obtained by working at the factories (e.g., social security), Mixteco workers appear to be choosing individual, rather than collective ethnic objectives.

Further research should explore other reasons for why there is now a seemingly more individualized approach to life in the city among Mixteco immigrants. Wirth (1938) and Parsons (1959) long ago predicted that urbanization would lead to weakening bonds of kinship and the declining social significance of family (extended family in particular). Among Tijuana's Mixtecos, however, family reasons remain at the heart of migration and employment-related decisions. Based on interviews and visits to Mixteco households in Tijuana, I have observed how the extended family remains a salient feature in the Mixteco social organization. Future research could thus explore whether the structure of the individual family changes when one or more of its members work at factories. As reported in this study, there are indications that the structure of Mixteco families is not static. Nuclear family units involving Mixteco informants have been observed. Moreover, exogamy is becoming more and more common in the community. Examples of Mixteco women and men marrying non-Mixtecos whom they met at the maquiladoras are illustrative of this trend. In turn, *mestizo* members in Mixteco families (extended or

otherwise) are likely to influence household dynamics and cultural cohesion within their family unit. As a result, they will likely change the direction of ethnic identity and modify long established conceptions of the structure of the family within Tijuana's Mixteco community.

Our knowledge of Mixteco life in this border city will also benefit from research addressing other new factors impinging on Mixteco ethnic identity and the on the community's ability to act collectively. Among these factors is the rapid proliferation of non-Catholic religious groups in Tijuana. Representing various Christian denominations, such groups are actively involved in Tijuana's impoverished *colonias*, including those where Mixteco immigrants live. Furthermore, near or within Mixteco settlements, there are non-Catholic churches of all sizes and new ones are under construction to accommodate recent converts. Among the recently converted are Mixtecos whose new religious beliefs conflict with significant expressions of Mixteco identity. Because the Mixteco indigenous culture has evolved through the syncretism of European and ancient Mesoamerican cultures following Spanish colonization, Catholic traditions are now fused with manifestations of indigenous identity. Thus, when Tijuana's Mixtecos gather to celebrate significant dates in their cultural-religious calendars (i.e., patron-saint festivities, Day of the Death, etc.), non-Catholic Mixtecos have found themselves torn between conflicting affiliations.   As the Mixteco community in Tijuana diversifies its interactions with the wider society, its members are assuming multiple, often conflicting subject positions. While all Mixtecos also consider themselves Mexicans, they often find themselves trying to negotiate their identity on many levels. Although their Mexican identity still acts as a common anchor (a situation that underscores the Mexican state's

success in propagating the notion of nationhood), other identities have been under constant negotiation, including that of *indígena* versus *mestizo* and class versus ethnicity. During this negotiation process, however, there are also unexpected outcomes. For example, the mostly foreign owned maquiladoras in Tijuana are, paradoxically, actually assisting Mixteco workers achieve full Mexican citizenship. By participating in the formal economy through the maquiladora industry, indigenous workers are normalizing certain aspects of their relationship with the state. At the maquiladoras, they are given identification cards or letters of reference that they can later find useful when applying for Mexican passports or U.S. visas. The significance of having official Mexican documents, such as a birth certificate, has also thus come to their attention because it is an entry requirement in most factories.

As life in Tijuana proceeds, layered identities have led to define the increasingly complex social identity of Mixtecos who may, according to the circumstances, label themselves Mexicans, Oaxacans, *indígenas*, workers, southerners, Christians of some sort, or as members of a deterritorialized transnational community spanning from the Mixteca region in southern Mexico to the borders of Western Canada. In this respect, their case is not different from other indigenous groups in Mexico, whose ethnicity is complex and multi-layered, and therefore, as Cook (1993: 333) notes, should be seen "as simply only one among many other possible socially constructed identities, all of which are 'formed from the interface of material conditions, history, the structure of political economy, and social practice.'"[234]

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[234] Quoting Carole Nagengast *et al.*, "Mixtec Ethnicity: Social Identity, Political Consciousness, and Political Activism," *Latin American Research Review* 25, no. 2 (1990), p. 62.

As Mixteco immigrants construct and redefine their social identities, outcomes with regard to their ethnic identity suggested in this study should not be deemed irreversible. Despite the findings presented in this report, we should not assume that the demise of the Mixteco community in Tijuana is inevitable. The structural conditions that are drawing young women and men away from their ethnic communities via factory employment may drive them back if work at the maquiladoras diminishes. This is not a remote possibility. Lower wages in China, India, and Central American countries are rapidly depleting Tijuana's competitive edge. In fact, fieldwork leading to this study was conducted against a backdrop of instability within Tijuana's maquiladora sector, resulting from widespread job losses and plant closures. In the short run, the Mixtecos are coping with their uncertain situation through long hours and hard work. In the long run, however, they may have to rely once again on ethnic solidarity to compensate for loss of maquiladora income. Thus, they may reconsider ethnicity as their primary affiliation. If this were to happen, the return to their ethnic community would likely proceed gradually, resulting from the protracted alignment of historical and structural circumstances.

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study involved a qualitative research design using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected during fieldwork in Tijuana between September 2002 and May 2005. Secondary data were collected during the length of the study and refer specifically to publications included in the bibliography section of this dissertation.

Primary data collection

The evidence supporting this study is in the form of qualitative data collected through interviews (verbal accounts) and observations.

