

Encuentros Mixteco/a-Chicano/a-Mestizo/a-Estado: La Construcción de Identidades Mexicanas Entre Jóvenes Transmigrantes en Oaxacalifornia¹.

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INTRODUCTION

The indigenous communities of La Mixteca have had a long history of migration both within Mexico and to the US but they have retained significant links to their communities in various forms through associations and organizations, the cargo system and the politico-religious obligations that it entails, remittances, infrastructure development, ownership of land, kinship and marriage ties, fiestas and cultural traditions, etc. In Mexico City Mixtec migrants initially formed diverse single community-based organizations. Since the mid-eighties, however, Mixtec migrants began experimenting with associations in Baja California, Mexico and California that combined members of various communities. In the nineties they formed a transnational organization called first Frente Mixteco-Zapoteco Bi-Nacional, and later Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Bi-Nacional or FIOB, to pressure the government of the state of Oaxaca as well as to defend immigrant rights in the US. In their negotiations with the Mexican and the US states they have forefronted their own notions of community and style of political negotiation. As the title of the organization connotes, migrants' national and ethnic identities draw upon their knowledge and participation in diverse, multi-sited cultural, political, and economic practices. They identify with and contest a homogenizing Mexican national identity, while they also identify with and recognize the diversity of cultures within the nation. But, as it has been noted by intellectuals, politicians, and Mixtecs themselves, an ethnic identity also emerges when Mixtecs migrate and find themselves living in conditions of extreme oppression and exploitation.

This paper is aimed at delineating an analytical framework to study the generational construction of national and ethnic identities and subjects by young Mixtec transmigrants, and how their idioms impact and are influenced by those of "organic" (Lomnitz 1992) or "ethnic" intellectuals (Rappaport n. d.), academic intellectuals, and those of representatives of the Mexican state (in many cases young transmigrant, intellectual, and state representative are not exclusive categories). I am particularly interested on how young Mixtec transmigrants manifest those identities in discourses on Mexicaness and indigeness in their interaction with other groups that claim Mexican and/or indigenous background such as Chicanas/os, Mexican-Americans, and Mexicanas/os², Zapotecas/os,

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² In this project the label "Mexicana/o" is used to refer to those who claim Mexican nationality in the basis of descent, culture and/or citizenship. This label is clearly an essentialized construction of an identity and it neglects and obscures other primary identities to which migrants refer (e.g. community, region, family, religion). The label "Chicano/a" refers to those persons of Mexican background who self-consciously identify as Chicano/a mainly for political reasons. The label "Mexican-American" is used for

and Triquis. This framework will ultimately aid a multi-sited research project which focuses on how youths, intellectuals, and the state construct identities and subjects in transnational migrant communities, in both Mexico and the United States, and thereby affect and transform nation-building and ethnic-building processes originated from the state as well as from, an increasingly transnational, civil society. The multi-sited project will be conducted in various communities of La Mixteca Baja municipios of Silacayoapan and Juxtlahuaca which send at least 80% of their population as migrants to Southern California and its Central Valleys. This multi-sited ethnography will allow a comparative and empirical framework from which to explore the differences and similarities in the processes of identity construction that emerge in a transnational space. More specifically, the objectives of the research project are the following:

- to investigate the variety and different meanings of national and ethnic identities/subjects that young Mixtec transmigrants develop in Mexico and the US, given differences in class, age, and gender, as they are enacted in performances and representations of “traditions”.
- to explain how the aged and gendered construction of alternative national and ethnic identities/subjects, as they are envisioned by the young transmigrants, both self-justify and constrain the politics of identity with which these youths may engage when they enter into contact with other groups that claim Mexican and/or indigenous background;
- to analyze the impact of these new discourses of Mexicaness and indigeness, as they have been developed in a transnational context, on the local traditions and discourses about community;
- and finally, to investigate the interaction/confrontation between these re(transformed) local discourses and state discourses about the cultural production of the community and the nation.

“NEW ETHNICITIES” IN OAXACALIFORNIA³

In recent studies on adult Mexican migration (Kearney 1986; Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Rouse 1991, 1992, 1995a, 1995b; Stephen 1996a; Stuart and Kearney 1981; Zabin et al. 1993), migrants’ identities are seen as resulting from and being constrained by the reordering of late capitalism and global processes, and as the result of their multi-local and transnational affiliations. They also refer to the migrants’ inclusion into the US racial system which uses race as a discourse about class positioning and as a discourse about national identity through which migrants are situated within the nation. The studies call our attention to the formation of new ethnic identities—a pan-Mixtec

those persons of claimed Mexican background who choose not to identify or be identified as Chicanos/as but that do not identify with Mexican either. One of the goals of the research is to document the various identifications used in interactional contexts by young people that claim Mexican background, but it should be understood that the main objective is to problematize them to elicit the kind of responses generated among the Mixtec migrants.

