········
# 10
··········

# Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society[1]

## *Contending Rural Futures: Democratization or Depopulation?*

Does migration take pressure off the Mexican political system, as is widely assumed? The short answer is that scholars lack the tools with which to address the question. Both analysts and politicians often refer to migration as a safety valve that contributes to Mexican stability, yet analysts of rural political change in Mexico are just beginning to take migration into account.

At the peak of contestation over Mexico's 2006 elections, Stanford economic historian Steven Haber warned the readers of the *Wall Street Journal* that shutting Mexico's escape valve of immigration to the USA would increase '[t]he widespread frustration...which fuels the populist presidential campaign of Andrés Manuel López Obrador....There is no scenario in which these developments would be positive for Mexican political and social stability' (2006). Shortly afterwards, a leading Mexican immigrant rights advocate surprised many by welcoming the prospect of a border wall; Primitivo Rodríguez reportedly argued that 'if Mexicans were really shut inside their country...Mexico might be

## 288  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

forced to get its own house in order'.[2] Apparently both those who
favor more pressure from below and those who fear such instabil-
ity can accept the counterfactual hypothesis that a harder border
could promote a left turn in Mexican politics. It is probably no coin-
cidence that rural Mexico's most radical mass movement in recent
decades, Zapatismo, emerged from one of the regions that was *least*
integrated into US labor markets. Indeed, Zapatismo first emerged
from communities of migrant homesteaders who a generation before
had left the highlands for the lowlands.[3] Yet analysis of the rela-
tionship between Mexican migration and collective action remains
incipient.[4]

Migration, the classic exit option, is widely considered to be a sub-
stitute for collective action. Yet there may be conditions under which
exit can *encourage* voice. This chapter proposes conceptual tools for
addressing these issues. While exit might well substitute for voice in
the short term, the emergence of what can be called 'migrant civil soci-
ety' suggests that exit can also be followed by voice. This chapter begins
with a brief empirical review of rural out-migration trends, followed
by a conceptual discussion of the relationship between exit, voice and
loyalty. This provides context for this chapter's main thrust, which is
to sketch an analytical and comparative framework for mapping the
contours of an emerging Mexican migrant civil society. The chapter
concludes with an effort to begin to bridge the persistent gap between
the analysis of migration and development with an analysis of migrant
civil society's 'feedback effects' in Mexico.

The premise here is that both conceptual tools and empirical
research needed for analyzing the relationship between migration and
rural politics beyond the micro-case level are lacking. Yet demographic
data on rural out-migration trends abound. For example, consider the
implications of the fact that the million Mexican farm-workers who
gained US permanent residency under the 1986 immigration reform
were equivalent to *one-sixth* of the adult men in rural Mexico at that
time (Martin 2005: 6). One-quarter of Mexicans who are in the for-
mal sector, earning at least the minimum wage, are now working in
the USA (Carter, Martin, and Zwane 2005). While circular migration

---

[2]  Cited in Thompson (2006: A12). See also Rodríguez (2006).

[3]  See Leyva and Ascencio Franco (1996).

[4]  The first systematic quantitative analysis of exit versus voice in Mexico finds that
high out-migration municipalities had a lower voter turnout rate in 2000 than otherwise
comparable municipalities, leading the authors to speak of a 'political brain drain'. Yet
they also found that high out-migration communities showed higher levels of group
membership. The authors hypothesize that this pattern is explained by residents turning
away from formal politics towards local civic activity stimulated by migrant home-town
associations (HTAs) (Goodman and Hiskey, forthcoming).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society* 289

continues to be viable for those workers who are documented, almost 6 million Mexicans in the USA are not—60 percent of the total (Passel 2005: 4). In other words, for increasing numbers of Mexicans, once-circular migration has become a one-way trip (Cornelius 2001; Durand and Massey 2004). As a result, in increasing numbers of villages, young men and women increasingly *expect* to migrate, rather than envisioning their future in rural Mexico.

Back in 1991, Mexico's then undersecretary of Agriculture, economist Luis Téllez, predicted dramatic changes in the place of agriculture in Mexican society. Thanks to the Salinas government's agricultural policy strategy, combining NAFTA, the withdrawal of production supports for family farming and the Constitutional reform that encouraged individual titling of agrarian reform lands, Téllez estimated that within the following decade, the share of Mexico's economically active population in agriculture would drop from 26 to 16 percent (Fox 1994*c*).

According to economic policymakers, this massive rural exodus was not a problem. According to their logic, it was a solution. The problem was that agriculture's share of GDP was only 7 or 8 percent, much lower than its share of the population. According to their worldview, these percentages should be similar. The dramatic, short-term population shift seen as necessary also promised to flood urban labor markets, keeping wages in export industries low. Since NAFTA, estimated annual Mexican migration levels to the USA rose by 63 percent, from 329,000 people in 1992 to over 530,000 in 2000.[5] Given this context, analysts need to go beyond merely referring in passing to cross-border migration as an 'escape valve' and begin to explore more systematically how migration influences the future of public life in Mexico.[6]

According to the Mexican census of 2000, almost 25 percent of the population continued to live in localities with less than 2,500 inhabitants. This suggests a remarkable persistence of 'rurality', especially when one considers that the government's threshold for defining rural is exceedingly low. Yet when one considers the share of the population

[5] See the trends presented by Passel and Suro (2005: Table 5a). Their estimate of annual Mexican migration rates later fell to 460,000 in 2004, apparently in response to rising US unemployment levels (post 9/11).

[6] Few recall that during much of the 20th century, Mexico's national government actively attempted to control emigration. In the decades following the revolution, when the central government was weaker, municipal and state governments played active roles in encouraging or discouraging emigration, especially through their control of travel documents. Fitzgerald found that local elites in Jalisco actively encouraged the emigration of landless *campesinos* in order to reduce the potential social base for *agrarismo* (2006).

290  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

that is 'economically active' in agriculture, it turns out that Luis Téllez was remarkably prescient. According to the National Employment Survey, agricultural employment fell from 24 percent in 1991 to under 15 percent at the end of 2005 (INEGI 2005). A similar survey found a loss of 1.3 million agricultural jobs between 1993 and 2002 (Polaski 2003: 20). These two respective data trends, for population and employment, indicate a growing gap between the population that lives *in* the countryside and the population that lives *from* the countryside.[7] The growth in the share of the rural population that does not live off of agriculture has major implications for the future of public life in the countryside.[8] This pattern raises the question: how rural is Mexican out-migration? Since the 1990s, migrants to the US increasingly come from urban areas, yet they still came disproportionately from rural areas.[9] According to the national census, 40 percent of US-bound migrants during the 1995–2000 period had rural origins.[10]

Before turning to conceptual issues of exit, voice and migrant civil society, with these large-scale demographic processes as context, it is worth briefly recognizing the role that language plays in shaping how these issues are understood. Powerful discursive frames can make it difficult to recognize migrant agency. Consider some of the conventional terminology. The term 'flow' is especially common, often used in the context of the powerful economic forces of pull and push. Then

[7] For a different comparative reference, remittances reported in 2005 accounted for 70 percent of the value of that year's agricultural production (Zúñiga and Cardoso 2006). As that news report concluded: 'the remittances sent by almost 900,000 farm-workers expelled from the rural areas of the country are practically the mainstay of the Mexican countryside'.

[8] Note that remittances are far from the only nonagricultural source of income for the rural poor. Of the 5 million families that receive welfare payments under the Oportunidades conditional cash transfer program, 69% are rural (Oportunidades 2005), and most of the grain farmers who receive Procampo crop payments are also low-income (World Bank 2004). Mexican policymakers continue to debate what fraction of the population receives remittances. According to the then Undersecretary of Social Development, only 6% of the population group with the highest levels of poverty received remittances regularly, while 90% of that group received government transfer payments from Oportunidades (Muñoz 2004). This empirical debate remains unresolved.

[9] According to a long-term government survey of Mexicans who migrate to the northern border, of those who specifically report the US as their destination, the proportion who came from 'nonurban' areas fell from 43% in 1993–4 to 40% in 2001–2 (STPS, n.d.). Data from the 2000 census could be interpreted as indicating that the rural share of US migrants was close to the overall share of the national population. The population living in localities of less than 10,000 five years earlier was 35.7%, and the share of US migrants who had lived in communities of that size was reported to be 34.6% (INEGI 2000). However, this figure does not include a large 'unspecified' category, and the data on current US residents is likely to be substantially underreported.

[10] See INEGI (2000). Migrants with rural origins continue to be disproportionately male. During the 1995–2000 period, 42% of male migrants to the USA came from communities with less than 2,500 inhabitants, compared to only 30% of female migrants.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*  291

there are the widespread references to 'waves' (e.g. Haber 2006), while policymakers speak of the need to 'choke off the flow' (e.g. Stevenson 2005). Waves, in turn, are not far from 'floods'. US critics of migrants also speak of a 'brown tide' (Santa Ana 2002). The Border Patrol's practice of dealing with non-Mexican unauthorized workers was widely known as 'catch and release', borrowing a term used mainly for sport fishing. All these terms refer to liquids, whose flows are difficult to stop, pulled by higher powers such as gravity. Sometimes flows come together, sometimes they disperse. They always find their niches, through capillary action. Yet this discourse obscures a great deal.[11] First, migration is not only an implicitly inevitable structural process, it also responds to specific public policy decisions.[12] Indeed, the term 'escape valve' does implicitly suggest hands that can open and close off flows. Second, the conventional discourse leaves out the role of *agency*: migrants' capacity to make choices, to act, and sometimes to act collectively. Migrants are not only acted upon, they are also actors. This brings us to the conceptual questions involved in their choices of exit or voice. Indeed, one advantage of these analytical tools is that they emphasize agency, in contrast to economistic approaches that frame migrant workers as anonymous commodities that flow from surplus to deficit areas and sectors.