Informants

Members of Tijuana's Mixteco community were the main source of primary data (i.e. verbal accounts). In this Mixteco community there are long-term residents as well as newly arrived immigrants. I sought informants from both groups to obtain contextual data as well as specific oral accounts regarding migration, urbanization and work experiences. I sought the participation of maquiladora managers familiar with workers' supervision and hiring practices to obtain information about the local labour market and their experiences with indigenous workers.

Recruitment and selection

In this study I relied on theoretical sampling, that is, the selection of cases for theoretical, not statistical, reasons (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The goal of theoretical sampling is the selection of cases to fill theoretical categories or to replicate/extend emerging theory (Yin 1994). As Pettigrew (1990) notes, theoretical sampling is to purposefully choose cases in which the process of interest is "transparently observable." The final number of informants participating in the study was decided as the data collection proceeded.

As the first round of exploratory interviews proceeded I realized that recruiting *maquiladora* workers for interviews was the main research challenge. The first attempts to recruit workers yielded unsatisfactory results as none responded to postings seeking volunteers. As an alternative I opted to approach workers outside factories between shifts. Yet most workers were distrustful or unenthusiastic about participating in an interview session after long hours of hard work. Moreover, I attached great importance to the location of each interview in order to get the most of each session. Thus, I aimed at interviewing workers in their homes in order to observe living conditions and households' dynamics. I also expected workers to feel more confident at home to facilitate in the type of in-depth interviewing I was seeking. Gaining access to worker's homes was not a simple goal and demanded considerable groundwork.

Taking these issues into consideration I opted to build the sample by first developing a trusting relationship with Mixteco elders and leaders in the community. Among Tijuana's Mixtecos those in a position of leadership within the community are well

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informed about what the others do. I thus approached leaders of this community for interviews and referrals. Although it took some time before I identified who these leaders were, approaching them was rather uncomplicated. By talking to them I obtained an informed account of the problems, aspirations and organization of Tijuana's Mixtecos. Yet I was referred to Mixteco maquiladora workers they knew only after they were more familiar with my objectives. It was not until I spent time with them and attended several events that made me more visible amongst the Mixteco community that they started to refer me to the maquiladora workers I was seeking to interview.

I also interviewed maquiladora managers, members of maquiladora associations and consultants. In most cases these informants were approached using a contact letter that I sent by fax to their attention. Most of those who I approached within this group agreed to participate in an interview session. Only a few declined, arguing lack of time or interest.

Interviews

Type and number of interviews

I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews during fieldwork in Tijuana. Most of the interviews took place between February and May, 2003, and involved the following groups of informants, time and location:

Table 5. Informants by group, number of interviews, time, and locations

Group of Informants	Interviews (number)	Time (hrs)	Location
Maquiladora managers	13	12	Tijuana
Mixteco maquiladora workers	25	21	Tijuana
Mixteco leadership	11	12	Tijuana
Other	6	6	Tijuana
Total:	55	47	

Interview dynamics

Mixteco community leaders were for the most part interviewed in their homes and occasionally in their offices when they had one. Only on one occasion an interview with a Mixteco women in a position of leadership was conducted in the streets where she was working as street vendor. In most cases only the participant and the researcher were present during the interview session.

The interviews of Mixteco maquiladora workers were for the most part in their own homes or in that of a close relative or neighbor. On several occasions their children or a relative living in the same household accompanied participants during the interview session. In most cases the usual activities in the household continued while the interview was in progress. On a few occasions, however, the interviews were conducted in the streets and in one occasion inside an abandoned car.

Maquiladora managers, government officials, businessmen and all non-Mixteco informants were interviewed in their offices. In all cases only the participant and the researcher were present during the interview session.

Most of the interviews were recorded. Only one of the maquiladora workers and four maquiladora managers declined the option of having the interviewed recorded.

Observation

Tijuana's complex urban fabric offers endless opportunities for observation. Lengthy walks in Tijuana's impoverished *colonias* gave me the opportunity to observe the multiple expressions of deprivation that afflict Tijuana's Mixteco community. I also spent time in areas were Mixteco men and women gather to socialize (markets, schools) and work (specifically streets and plazas where members of this community sell informally).

I visited industrial parks at different times of the day to observe the social and production dynamics of these sites. I also toured a number of maquiladoras following various interview sessions and was able to observe production arrangements and working conditions.

I used public transportation on a daily basis and witnessed the difficulties dwellers of Tijuana's colonias face as they commute from home to workplace.

When I spent time with informants in their homes during interview sessions I was able to observe living conditions and household dynamics. I was also frequently exposed to the traditions and social practices of this migrant community by attending family events like birthday parties, religious ceremonies and even funerals. Likewise, I attended

cultural gatherings and organization meetings that Tijuana's Mixteco community organized either to preserve their cultural identity or to obtain certain community gains.

Problems and difficulties during fieldwork

The period spent in Mexico doing research was free of major complications. Most difficulties were related to the weather conditions that often complicated the data collection process. February and March 2003 were unusually rainy months in Tijuana. Heavy rain made access difficult to the impoverished neighborhoods where the majority of informants lived. On many occasions planned interviews were called off or postponed because transportation was either unavailable or access by flooded or muddy unpaved streets was difficult. This was particularly frustrating because sometimes it took several days to arrange a single interview with Mixteco informants.

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