

CASA PUEBLA: AN ORGANIZATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

Mexican migrants living in New York City have not uprooted themselves from their homeland as did migrants from previous generations. These contemporary migrants have engaged themselves in the phenomenon of transnationalism, which is characterized by the building and maintenance of simultaneous linkages in both the migrants' country of settlement and their country of origin.

New York City is the destination of a large number of Mexican migrants from different regions of the state of Puebla. Leaders of this Mexican state are increasingly engaging in new practices so that the Poblano (people from Puebla) population abroad remains socially, politically, culturally and economically part of the state from which it originated. This thesis is an ethnography of Casa Puebla, an organization in New York created conjointly by the Poblano migrants and their state government. It explores and describes the practices and activities employed by the leadership of this organization for involving migrants in a transnational experience. It also explores the role of this organization as a venue for the construction of a deterritorialized state of Puebla in New York and an "imagined" Poblano community. By strengthening the migrants' identification with their state of origin, the state can make new claims for their loyalty and sustain political, social and economic relationships between the Poblano migrants and their state of origin despite their living in another country. The creation of transnational organizations sponsored by the state of origin reflects the growing institutionalization of migration orchestrated by the sending regional states and highlights the role of the middle entity--the regional state-- in the construction of the transnational experience.

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1. CASA PUEBLA: "A DREAM CAME TRUE"

Introduction

In a spacious Manhattan office, a meeting was about to take place. The leadership of the Federacion de Asociaciones Mexico Americanas del Noreste de los Estados Unidos (F.A.M.A.), an organization encompassing the 35 different Mexican organizations that operate in Manhattan, New Rochelle, Connecticut, New Jersey, Brooklyn, Yonkers, Bronx and Queens, was waiting impatiently for its three main leaders. This was not an ordinary meeting. Since its creation in 1992 they had always had to rent or borrow a place to hold such meetings. But not anymore. Now they had a place of their own: Casa Puebla. Yet, this physical setting symbolized much more than a venue for organizing various civic, recreational, religious, cultural and sport events, it meant having brought "home" to New York. The much awaited leaders finally arrived. They had just returned from Puebla where they had held a meeting with the Governor of the state to sign an agreement for the creation of Casa Puebla and were going to recount all the details of the trip. This state was the homeland not only for many of these leaders of Mexican organizations in New York, but to more than 500 000 Poblanos (people from Puebla) currently living in New York City and its surrounding area (*Magazine Informativo F.A.M.A.*, July 21, 1999).

Before the meeting started, the main leader individually greeted all the participants who were seated in chairs forming a circle. Until this point I had been an anonymous observer who had only shyly said "Buenas noches" and

after that been invited to take a chair. I was supposed to be introduced by one of the leaders, whom I had contacted through the Mexican Consulate, and who had invited me to attend. To my dismay, he was late so I clumsily introduced myself as a Mexican scholar living in Vancouver interested in doing research in New York with the Mexican community. I asked if I could attend the meeting or meet them after it was over. The leaders invited me to stay in a very friendly and open manner, so from that moment on, I did not feel like an intruder anymore.

The meeting started, the main leader gave the official account as to how an agreement on the creation of Casa Puebla was signed between the government of Puebla and the leadership of F.A.M.A. This brief account was followed by those of the other leaders who had gone too, and included pictures of the trip. At this moment, there was an outburst of enthusiasm and the meeting turned into a celebration. Pictures of the events were circulating among those in attendance and the three leaders were bombarded with questions about the smallest details in the pictures. In one, the leaders were accompanied by the president of Mexico. This triggered many commentaries. Ultimately, the picture of the President of Mexico stood as a symbol to authorize and legitimize the project of Casa Puebla. This was the culmination of a long held dream among the leaders of the Poblano community in New York.

The creation of Casa Puebla was a joint arrangement between the migrants in New York and their home state. It reflects the Poblano leaders' effort to maintain links with their home society and also the interest of government of the state of Puebla in cultivating and maintaining these links.

Casa Puebla constitutes a case study for testing a new framework on migration that challenges prevailing models of understanding this phenomenon. Before the late 1980's, academics tried to explain migration as a process in which the nation state was the principal organizational unit of politics and cultural identity (Torres 1998:169). Migrants were bound to a territory or place, and the social relationships that they developed were much more intense within this space than beyond. Migration was treated as a movement between places, from one significant environment to another and within this framework different paradigmatic models emerged. The focus of these models was on explaining if the migrants converted fully to the dominant way of life, if they remained oriented to the places from which they came from or if they forged their own form of accommodation in a synthesis of old and new (Rouse 1991:11). These approaches emphasized an unidirectional shift where migrants were only capable of maintaining an involvement in one socio spatial arrangement (Rouse 1991:10).

These ways of construing migration were challenged by the development of the transnational analytical framework that understands a migratory phenomenon as a simultaneous engagement of the migrants in two or more nation states. In their daily lives, activities, and social relationships, migrants take actions, make decisions and develop identities that connect them simultaneously with their country of origin and country of settlement and bring these two societies into a single social space or field (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton 1994: 7). Kearney highlights the social nature of space. He describes it as something created and

reproduced through collective human agency. For this anthropologist, existing spatial arrangements are always susceptible to change, within the limits imposed by power. Migration has the potential to challenge established social spaces (Kearney 1991:11). These new migrants, who differentiate themselves from those whose migration process meant rupture with their countries of origin, are called "transmigrants" (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc Szanton 1992:1). Transmigrants simultaneously hold memberships in both home and host societies and their daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across the societies of origin and settlement. The phenomenon of transnationalism has emerged because the convergence of several historically specific factors including the globalization of capitalism, technological revolutions in the means of transportation and communication, and global political transformations (Guarnizo & Smith 1998: 4).

Within their complex web of social relations, transmigrants draw upon and create multiple identities grounded both in their society of origin and in the host society (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc Szanton 1992:11). The identities of the transmigrant population as well as their sense of loyalty is a contested terrain between the hegemonic constructions of their home and host societies. Transmigrants will actively manipulate their identities and both accommodate to and resist them (Glick, Basch & Blanc Szanton 1992:12). The leadership of the sending nations will try to forge in the migrants national individual and collective identities so this population remains socially, politically, culturally and

economically part of the state from which it originated (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994: 8).

In this project, which constitutes an organizational ethnography, I will explore the organizational life and the daily practices of Casa Puebla. Casa Puebla stands as an example of a transnational organization aimed towards creating and sustaining political, economic, social and cultural relationships and networks between Poblano migrants and their home state of Puebla. It is a venue for involving migrants into a transnational experience enabling, and at times, even compelling them to participate in their state of origin despite living in another country. Their engagement with the state of origin will have an impact in the migrants' transnational life (Smith 1998:203). I will examine the processes employed by the leaders of Casa Puebla to engage in the phenomenon of transnationalism.