## *Exit and Voice: Dichotomous or Interactive?*

Overall, in 2000, 14 percent of Mexican-born adult workers were in the USA (Martin 2005: 10). The cumulative result of this exodus of working age adults must affect the prospects for future social and political change in the countryside, but the nature of this impact remains unclear. So far, no research strategy for addressing this question

[11] Similarly, Tsing's analysis of north–south environmental issues critiques the widespread use of the term 'flow' to suggest quasi-natural associations, obscuring tensions and the role of agency—hence her title: 'friction' (2004).

[12] For contrasting analyses of the Mexican agricultural policy decisions in the early 1990s that encouraged increased rural out-migration later in the 1990s, see, among others, Cornelius (2002*a*), Fox (1994*a, c*), Martin (2005), and Puyana and Romero (n.d.). Campesino advocate Victor Suárez was one of the first to draw attention to the Mexican government's decision to open up to imports much earlier than NAFTA required (2005). Few recall, however, the ostensible logic of Mexico's negotiators, who were willing to open up the nation's single-most important crop in exchange for the right to export orange juice to the USA—a commodity that is still marginal for Mexico (Maxfield and Shapiro 1998). Recent Mexican research also finds that 'it was not the US that pressured to open the corn market to free trade, rather the offer came from the Mexican government. Why? One reason, among others, was, to use NAFTA as an excuse and lever to force the traditional Mexican economy to transform itself or die. The second is what ended up happening' (Meyer 2005: 126, citing Lasala 2005).

## 292 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

has overcome the challenge of making counterfactual assumptions. What are the possible impacts of this massive exercise of the 'exit option' on the prospects for addressing the problem of the underrepresentation of the concerns of the rural poor in the national policy process?

It is worth recalling that during the post-NAFTA decade, with the notable exception of the regionally bounded Zapatista movement, Mexico experienced no sustained protest movement of the rural poor of national scope. The well-known Barzón protest movement for debt relief reached national scope after the 1995 peso crisis, but it represented primarily small-to-medium-sized commercial producers.[13] The broad-based but brief 'Countryside Won't Take Any More' 2003 march on Mexico City was the decade's only peasant protest of national significance that focused on making family farming economically sustainable. Though that mobilization was larger than even sympathetic observers expected, it ended up having virtually no impact on national agricultural trade and investment policies, which continued to be extremely biased in favor of better-off producers.[14] This one national protest against agricultural trade opening took place years after most of NAFTA's provisions had already been implemented.

One does not need to assume that those who migrate are necessarily more enterprising than those who stay, in order to conclude that the 'exit option' potentially undermines the capacity for collective action among those left behind. As one of Mexico's most incisive political analysts put it, migration, along with the lack of formal sector employment, 'stimulates the disintegration of the communities and the social fabric that sustain popular movements. They severely erode traditional forms of political and social mediation' (Hernández Navarro 2006: 27).

---

[13] See de Grammont (2001), Williams (1996, 2001). Only a minority of Mexican farmers were sufficiently well-off to have received bank credit in the first place.

[14] On the distribution of Mexican government's agricultural spending across social classes, see the little known but nominally public social incidence analysis by the World Bank (2004*c*). Most analysts would agree that the very modest agricultural policy concessions that the 2003 peasant protest had appeared to win were quickly subsumed by old-fashioned corporatist-style payments to organizations. Once the protesters returned home, the combination of technocratic diversions and the persistent intervention of traditional corporatist peasant groups overwhelmed the national representatives of participating independent organizations. The newly governing PAN discovered the political convenience of providing funds directly to PRI-style peasant organizations, as evidenced by the biased and clientelistic allocation of resources within the federal programs for the rural elderly and rural housing (Pérez 2004; Fox and Haight 2006). For background on the '*El campo no aguanta más*' movement, see, among others, Schwentesius et al. (2004), a thematic issue of *El Cotidiano* (no. 124, March–April, 2004) and the extended debate between leading analysts Luis Hernández Navarro and Armando Bartra in the pages of *La Jornada* during 2003.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   293

In Mexico, the 'exit' option is still widely associated with a lack of loyalty. In spite of the post-2000 change in official Mexican rhetoric towards greater public recognition of migrants' contributions to the homeland, many still refer to those who moved to work in the USA as having 'abandoned' their country.[15] Until very recently, most Mexican political elites treated migrants as second-class citizens, and nationalists close to the PRI considered them too subject to US influence to risk granting them the right to vote (Martínez Saldaña and Ross Pincda 2002).

These concepts of exit, voice and loyalty draw from the classic approach developed by heterodox economist Albert Hirschman (1970, 1981). In this view, simply put, exit and voice are two alternative responses to decline (in firms, organizations, states). Exit refers to opting out, voting with one's feet—whether as consumer changing brands or as emigrant leaving one's homeland. Voice refers to more direct expressions of dissent, whether through protest, electoral contestation or suasion—in its German edition, Hirschman's book title was translated literally as 'Out-migration and Contradicting' (Hirschman 1993: 174). Loyalty cuts across both options, affecting decisions about whether to use exit or voice by making voice more likely. One of Hirschman's main points was that easy availability of exit is inimical to voice, because voice is generally more costly than exit. 'The more pressure escapes through exit, the less is available to foment voice' (Hirschman 1993: 176). This approach appears to account for an extraordinarily wide range of experiences.[16] If this hypothesis holds for rural Mexico, then the implications are dramatic.

Yet the relationship between exit and voice may not be predetermined. This is the context for asking, along with one of Hirschman's

---

[15] For example, when Subcomandante Marcos was recently asked about the relationship between the migrant movement in the USA and 'the other campaign' of the nonparty radical left in Mexico, he replied that they were relating 'from below, through the families. Wherever . . . *the other campaign* has gone, they have told us that there is practically no family that has not lost a member, whether because of death or because they are there [in the US] and don't see them anymore, and they feel the need to rebuild, not only their family, but their community' (quoted in Marcos 2006: 17). Curiously, his response focused exclusively on migrants being 'lost', rather than their new public presence (in the USA), even to the point of implicitly equating their physical absence with death.

[16] For example, many US historians have explained the weakness of 19th century US labor movements with the open frontier and the ease of exit. Tolnay and Beck explain geographic variation in rates of African-American out-migration from the US South during the 1910–30 period and find that exit was more likely in counties where lynchings were more frequent—with terror presumably the opposite of voice (1992). Gammage explores the gendered interaction between exit and voice among Haitian women migrants (2004).

## 294 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

critics, 'whether in some cases the same factors make for exit *and* for lack of voice among those remaining' (Barry 1974: 85). Hirschman later recognized that under certain conditions, exit and voice can be mutually reinforcing, and the East German revolution of 1989–90 offered a vivid example. Indeed, Pfaff and Kim's study of East Germany is especially suggestive, showing how the analysis of collective action can benefit from taking exit into account (2003). They find that the effects of exit on voice depend on the scale and pace of exit, following a U-shaped pattern. Exit can encourage voice by revealing grievances in ways that undermine regime legitimacy, especially if the regime attempts to forbid exit. In this context, exit signals voice. Yet at higher levels, mass exodus undermines the social foundations of protest by siphoning away participants and potential leaders. Pfaff and Kim contrast what they call exit's 'signaling effects' versus its 'network erosion effects' (2003: 438). Yet turning back to Mexico, when one looks for 'signaling effects', more than four million *paisanos* had left the country during the administration of Vicente Fox without apparent dramatic impacts on the regime's political legitimacy (*Milenio* 2006). It remains to be seen under what conditions exit and voice are complementary or contradictory.

Hirschman's original formulation explicitly framed migration and protest as alternatives, citing a study of Italian workers in the first decade of the twentieth century (1981: 226). He recalled that MacDonald asked why levels of out-migration varied so much, even between regions with similar poverty rates (1963). The study found little out-migration from regions with strong, mobilized workers' movements, like the center and Apulia—in contrast to southern Italy, where there was little collective action and a massive exodus. No comparable study of Mexico exists, but it would be useful to compare levels and forms of organization with levels of out-migration across regions and sub-regions. The findings would be unlikely to reveal as clear-cut a pattern as in the Italian case, but one still might find a relationship between exit and voice in rural Mexico at a more general level. Looking back at the dramatic increase in levels of out-migration from Mexico during the 1990s, it might be useful to rethink the importance of the 1994 national elections. The public policies that are now widely associated with the increase in out-migration, notably the withdrawal of support prices, input subsidies for low-income farmers and trade protection for basic grains, date primarily from the Salinas presidency (1988–94). In this sense, the 1994 elections, had they been fully democratic for rural voters, might have served as a referendum on this package of public policies. Yet, as Chapter 5 showed, the systematic lack of a

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   295

guaranteed secret ballot meant that a significant fraction of the rural electorate was denied free and fair electoral choices about their country's national future. As Hirschman noted, the secret ballot is a key mechanism for 'making voice retaliation-proof' (1981: 241). To put this in Hirschman's terms, given the lack of political voice for most of the rural poor, many turned to exit. While this was certainly not the only migratory push factor, out-migration rates did rise substantially over the rest of the decade, perhaps suggesting some relationship between lack of voice and the exit option—at least at that political turning point.[17]

Beyond the electoral arena, through the 1980s and 1990s, many dozens of autonomous regional producer organizations exercised voice through scaled-up community-based economic development alternatives. But many failed to survive the increasingly inhospitable policy environment—as in the case detailed in Chapter 4. The clearest expression of rural political voice during this period came from Mexico's indigenous peoples, whose numerous local and regional organizations began to influence the national political agenda for the first time in the 1990s, especially after the Zapatista rebellion. Yet during the same decade, cross-border migration processes reached most of Mexico's indigenous regions for the first time. Looking back over the past decade and a half, Mexico's indigenous peoples have been exercising *both* voice *and* exit more than ever before. Both decisions involve agency, though with very different implications for the balance of power in the countryside.