³ “Oaxacalifornia” is the transnational space within which Mixtecs migrate and within which their identity is shaped (see Kearney 1995).

identity in the case of Mixtec migrants—which is emerging as a significant dimension of identity and the politics of identity among transnational migrants (see also Corbett et al. 1992) in face of the diminishing power of the nation-state to inform and manipulate ‘peasant’ identities. Thus, ethnicity as Michael Kearney (1996) argues, allows migrants some degree of autonomy, whereas citizenship or nationality, as identities assigned by the state, or class do not. However, in La Mixteca regional coalitions and the formation of a Mixtec ethnic identity have failed to take hold due to the powerful and fracturing identification with the local community and the lack of regional organizations and leadership (Spores 1996). In fact, in La Mixteca the social identity is primarily based on one’s local community reinforced by a long standing history of intercomunal conflict (Nagengast and Kearney 1990). Nevertheless, as migrants bring with them to their localities “new” forms of ethnic consciousness or identifications and affiliations, as they engage in the community affairs that are increasingly being transnationalized, as their transnational organizations become increasingly involved with national affairs, and as the state’s militarization and human abuses in the region continue, it is not difficult to think that the pan-Mixtec discourse or that Mixteidad will emerge in La Mixteca itself, however transformed according to the cultural repertoires of the localities and regions.

Lynn Stephen (1996b) notes that there are many current factors in Mexico that have fostered an identity politics based on essentialized constructions of “Indian” and the formation of multi-ethnic coalitions⁴: a) the weakening of the ruling political party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional); b) the emergence of two guerrilla forces of national significance (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional and Ejército Popular Revolucionario) which have given the state an excuse to increase the militarization of several regions like Oaxaca; c) the transnationalization of the movements which has given them wide access to an international audience and resources through which pressure the Mexican state; and, d) the resonance of an indigenous-defined nationalism with the majority of Mexicans that do not consider themselves to be completely indigenous, yet, they have begun to see themselves in today’s indigenous peoples. To this we can add the overt repression of Mixtec leaders and workers in La Mixteca and in the northern states of Mexico which has fostered ethnic awareness and offset the negative self-image among Mixtecs (Clark Alfaro 1987 and 1989; Kearney and Nagengast 1989). These factors have been compounded by the racialization of US global economy which has also opened up the space for ethnicized identity politics: Americanization, from being a process of building a labor force for a national US economy, has become a process that promotes multiculturalism (through corporations, foundations, universities) because the globalized US economy no longer needs a homogeneous national labor force. Transnational ties become means of connecting and representing US-based capital within the global economy. Thus, the racialization of identities serves simultaneously as a discourse about class positioning and a discourse about national identity, through which migrants are situated in the nation, and through which oppression and exploitation are masked (Glick Schiller in Ong 1996; cf. Rouse

⁴ These factors are similar to the conditions that gave rise to a shift in the ways of “doing politics” throughout Latin America in the last two decades. Identity-based movements are the basis of contemporary social movements, be it feminist, environmental, gay, indigenous, etc. (for a discussion on the shifting of identity politics in Latin America see UC Davis Group Study 1995).

1995b). Nina Glick Schiller (1996) in studying Haitian transnational migrants in New York claims that they construct their identities through descent rather than through nationality. Race thinking, ideologies of blood, and their moralization, are deeply implicated, she argues, in transnational nation-building processes and political struggles, and while these construct new and alternative collectivities through which the migrants can empower themselves, they also limit their struggle because the source of power is misrecognized and misplaced. However, Mixtec migrants do construct discourses and identities in which nationality is important.

How are these migrants' indigenous ethnicities different from those sanctioned by the nation-state? What are the new strategies and tactics employed and what is their potential to create alternative projects? These questions are at the core of current intellectual and political debates. For Kearney (1996) and Zabin et al. (1993) what is new about Mixtec ethnicity in a transnational context is that it is organized around human rights issues—to the extent that to be indigenous is almost synonymous with being victim of human rights abuses—and around ecopolitics. The politics of self-defense in both, Northern Mexico and California, have fostered the emergence of a politicized transnational popular culture and various Mixtec associations engaged in global oppositional politics. But these ethnicities are also different in the way by which they re-inscribe their ethnicity in the Mexican and the US nations. While an investigation of the young migrants' insertion into the US nation is extremely relevant and important given the current anti-immigration atmosphere that reigns in California, in this research project I am interested in how Mixtec migrants conceptualize their relationship with the Mexican nation-state.