Casa Puebla is a forum in which hegemonic constructions and practices emanating from their home state are reenacted and new ones created. I argue that, through practices similar to those employed in the nation building process (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994: 22), the leaders of Casa Puebla are seeking to construct an "imagined" Poblano community (Anderson 1991). By forging an all-encompassing regional identity among the diverse Poblano migrants living in New York, leaders strengthen the migrants' identification with the state of origin and make new claims for their loyalty. In this research, I also argue that Casa Puebla is a venue for the construction of a deterritorialized state of Puebla in New York. Leaders are actively engaged in the construction of a

detrterritorialized state in a transnational context and part of this state building project is the construction of individual and collective identities. I will examine the joint role that Casa Puebla and the regional and federal Mexican government play in the creation of a detrterritorialized political entity. I will analyze the role played by Casa Puebla's media in the perpetuation of regional and national identifications in a transnational context and in the creation of what Morley refers to as a "diasporic public space" (Morley 1995: 61). This space crosses geographic, cultural and political borders and connects people electronically rather than by geographical proximity.

Finally, I argue that Casa Puebla plays a very important role in enfranchising the Poblano migrants actively involved in this organization within their home and host societies. In their home society, it provides them with social status and respectability; belonging to a respectable Poblano community also allows them to challenge their inclusion into a stigmatizing and all-encompassing Latino identity assigned to them by their host society.

Background and importance of state sponsored transnational organizations

The creation of Casa Puebla was an effort of the community leaders in New York and Puebla, but it was also the result of political changes that had been occurring in Mexico since the early 1990's. The overall political changes that Mexico has undergone for the past decade, have set the background for the creation of regional state transnational organizations such as Casa Puebla.

In February 1992, the Mexican State made a major change in its extra territorial political life; it created the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad. This program was a foreign policy strategy to "increase relations with both Mexican and communities of Mexican origin outside the country". The administration of President Salinas had realized that, with 17 million Mexican-Americans and Mexicans living in the United States, it was time to consider the Mexican nation as a geopolitical entity that stretched beyond its geographical limits (Program for Mexican Communities Abroad 1998:3). Among the goals of this program was that of facilitating and promoting joint programs, as well as to serve as the point of contact between Mexican communities in Mexico and those of Mexican origin or Mexicans in the United States.

These policies were intended to cut across national boundaries and link the two societies in single "social space" (Kearney 1991:9). Changes in Mexico's policies towards its immigrants in the United States contributed to maintain spatially extended relationships with the migrants living abroad. Contrary to previous generations of immigrants, this new wave had the state's support to live their lives, activities and identities across national borders. The now accepted dual citizenship for Mexicans living abroad, also contributes to the sense of not losing their membership in the Mexican nation although they do not live in it. Such policies have helped this new wave of Mexican immigrants to overcome the feelings of uprooting or permanent rupture that previous generations of immigrants had to face.

With the political strategy of the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad, the Mexican state engaged itself actively in creating transnational public spheres (Smith 1998: 219). Governmental organizations have played a crucial role in transnational practices; through them, migrants and their sending states construct a deterritorialized nation-state that encompasses a diasporic population within its domain. In this manner, states imagine themselves to exist wherever their emigrants have settled (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995:51).

Although Casa Puebla case has its local particularities, the creation of transnational organizations sponsored by regional states rather than national government are becoming increasingly important in the migration experience of Mexicans to the United States. They reflect the growing institutionalization of migration orchestrated by the sending regional states. Academics have emphasized either the role of the local government *municipios* in the transnational experience (Rouse 1991, Smith 1998) or the role of the nations in claiming its dispersed population into a deterritorialized nation state (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992). But little attention has been paid to the middle entity – the state- in the construction of the transnational experience. Since the late 1980's, Mexico has been experiencing an increasing pattern of decentralization of political control which has resulted in a revival of autonomy and independence at regional and local levels (Camp 1999: 16, 245, Rodriguez 1995: 153). Nowadays, with the democratization process that this country is witnessing, it has become crucial for states like Puebla to involve their migrant

population in their political practices. Migrants can have a decisive role in the outcome of the electoral processes. R. Smith emphasizes the strong influence that migrants have in their regional and local political outcomes: "they [migrants] will call their people back home and tell them vote for so-and so. They are also big leaders of public opinion in the towns where they are from" (Smith, New York Times July1, 2000). In this context, the creation of transnational organizations, sponsored by their state of origin, can prove an important factor in reinforcing political alliance to whichever political party is in power at that moment. Camp emphasizes the utilization of organizations by the Mexican political system to mobilize the rank and file to further a particular political agenda (Camp 1999: 151).

THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT

In August 1998, Melquiades Morales, the candidate for Governor of Puebla, visited New York as part of his political campaign as the "candidato" for the PRI, the ruling party of Mexico. There he met with some of the most prominent leaders of the Poblano community well known back home for their active participation in their community. These leaders asked the candidate for the establishment of a governmental office in New York that would represent the Poblano government in New York. In an interview, one leader told me: "The Consulate represents the nation, but in this case the Poblano community of New York needed a closeness with the government of Puebla, that is why we asked

for a governmental representation of Puebla in New York" (Personal interview, New York City, July 1999).

For the leaders of the Poblano community, it seemed that their claim of Poblanos was not being addressed by the Mexican federal government, for they were being encompassed within the broad category of "mexicanos". The future governor assured them that if he won the election, they would have their Casa Puebla. This statement is known by the leaders as the "promesa compromiso de campana" ("the campaign promise"). Having a candidate traveling abroad as part of his political campaign highlights the change in the PRI's domestic politics. Leaders of the dominant party have realized the importance of links with the Poblano community in New York. There has been a transnationalization of political life. Migrants are diasporic members that have an active participation and involvement in the political community. Even though voting from abroad is not possible yet, there is a recognition that the influence that some of these leaders have in their home communities may translate into electoral gain. The transnationalization of political life can be seen, according to Smith, as a strategy for political control (Smith 1999:5). A member of an opposition political party in Puebla described Casa Puebla as "an extension of the government of Puebla, whose goal was to keep the PRI hegemony abroad" (Personal interview, New York City, July 1999). In interviews with the Casa Puebla leaders, some openly assert their affiliation with the ruling party, but regarding the project of Casa Puebla, they emphasized the non partisan character of this organization.

Having achieved his electoral triumph as Governor of Puebla, Melquiades Morales started implementing his campaign promise. On May 6th, 1999, the most prominent Mexican leaders in New York traveled to Puebla to sign what has been described as “ the historical agreement between the government of the state of Puebla and the Poblano communities abroad” (*La Voz de Mexico*, May 14, 1999, 2). The agreement is stated in terms of mutual collaboration between the Poblano communities abroad and the government of Puebla. Among its goals are: “..the cooperation and collaboration in projects and programs with the Poblano community abroad in order to enhance the cultural, social, economic and fraternity links with its homeland community.” It also points out as a goal that it will help strengthen links among Poblanos abroad, provide advice on migration and custom’s issues, and function as a link between migrants abroad and their families back home (*La Voz de Mexico*, May 14, 1999,2).

This agreement is a clear example of the role of the state in the development of transnational practices. The agreement is also geared towards the creation of an imagined community in New York and as a source of empowering the Poblanos in claiming their rights as migrants in an alien territory. Casa Puebla was the organization through which these goals stated in the agreement were going to be put into practice.