If one brings in loyalty as an 'intervening variable' between exit and voice—a factor that influences the choice between collective action in communities of origin versus the individual or family-based strategy of migration, it is worth reflecting on the commonplace Mexican use of the term 'to abandon' one's community. First, one must also recognize that many who migrate *do* abandon their communities. Some do not return. More revealing is the fact that many do not send resources to support their families. Surveys of Mexican migrants report that 45 percent send remittances—which means that a slight majority do *not* (Benavides 2002: 19).

The 'abandonment as disloyalty' view is understandable from the point of view of community organizers. When an organizer migrates, their organization clearly suffers a loss—especially if their training required an investment, as in the case of cooperative certifiers of

---

[17] An alternative explanation should be acknowledged: low US unemployment rates during the Clinton presidency—but the arrow points in the same direction.

## 296 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

organic coffee production (Mutersbaugh 2004). While such scenarios may well be commonplace, the impact of the emigration of activists on Mexican social movements has received remarkably little research attention. Yet what does this suggest for understanding the role of loyalty? From the point of view of an individual committed to change at home who decides to migrate, exit may be understood as an act of loyalty to their family—or as an act of self-preservation in the face of repression. More broadly, Mexican rural development activists and policymakers often use the term 'migration problem', when from the point of view of individual migrants, exit is actually the response (and for some the 'solution') to their employment problem.

In some Oaxacan communities, highly localized identities ground collective efforts to discourage out-migration. While even communities with strong norms lack the clout to prevent members from leaving, they retain indirect leverage that takes the form of strict enforcement of obligatory citizenship duties for those who leave. In these cases, one must make amends in order to be permitted to return in good standing, which includes access to communal land and the right to be buried in one's home village cemetery. There the penalty for noncompliance is 'civic death' (Mutersbaugh 2002). At least one Zapatista local government attempts to discourage migration, though they are unable to forbid it. Their rule requires potential migrants from their communities in resistance to ask permission, to justify their request, and—like in much of Oaxaca—for family members to compensate the community for lost labor (Stahler-Sholk 2006: 20).

Yet the trends of the 1980s and 1990s, involving growing migrant collective action based on shared communities of origin, suggests that many migrants bring their sense of community with them. They recreate their sense of home community with their *paisanos* in the USA, which raises questions about the meaning of 'exit'. This sense of shared collective identity is broadened when hometown associations form statewide federations, constructing a regional civic identity that the migrants may not have shared before they left. Similarly, the collective identity formation experience of Oaxacan indigenous migrants suggests that they developed shared ethnic and pan-ethnic identities through and because of the migration process, leaving behind more traditional, highly localized identities.[18]

These patterns suggest that while exit may sometimes weaken voice, and at other times they may reinforce each other, perhaps exit can

[18] For a review of the growing literature on this process, see Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004). For a related conceptual discussion, see Fox (2006*a*).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   297

**Table 10.1**   Locating migrant civil society in terms of exit and voice

| Exit/Voice options | Silence | Voice |
|---|---|---|
| Leave | *Unorganized migrants* | *Migrant civil society* |
| Stay | *Compliance, clientelism* | *Mass protest, electoral opposition* |

*Note*: This approach draws on ideas presented in Barry (1974), in response to Hirschman (1970).

also reflect the *prior weakness* of voice. Many look to regions of long-term out-migration and see a very thin civil society, yet the cause and effect relationship is not so clear-cut. Many migrants leave regions where rural civil society was *already* thin. In addition, even in regions that had experienced autonomous collective action, few campaigns had produced lasting change, and even fewer could offer viable future options from the point of view of young people.[19] But if we extend the temporal and geographic frame for considering the interaction between exit and voice and take the binational arena into account, new ways of considering the relationship between exit and voice emerge, as well as the role of loyalty as a mediating factor.

Several steps are involved in broadening the frame. The first is to recognize that at least some migrants engage in collective action, along a range of possible pathways to be discussed further below. Second, for many migration has a collective dimension, insofar as it is only possible thanks to extended networks of social capital in which loyalty and trust can make the difference between life and death, between economic success and disaster, and between deep alienation and cultural survival. Third, when migrants send a significant fraction of their wages to their relatives and communities, they are also expressing loyalty. As suggested schematically in Table 10.1, when migrants come together in hometown associations to send collective social remittances for community projects, they are expressing not only loyalty, but also voice directed homeward—as they participate in debates over what social investments are most important. For those migrants who did not have access to autonomous, dense civil society alternatives back home, *their exit can permit the exercise of their collective voice for the first time, whose costs are born out of loyalty*. To sum up before exploring migrant civil society, exit can be a step *towards* voice rather than necessarily a substitute. Meanwhile, the implications for those who remain at home remain to be seen.

---

[19] For a comparison of Mexico's indigenous regions in terms of varying density of autonomous regional organizations, see Chapter 3.

298 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

## Mapping Mexican Migrant Civil Society[20]

As many as hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrants work together with their *paisanos* in the USA to promote 'philanthropy from below', funding hundreds of community development initiatives in their hometowns. Almost 55,000 attempted to register to exercise their newly won right to cast absentee ballots in Mexico's 2006 presidential election. Others are more engaged with their US communities—as organized workers, parents, members of religious congregations, undocumented get-out-the-vote campaigners and naturalized voters. In addition, some Mexican migrants are working to become full members of *both* US and Mexican societies at the same time, constructing practices of *civic binationality*. Many of the migrant activists working at the interface between Mexican and US societies are themselves cross-cultural interlocutors, people who straddle networks.

The patterns of social, civic, and political participation among the Mexican migrants are just beginning to be seriously documented, and major gaps remain. The literature on Mexican hometown associations is becoming increasingly robust, yet it is often difficult to discern the patterns that are specific to Mexicans in the studies that document broader Latino participation in community organizations, unions, or religious congregations. In addition to the gaps in our basic knowledge about what the key trends look like, our capacity to *understand* these patterns of migrant collective action is also limited, in part because our conceptual frameworks have lagged behind migrant realities. Both Mexican and US approaches for understanding migrants remain basically national in their focus.

US-based frameworks focus primarily on the degree to which migrants are incorporated into US institutions, and do not take into account how migrants are organizing themselves, often in relation to their communities of origin. The ethnic politics literature that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to explain patterns of participation among Mexican-Americans has limited applicability to the millions of migrants who grew up in Mexico. A transnational perspective is needed to understand migrants' nationally and regionally distinctive worldviews and organizing repertoires—to understand, in other words, 'where they are coming from'.

In contrast, Mexico-based lenses see a broad panorama of cross-border migrant collective action, as migrants organize as

---

[20] The following section draws on Fox (2005*d*). Lanly and Valenzuela (2004) also use the term 'migrant civil society', though limited to the world of Mexican HTAs. The use here is broader and not limited to 'homeward-oriented' associationalism.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society* 299

Mexicans—yet they have difficulty accounting for patterns of continuity and change in terms of migrants' integration into US society. To sum up, the research literature has not analyzed migrant integration into the USA in ways that fully take into account the process from Mexicans' points of view. To see the full picture, we need to look *both* at how migrants are organizing themselves in relationship to Mexico and other Mexican migrants, *and* at how they are organized in the USA, as residents, workers, parents, or members of faith-based communities.

Increasingly, to account for both migrant collective action and patterns of continued engagement with their home countries, scholars have worked with the concept of 'transnational communities'. Transnational communities are groups of migrants whose daily lives, work, and social relationships extend across national borders.[21] This idea helps to reveal relationships that are not visible when migrants are seen only through the lens of their engagements in the USA, yet the concept also risks tilting too far in the other direction, leaving out migrants' multiple engagements in the USA. Moreover, transnational communities provide a social foundation for, but are not the same as, an emerging *migrant civil society*, which also involves the construction of public spaces and representative social and civic organizations. Just as only *some* migrants are members of transnational communities, only *some* transnational communities become the building blocks for representative social and civic organizations of migrants themselves. This idea is the point of departure for a *comparative approach* to analyzing the diverse and sometimes overlapping patterns of migrant collective action in the USA.[22]

Most often, in migration studies, comparative analysis refers to the comparison of different national origin groups. This approach, most

[21] For reviews of the flourishing sociological literature on transnational communities, see, among others, Fletcher and Margold (2003), Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003), Levitt (2001), Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999), Portes (2003), Smith and Guarnizo (1998), and Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004). Much of this debate is framed in the broader context of 'transnationalism'. For those who use survey methods, the individual is the unit of analysis. Guarnizo, Portes, and Heller find that a modest share of the migrant population participates intensively in collective transnational activities, while a larger group participates intermittently. Compared to high expectations associated with a romanticized view of transnational communities, these levels of reported participation appear low. However, if one compares reported participation to levels among members of other groups, especially when controlling for education and income, then they may not seem so low.