In Mexico, as it has been extensively documented, Mixtec migrants, as well as many other indigenous peoples throughout the hemisphere, have developed and fought for the concept of pluri-nationality or pluri-ethnic autonomous regions in Mexico (Díaz-Polanco 1991; Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez 1996; Stephen 1996b; Varese 1988) which invokes the equivalence of multiple loyalties within a de-centered social (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Rubin 1996). The FIOB has been actively engaged in the debates about autonomy brought to the front of Mexican national politics by the rebellion of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). The concept of self-determination does not imply succession from the nation-state, but the broadening of rights within the structure of the nation-state. In this sense and in many others, I would argue, indigenous cultures are significantly influenced by nationalist precepts but theirs is a nationalism “from below” that forges a fragile and temporal pan-indigenous unity in key political moments (Stephen 1996b). Recent arguments about the rise of these “new ethnicities” claim that the concept of the nation appropriated from below occurs in relation to the particular regional and historical circumstances of land distribution and conflicts over land, and of the political relations between the indigenous communities and state officials (Field n. d.; Stephen 1996b; Varese 1997). However, the “traditional” association of indigenous peoples with the land is rethought and redefined in the “new ethnicity” paradigm.

“Indians” were incorporated into the Mexican national identity through glorifications, fixation, and homogenization of past cultures (“positive tradition”), while national policy focused on assimilation and conversion of “Indians” into “Mestizos” (i.e. “modern”) through a set of socio-economic rights. The state acted as if indigenous rights were rights accorded to individual citizens belonging to the category of “Indian”. When the state failed in giving those basic rights, it opened up a space for a resistance in which Indianess, a unitary identity, appeared as the way to gain access to collective socio-economic and political rights. Indianess, then, became the platform through which indigenous peoples attempt to democratize the state by demanding respect for their internal practices and decision-making modes and for demanding autonomy and self-determination⁵. However, if the route to autonomy is through specific laws which accord rights, the process of gaining autonomy involves becoming further incorporated into the administrative and legal function of the state (Stephen 1996b). Furthermore, even in the US, the Mexican state attempts to domesticate (even though its attempts may not fully succeed) Mixtec ethnicity through “cross-border” politics carried out by governmental institutions and agencies such as the Office for Mexican Communities Abroad. This office, interestingly, was justified on cultural grounds as crossing the borders “to rebuild the culture” and “recapture the Mexican identity” of migrants, Chicanos/as, and Mexican-Americans alike (M. P. Smith 1994). The Instituto Nacional Indigenista has also crossed borders with projects to recreate indigenous culture (Zabin et al. 1993). Mexican nationality does provide migrants an assumed common identity on a day-to-day basis. They also use it to differentiate themselves from “Chicanos/as” and “Mexican-Americans”—who are, nevertheless, perceived as sharing with them various cultural and biological traits—as well as from other social groups. The coexistence of ethnic identifications and nationalist feelings can be better understood if we look at the particular ways in which nationalism and ethnicity are constructed reciprocally (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Williams 1989), even in transnational contexts (Alonso 1994; Appadurai 1993; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Gupta 1992; Rouse 1995b).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Oaxacalifornia: A Transnational Community?

Contrary to still dominant popular and scholarly assumptions I do not believe (1) that the processes of self-identification of Mixtec migrants in the United States follow a linear and inevitable course of unidirectional assimilation, over the life course of an individual or within two or three generations, that can be traced in a continuum from Mixtec from community “X” (locality) to Mexican (national) to Mexican-American (ethnic) to Chicana/o (minority) or Anglo (mainstream) identities; or that can be traced from peasant to farm laborer or to blue collar worker; (2) that migrants simply adapt to the new context and assume existing identities; (3) nor are their identities, traditions, and politics of identity simply the product of either their identification with “Mexican” (national) history and traditions or with “Mixtec” (ethnic) culture. Rather, I argue that, as

⁵ The Mexican constitution now recognizes the existence of cultural rights of indigenous peoples, and the state also recognizes “human rights” as a legitimate discourse within which to conduct politics.

Mexican migrants move across the transnational space, they constantly re-imagine and co-construct a variety of ethnicized (pan-Mixtec) and nationalized (“Mexicanized” and “Americanized”) identities and, in the process, internalize and challenge hegemonic notions of ethnic and national identities while constructing alternative ethnic and national identities.