Expectations and constructions around Casa Puebla

There was a lot of expectation on May 22nd, 1999, as everyone in this organization was getting ready for the great day: the official inauguration of Casa

Puebla. "Distinguished personalities" were invited to attend this event, among them top- ranked politicians from the state of Puebla, the Mexican ambassador in New York, top- ranked staff from the Mexican consulate, successful Poblano entrepreneurs and people from the media. This inauguration was not restricted to Mexicans, but prominent members from the host society were invited as well, including the governor and the mayor of New York; while neither of them attended, both sent others to represent them. A well- known congressman and the president of the commerce chamber of New York did attend the event. Pictures depicting the leaders of Casa Puebla accompanied by their special Mexican and American guests during the ceremony appeared in newspapers that are distributed among the Mexican and Latin American population in New York (*La Voz de Mexico, Noticias del Mundo*) and a local newspaper of the state of Puebla (*Esse Paisano*). These pictures represented a visual testimony of the "official" validation of Casa Puebla in both the home and host societies.

This event was an unique occasion for the leaders of the community to assert themselves to the main leaders of their home and host societies. It also reflected the complexities and intricacies of the transmigrant experience, for the leaders had to engage actively in developing and maintaining a complex social network that connected them to the Mexican and American societies simultaneously (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc Szanton 1992:2). The newly- created organization had to be officially recognized by the representatives of their home and host societies. The governor of the state of Puebla was going to have the lead in the ceremony. For him, this ceremony embodied his capacity to fulfill his

promises and a way to further his own political agenda; for the leaders in New York, having him enact the rituals of the ceremony gave them and their organization the prestige and legitimacy they would not have achieved had they lacked official support from their government.

The ceremony was the forum for the creators of this organization to make a public statement regarding the official image they wanted to convey of Casa Puebla. The festive atmosphere of the ceremony went along with the solemnity given by the speeches delivered by key figures. Excerpts from the speeches were reproduced in the newspapers that reported the event. The governor of Puebla stated that Casa Puebla was intended to serve as a bridge between the Poblanos of Puebla and the Poblanos of New York” (*Noticias del Mundo*, June 7,1999, 26). He stressed the importance of Casa Puebla as a space to strengthen the ties among the Poblanos living in both sides of the border and to “maintain the unity and identity as a community as well as a sense of pride for being Poblanos” (*Esse Paisano*, May 1999, 12).

The analysis of the discourses given at the ceremony reflect the aim of creating a single regional identity, that of *Poblanos*, among a fractured community composed by people from the very different ethnic groups that inhabit the different *municipios* of the state of Puebla. The internal divisions within *municipios*, that exist in their homeland (Jaramillo 1985 cited in Smith 1998: 208) and that still pervade in New York, are dismissed by hegemonic messages and local identities are reshaped in favor of a monolithic one. In a similar process to that employed by the leadership in the nation state building process (Basch,Glick

Schiller & Szanton 1994:36), the leaders of Casa Puebla forged legitimacy by claiming to represent a unity among culturally and ethnically diverse sectors of the population.

The official discourses at the ceremony were also aimed at conveying the image of Casa Puebla as an empowering site for Poblanos: “the pride of being Poblanos will get stronger with the creation of the new Casa Puebla in New York” (*Esse Paisano*, May 1999,12). The slogan of this organization “La Casa es su Casa” also contributes to portray Casa Puebla as an inclusive and empowering physical space for the Poblano community.

People attending this event remember it as “beautiful and moving, with great food, music and folkloric dances”. An interviewee told me: “How could you possible miss this event? It was a beautiful party, many people attended it, we had very important people attending it” (Personal interview, New York City, July 1999). In her narrative, the importance of the event is backed up by the rank of the guests who attended it.

After the official inauguration was over, the official discourses regarding the meaningfulness of this organization continued to permeate the printed media for the next couple of months. The printed media was used to “immortalize” the event, depicting it as an “historical moment” for the Poblano community in New York.

The printed media also informed the literate community about the official agenda set by the institution. The Mexican newspaper in New York (*La Voz de Mexico*) and the bulletin of F.A.M.A. (*Magazine Informativo F.A.M.A.*) gave

detailed descriptions of the goals and community programs of Casa Puebla. It stressed its crucial role in offering advice to the migrants in migratory, laboral, cultural, social, medical and human rights issues. A very important government program developed to encourage migrants' financial assistance in public works in their homeland was also highlighted. In this investment program, *Dolar sobre dolar*, the government encourages migrants to send remittances to their homeland in order to invest them in public works by matching the migrants' investments with state funds. Other programs are aimed to help Poblano entrepreneurs living in New York to invest in their homeland and encourage Poblanos living in Puebla to export their products to New York. The programs promoted by this organization are intended to "strengthen the links between the government of Puebla with its communities living in New York" and the Poblano communities living on both sides of the border (*Magazine Informativo F.A.M.A.* , July 21, 1999, 3). The agenda of Casa Puebla is linked to that of the state of Puebla. Casa Puebla therefore, is the forum where the relationships between the migrants and their home state can be enacted.

Casa Puebla as a source of empowerment and social status

In analyzing the whole process surrounding the project of creating Casa Puebla, we can understand the various meanings this organization has for the leaders involved in making what they describe as a "dream that became true" (statement done by leaders in radio program "Puebla in New York", August 24, 1999). Many of the leaders actively involved in the project left their homelands

many years ago when they were young; they had no status that would entitle them to any kind of political participation. The successful overcoming of the challenges involved in their immigration experience was recognized in their homelands. Their economic success also conferred on them the power to become economically and sometimes politically active members in their communities of origin. The funds they sent had an enormous impact not only in the private familial sphere, but also in the public arena. They started funding public projects, such as church restorations, sewage systems and road paving. Some of them also engaged in creating employment sources back home. With the visit of governor Morales to New York during his political campaign, a new kind of relationships began between the transmigrants and "their" government. By having their views elicited by a government minister from home, these Poblanos were exercising their status as politically active leaders. By this moment, they had the power to ask the future governor to officially support them in the creation of Casa Puebla. By being equal partners in this project, they were able to assert their status as Mexican citizens, Poblano leaders and successful transmigrants. They would be unlikely to attain the position of active political leaders in the host society.

Being addressed and acting as their home society leaders, these immigrants actively resist incorporation in a lower ethnic order in the United States where they are categorized as Latinos or Hispanics along with other Latin American or Caribbean immigrants. In the social order of the host society, these groups occupy the bottom of the social and economic ladder. According to Smith, there

is a belief among many Americans that that some ethnic groups are poor because of their culture, bad working habits and values. The term "underclass" is employed to describe these groups (Smith 1996:68). In Smith's interviews with some of the Poblanos in New York, he was able to notice that they have adopted the same beliefs as the dominant society, but only in regard to other ethnic groups such as African- Americans and Puerto Ricans. Smith reports that they see themselves as belonging to a "better culture" that helps them stay away from the urban vices to which other groups fall prey (Smith 1996:69).

Ascribing themselves to an encompassing Poblano identity proved a way of distancing themselves from those groups that belong to the "underclass" for those leaders and migrants who chose to comply with this construction. In this case, Poblanos migrants incorporated a hegemonic construction into which they have read other meanings. Migrants have engaged actively in redefining this hegemonic construction of an encompassing Poblano identity to resist their subordination into the host society. This process reflects the bottom-up construction of identities that coexists with the top- down ones. In one interview I was told: "Poblanos are really good workers, they do not get in trouble, that is why it is so easy for them to find a job as soon as they get here, because employers know that". In another interview a leader told me:

Until now the majority of Mexicans that are here are Poblanos and we have a very good reputation. If other Mexicans start arriving here, specially from urban areas, they do not have the same respectability and ethic our "paisanos" have, because employers do not know where do we come from, for them, we are all Mexicans. And until now, they prefer to hire Mexicans over other Latino groups. (Personal interview, New York City, August 1999).