[22] Note that these specifically migrant-led membership organizations are all distinct from those that emerged from the Mexican American civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The Chicano movement generation of organizations included both internationalist and cultural-nationalist wings that identified as Mexican and *mexicano*. See Gutiérrez (1995, 1996) for historical analysis and Jones-Correa (2005*a*, 2005*b*) for contemporary perspectives.

## 300 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

often used in survey research, has generated rich findings.[23] Yet the Mexican migrant population in the USA is so large, and so diverse, that national-origin averages can mask key variables, such as ethnicity, region of origin, or region of settlement. Note that migrants from different Mexican states organize hometown associations at widely varying rates, and Mexicans from the same states organize at different rates in different regions of the USA (Rivera-Salgado, Bada, and Escala-Rabadán 2005). Among indigenous Mexican migrants, members of some ethnic groups organize much more than others, in some regions more than others. Sectoral differences may also matter, insofar as we have not yet compared participation trends across hometown associations, worker organizations, neighborhood associations or religious communities. In the literature on naturalization and voting patterns of new citizens, it turns out that national samples can hide significant regional differences. Migrants in California have followed a much more highly politicized path than those in Texas and Florida, in terms of their rates of naturalization and voting (Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001). These differences only become visible once one takes a comparative approach—across states, regions, sectors, and patterns of participation.

One of the main puzzles to consider here is whether the models of civic and social engagement that we work with, the lenses that we use to see how and why people engage in collective action, see home country engagement as 'instead of' or 'in addition to' participation in the host society. This could be seen as the inverse of the exit-voice dichotomy, in which voice back home is assumed to involve deferring on voice in communities of residence. Is the relationship between these two kinds of participation 'win-lose' or 'win-win'? Some see the answer as culturally predetermined, but this review of the research available finds no predetermined response. We can find both trends at the same time in the same communities. We can also see change over time. In other words, the terms of engagement are politically contingent— as in the case of the recent growth in the rate at which Mexican legal residents become US citizens.[24] This variability suggests that strategy, context and institutions matter. If this proposition holds up, then one could go further and suggest that strategies for encouraging civic participation 'here' that *take into account* engagement 'there' can increase the degree to which each kind of involvement can bolster the other.

[23] See, among other recent studies, DeSipio et al. (2002, 2006), DeSipio (2004), and Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2004).

[24] According to Fix, Passell, and Sucher, the fraction of Mexican permanent residents who had become US citizens grew from 19% in 1995 to 34% in 2001 (2003: 3).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   301

What are some of the implications of the term 'migrant civil society'? Simply put, migrant civil society refers to *migrant-led membership organizations and public institutions*. This includes four very tangible arenas of collective action. Each arena is constituted by actors, while each set of actors also constitutes an arena.[25]

## *Migrant-led Membership Organizations*

Membership organizations composed primarily of migrants can range from hometown associations (HTAs) to worker organizations, religious associations and indigenous rights groups. In other words, they tend to come together around four broad collective identities—territory of origin, shared faith, work, and ethnicity.[26] Sometimes, these identities overlap, as in the cases of specifically Oaxacan catholics in Los Angeles or religious farm-workers in the Midwest, where union leaders preside over weddings and baptisms (Franklin 2006).

## **Hometown Clubs and Federations**

Most of the territorially based organizations take the form of hometown associations (HTAs) and their federations. The Mexican consulates have registered well over 600 hometown clubs (Rivera-Salgado, Bada, and Escala Rabadán 2005).[27] Each has a core membership of perhaps an average of two dozen families, some with hundreds more. They are primarily concentrated in metropolitan areas. Many HTA members are relatively well-established, and are better-educated than average among migrants. Much of their leadership has relative economic stability and are either legal residents or US citizens (e.g. Alarcón 2004; Alarcón, Runsten, and Hinojosa-Ojeda 1998). Leadership is also heavily male, and with a significant presence of entrepreneurs. Hundreds of HTAs have in turn federated into associations that

---

[25] Definitional note: While this approach accepts the widely held proposition that the density of civil society constitutes the social foundation for democracy, it does not assume that civil society organizations are necessarily either democratic or democratizing. Indeed, recalling Gramsci, much of civil society reproduces dominant social hierarchies and is invested in maintaining the status quo. Hence the importance of unpacking civil society into its distinct components, to be able to identify where democratizing potential lies.

[26] It should be noted that Mexican and other Latin American migrant entrepreneurs also come together in their own business associations and professional associations, as in the case of many Spanish-speaking Chambers of Commerce, professional, and service organizations. As many as 10% of Lions Clubs members are immigrants (Ly 2005).

[27] Orozco and LaPointe claim over 2000 clubs (2004: 31).

302 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

bring people from one state in Mexico together in another state in the USA, as in the flagship case of the numerous Zacatecas Federations.

It is difficult to measure how many migrants participate with any precision, especially given the wide variation in the size and activities of each HTA and federation. In addition, the official consular registries include some clubs that exist only on paper, while some active associations choose not to register. An unusually large-scale survey of relatively recent Mexican migrants found that 14 percent of respondents belonged to some kind of hometown association, with higher rates reported for men and for migrants over 30 years of age (Suro 2005*c*). Whether this is considered a large or a small percentage depends on one's comparative frame of reference.

Today's Mexican HTAs have a long history, with the first Zacatecan club in California dating back to 1962 (Moctezuma 2005). But their numbers and membership boomed in the last fifteen years, as the result of several converging factors. Within the USA, the massive regularization of undocumented workers that followed the 1986 immigration reform facilitated both economic improvement and increased cross-border freedom of movement for millions of migrants. On the Mexican side, the government deployed the convening power of its extensive consular apparatus, bringing together people from the same communities of origin and offering community development matching funds to encourage collective social remittances, through the 3x1 program. Though this policy began as a response to pressures from organized Zacatecan migrants, it also served as a powerful inducement for other migrants to come together in formal organizations for the first time. After all, many transnational social and civic relationships unfold outside of the clubs and federations (Fitzgerald 2000). In addition, the Mexican state changed the tone of its relationship with the diaspora by formally permitting dual nationality for the first time (Castañeda 2004, 2006). While many clubs emerged from below, many of the state level federations were formed through engagement with the Mexican state (Goldring 2002).[28] This raises questions about the degree to which the state migrant federations involve new, cross-border forms of corporatist representation.

[28] For more on Mexican HTAs, see also, among others, Bada (2001, 2004*a*, 2004*b*), Cano (2002, 2004*a*, 2004*b*), Escala Rabadán and Zabin (2002), Espinosa (1999), Fitzgerald (2000, 2004*b*), Goldring (1998, 2002), Lanly and Valenzuela (2004), Leiken (2000), Moctezuma (2003*a, b,* 2005), Orozco, González, and Díaz de Cossio (2003), Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán (2004), Smith (2003), Smith (1995, 1998, 2003), and Williams (2004). On the strategies of the Mexican state, see also Ayón (2005), García Zamora (2005*a, b*), Goldring (2002), Gonzalez Gutiérrez (1993, 1997, 1999), and Martínez Saldaña (2003).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society* 303

At least until recently, many Mexican migrant organizations were disengaged from US civil society. For example, in 1994, few Mexican hometown associations participated in the broad campaign against California's notorious anti-immigrant Proposition 187 (Zabin and Escala Rabadán 1998). In contrast, a decade later, when California's main state level immigrant rights advocacy campaign involved the right to drivers licenses for the undocumented, hometown association members were actively involved, working the phone banks at the headquarters of the Los Angeles trade union movement.[29] The leadership of the Southern California Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations has now joined the fray of state politics (Rivera-Salgado, Bada, and Escala-Rabadán 2005). Some Mexican federations have also joined the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, especially in the Midwest.[30] Meanwhile, mainstream US Latino politicians and public interest groups are also reaching out to Mexican HTAs like never before (e.g. Hecht 2005).[31] This contrasts with the once widely held view among Latino civil rights advocates that immigrant home country engagements were potentially in conflict with encouraging civic participation in the USA.[32] This array of Mexican migrant alliances within the USA would have been hard to imagine a decade ago.[33]

## Faith-based Organizations

While HTAs are one of the main forms of expression of Mexican migrant civil society, they have received more scholarly and press attention than the other main categories of membership organizations,

[29] On the role of Los Angeles trade unions as channels for political participation by noncitizens, see Varsanyi (2004, 2005). On the drivers' license campaigns in California and elsewhere, see Ansley (2005), Seif (2003), and Waslin (2002). On the contested terrain of state and local immigration policies more generally, see Wells (2005).

[30] Founded in 2004, NALACC is a national coalition of diverse migrant-led organizations that encourages civic engagement both in the USA and in their countries of origin. See www.nalacc.org.

[31] As a precedent, in 1999–2000, the National Council of La Raza convened at least three meetings to explore relationships with Mexican HTAs, with a focus on community economic development, collective remittances, and the formalization of nonprofit status for HTAs in the USA. See Mexico-US Advocates (2000).

[32] On relations between Mexican migrants and Mexican-Americans, the classic work is Gutiérrez (1995, 1996, 1998, 1999). See also Fitzgerald (2004*b*), Jones-Correa (2005), and Pitti (2003*b*).

[33] In smaller cities, however, the distance between mainstream Latino organizations and organized migrants can remain significant. In Salinas, California, for example, according to local community organizers, Mexican HTAs have long been invisible to local Latino political and nonprofit leaders (field interviews, August, 2005).