Before discussing nation-building and ethnicity-building processes among Mixtec migrants, the object of study of this research, we need to establish the ontological basis of their transnational character. Transnationalism is defined by Basch et al. “as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.” Thus, identity-making among transmigrants is “embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states.” (1994:7). For Rouse (1991), transnationalization is not only the capacity to forge multi-stranded social relations but, very importantly, the capacity to deploy new technologies that make possible for people to participate simultaneously in different places, thus, he talks about *transnational circuits*. This idea has been used in recent studies of transnational migration from Mexico inspired specially by Rouse, however the nature of these circuits still needs to be investigated and theorized further. Zabin et al. (1993) argue that Mixtec migrants belong to *transnational communities* due to their relatively short migration history and incipient settlement in the United States, and as a consequence of the migrants’ especially strong ties to their home villages in Oaxaca, created by community citizenship obligations (see also Kearney 1991). Various scholars have challenged the long-standing anthropological notion of community (see for example, Kearney 1991; Warren 1978; Watanabe 1990). John Monaghan (1995) argues that instead of searching for models on finished social groups, we need to focus on local articulations of how collectivities emerge out of particular relations and interactions. He studied forms of sociality in Nuyoo, a community of La Mixteca Alta, to understand how Nuyootecos define their distinctiveness. The extent to which Mixtec migrants are creating and participating in transnational circuits and communities according to their own conceptual “local” models has to be established empirically, as it is through these conceptual idioms that we can understand the nature and direction of changes within collectivities (Mato 1994; Warren 1978). However, an important working assumption for this research is that the cultural (re)production of the Mixtec “communities” occurs simultaneously in various sites within Oaxacalifornia.

We need to be careful to characterize migrants identities simply as fluid, multiple, situational...even in the migrants’ transnational context, their identity-making results from, is constrained by, and affects the historical processes linked to state-formation, such as nationalism, that have shaped the relations between the different groups that claim Mexican background (cf. Glick Schiller et al. 1992; 1995). Given that “change occurs within a constrained and processual framework of meaning,” and collective identities are formed by the interaction between history and culture in a process that Richard Wilson calls “constrained refashioning,” (1995) we must pay close attention to different elements of historical processes: the age, gender, class, regional, and racial/ethnic differentiation and hierarchization in Mexico and the US as they are embedded in the performance and

representation of “traditions”. Rather than assuming that their presence suffice to give them explanatory status as it is problematic in much of the existing literature, we need to develop an analytical model in which their influence is empirically established. Instead of asking what are the main social processes that shape the phenomena of identity-making, we need to ask *what particular element directly impinges on the practice of a particular tradition at a given moment?* In this research I am particularly interested in analyzing these historical processes in the context of and through the formation of “new ethnicities”, such as in the formation of a pan-Mixtec ethnicity, using a state-centered analysis that recognizes how it attempts to redirect the migrants’ incorporation into the nation-state.

B. Traditions as Rights: Idioms of Nationalism, Ethnicity and Gender.

The contributions of the existing anthropological studies on ethnicity and nationalism lie in that they have shown that these ideologies reify tradition and culture in order to construct bounded cultural objects (through boundary mechanisms and the inventive use of history to create the impression of continuity); stress solidarity across class; operate through politics of exclusion and inclusion; and appropriate symbols and meanings from cultural contexts which are important in people’s everyday experiences. As Fox (1990) has recognized, the main problem of these studies is that they posit the nations and the ethnic group as cultural products and nationalism and ethnicity as cultural processes of collective identity formation. Feminist approaches have drawn our attention to the need to study the construction of national cultures and identities in the field of ideology and power relations in order to understand how the naturalization of power differentials operates in the production of kinship and family systems, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class, and so forth, in nation-building through the definition of substance (C. A. Smith 1997; Williams 1995), and to understand how gender relations shape negotiations over citizenship as women and men have distinct places and identities through which express claims (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992).