The creation of Casa Puebla is a way of getting the recognition as politically active members from their regional home government. It is also a forum for conveying an image of the Poblano migrants as respectable people endorsed by a prestigious organization. In doing so, it challenges the all encompassing category of Mexicans, where not all of them have the qualities of the Poblanos and it also challenges the "underclass" category given by the host society to some ethnic Latino groups, which would otherwise include Poblanos. As will be described along this thesis, many of the activities of Casa Puebla were directed to enhance the public image and social status of this organization and its members. Once this goal started to get accomplished, the activities and strategies were more focused into the construction of a sense of transnational community and the creation of the Poblano identity.

Making Casa Puebla a leading organization

Once the enthusiasm that followed the creation of the Casa Puebla and its official inauguration was over, the leaders of different organizations started to question if Casa Puebla was ever going to accomplish the ambitious agenda it had announced. In the interviews I made two months after its opening, I could see that some of the original enthusiasm had faded and some leaders were starting to feel deceived in their expectations surrounding this organization. My respondents would make comments such as: " We haven't seen anything being done in Casa Puebla ". "Until now Casa Puebla has not fulfilled the enormous amount of demands issued by the community." "It is only concerned with its

commercial agenda and it is ignoring very crucial aspects the community needs [such as?] well, education, legal and migratory assistance, job orientation etc.”

It seemed that the work invested in giving Casa Puebla an image in the host society had better results there than with the other Mexican organizations of New York. Casa Puebla faced the challenge of building a reputation and credibility with its own nationals. One of the first steps in this strategy was to build an alliance with the Mexican consulate which until that moment had played a crucial role in the structuring and organization of the Mexican community in New York (Smith 1996: 70). The Mexican consulate realized the importance of this collaboration for 60% of the Mexicans that are assisted the Consulate are from the state of Puebla (*La Voz de Mexico*, August 27,1999, 9). The Consulate and Casa Puebla collaborated in a campaign entitled “ Mexicano: ayudanos a ayudarte” (Mexican: help us to help you). This campaign consisted in the continuous printing and distribution of a pocket size pamphlet stating the basic rights of an undocumented Mexican nationals in case of being arrested by U.S. migration officials. The Consulate wrote the text and Casa Puebla sponsored the publication of the pamphlet.

The other project that was done in this collaborative climate was the long-distance issuing of birth certificates for “Poblano” immigrants. Birth certificates are crucial for any kind of bureaucratic paperwork, ranging from being able to sign in children in public schools to obtaining their Mexican passport. With the program “Actas de Nacimiento a distancia” (distance birth certificates) any person born in Puebla could go to Casa Puebla, provide them with his/her basic

information such as place and date of birth, and Casa Puebla or the Consulate would get in touch with a birth registration office in Puebla and start the process of issuing their birth certificate. When this program was implemented, it was Casa Puebla the one that ended up carrying it out; this organization was backed up by Puebla government's staff and had the connections and authority to ensure the fulfillment of the procedure. The success of this program made Casa Puebla an organization capable of doing things that neither other Mexican organizations nor even the Consulate had done before. One interviewee told me:

I am amazed what Casa Puebla has been able to do regarding the birth certificates program, they had done what the consulate has not been able to...it takes them four days to issue a birth certificate while it might take the consulate more than three weeks. (Personal interview, New York City, December, 1999).

Their new status as a leading organization was not only enhanced by their collaborative projects with the consulate, but they started to use Casa Puebla's appealing locale as a forum for important activities that took place within the community. A special ceremony was organized in Casa Puebla for a Mexican activist who had had a leading role in advocating on behalf of bilingual education in public schools where there was a large concentration of Mexican children. Casa Puebla was also the setting for a great banquet that was organized to celebrate the triumph of the Mexican athlete Adriana Fernandez in the New York Marathon. There was wide media coverage of this event as the main Latin American newspapers reported the event, the details of the party and the setting. Some newspaper headlines stressed the venue, Casa Puebla, as much as the athlete: "En Casa Puebla homenaje a Adriana" (honoring Adriana in Casa

Puebla) (*La Voz de Mexico*, November 12, 1999). The annual ceremony of the "Sanchez to Sanchez to Smith Award", a recognition given by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to the entrepreneur who has had an outstanding performance, took place in Casa Puebla too. The leaders of the main Mexican organizations, including the Consulate, attended most of these events. The stories were covered by the main Latin American newspapers in New York: *Noticias del Mundo*, *La Voz de Mexico*, *El Diario*. Hosting these events proved an excellent public relations strategy for Casa Puebla and served to enhance its status as a leading organization.

Casa Puebla is able to host such events because it has a the physical space other Mexican organizations lack. In this case, by being the organization that is capable of hosting important events for the community, Casa Puebla is asserting its hegemony with respect to other Mexican organizations. In discussing Mexican political culture, R.Camp mentions that, contrary to American organizations where achievement is measured in terms of accumulated wealth, in Mexico and other Latin cultures, social prestige is measured in terms of public influence (Camp 1985:16). The depiction of Casa Puebla done by the media, particularly the newspapers, helped this organization achieve prestige with the other leaders and organizations of the Mexican community.

In my interviews with different members of the Mexican community that were actively involved with some organizations, the issue of leadership appeared repeatedly. I was able to identify this theme as a core one (Emerson, Fretz and

Shaw 1995:159). That made me realize the importance it had for leaders of Casa Puebla to display their organization as a leading one. One person told me :

Here we have more than a hundred Mexican organizations, but they are minor ones, they can't do much because the leaders only want two positions: either the presidency or the treasury. If they can not have either one, they just walk out and create their own organization, where they can have the presidency, even though it has to be in the basement of their homes" (Personal interview, New York City, August 1999).

Another interviewee told me:

The problem that has always existed in the Mexican community here [in New York] is the lack of leadership. Mr. L... made a huge advance in grouping more than 30 organizations in F.A.M.A. but now by incorporating F.A..M.A. into Casa Puebla, we might be having the first really important Mexican organization other than the Consulate...I can visualize the Consulate for official procedures and Casa Puebla for reaching the community in a much less formal and official way (Personal interview, New York City, July 1999).

It seemed that until the creation of Casa Puebla, there was a plethora of Mexican small organizations, the majority lacking credibility with the exception of some dealing with sports and religion. In several interviews, it was mentioned that "the problem" with Mexicans in New York was the lack of leadership. Casa Puebla's first goal was to fill the niche of a strong civil organization capable of assuming a position of leadership with the conglomerate of small Mexican organizations.

OUTREACHING THE COMMUNITY: THE USE OF THE MEDIA

The next step for Casa Puebla was to start building a reputation with the community of Mexican migrants. While leaders were able to acknowledge the importance of this new organization, for the vast majority of Poblanos living in the city, this newly created organization was something very alien to them. In my informal interviews with ordinary Poblanos, those working in delicatessens and restaurants, when they were asked about Casa Puebla they would reply that they did not know anything about its existence, Casa Puebla was an institution totally unknown to them. This made sense to me for until then they had been totally excluded from the agenda surrounding Casa Puebla.