### 304  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

notably religious, worker, community-based and indigenous organizations.[34] Faith-based associations are among the most widespread forms of collective action among Mexican immigrants. According to Pew Hispanic Center surveys, by far the leading category of 'volunteer activity' among both US and foreign-born Latinos is church-related (Suro 2005: 5). Cano's comparison of Mexican Catholics in Houston, Chicago and New York highlights the diverse patterns of interaction between religion and civic engagement (2004*c*). While many congregations generate social or civic action among migrants—as with the rest of the population—the degree to which they do so, as well as the different pathways they follow, have yet to be well-documented.

The Catholic Church has been reorienting towards its new mass constituency, and has become one of the most important forces promoting immigration reform in the USA, but it remains unclear the degree to which congregations and related organizations are actually immigrant-led.[35] Faith-based groups, like worker organizations, are also likely to bring together Latin American immigrants of diverse national origins, bolstering the social foundations of the concept of Latino.

Beyond the Church itself, the most prominent specifically Mexican faith-based membership organization that is consistently active in promoting a rights-based approach to civic and social issues is the New York-based *Asociación Tepeyac*. Tepeyac is well-known for leading its own mass traveling collective action for immigrant rights, an annual relay Torch Run that travels through several of Mexico's 'sending' regions and arrives in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on December 12 (*Antorcha Guadalupana Mex-NY*). Along the way, the runners, called *Mensajeros por la Dignidad de un Pueblo Dividido por la Frontera* [Messengers for the Dignity of a People Divided by the Border] pray to the Virgin for the right to permanent legal residency.[36]

---

[34] Few cases of gender-based Mexican migrant membership organizations have emerged. The most notable example is Líderes Campesinas, a membership organization of women farmworkers in California, mainly from migrant families (Blackwell 2006). Founded in 1992, Líderes organizes *mexicanas* to create and occupy public spaces in small rural towns. They literally take to the streets, marching to challenge domestic violence and impunity, showing that the barrier between public and private can be challenged. Like many other US grassroots organizations with a primarily Mexican migrant membership, Líderes Campesinas is led by a bilingual, US-born daughter whose parents participated in the United Farm Workers movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

[35] The main Catholic advocacy campaign brings together a wide range of US religious authorities, health and education institutions, including the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Jesuits. See www.justiceforimmigrants.org. Kerwin reports that 'nearly 80' dioceses had 'initiated' local campaigns by 2006, of a total of almost 200. On bishops' national political role in the 2006 immigration debate, see Swarns (2006).

[36] See www.tepeyac.org.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   305

Their repertoire resonates widely, though Mexicans in New York also form hometown associations and worker organizations.

The Tepeyac Association pursues a distinctive strategy for forging collective identity, based around the combined ethnonational and spiritual symbolism of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, together with an explicit effort to build a shared collective identity as undocumented workers. Founded by Jesuits, their New York City social base is organized in forty different neighborhood *Comités Guadalupanos*. This is very different from the hometown-based approach to migrant organizing. Tepeyac's original US partner was the New York Diocese of the Catholic Church, whose leadership took the initiative that led Tepeyac to form in the first place, by reaching out to Mexican church counterparts.[37]

Another major form of immigrant participation in faith-based organizations is through the Industrial Areas Foundation's many regional affiliates.[38] IAF members number in the hundreds of thousands. The IAF is a secular network, but one of its main organizing strategies is to work with communities that are already involved through their congregations. IAF organizers often begin to work in regions through alliances with religious leaders—notably Catholic bishops. IAF affiliate organizations are multiethnic and multiracial, but Mexican-Americans are especially well-represented, especially in Texas, Illinois, California, and Arizona. In this context, Mexican immigrants clearly participate, though available research does not address their specific role and presence in network affiliates (e.g. Warren 2001). At least one major union organizing success involving primarily Mexican and Guatemalan meatpacking workers in Omaha, involved both an IAF-affiliate (Omaha Together One Community—OTOC) and the United Food and Commercial Workers (Bacon 2002, 2006; Fine 2006). OTOC, in turn, brings together more than thirty-five organizations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish congregations, as well as the Omaha Latino Soccer League and *Charros* Hometown Association.[39]

Both the institutional church and faith-based community organizations are widely recognized to have played very significant roles in the spring, 2006 mobilizations, most notably in southern California. Indeed, some church activists explicitly contested the media version

---

[37] See Gálvez (2004), Rivera-Sánchez (2004*a*, 2004*b*, 2005), and Solís (2001, 2002). On local level Catholic Church responses to Mexican migration, including changing forms of popular religiosity, see also Machuca (2004). More research is necessary to document the full picture of cross-border collaboration between Mexican and US churches. For a historical perspective, see Fitzgerald (2005). On religion and Latino migrant political participation more generally, see Jones-Correa and Leal (2001).

[38] See affiliate listing at http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/

[39] See http://www.otoc.org/

306 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

that portrayed the marches as 'spontaneous' (León Zaragoza 2006). Together with the active encouragement of Spanish language media, the blessing of church leaders created an environment in which hundreds of thousands of immigrants felt safe enough to engage in mass public action for the first time.[40]

## Worker Organizations

The US labor movement's opening to Mexican immigrant workers is relatively recent, and was made possible primarily by the growing voice and clout of Latino leaders within the mainstream labor movement—notably in California.[41] Mexican workers are an increasingly important part of the trade union movement in those regions and sectors where unions are dynamic and organizing new members. By 2004, Mexican-born workers represented 2.3 percent of all union members, over 360,000, with unionization rates much higher for long-term residents (Milkman 2005: 5). In regions of high union density, Mexican migrants are well-represented in the membership of unions that represent primarily low-wage workers, like UNITE–HERE (garments, textiles, hotels, and restaurants), SEIU (services, including health-care workers, and the legendary Justice for Janitors campaign), UFCW (food processing), and the Teamsters (agro-industry). Further research would be needed to determine how many union locals are actually migrant-*led*, and therefore part of migrant civil society, as defined here. Clearly, however, in terms of both sheer numbers and the impact on members' daily lives, unions are by far one of the most important institutions for the representation of Mexicans in the USA.

Nevertheless, trade unions face many structural, institutional, and cultural constraints in their efforts to organize immigrant workers. In response, a new set of institutions has emerged to try to fill the gap between traditional workplace-based unions and low wage immigrant

[40] In this context, the political role of Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles has been crucial. After working to support the UFW in the 1960s, he served as the first chair of the state's farm labor authority in 1975, when it supported worker representation and opposed the 1994 ballot initiatives against immigrant access to public services. In 2006 his constituency included 5 million Catholics, 75% of whom were Latino (Parkes 2006; Watanabe 2006).

[41] On US worker organizations and Mexican migrants, see Bacon (2004, 2005), Delgado (1994), Fine (2005, 2006), Fitzgerald (2004*a*), Gordon (2005), Johnston (2003, 2004*a*, 2004*b*, 2005), Mellor, Kath, and Bulger (2003), Milkman (2000, 2005, 2006), Ruiz Cameron (2000), and Waldinger et al. (1998). Fitzgerald's study is one of the most comprehensive so far, taking into account worker identities, organizational issues and hometown dynamics. For analysis of grassroots Mexican worker identities through the lens of the US racialization process, see De Genova (2005). For comparison, see Fink's richly nuanced analysis of a primarily Guatemalan immigrant worker organizing campaign in North Carolina (2003).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society* 307

workers. Worker centers include a wide range of grassroots organizing initiatives that operate separately from trade unions. Sometimes they coordinate, and sometimes they are in tension. A comprehensive recent survey found 137 worker centers across the USA, 122 of which work closely with immigrant workers (Fine 2005, 2006). Of the 40 studied in depth, about 17 have a significant Mexican constituency, and 13 of them are predominantly Mexican.[42] The National Network of Day Laborers brings together 29 worker centers from 11 states, with half in New York and California.[43]

One approach to unpacking migrant civil society involves distinguishing between organizations in terms of whether they are US institutions transformed by migrants, or whether they are 'migrant institutions', but one also needs to consider the participation of migrants as *individuals*. The same people may participate in both arenas of migrant civil society, though sometimes separately, a form of *doble militancia*. Note the case of Oregon's farm-worker organization, the Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United (PCUN), whose membership combines Mexican-Americans, *mestizo* Mexican migrants, and indigenous Mixteco migrants from Mexico's state of Oaxaca. While PCUN is very much a US organization, some of its Mexican members are also active in their own hometown associations. In the case of some of the Oaxacan HTAs, they have as many as a dozen branches spread across the USA, each raising funds to support community development projects back home.[44]

PCUN is one of several regional US farmworker organizations, each one with thousands of members.[45] Some have won tangible victories, which are especially notable in the overall national context of eroding union bargaining power. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), a trade union based in the Midwest and North Carolina, won an unprecedented contract for as many as 8,000 Mexican H-2A workers (Chavez 2004). The FLOC has long pursued an unusually internationalist, cross-border worker organizing strategy, and recently opened its own office in Mexico.[46]

---

[42] Janice Fine, personal communication, June 2005.

[43] See www.ndlon.org, which has links to members' websites. See Gordon (2005) for a detailed study of a leading worker center, Long Island's Workplace Project.

[44] See www.pcun.org and Stephen (2001, 2004, 2007).

[45] According to the most broad-based farm-worker field survey, Mexican-born workers represent 75% of the US farm labor force, up from 65% in 1994 (Department of Labor 2005). This finding is substantially higher than the Current Population Survey figures, which are cited more often (e.g. *Migration News* at www.migration.ucdavis.edu)

[46] See www.floc.com. One observer estimates their long-standing Ohio and Michigan membership at 6,000 (Straub 2006).