It is important to recognize that there are official nationalisms as well as “popular” nationalisms or nationalisms “from below” (Anderson 1992; Appadurai 1993; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Rowe and Schelling 1991; Stephen 1996b) or, put in another way, state and non-state nationalisms (Hale and Smith 1991). The current primacy accorded to nations and national belonging give rise to this kind of nationalisms. Nationalism, in addition to contribute to a sense of continuity with history and culture, gives a sense of place (i.e. territory) to people (Alonso 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). While ethnicity also gives a sense of place (e.g. place of birth), it utilizes above all the notion of shared descent (Alonso 1994; Williams 1989). Given that the political, economic, cultural and social dynamics of place are a defining marker of the lived experience of people we need to look at national identity—the identity between people, heritage, territory, and state—and new ethnic identities—the identity between people, heritage, and space—as a product of the interaction of global, national, regional, and local affiliations which provide potential sites for creation and reproduction of subjectivities (Alonso 1994; Kearney 1996; Lomnitz 1992; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Rouse 1995a). Since these sites are gendered there are different affiliations to nationhood. In doing an analysis of the multiple sites and socio-spatial

relationships through which national identities and ethnic identities are made we draw attention to the contingency and tenuousness of affiliations with the “national place” and on the power relations and positionings through which a sense of belonging is mediated. Furthermore, we can also recognize the kinds of inclusions and exclusions present in all forms of nationalisms and ethnicities.

In early Mexican nationalism indigenous femininity (in the figure of La Malinche or Malintzin) symbolized treachery and conquest of nationhood in the literature that attempted to glorify Mexico’s prehispanic traditions (see Paz 1959), it symbolized the origin of Mexican nationality in the literature that praised the creation of a new mestizo fusion of cultures. In any case, indigenous femininity is seen as dangerous and as a container of the nation’s blood. In Chicana revisions of La Malinche (Alarcón 1983, 1989; Cypess 1991) she is neither of these images but instead the first woman to cross boundaries. While her body is marked as the boundary between cultures (she is an insider/outsider), she can potentially explode such boundaries (cf. Mallon 1996; C. A. Smith 1996). Racialized gendered historical narratives are greatly implicated in ethnicity and nation-building. Women are more selectively and restrictedly drawn into ethnic and national communities than men are, thus, they are disempowered by them. As Mixtec women’s spheres of activities and interactions change through migration and in the transnational spaces into which they come in, they can start imagining themselves and relating to the state in different ways. Whether or not the new forms of self-formation and self-definition through the discourses of human rights and ecopolitics (Kearney 1996) can profoundly challenge the gendered images in ethnicity and nationalism remains to be investigated.

According to Foster (1991) nation and ethnicity-building processes can be studied through 1) the practices whereby time and space become bounded, whereby individual and collective memory becomes engendered and embodied; 2) the technologies of power through which the state agencies control, and classify citizens; and 3) the practices in which agents constitute themselves as subjects through the fabrication and interaction with a world of commodified objects. I will focus on the first set of issues. An exploration of “traditions” that are depicted as Mexican or Mixtec or as part of the community’s culture in a particular context will help me uncover the underlying basis of both the communities’ and the state representatives’ senses of identity. It can also help clarify the acceptable grounds of social change in transnational contexts where migration brings about a disruption between place and identity. Since place is still important because migrants need to create a social space in which to express belonging, at the same time that there is a need to define those which are Other (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), national and ethnic traditions still hold an ambiguous promise of community and continuity (cf. Albó 1995; Anderson 1992; Appadurai 1993; Rowe and Schelling 1991; Yúdice et al. 1992). How are traditions born, nurtured, and grow, and the political implications and cultural consequences of enacting ethnic and national traditions are crucial in understanding the formation of “new ethnicities.”

I hypothesize that the process of cultural recovery is centered on those activities that most clearly mark the communities as indigenous and Mixtec—language, bilingual

education, rhetoric of identity-making, juego de pelota, fiestas—given their embeddedness in the context of pan-indigenous politics and activism and assimilationist (e.g. nationalist) pressures from both Mexican and the US states, and from within the local community. Mixtec organizations that have a recovery agenda work within the structure of traditional community authority but their activities run counter to community concepts of tradition and self-identity. I will focus on the relationship between the organization and the community and how young transmigrants respond to the organization's agenda of cultural recovery. The cultural repertoire available to young people is greatly increased by the forces of global capitalist commodity production encountered in popular culture. Thus, they have to actively negotiate different sets of ideas and conceptions of the social world. Traditions and identities, however, do not exist outside of the realm of power relations since they are not solely points of identifications but positionings (Hall 1991, 1994; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and, very importantly, they do not exist outside of the realm of the state. Rowe and Schelling (1991) remind us that popular culture is one site where popular subjects are formed.