During its first months, the leaders of Casa Puebla had been much more interested in building an image of their organization as a way of legitimizing it before the eyes of the host society authorities, the home society government and the other Mexican organizations. Once the leaders felt this goal was achieved, they decided to turn Casa Puebla into a more inclusive organization. One of the leaders told me: " Now it is important that Casa Puebla reaches the masses, in order to help us accomplish that we are going to start our own radio show".

Casa Puebla was going to sponsor the transmission of a radio program called "Casa Puebla in New York". This show was directed not only at the Poblanos in the state of New York and its surrounding states, but it was going to link simultaneously Puebla and New York. An arrangement was made with a radio station back in Puebla and one in New York which was devoted to the

Hispanic population for it was completely in Spanish. The way the radio programs were structured and the content of them provide a very clear example of the phenomenon of transnationalism. In the next section of this paper, I will provide a detailed description of several of these transmissions. Appadurai stresses the relationship between mass mediated events and migratory audiences and highlights the importance of electronic media in the construction of imagined selves and worlds (Appadurai 1998:5). The narratives that come through mass mediation deeply affect the imagination of migrants. The consumption of mass media builds a sense of "community of sentiment" because a group of persons begin to imagine and feel things together (Appadurai 1998:5). Listeners imagine themselves as members of a community (Morley and Robins 1995:11).

The radio program can be analyzed in two ways: on one side, it was the venue by which Casa Puebla was asserting its leadership and trying to create in the diverse Poblano migrants a sense of belonging to an encompassing Poblano community. Through the radio programs, the Poblano leaders had a venue to reach migrants and create ideas of community and identity in the Poblano audience. On the other hand, the messages and hegemonic discourses sent through the radio program to the migrants in New York by their local leaders in Puebla contributed to reinforce the transnational practices and a sense of allegiance and affiliation with their homelands. Casa Puebla was created by the government of Puebla, and parallel to the construction of an imagined community among the migrants in New York, there was also the project of the creation of the

detrterritorialized state of Puebla. Poblanos commonly refer to New York as "Pueblayork".

The beginning of the radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York"

"Today Casa Puebla will outreach the Poblano community" announced one of the leaders of this organization as I kept myself from stumbling with the cables and audio equipment that were brought to Casa Puebla in order to broadcast the radio show from there. Everyone was excited and nervous for the "distinguished" guests invited to the launching of the radio programs would be arriving soon and there were many technical problems with the equipment. The technical problems did not impede the special program from being carried out. The elite of the Poblano community in New York was going to address the Poblano audience back in Puebla and share with them their impressions of the recently created organization. Among the guests were the Mexican ambassador, the president of Casa Puebla, Poblano entrepreneurs, academics , one of the first Poblano immigrants to arrive to New York and community leaders of Casa Puebla. These guests were asked to offer their impressions about Casa Puebla and its importance for the community. These are some excerpts from their comments:

Well, Casa Puebla is an old dream that finally came true and will help all those Poblano migrants feel they have a place where they can meet and where they can go in case they need some kind of advice or guidance with respect educational or migration problems. With no doubt this organization will be of great help for the Poblano community.(Mr. E. P. Radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York", New York City, August 24, 1999)

When I came to New York forty years ago, I could not speak English, nor eat Mexican food. It was very hard to stay in communication with the people back home and I did not have any kind of community support. Moving here is a very hard experience, I am glad that with organizations such as Casa Puebla, the Poblanos that move here will have the kind of support I didn't have (Mr. J.A. Radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York", New York City, August 24, 1999).

Casa Puebla is something we Poblanos should feel very proud of. Casa Puebla is a support organization for paisanos (refers to someone from the same place of origin) We want to thank Mr. Governor Melquiades Morales for having turn into reality the dream we had (Mr. C.M. Radio Program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York, New York City, August 24, 1999).

All these comments were all directed toward validating Casa Puebla among the Poblano community in New York and also back in Puebla. In Puebla, the local broadcasting station had been announcing the upcoming event so there was a wider audience listening to this program. In fact, I had the impression that this event was mainly directed towards the Poblanos in Puebla. As one leader told me: "Casa Puebla is seen in Puebla as the shining star that will be able to guide the "paisanos" that live here [in New York]."

The second half of the program was announced as "the opportunity for the Poblanos to send their greetings to their relatives and friends that lived on the other side." The slogan that would be present in the following radio program was introduced: "Casa Puebla uniendo la comunicacion entre los de aqui y los de alla" (Casa Puebla linking those ones who are here and those who are there)."

This slogan was very significant specially for those who stay in their *municipios* in Puebla wondering how their relatives and friends that migrated to New York are doing. In some *municipios* where the more than half of the population has emigrated to New York (Imaz 1998:20), this radio program created a virtual space that linked them together. In order to help achieve this, the broadcasting station in Puebla went to different neighborhoods and *municipios* in a mobile broadcasting station and offered people the opportunity to send their regards to their relatives in New York. The majority of people who sent their regards to their relatives in New York were the wives and mothers of men who had migrated. Many *municipios* in the state of Puebla are now composed of women, children and elderly for the majority of the economically-active male population is working temporarily in New York. Although they will eventually return, it might take them between two and five years to do so (Imaz 1998: 20).

People in the streets took advantage of the mobile broadcasting station to send messages to their relatives. One man said: " I want to send regards to my brother M.L. who works in Manhattan and tell him that on the 15th we will be waiting for him." A woman sent this message: " I just want to tell my husband R.O. that we are all fine here and to take care of himself." Another woman said: "I just want to tell my son M.P. if he is listening to the radio, to please call us at home." (Radio Program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York", New York City, August 24, 1999).

Through the use of media, the people in Puebla were creating a social field that crossed geographical borders (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc

1994:7). People were connected electronically rather than by geographical proximity (Morley 1995: 61). In the following weeks, as the radio program continued, it became part of their everyday practices for its audiences in Puebla and New York.

The broadcasters from Casa Puebla highlighted that a goal of the radio show was to “promote the reunification of Poblano families”. The migration experience has had an impact in the Poblano’s traditional family unit since the majority of all males between the ages of 17 and 40 migrate to New York (information provided by Casa Puebla). Although the husband or sons do not live in the household, they still perform critical functions such as economic support, decision making and nurturing (Gendreau and Gimenez 1998:16). Families have had to modify their traditional definition of family integrity with the physical presence of all its members and started to think of themselves as intact family units but unbound by a physical household and territory. I think of these families that are still intact in the imagination of their members as “imaginary households”. Through their radio program, the leaders of Casa Puebla were actively forging a link between the dispersed family member listeners across national boundaries through the construction of a diasporic public sphere (Appadurai 1996:220).

The project of reunification launched by the radio program was not confined to the family sphere but was directed to all the Poblano community living in New York; as one prominent politician stated in a speech at the inauguration of Casa Puebla: “We want unity among all the Poblanos (*Esse Paisano* ,May 1999,1). The leaders used this program and the others that followed to stress the

importance of Casa Puebla as a venue for helping bring together Poblano migrants. Examples of these messages broadcasted were: "Casa Puebla is meant for all the Poblano migrants of New York. All the Poblanos united through Casa Puebla".

On most of the radio programs, the messages conveyed to the migrant Poblanos were intended to empower them and create a sense of belonging to a strong Poblano community. "We Poblanos are a very strong community. We want people to acknowledge that our laboral activities are not confined in the service industry, but we [Poblanos] have very important entrepreneurs, bankers, scholars among us... Little by little we [Poblanos] are starting to assume a position of leadership among the Hispanic groups here in New York". (Radio programs "Casa Puebla en Nueva York, New York City, November 6,1999 and November 20,1999).