### 308 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

Florida's Coalition of Immokolee Workers recently won a major victory from Taco Bell, thanks to a combination of a mobilized base, highly effective media strategies, and strong alliances with students, churches, and unions. They combine direct action with legal strategies, which have even jailed labor contractors on charges of forced labor. The CIW led their own Truth Caravan, with eighty workers traveling to fifteen cities by bus. Their rank and file is 50 percent Mexican (many from southern states), 30 percent Guatemalan, and 10 percent Haitian.[47]

Majority-migrant worker organizations, like the UFW, PCUN, FLOC, CIW, as well as many union locals in manufacturing and service industries, are all US organizations insofar as their goals are to defend their members' rights in the USA, both as workers and as migrants.[48] In some of these regional organizations the vast majority of members are Mexican, while others include workers of multiple nationalities, as in the case of CIW. Few have binational or cross-border priorities or characteristics—with the major exception of FLOC. Yet their members may also have other affiliations, which may or may not be visible to outsiders, as in the case of PCUN, or the representation of leadership of the United Farm Workers on the Mexican government's migrant outreach agency's Advisory Council.[49] Only further research could tell whether their members are also organized binationally, around their communities of origin.

Mexican immigrant workers are incorporated into US unions and worker centers as Latino immigrant workers. Mexican migrants encounter this panethnic identity for the first time in the USA. US union strategies and discourses, meanwhile, downplay immigrant workers' distinct national origins and migration experiences. While this umbrella approach facilitates collective action among workers who share labor market position, language, and immigration status issues, the submergence of their 'Mexican-ness' complicates efforts to understand the political cultures and repertoires that these workers bring with them. Even in cases where Mexican workers are successful at democratizing both their workplace and their organization, unions

[47] See www.ciw-online.org, Bowe (2003), Payne (2000), and Leary (2005). Leary estimates CIW's core membership at 2,500, but they played a key role in leading an April 10, 2006, march of 75,000 in Ft. Myers, Florida (a community of 65,000), according to local newspaper accounts (*The News-Press*, April 11, 2006). For comparative context and sources on turnout in the spring, 2006 immigrant marches, see Table 10.2.

[48] Little field-based research is available on the changing relationships between the UFW and Mexican migrants over the past decade. In the 1960s and 1970s, growers used undocumented workers to break UFW strikes, leading to tense relations.

[49] For recent analysis of the Mexican government's effort to institutionalize liaison with the diaspora through the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, see Ayón (2005).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society* 309

are reluctant to draw fully on the potential for solidarity generated by their shared migration experience (e.g. Apostolidis 2005).

## Ethnic Organizations

While 'Mexican' in the USA is widely seen as a homogeneous ethnic category, Mexico is in fact a multiethnic society, with at least one in ten Mexicans coming from a family in which an indigenous language is spoken. Indigenous Mexicans have a long history of migration to the USA, but only since the 1990s has their share of the migrant population begun to approach their share of the national population. In the racialization process that accompanies migration, indigenous Mexicans often go through a process of 'scaling up' their collective identities. This shift from a primary identification with their home community to ethnic and panethnic identities became the basis for political activists to build indigenous Mexican rights organizations.[50]

The Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations, formerly known as the Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front (FIOB), is one of the very few mass membership organizations that include organized bases in *both* the USA and in Mexico, with thousands of affiliated members organized in branches in California, Baja California, and in their home state of Oaxaca. The FIOB is not a federation of hometown associations, though its members have a strong sense of shared homeland, in the sense of being *paisanos*. For Oaxacan migrants, the collective identity represented by the term *paisano* is situational. As the FIOB's Oaxaca coordinator put it:

The word *paisano* can be interpreted on different levels . . . it depends on the context in which it is used. If we are in a specific community, you say *paisano* to mean being part of that community. . . . it's a mark of distinction for the person, showing their honorability . . . This term has been part of the people's culture . . . With the need to migrate to other places, we find ourselves meeting people who, after talking a bit, we find out are from the some region, in a place filled with people from other states. There the concept is used to distinguish ourselves, and to bring us together more. Then the word reflects our identity as brothers. (Interview, Romualdo Juan Gutiérrez Cortés, Huajapan de León, Oaxaca, May, 2000, author's translation)

This quote shows how collective identity 'scales up' from home community to shared region of origin in the course of the migration process.

[50] The foundational work is Kearney (1988, 1995, 2000) and Nagengast and Kearney (1990). See also Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004), Fox (2006*a*), Rivera-Salgado (2002), and Velasco Ortiz (2002, 2005).

310  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

Their sense of being *oaxaqueño* is a shared identity that comes out of a struggle against the intense racism they face in northern Mexico and in California, where they face ethnic slurs, like *oaxaquito*, or *oaxaco*, from other Mexicans. In this context, *oaxaqueño* is not just a geographic reference, but rather a term of both respect and self-respect. In the process, regional identity becomes socially constructed as a pan-ethnic umbrella identity, since Oaxaca includes at least sixteen distinct ethnic groups. In this context, the FIOB's recent decision to change its name is especially notable. The change in the wording from 'Oaxacan' to 'Organizations', while keeping the FIOB acronym, reflected the new realities of their mass base in California and Baja California, where indigenous migrants from states other than Oaxaca are increasingly involved (Cano 2005). Among the binational leadership commission elected in March, 2005, five Mexican languages are spoken (Mixtec, Zapotec, Mixe, Purépecha, and Spanish).

The FIOB actively pursues a wide-ranging *rights* agenda on issues that range from family and community-level public interest advocacy, environmental justice, public health education, and PTA training, to national immigrant and indigenous rights in both countries (Domínguez Santos 2004; Martínez Saldaña 2004).[51] They work closely with a wide range of public interest groups in both countries, their leaders run for mayor and state congress in Oaxaca, for school board in California, and they do public interest advocacy at local, state, and federal levels in both countries. This raises a conceptual issue. Does the FIOB represent the 'migrant wing' of Mexico's national indigenous movement? Does the FIOB represent the 'indigenous wing' of a broader cross-border migrant movement? Clearly the FIOB plays both roles.

## Migrant-led Communications Media

Migrant-led nonprofit media can range from local and binational newspapers to radio programs, independent video, and now numerous internet discussion oriented to hometowns or regions.[52] For example, the Oaxacan community in Los Angeles is now sufficiently large and established to support *two* newspapers, *El Oaxaqueño* and *Impulso de Oaxaca*. The first publishes more than 30,000 copies biweekly and circulates both in California and Oaxaca. In additional to regional community service-oriented publications, the broader Mexican migrant voting

---

[51]  For foreign-born Latinos in general, school programs are the second most extensive form of reported volunteer activity, after church (Suro 2005*c*).

[52]  See the listings of hometown websites by state at www.jornadasinfronteras.com, the migrant-oriented website of Mexico City's *La Jornada*.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   311

rights campaign now has its own binational monthly magazine based in Chicago, *MX Sin Fronteras*. The migrant-run Spanish language public radio network, *Radio Bilingüe*, is broadcast on approximately fifty stations in the USA and twenty more in Mexico.[53] In addition, for many years *Radio Bilingüe* broadcast the only regular programming in indigenous Mexican languages. For many migrant farmworker communities, *Radio Bilingüe* is their principal news source, and internal evaluations have found that it really reaches them.

Beyond the nonprofit media is the huge world of commercial Spanish language media. Though for-profit enterprises fall outside of most definitions of civil society, these media nevertheless play key civic roles, not only informing their publics, but also encouraging public service. Spanish language media have actively encouraged both US citizenship and voter turnout (Rodríguez 1999, 2005). Such practices contrast sharply with critics' assumptions that the persistence of Spanish is associated with an unwillingness to join US civil society (e.g. Huntington 2004). At the same time, migrant-oriented media is not necessarily the same as migrant-owned, so Spanish language media institutions therefore only overlap partially with a strict definition of migrant civil society. In many cases, however, key media decision-makers, such as editors and reporters, are most often migrants. This is increasingly the case in English language mass media as well, at least in California, where fully bilingual migrant professionals have made important steps up the media ladder. Here, as with the media more generally, there are gray areas where civil society and the corporate sector overlap. The concept of migrant civil society includes both institutions and individuals. For example, the civic role of Spanish language media personalities has yet to be fully documented, but was quite significant even before their widely recognized role in the mass mobilization of the spring of 2006.

In the key immigrant cities of Chicago and Los Angeles, Mexican Spanish language radio DJs were quickly recognized to be major forces behind the huge 2006 immigrant marches.[54] Once considered to be exclusively entertainers, they have taken on their civic role with seriousness. As Los Angeles DJ 'Piolín' put it, 'I feel a great responsibility, and I should be careful. I'm not going to do things because a politician or anyone else calls me . . . I'll only do what comes from my

---

[53] See www.radiobilingue.com and Orozco (2001).

[54] See Watanabe and Becerra (2006). In the context of the new public attention to the penetration and influence of Spanish language radio, media and political analyst David Ayón noted that the contribution of TV and print media has been underestimated. He cited the prime-time endorsement of the April 10 march by Los Angeles' leading TV newscaster, whose credibility contributed to the widespread feeling that collective action was both safe and legitimate (personal communication, April 2006).

312 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

heart' (Navarro 2006). The experience of Chicago DJ 'El Pistolero' is especially important, since that city was the first of the spring, 2006 protest wave to experience a truly enormous immigrant march. When later interviewed in English on National Public Radio, 'El Pistolero' revealed the relevance of his own family's Mexican political history for understanding his current civic commitments:

I grew up in a very active, pro-immigrant valley, I come from Fresno, California, the Central Valley, and to be honest, I lost my father in Mexico and that's how I ended up in Central California, because my father was in politics in Mexico and he lost his life because of it. And I've always promised myself that I would never get into politics. But you know, you hear the call and it is the moral responsibility when you're behind a microphone, not just to entertain people, but to inform people of what's going on around their lives. (cited in Block 2006)

In terms of the framework sketched out earlier, this testimony evokes exit being transformed into voice, mediated by loyalty to community.