C. Can "New Ethnicities" Challenge the Cultural Inscription of the State?

Brackette Williams studies (1989, 1995) link the symbolics of identity formation to an understanding of the distribution of rights and obligations. By utilizing the nation-state as the center of her analysis argues that, in nationalism, ethnicity is an euphemism for a subordinated aspect of identity in putatively homogeneous, class-stratified nation-states. In the creation of homogeneity out of a reality of heterogeneity, of a unitary and socialized substance out of diverse biogenetic substances, of purity out of impurity, nationalism resolves the problem posed by the existence of seemingly culturally different groups through the establishment of the category "ethnic group". In this sense, it can be said that nationality is ethnicized. However, in nationalist ideologies, the concept of race is the reigning image of socialized nature. Thus, ethnicity is defined through an assessment of a) the amount of "right blood" necessary to claim membership in the segmentary hierarchies of ethnicity; b) how the "bloods" of competing groups get into the mainstream of national society, and c) how much cultural change is admissible before a group based on shared descent loses its distinctiveness. In her approach, ethnic movements can be seen as a reaffirmation or re-legitimization of ethnicity in a context of unequal power. But ultimately ethnics, as marginalized groups, learn that national celebrations of ethnicities are just "feathers and flourishes" and they learn that they have little power to turn "feathers and flourishes into brick and mortar". The inventory of attributes each group will claim as diagnostic of its existence as a descent group is relative to the contents claimed by other groups as proof of their contribution to the nation. Ethnic culture is valued and structured in terms of the attributes that provide the group with the strongest claim to equal citizenship.

One of the problems raised by Williams' conceptualization of nationalism and ethnicity is that it gives little room for resistance against the nation-state in as long as hybridity and pluralism within a state-defined population are not ideologically valued end points. If citizenship is framed in terms of global citizenship, as Kearney (1996) claims new

ethnic movements do, and if they conceptualize citizenship within a pluri-nation framework, can they escape the defining power of the nation-state? Can they escape the cultural inscription of state power? In order to evaluate the extent to which indigenous people accept, reformulate or reject hegemonic cultures of ethnic domination, we need to study 1) the articulation between indigenous communities, nation-states and the international (global) order (Alonso 1994; Kearney 1986 and 1996; Mato 1994; C. A. Smith 1990) and the locality⁶ where migrants settle (Appadurai 1991; Ong 1996) while taking the state as one of the possible political and economic contexts in which homogeneity and heterogeneity are produced; and 2) how nationhood is created and inscribed by the state and how it is appropriated by “ethnics” in everyday practices. Nation-building entails not only the creation of purity out of impurity but also working through and with local cultures.

Ana María Alonso (1994) provides us with a more suitable framework of analysis to study ethnicity and nation-building among transmigrants. Using a state-centered analysis she argues that nationalism and ethnicity are constructed reciprocally. The self-identity of nations has been secured partly through the construction of internal Others, whose markedness assures the existence of a national identity. Nationalism is an effect of the totalizing and homogenizing projects of state formation, while ethnicity is partly an effect of the particularizing (creation of heterogeneity) projects of state formation. She argues that the cultural inscription of nationhood and the incorporation of ethnicized subjects occur through five processes: spatialization, substantialization, aestheticization, commodification, and temporalization.

Through the spatialization of time (the transformation of becoming into being through everyday routines rituals, and policies of the state system) ethnicity is used to name and mark off culturally and racially varied places. This approach calls our attention to the politics of spatial organization which have been analyzed in recent studies of nationalism and transnationalism (Albó 1995; Appadurai 1990, 1991, 1993; Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Gupta 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Lomnitz 1992; Malkki 1992; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Rouse 1991, 1992; Rowe and Schelling 1991; A. Smith 1991; Yúdice et al. 1992). Of significance for this project is the question of how do nationalisms construct the displaced, those whose mobility denaturalizes identifications with the state, nation and territory. For Alonso, ethnicity is a belief that ethnic groups are superorganisms characterized by unique repertoires of cultural traits that can be transmitted, borrowed or lost. Furthermore, nationalism particularizes ethnic identities and differentiate their contributions and places in the nations through temporalization and memory-making. That is, through the mediation of the identity of people and heritage in space (see Anderson 1983; Boyarin 1994; Harvey 1989). Ethnicity is fluid but its fluidity is limited by hegemonic processes of inscription and by the relations of forces in society. Thus, the possibility of counter-inventing ethnicity is not always already there. Resistance takes place under conditions of

⁶ Aihwa Ong (1996) argues, for example, that affluent transnational Chinese in California can escape, to some extent, the disciplining of the state because of the flexibility of their capital; however, they cannot within the locality where their families are based, because the flexibility of Chinese professionals shifting back and forth across the Pacific contradicts notions of belonging as normative American citizens.

inequality that limit the power of the subordinated subjects to redefine their status and their place in and contributions to the imagined national community. In transnational communities, however, resistance is organized in space (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992), not exclusively in place (e.g. territory), opening the possibilities to form broader coalitions from which to challenge the state (Alonso 1994; M. P. Smith 1994). But, as long as new ethnic movements continue using idioms of kinship through which moralize hierarchical social relations, gendered images to construct collective identities and communities, folklorized images of Indianess and authenticity, all through which the state substantializes, aestheticizes and commodifies difference, resistance to the definitional power of the nation-state is, at its best, partial.