The different ethnic groups composing the Poblano community were encompassed within a broad category of "we Poblanos". The leaders of Casa Puebla had to disregard the division of the community and portray an image of a unified community in order to assume a position of leadership among the different migrants. This strategy is similar to the one employed in nation building projects where the leadership legitimizes its power by developing a sense of "we-ness" in the population in order to have them conceive themselves as a fraternity or as part of a deep horizontal comradeship (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton 1994:36, Anderson 1983, Hannerz 1996: 21). Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined community can prove very useful in trying to understand the impact of

the radio programs in the Poblano audience of New York. Through the messages conveyed by the radio, the Poblanos could start internalizing an image of a community and themselves as interconnected members who shared membership in this overarching Poblano community.

The radio programs heavily focused on reinforcing a monolithic Poblano identity and Poblano community. Two sections were added to the program that contributed to this goal, a part called "Remembrances of Puebla" and different interviews with Poblanos who had faced different kinds of challenges or abuse from members of the host society as a result of their being immigrants. The section "Remembrances of Puebla" was added, according to the leaders involved in the radio program, because "Casa Puebla rescues the cultural traditions of Puebla". In this part, detailed and rich descriptions of different places and traditions of Puebla were depicted. On a couple of occasions, the broadcasters invited a Poblano migrant who writes poetry, introducing him as the "poet of the Mixtec region". He read several of his poems where he remembered in a nostalgic way aspects of the landscape in Puebla. This section was followed by a well-known musical piece called *How far I am from the land where I was born*. The elaboration of images of home sentimentalized in the reading of a passage, a song or a poem serve to remember and reinvent pasts alleviating the feelings of uprooting that accompany the migrating experience (Feldman Blanco 1992:169). Listening to the radio program restores to isolated listeners the sense of community they lost by having moved away from their homeland (Morley 1995:66). Leaders of the program made appeals to a common past and

traditions held by the migrants. An example of this was an announcement made on the program inviting the Poblano and Mexican migrants to visit the Day of the Dead altar set in Casa Puebla with the following statement: " Casa Puebla rescues the cultural traditions, so that the compatriots here in New York know that Casa Puebla is a window to the traditions and culture that bond us so much" (Radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York", New York City, October 23, 1999).

The program also served as a forum where ordinary Poblanos could address publicly some of the problems they were facing in the host society. In one of the programs there was a section devoted to discussing common experiences and injustices suffered by some Mexican workers. In another program a guest speaker was invited to address Mexican artists and invite them to form an union of artists to "end the exploitation". According to Rouse (1995), having been victims of prejudice, discrimination or being in situations where there has been a denial of fundamental rights can contribute to the creation of a sense of shared social struggle and commonality with other migrants (Rouse1995: 358). It has to be emphasized that parallel to the exposure of the problems, there was an emphasis on how these problems should be tackled. The discourse of Casa Puebla was on helping migrants seek their own enfranchisement through this organization. Whether we emphasize social struggle, common historical past or cultural or other types of commonalities as a binding strategy used by the community leaders, it was aimed to create a sense of community among the Poblano audience.

The utilization of the radio program by the government of Puebla was an ongoing process that ran parallel to a series of events that occurred in the state of Puebla and in New York in the months following my fieldwork. I will incorporate and analyze the discourses conveyed by the politicians and their importance in the phenomenon of transnationalism as I proceed in this thesis. It has to be emphasized that once the broadcasting began, it had a very important impact on the everyday practices of Casa Puebla. The use of the media opened a venue for mobilizing migrants in New York and involved them in a more active way at the local level and also in their involvement with their homelands.

“Pueblayork”

“Good morning friends of Puebla and friends of Pueblayork in the district of Manhatitlan.” This statement would be used sometimes as the opening of the radio program by the broadcasters in New York. The name of the radio program would vary between “Casa Puebla in New York” or “Puebla in New York”; it seemed that the variation in name would be in relation to the content of the program. As did their counterparts in Puebla, the broadcaster station in New York started sending a mobile station to all those neighborhoods with a high concentration of Poblanos and Poblano small businesses to offer them the possibility of sending their regards to their relatives back in Puebla. On several occasions, the relatives back home would call the broadcasting station in Puebla to let their relative in New York know they had heard him on the radio, and this would be transmitted on the air too. On other occasions, the broadcasters on

either side of the border would put on hold one of the parties, locate by phone the other, and then put them on the air simultaneously so they could “chat” for a few seconds in this imaginary space created by the electronic media (Morley& Robins 1995:66).

The mobile station would also spot the small business owned by Poblanos and interview the owners and some of the customers who frequently were Poblanos as well. An example of this is when they interviewed the owner of a Poblano bakery. The reporter mentioned “ Here we have the same products we can find back in Puebla.” When the owner was asked about the way he did his breads, he replied: “Our grandfather used to have a bakery in Puebla, he taught my brother and me how to make it. Here we do it exactly the way it is done in Puebla.” After that a customer was interviewed, she was asked how she felt about eating the “semitas” (a special bread from Puebla) she answered: “ It feels like home” Another customer said: “ One finds in this bakery and other shops in the areas, what one is used to.” (Radio program “Casa Puebla en Nueva York”, New York City, October 16,1999).

“Pueblayork” is what Appadurai (1998) refers to as an imaginary landscape created electronically for the Poblano audience on both sides of the border. “Pueblayork” can be understood as an example of the Poblano leaders’ use of the media in the construction of a deterritorialized state of Puebla.

“ A tragedy has hit our state of Puebla”

A few months after Casa Puebla was created, a natural disaster hit the state of Puebla. By this time, Casa Puebla had built a reputation among the other Mexican organizations and was already broadcasting its own radio program. News of the disaster appeared in the major national newspapers in the United States and in all the Latin newspapers that circulate in New York. In a few days, Casa Puebla became the axis for all the activities that were related to what was happening in Puebla.

The government of Puebla named this organization as its only official avenue to deal with all matters pertaining to the disaster. Casa Puebla alone was to provide information regarding the tragedy and to organize the aid sent from New York to Puebla. The day after the tragedy, spots appeared on the major broadcasting station in Spanish (actually the one in charge of transmitting their radio program) announcing that all the food and money donations had to be directed to Casa Puebla giving its address and phone number. In a matter of hours, many Poblano migrants who until then had remained as outsiders to Casa Puebla and its activities started showing up with bags containing food and clothes. Most of the donors were Poblano migrants from poor *municipios* back in Puebla. Although phone calls were made to the Poblano elite of entrepreneurs asking them for their support, most of the donations came from low income Poblano migrants. In a week, two and half tons of food and clothes were taken by one hundred and seventy nine persons (the majority Poblano migrants) to

Casa Puebla (data given by Casa Puebla). The following day, all the ornaments that were displayed for sale in Casa Puebla had to be put away because there was not enough room for storage.

For the first time since its creation, reporters from one mainstream newspaper came to Casa Puebla to write a story about this organization and its role in helping Puebla. Casa Puebla appeared in the headline of the Mexican newspaper in New York: "Poblano Solidarity in Casa Puebla" (*La Voz de Mexico* October 15,1999).