Indeed, the previous summer, 'El Pistolero' had helped to convene an effervescent immigrant rights march that was largely invisible outside of the immigrant community. He was inspired by a local Mexican priest's call-in talk show to denounce the claims of the 'Minutemen'. The priest later commented that 'it's sad that the hometown clubs and the federations didn't want to participate, because the march was going to be on the South Side [in immigrant neighborhoods rather than downtown] and [they thought therefore] it would have no impact, and because it was organized by radio personalities' (cited in Martínez and Piña 2005: 8). The turnout was then unprecedented, with estimates ranging from 30,000 to 50,000.[55] This little-known mass action reinforces the widely held interpretation of the later spring, 2006 protest wave, in that both Spanish language media and religious leaders proved to have broader convening power than existing membership organizations.

## *Migrant-led NGOs*

While many NGOs, or nonprofits, *serve* migrant communities, in this approach only those that are *migrant-led* would be considered part of migrant civil society. Here one must keep in mind the clear distinction between NGOs and membership organizations—a distinction that is sidestepped by the fuzzy US term 'community-based organization'.[56]

[55] Raûl Ross, personal communication, October 27, 2005.
[56] In Spanish, the often preferred term for NGO translates into English as 'civil organizations'.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   313

In some cases migrant membership organizations have spun off their own NGOs, as in the case of the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB), which has set up its own NGOs in California and in Oaxaca, to provide support services and to invest in community development and public education projects.[57] In addition, many migrants in NGOs, both as individuals and as organizations, joined with membership organizations to lobby the Mexican government for voting rights abroad (Rodríguez Oceguera 2005). While many US community development organizations appear to be quintessentially US Latino NGOs, an uncounted number are in fact migrant-led, as in the case of Chicago's Little Village Community Development Corporation. Affiliated with the National Council of La Raza, this nonprofit is led by a pioneer of civic binationality, a Mexican immigrant who is also a founder of a Mexican organization, Durango Unido (Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006).

To continue recognizing gray areas of overlap, this category within migrant civil society can also include those migrants who, *as individuals*, have gained positions of leadership within established US nonprofits, including foundations. They are strategically located to make major contributions to the capacity-building of other migrant civil society institutions.[58] Here the support group Hispanics in Philanthropy plays an important role, bringing together both US-born and immigrant foundation staffers, with chapters in California and Washington, DC.[59]

## Autonomous Migrant-led Public Spaces

Public spaces refer to large gatherings where migrants can come together to interact and to express themselves with relative freedom and autonomy.[60] Here culture, religion, sports, and recreation are key. For example, in California, indigenous Oaxacan migrants now organize huge annual music, dance, and food festivals known as *Guelaguetzas*. They are the embodiment of the imagined cultural and civic space known as *Oaxacalifornia*.[61] Specifically Oaxacan migrant civil society in California is now sufficiently dense that migrants put on six

[57] See www.fiob.org, Domínguez Santos (2004), Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004), Ramírez Romero (2003), and Velasco Ortiz (2002, 2005).

[58] The US foundations involved in these issues are organized into an affinity group, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees. See www.gcir.org.

[59] See http://www.hiponline.org

[60] On the social construction of public spheres in the Latino community, including both migrants and non-migrants, see Rocco (2004).

[61] For background on this concept, see Kearney (1988, 1995, 2000) and Nagengast and Kearney (1990), as well as Besserer (2003), Escárcega and Varese (2004), and Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004).

314 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

*different* Guelaguetza festivals each year.[62] They are held in parks, high school auditoriums, college campuses, and the largest is held in the LA Sports Arena—the former home of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team. In each one, hundreds volunteer their time so that thousands can come together, so that parents can share their culture with their children. Indeed, probably few had had the opportunity to see such a festival when they were living in Oaxaca. With so much activity, California's multigenerational Oaxacan migrant dance groups are in high demand, and they represent yet another network of membership organizations.[63] Each of the six annual festivals reveals an X-ray of the social networks and organizational styles of different strands of the web of Oaxacan civil society in California. For example, some work with local Latino politicians and organizations, others collaborate with the PRI-controlled Oaxacan state government, and still others keep their distance.

One of the most vivid efforts to bring immigrants into the public sphere was led by trade unions, notably UNITE—HERE, the union that brings together hotel and restaurant workers with garment and textile workers. They led the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride in 2003. By highlighting the historic legacy of the Freedom Rides, migrants of many nationalities explicitly reached out to diverse US constituencies by framing immigrant rights under the historical mantle of the African-American civil rights movement. Migrant organizations, including California's Oaxacan Federation, were officially represented on the ride.[64] In several areas of recent Mexican settlement in the USA, such as Nashville, the Freedom Ride permitted migrant organizations to become public actors for the first time.[65] Old habits die hard, though, and some Mexican migrant bus riders were frustrated with what they described as their trade union handlers' 'mania for control'. This cross-cultural disconnect erupted at one point into

[62] Two are held in Los Angeles, including the longest-running California *Guelaguetza*, led by the Oaxacan Regional Organization, as well as the largest one, organized by the Oaxacan Federation. The Coalition of Oaxacan and Indigenous Communities in northern San Diego County holds theirs at California State University, San Marcos. Two different branches of the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations hold *Guelaguetza* festivals as well, one in the central valley in Fresno, the other on the Ventura County coast in Santa Maria. The most recent one is held in the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium.

[63] See Cruz Manjarrez (2001).

[64] The two returning Oaxacan migrant federation representatives on the ride were honored with a photo on the front page of the Los Angeles-based *El Oaxaqueño* newspaper (October 18, 2003, 4(116). On the importance of 'framing' for social movements and collective identity formation, see Morris and McClurg Mueller (1992), among others.

[65] See, for example, Miller (2004) and Reyes (2003*a*, 2003*b*). On the broader processes of new Mexican settlement in the South and Midwest, see Zuñiga and Hernández-León (2005).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society* 315

a brief, behind-the-scenes 'rebellion' by migrant riders against the coordinators of one of the buses.[66] This small but revealing incident is emblematic of how much more work is needed to build and sustain cross-cultural coalitions. Overall, the Freedom Ride made unprecedented inroads in terms of projecting humanizing images of migrants in the mainstream media.

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

This review of public civic spaces created by organized migrants provides context for understanding the extraordinary explosion of civic energy embodied by the immigrant marches on the spring of 2006. Until more in-depth research is carried out, the following patterns emerge. First, the marches were triggered by the attempt to use federal law to criminalize undocumented workers and their supports. This added insult to injury, provoking perhaps the single clearest message to emerge from the mass actions: 'we are workers, not criminals'.[67] Second, while existing membership organizations played key roles, notably unions and hometown federations, the turnouts dramatically surpassed their organized bases. To reach out beyond the already organized, the Spanish language media and the Catholic church were the most important actors. They were primarily responsible for the remarkable consistency of the marchers' message and repertoire— order and respect for the law, white shirts, and the mass display of US flags. Though well over three million people marched, hardly a single arrest for violent protest was reported. Third, though participation was primarily Mexican—especially in the West and Midwest—the marches went further than ever before toward the social construction of a shared identity among Latino immigrant workers. Fourth, the marches united people of diverse migration status, including undocumented, permanent residents and citizens—reflecting the actual experiences of

---

[66] They were reportedly turned off by some union staffers' styles, their lack of Spanish, and their efforts to prohibit Mexican flags while encouraging the display of US flags. See Ehrenreich (2003) and Jamison (2005) for detailed accounts of the Freedom Ride.

[67] Among many other accounts of this dynamic, see Brooks (2006) and Pomfret and Geis (2006).

316 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

**Table 10.2**   Immigrant rights marches, Spring 2006

| City | State | Date | Estimated turnout (Lower and upper bounds) | Sources |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Los Angeles | CA | 5/1/06 | 650,000–700,000 | LA Times, La Opinión, ABC News |
| Chicago | IL | 5/1/06 | 400,000–750,000 | Chicago Tribune, Univision |
| Dallas | TX | 4/9/06 | 350,000–500,000 | Dallas Morning News |
| Los Angeles | CA | 3/25/06 | 200,000–500,000 | LA Times, La Opinión |
| Washington | DC | 4/10/06 | 180,000 | New York Times |
| Chicago | IL | 3/10/06 | 100,000–300,000 | Chicago Tribune, CBS2 Chicago |
| New York | NY | 4/10/06 | 100,000 | New York Times |
| Phoenix | AZ | 4/10/06 | 100,000–300,000 | Arizona Republic, Washington Post, NYT, CNN |
| San Jose | CA | 5/1/06 | 100,000 | San Jose Mercury News |
| Atlanta | GA | 3/24/06 | 80,000 | Atlanta Journal Constitution |
| Fort Myers | FL | 4/10/06 | 75,000 | Orlando Sentinel |
| Denver | CO | 3/25/06 | 50,000 | Denver Post |
| Denver | CO | 5/1/06 | 50,000–75,000 | Denver Post, La Opinión |
| Detroit | MI | 3/27/06 | 50,000 | Detroit Free Press |
| Houston | TX | 4/10/06 | 50,000 | Houston Chronicle, Forbes |
| San Diego | CA | 4/9/06 | 50,000 | San Diego Union Tribune |
| Atlanta | GA | 4/10/06 | 40,000–50,000 | Atlanta Journal Constitution, Houston Chronicle |
| San Francisco | CA | 5/1/06 | 30,000 | San Francisco Chronicle, AP |
| St. Paul | MN | 4/9/06 | 30,000 | Minneapolis Star-Tribune, AP |
| Washington | DC | 3/6/06 | 30,000 | Chicago Tribune |
| 20 largest events totals | | | 2,715,000–4,000,000 | |
| Totals Spring 2006 | | | 3,568,566–5,111,716 | |

*Source*: Bada, Fox, and Selee (2006).

so many immigrant families of mixed status. Fifth, the impacts of the marches on national policy, like so many grassroots movements, will be mediated in unpredictable ways by electoral politics and intermediary organizations.