Migration desnationalizes and nationalizes, desethnicizes and ethnicizes the experience of transnational migrants: they do attempt to create territorial identities (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; A. Smith 1991), even in the mingling of two or more localities (Appadurai 1990). Mixtec migrants, as indigenous “minorities” both in Mexico and the US do not participate of the “fictive” ethnicity of the nation (mestizo Mexican nation; Anglo-Saxon American nation). This is an endemic situation in contexts of racism where there is no full access to democracy and citizenship for all ethnic groups. However, Mixtec migrants do engage in nation-building by reconstructing the national story drawing on global, regional and local ideas and affiliations through the ethnicization of locality, that is through the construction of an oppositional, and I would argue nationalized, ethnic identity. In the mean time, the state is also attempting to create new hegemonies, new official nationalisms through which to rearticulate the nation (cf. Mallon 1995). But the fact that issues of ethnicity and culture emerge as important aspects of the transnational era evidences the failure of official discourses to become common sense. Internal and external migration then, can be seen as an aspect of formation of national belonging and citizenship because it allows migrants to engage with national institutions such as schooling, hospitals, public services, state administration, and so forth, through which they negotiate their relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory (Ong 1996).

D. What's Age Got to Do with It?

As children and young people are the foci of gender-specific roles in the family, are objects of regulation and development in school, and are symbols of the future and of what is at stake in contests over cultural identity, it is important to study how transnational and local politics of culture affect them and how young people themselves experience, understand, resist, or challenge the cultural politics that inform their daily lives (Stephens 1995). Even though researchers have “recognized” that children and young people are active social participants, there are a few studies on the construction of identity among young Mexican migrants and other groups that claim Mexican background (Baca Zinn 1980; Davidson 1996; García 1981; Keefe and Padilla 1987; Portes and Zhou 1993; Skerry 1993; Vigil 1997), and almost none on Mixtec youth. The literature on Mexican youth in the US has focused mainly on Chicano/a political activism (Muñoz 1989), educational performance, and linguistic issues (Matute-Bianchi 1986; Ogbu 1982, 1987, and 1991; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-

Orozco 1993 and 1995), without paying enough attention to the self-identification of migrants and their differing politics of identity (an exception to this is Vigil 1997). Moreover, thorough and significant research examining young Mexican migrants from different class, race/ethnic, gender, age, and regional backgrounds is noticeably lacking.

In the literature on Chicano/a political activism by Chicanos it is claimed that the Chicano movement has shaped the perceptions of other Mexican-Americans and Mexicans concerning the saliency of their ethnic and working-class identities and their significance for political activism, regardless of whether or not they have adopted a Chicano/a identity (Gutiérrez 1995). Chicano nationalist discourse contends that Mexicaness is defined by “the” indigenous past, contemporary lower-class status and racial oppression of Mestizos. Through the construction of a unique lineage stemming from the center of Mexico—a place imagined and claimed as Aztlán—this discourse has downplayed differences in history, migratory experiences, linguistic preferences, sexual orientations, gender, and the internal division of social class and race (Chabram and Fregoso 1990; Fregoso 1993). Thus, by selectively remembering and forgetting, Chicano nationalist discourse largely ignores the experiences and identifications of recent Mexican migrants, particularly those of young Mexican women and indigenous peoples. Therefore, it is not strange that young female and male Mixtec migrants respond to Chicano nation-building projects in different ways by adopting it, accommodating to it, or challenging it. Such responses develop not only out of the lived experiences and memories of migration, but out of their gender, racial/ethnic, regional and class positionings in Mexico and the US, and their negotiation between such positionings. However, given the extensive engagement and support of various Chicanos/as groups with the Zapatista cause, there are new discourses about indigeness and the relationship between Chicanos/as and their indigenous background that need to be documented.