On the radio program of that week, a high ranking officer of the Ministry in charge of the major political policies (Secretaria de Gobernacion) spoke to Poblano migrants in New York telling them: " I want to address the Poblanos living in New York and reassure them that we are working very hard so your paisanos here in Puebla are safe". The whole program was devoted to informing the migrants in New York about the areas damaged by the disaster, the number of victims and the measures taken by the government to help them out. The governor of Puebla also sent a message to the migrants: "Paisanos, Poblanos that live in New York, trust your government, your president and the institutions of the state in their capacity to overcome the situation and support the thirty thousand homeless victims." (Radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York, New York City, October 16,1999).

Through this message, Poblano immigrants were being addressed as nationals of Mexico and specifically of Puebla. They were asked to trust their government as if they still lived in Mexico, ignoring that they were now under a

different geo-political system. By treating Poblano immigrants in the audience as members of the Mexican nation state, Mexican political leaders were challenging the traditional notion of nation state bounded to a geopolitical entity. In contrast, in the nation state conceptualized by the leaders, identity and political loyalty were no longer geographically bounded (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton 1994: 53). In the politicians' address to Poblanos, the multistranded relationships that migrants sustain in their transnationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton 1995: 47) were ignored. In the construction of the deterritorialized Puebla state, no mention was made to their relationships with their host countries; instead it was emphasized that "their government and president" were the Mexican one. This reflects their government's expectation about where their primary loyalty has to be directed. However, this was not always the case with Poblano migrants. In discussing about the issue of loyalty towards the host nation one Poblano interviewee told me: " This is a good country to be in, it gives us the job opportunities that we cannot have back home, I like being here." Another interviewee told me: "This is a country that has taught me how things should work, this nation cares for its people, I don't even think of going back [to Mexico].(Personal communications, New York City, December, 1999).

In the radio programs that followed, loyalty and solidarity towards the home society were constantly stressed. "We are appealing the sense of solidarity of our Poblanos in New York so they help us in the reconstruction of our beloved Puebla that was so badly hit by this tragedy" (Radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York, New York City, November 13, 1999). In another program a

municipal president addressed the migrants in New York telling them "Do not forget our land, please continue to support us as you have been doing until now." (Radio program "Casa Puebla en Nueva York", New York City, December 19, 1999). These spots asking for help for the victims of the tragedy addressed the multiple identities that Poblanos confront, adopt and manipulate as migrants. At one point, the municipal presidents would address specifically the migrants of that *municipio* and ask for their contributions: "I want to address the "paisanos" from the *municipio* of...". At others, migrants were encompassed under the category of "Poblanos: "Paisanos, our beloved homeland Puebla needs our help". Other times, migrants were encompassed within the broad national category of Mexicans: " This is an important call for the Mexican community to help our brothers" and at others it was even more encompassing: "Hermanos latinos, as you all know our brothers in Puebla are in disgrace, let's help them". These statement reflect the multiple and complex identities that the Poblano migrants hold and express their simultaneous linkage to several societies and groups.

TWO PROJECTS COMING TOGETHER: CONSTRUCTING A DETERRITORIALIZED STATE OF PUEBLA AND A DETERRITORIALIZED NATION STATE

In the daily practices of the leaders of Casa Puebla, there is a continuous interplay of discourses underlining being Poblano on one side and being Mexican on the other.

In the construction of the deterritorialized Mexican nation and Puebla state, central and local government authorities have emphasized that no matter where the Poblano migrants have emigrated and settled, they continue to belong to Mexico, to Puebla and to their particular municipality. Migrants are faced with simultaneously holding different forms of membership and identities including those linked to their communities of origin, to the state, to the Mexican nation (Smith 1998: 229). In November, Casa Puebla hosted the "Encounter of Poblanos in New York"; the three governmental cornerstones: municipal, state and federal authorities were going to get together and discuss the main issues regarding the Poblano immigrants in New York. These three powers can have a crucial role in the creation of transnational communities, especially the local state (municipio) and the regional (state of Puebla) for they are the most involved with the daily lives of migrants (Smith 1998:203). This encounter was described by Casa Puebla's leaders as "a day that would make history." The encounter was going to be transmitted through the radio program "Casa Puebla in New York".

Retaining ties and identities associated with their home communities offer Poblanos a way of validating their social status and empowering them in host society that excludes them on the basis of "race" (Goldring 1998:170). In return for community membership and status, migrants have a set of ongoing obligations and duties towards their communities of origin. These different claims of each of the government powers were expressed in speeches given at the event. For the municipal presidents, this gathering was to "inform the Poblano community in which ways they could contribute to help restore churches,

schools, hospitals and all those buildings in their communities of origin that are so important in the daily lives their families and friends back home". For the state governor this event was to "strengthen the bonds with our "paisanos" who live in New York so they feel closer to their land and let them know that they have a friendly government that permanently concerns itself about them". For the federal government this encounter was part of the campaign the representatives of the program "Paisano" were promoting in the main consulates in the United States. The "Programa Paisano" was created to improve conditions for Mexicans who returned home for visits. Under this program, the returning migrants could report abuses by authorities. The national representative of the Programa Paisano underscored the importance that it had for Mexicans living abroad and traveling to Mexico to be aware of the benefits of this program in order to avoid abuses by the Mexican custom authorities for " we have rights, we are not "gente aparte" (alienated people) we have the same rights as the other Mexicans, we are important members of the Mexican community that are working on behalf of our families." (Radio program Casa Puebla en Nueva York, New York City, November 13, 1999). The central government had its own agenda in mind for Poblano migrants for it encompassed the different Mexican migrants within the "Mexican community" and reinforced a sense of Mexican identity. According to Appadurai (1998) when governments reinforce the migrants' sense of nationalism and national identity, the idea of the nation flourishes transnationally and the transmigrants' loyalties are towards their nations of origin and ambivalent about their loyalties to the host country (Appadurai 1998:172) . With the creation

of Casa Puebla, the leaders of the Poblano community also embraced the federal government project aimed of creating a “transnational nationalism” (Tambiah 2000:176) in Poblano migrants.

The nation building processes of a newly deterritorialized Mexican nation were being recreated and incorporated in the daily practices of Casa Puebla. The radio program was one strategy to accomplish this goal. Morley stresses the role of broadcasting as a key institution through which audience members imagine themselves as belonging to the national community (Morley and Robins 1995: 11). Casa Puebla’s radio program started to broadcast the Mexican president’s brief weekly address to the Mexican nation with a nationwide transmission called “Platicas del Presidente” (conversing with the President). This consisted of a five minute report given by the president regarding different topics such a description of governmental programs to benefit the physically disabled, to preserve the indigenous culture and language and a description of the public works aimed at socially benefiting the communities. Advertisement of the PRI ruling party also reached the migrants in New York. The project to reinforce the sense of nationalism in the migrants was not solely confined to the radio programs. Casa Puebla, in conjunction with the Consulate or other Mexican organizations, organized activities such as the commemoration of civic holidays. Some of these activities are very inclusive, so a large number of people attend and celebrate a national holiday. Such is the case of the “Cinco de Mayo” holiday where a huge celebration was organized in New York Madison Square theatre with the presence very well-known Mexican artists.

Migrants have to face a set of complex and sometimes contradictory processes in the development of their simultaneous memberships in their communities, and their states of origin and destination (Smith 1996: 57). They have to negotiate the different claims they are being exposed to by these different and sometimes competing social structures. While I was doing my fieldwork in Casa Puebla, I was able to witness the confusion some migrants felt regarding having to comply to the host society regulations specially in regarding family matters. Some parents were shocked because the Ministry of Families and Children had forbidden them to share with another family a single piece room, a common practice in their home towns when families could not afford to pay the rent of a single family living unit. At other times the competing claims were between two social structures of the home society. As one Poblano migrant told me, "I need some legal advice regarding my migratory status, some Mexican friends told me to go to the Consulate, then I heard on the radio about Casa Puebla offering free advice, I do not know where to go." (Personal communication, New York City, December 1999).

Throughout this work, I have stressed hegemonic constructions of individual and collective identities aimed at by the leaders of the Poblano community. This was mainly because I am doing an organizational ethnography and my focus has been on the daily practices and organizational life of Casa Puebla. However, I want to highlight that the construction of a deterritorialized nation state and multilocal identities is not a uniquely top down, uncontested process. These identities are constituted through the interplay from the "top down" and "ground

up" constructions and are constantly being remade (Gregory 1993:401, Clifford 1994: 322). Migrants might incorporate partially some of the hegemonic discourses given by their community leaders and politicians, but they have an active role in resisting, reshaping and accepting the rhetoric of the transnational state and their identities (Basch, Schiller and Szanton 1994:47, Glick Schiller and Fouron 1998:130).

Throughout my fieldwork, I could corroborate some of the ways by which the Poblano migrants challenged the leaders' constructions and discourses conveyed through the radio program, events and daily practices of Casa Puebla. One way of resisting this hegemonic discourses, was by not participating in the activities organized by Casa Puebla. Many of the activities organized through this organization had to be cancelled for people did not enroll despite the publicity made by the radio program. In several of the informal interviews I did with Poblano migrants many of them did not know of the existence of Casa Puebla; some who knew about it chose not to participate in any of the activities it sponsored. Some of them even refused to listen to the radio program. One of them told me: "I listened to it a couple of times, then I got bored, I rather listen to music or to a sports program." (Personal communication, New York City, December 1999).

When I asked Poblano migrants in informal interviews about their social practices and their impressions of the Poblano community, some of them told me that they were very alienated from other Poblanos, that they would engage in social activities but it was mainly with their relatives or people they would meet at

work. There seems to be a contradiction in the image conveyed publicly by the leaders and what people would report to me in interviews regarding their sense of community. Some excerpts of these comments are presented below.

The problem that we Poblanos have is that there is not a sense of unity among us, we are very divided as a community, we fight among ourselves as we used to do back home. I wish we had the sense of solidarity I can observe in other immigrant groups that live here [New York] have.

(Personal communication, New York City, August 1999).

The main problem I see among the people from Puebla is that we are very "desconfiados" (mistrusting) specially among ourselves, we do not think of ourselves as "paisanos" (Mexican idiom that refers to people from the same homeland, it could be country, state or small town so even if we meet someone from Puebla but not from the same "*municipio*" we do not think of them as our own people. (Personal communication, New York City, December 1999).

There is a large number of people from Puebla here, but we all come from different places. When I lived there I was not in contact with people from other *municipios*, why should I here? We are very different among ourselves.

We Poblanos get together with other Poblanos only when we are planning some project back home, but in these gatherings we united as paisanos from the *municipio* of "...", we would not like someone else from other *municipio* to attend our meetings, we would not care if they are from Puebla or not, we would feel that person as an intruder (Personal communication, New York City, March 2000).

There doesn't exist a sense of unity among Poblanos in New York as it exists between the migrants from Jalisco or Michoacan. For instance, I am part of the soccer league, and there are a lot of Poblanos there, but what unites us is that we belong to the same league, not that we are Poblanos... "aca cada quien anda por su lado" (here, everybody is on their own) (Personal communication, New York City, March 2000).

I make friends at work, but I am not looking for being with other Poblanos, in fact my best friends are from Tlaxcala.(Personal communication, New York City, March 2000).

Everytime I asked the same questions to Poblanos I met in the street, the subway, delicatessens and restaurants in Manhattan I would get very similar answers. Most of them did not have a sense of being part of the "Poblano community", in their discourse I could not find that sense of "we ness" that was so prevalent in the discourses made by their leaders. Through the analysis of these interviews and practices of those Poblanos who are more concerned in overcoming the challenges they have to face in daily lives, I was able to realize that "the Poblano Community" is not the finished and monolithic ideological formation the leaders of this transnational organization try to convey, but it is a problematic, contested and political terrain of domination and struggle.

CONCLUSIONS

In this ethnography, I have tried to understand the practices of Casa Puebla within the framework of the recent work on transnationalism. As a transnational organization, Casa Puebla has engaged in building relationships between Poblano migrants in New York and the state of Puebla that span national borders and directed its practices into the construction of a deterritorialized state of Puebla in New York. This organization has mainly engaged itself in the creation of monolithic and encompassing constructions of identity and community. Throughout this project, I have tried to highlight the continuous interplay that exists between the Poblano identity and a broader Mexican identity in the homeland's hegemonic constructions of identities. There seems to be a constant

complex interaction among these two identities and, while at some points they seem to be in a terrain of alliance, at others they are in conflict. If we consider the construction of identities in the transmigrant population as a political project, we can think of it as an arena of contestation where local and central state power is being contested (Mallon 1994:69). The construction and reinforcement of regional and national identities can be understood as a way of reassuring political loyalty and a sense of affiliation with the home society; it is also a way to enfranchise migrants as members of a "respectable" Poblano community which allows them to challenge the stigmatizing and all-encompassing Latino identity that the host society assigns them.

In order to be able to convey the hegemonic constructions of identity and community, the leaders of Casa Puebla had to assume a position of leadership and gain access to the diverse and disperse Poblano migrants. It tried to achieve reputation and legitimize itself in its role of leading organization among the myriad of small Mexican organizations, by engaging in practices such as hosting important events within the community. These practices contributed to enhance its respectability with the host and the home society and with the other Mexican organizations in New York.

The creation of its own radio program not only contributed towards linking the Poblanos on each side of the border through the creation of a virtual space but the use of the media proved as a key element in the nation building project. It was aimed in helping the Poblano migrants embrace the process of building a deterritorialized Puebla imagined by their local and national leaders. In this

process, different hegemonic claims emerge, and the non inclusive project of constructing a deterritorialized state of Puebla coexists with the broader national project of "conceiving the Mexican nation beyond its geographical limits." (Program for Communities Abroad).

In order to achieve a better understanding of Casa Puebla, it has to be considered as a joint project between the leaders of the Poblano migrant population engage and the government of Puebla. As Mexico furthers on with its democratization and decentralization processes, regional states rather than national government will have crucial role in the creation and sponsoring of transnational organizations. These organizations are becoming increasingly important venues for involving migrants in the political and economical processes of their sending regional states. Finally, I would like to stress that the construction of identities, community and nation state do not go unchallenged nor constitute a top down process, but are a result of the complex and contradictory interplay between the leaders of Casa Puebla and the Poblano migrants. The scope of this projects was limited to writing an organizational ethnography, focusing on the "top down" constructions, but further ethnographic research has to be done with the diverse Poblano migrants that live and work in New York in order to determine how they experience and negotiate the hegemonic claims of their local, regional and national leaders.

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