Young Mixtec migrants that come to California already find competing discourses about what it means to be Mexican, indigenous, and Mixtec that originate from other groups that claim Mexican descent like Chicanos/as, from the Mexican state and the US state, from Mixtec intellectuals, leaders, and anthropologists. When these migrants return to their communities in La Mixteca, they also confront local discourses of what it means to be Mexican, indigenous and a member of the community. All of these identities are contested by Mexican and international academics, indigenous intellectuals, state officials, migrants, community elders, and so forth. Most migrants from La Mixteca region in Oaxaca still self-identify primarily with their particular local communities because of the history of land conflict and community-state relations. Rouse (1995a) in analyzing questions of identity among migrants from Michoacán argues that, even though Aguilillans recognize the geopolitical forms of ordering that constitute them simultaneously as Aguilillans, Michoacanos, and Mexicans, these attributions and distinctions rarely play a significant part in their understanding of the world. Instead of being preoccupied with the “Who am I?” (a bourgeois notion), they are more concerned with “Where do I stand? How should I conduct myself in relation to others?” Monaghan (1995) in a study of local versions of community in La Mixteca has noted that Santiago Nuyoo sociality is precisely based on the similar preoccupations: on notions of the house functions as an image of

social relatedness. As migrants move within and beyond nations, become interpolated by states and the media, they become bearers of individual and collective identities, such as citizenship and nationality, without losing their local notions of collectivities and how they are formed. Thus, a localized, ethnicized, and nationalized Mixtec identity is becoming an important resource and currency for collective mobilization in a transnational political field. While I agree that transnational migrants can produce alternative forms of identity that can potentially escape the definitional and institutional power of the nation-state, I argue that, in a transnational space, their processes of identity formation have to be understood as nation-building projects themselves. And as such, the mobilization of ethnicity, race, nationality, or community have to be studied “in relation to the societal production of enduring categorical distinctions and not simply in terms of individuals adopting and ‘shedding’ particular manifestations of those categorical distinctions” (Williams 1989:428). As migrants are becoming transnationalized and are creating transnational spaces, and as “deterritorialized” nation-states (Glick Schiller et al. 1994) are seeking new ways of controlling and exercising power over such populations, nationalist precepts still operate through and affect social relations. Malkki suggests in a study of the prevalence of nature imagery in different nationalisms, that there may even exist a transnational culture of nationalism (In Alonso 1994; cf. Glick Schiller et al. 1995; M. P. Smith 1994) which, I would argue, enables the construction of seemingly “deterritorialized,” “uprooted,” and “fragmented” identities through nationalist images of “cultural aliens” and “undocumented workers,” of (in)authenticity and (il)legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

The significance of this study lies in that young Mixtec migrants’ idioms of identity impact not only local or regional struggles for cultural production in both Mexico and the US, but ultimately affect official projects of nation-building, their politics of identity playing a major role in modern state-formation (cf. Gilbert and Nugent 1994). As nationalism and nationalist feelings are reworked in transnational spaces, so do states struggle to define and create new kinds of subjects and identities. Mexican state officials and institutions have long been concerned with migrants and their political activities in the US as is evidenced by the official visit that the governor of Oaxaca made to California in 1989, after the July 1988 elections in Mexico in which it was though Mixtecs voted overwhelmingly for the Cardenistas, to assess the working conditions and problems of Oaxacan migrants. Given that discourses about immigration are tightly linked to projects of nation-building and given the current political discussion about permitting double citizenship for Mexican citizens in the US and the final approval of the double nationality act, it is necessary to ask: What is the new official identity of the citizen? What kind of transnational subjects and identities are being legitimized by the state? How are transnational subjects, and if are they indeed, challenging the state’s definition of their place and role in the nation?

In sum, I argue that it is necessary to study how different forms of ethnicized and nationalized identities among Mixtec migrants—that are community-based, regionally-based, and transnationally-based—may play very different political roles in different

contexts (cf. Mallon 1996; Rubin 1995). Therefore, not only an analysis of the significance of ethnic identity is needed, but also of the way in which it interacts (and is conflated) with age, gender, class, race, region, nation, and state. A focus on the generational and gendered discursive construction of national and ethnic identities among Mixtec migrants in both Mexico and the US, as it is manifested in the performance and representation of traditions, will show how young people adopt, negotiate, transform, and reshape identities and the politics of identity through the manipulation of history, memory and forgetting, and cultural symbols. The reinterpretation of the past is characteristic of identity politics in modern societies because imputed aboriginality and continuity with the past can be important sources of political legitimacy. Thus, questions of authenticity, legitimacy, and belonging lie at the heart of identity formation and politics (Clifford 1988; Mallon 1996). For this reason, my research project ultimately seeks to illuminate how and through what kind of practices does La Mixteca become a land of the past, a culture with a discernible memory or with a configuration of recognized pasts, and what are the political and cultural consequences for the localities, the nations, and the formation of a transnational space.

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