The geographic pattern of the marches and their varying sizes provides a snapshot of the density of immigrants' willingness to 'come out'. Table 10.2 documents the size of the marches, citing the turnout reported by each city's local English-language newspaper as the most conservative estimate (as well as sometimes higher estimates by other

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   317

media). The first very large march was in Chicago, reaching over 100,000 and included the mayor and governor. The next major wave was led by Los Angeles, Dallas, Denver, Phoenix, San Jose, and San Diego, each of which experienced the largest public protests in their cities' respective histories. Also remarkable were the many marches in smaller and medium-sized cities, such as Fresno, Yakima, and Walla Walla, each of which also experienced the largest protests in their cities' histories. The May events capped the cycle of protest with more than 400,000 again in Chicago—by far the largest march that city had ever seen, on the very anniversary of that city's own contribution to international workers' history—the fight for the 8 hour day, led by immigrant workers in the late nineteenth century. It would be difficult to account for the huge May 1 turnouts across the country without recognizing that day's place in the political-cultural repertoire that Latin American migrants came with.

To sum up this review of the landscape of Mexican immigrant membership organizations through the lens of migrant civil society, migrants are represented through two main pathways. The first is the most straightforward: organizations that are led by and made up of migrants themselves. The second is less straightforward because the boundaries are more blurred, and takes the form of US civil society organizations that have effectively been *transformed* by migrant participation. This would describe many Catholic parishes, trade union locals, worker centers, and parent teacher associations. Notably, an estimated 170 of Chicago's innovative elected School Councils are reportedly primarily Mexican—they allow noncitizen voting (IME 2005).

## Pathways of Synergy

Clearly this landscape of four intersecting arenas is dynamic rather than static, as suggested by Figure 10.1. At different moments in history, different arenas lead and lag in the process of 'thickening' civil society. During much of the 1990s, membership organizations quietly carried out the slow work of assembling the building blocks of participatory campaigns to defend rights, ranging from Justice for Janitors to efforts to get Mexican Consulates to pay attention to their constituents to the right to the absentee ballot. By the middle of the next decade, however, formal organizations of any kind still had yet to reach the vast majority of the migrant community, yet they turned out to be engaged and paying attention to the public sphere through the mass media and their congregations. When media and religious leaders,

318 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*
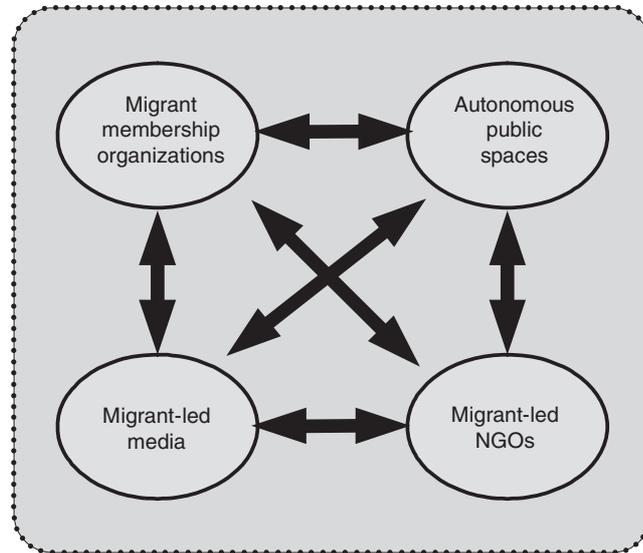


**Figure 10.1.** Migrant civil society: pathways of synergy

resonating with their constituents' concern, called for taking a stand, the thickness and directionality of the arrows shifted dramatically, inflating the public sphere to previously unimaginable proportions.

## *Unpacking Civic Binationality*

This chapter will conclude by posing a series of specific analytical questions raised by the construction of migrant civil society, but first it is worth posing more general, crosscutting interpretive questions about the nature and process of binationality. While most civic binationality takes the form of *individuals* who do double duty, some migrant *organizations* are following what we could call 'fully binational' paths as well. This means being engaged with social, civic, or political agendas in both countries. Increasingly, hometown federation leaders have been increasingly involved in US civic life and deal directly with local and state government leaders. This process of engagement is most developed in Los Angeles and Chicago, reflecting the high level of institutionalization of the federations themselves in multistate councils (Rivera, Bada, and Escala Rabadán 2005).[68]

[68] This process is expressed both by organizations and by individual leaders. In Chicago, the former president of the Michoacan Federation (FEDECMI) was hired by the Illinois Government Office of New Americans.

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*  319

Among the few organizations that go as far as the FIOB in terms of having organized mass bases in both countries is the campaign of the ex-*bracero* workers for the restitution of government wage deductions. This campaign has been active both in Mexico and in the USA and involves several organizations, including the *Unión Binacional de Organizaciones de Trabajadores Ex Braceros* and the *Alianza Braceroproa*. They took different positions on the Mexican government's recent commitment to make a flat compensation payment of just over $3,000 to each former bracero (Balboa 2005). In practice, the Interior Ministry's bureaucratic obstacles, including the requirement that former Bracero program workers produce originals of the evidence of their participation, will ensure that only a small fraction of eligible workers actually receive payments (Martínez 2005).

This wide range of practical experiences with civic binationality raises the following more general question: Do organized Mexican migrants represent the US branch of Mexican society, or the Mexican branch of US society? In other words, having reviewed these four distinct arenas of migrant civil society, how might we think about their relationships with *US* civil society? Is migrant civil society the *US branch of Mexico's civil society*? Or is it the *Mexican branch of US civil society*? The concept of migrant civil society proposed here would include both, because it is defined by the migrants themselves rather than the national arena within which they are active. The hometown associations would be the clearest example of a branch of Mexican civil society that is *in*, but not necessarily *of* the USA. They have created a public sphere that is clearly Mexican, not only because of its participants' national origin, but also because of their culture, organizational style, symbolic references, and principal counterparts. In contrast, for examples of Mexican branches of *US* civil society, we could look at the trade union locals that have become majority-migrant and migrant-led, as in the case of several major agro-industrial, service, and construction unions in California, or the probably hundreds of religious congregations that have become Mexican spaces within US churches.

To pursue this conceptual question, one way to think about this distinction between migrant civil society *in* the USA versus *of* the USA, is to think about two words that are usually treated as synonyms: *cross-border* and *binational*. Here 'cross-border' refers to Mexican society broadly defined, located both inside and outside the physical borders of the homeland.[69] 'Binational', in contrast, would refer to being *of* both

[69] This distinction is compatible with Fitzgerald's distinction between 'long-distance nationalism' and 'dual nationalism' (2004*b*), as well as his related point about

## 320  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

nations, an overlapping sphere or space of convergence, in which civil society actors are simultaneously part of both Mexican and US civil societies. In both cases the membership of the organizations may be similar, but in the first case their goals, strategies, and coalition partners are focused exclusively on Mexico, while the second arena would also include US-oriented goals, strategies, and coalition partners.

Figure 10.2 is intended to illustrate the conceptual distinction at the most general level, rather than to describe any specific organization or relationship.[70] The two diagrams might reflect a process of change over time, given the important shift among Mexican immigrants toward a binational agenda over the past decade (Rivera-Salgado, Bada, and Escala-Rabadán 2005).

To illustrate how this understanding of cross-border and binational can be both distinct yet overlapping, consider some of the discourse of the recent campaign for Mexican voting rights abroad. Not long ago the Coalition for the Political Rights of Mexican Abroad, which led the recent campaign, celebrated their victory in the National Palace in Mexico City. One of the pioneers of this campaign, Raúl Ross Pineda, commented:

This [decision] has returned to millions of Mexicans what they needed to stop being second class citizens. . . . The struggle for the vote was a cause that, like no other before, horizontally united Mexicans abroad beyond our economic, social, professional or organizational differences. (Ross Pineda 2005, author's translation)

Here we have a very civic discourse, which emphasizes the expansion of rights—what Ross calls 'the universalization of electoral democracy'. His next comment is quite relevant in terms of the explicit analysis of the relationship between campaigning for voting rights in Mexico and immigrant rights in the USA.

[The campaign] leaves us with a valuable experience that could serve as a precedent for other battles. Having resolved the voting issue, a huge amount of social energy has been released which now can be applied to deal with other problems, like a migration reform in the US, to address the situation of the undocumented.

The proposition here is that once the social actors are in action, they can campaign on various fronts at the same time. In this view, once having achieved the unifying experience, and the dignity and

'extraterritorial citizenship' (2000). For further discussion of cross-border civil society networks, in terms of social sectors that include but are not limited to migrants, see Brooks and Fox (2002) and Fox (2002*b*).

[70]  Thanks very much to Emma Estrada Lukin for assistance with graphics design.
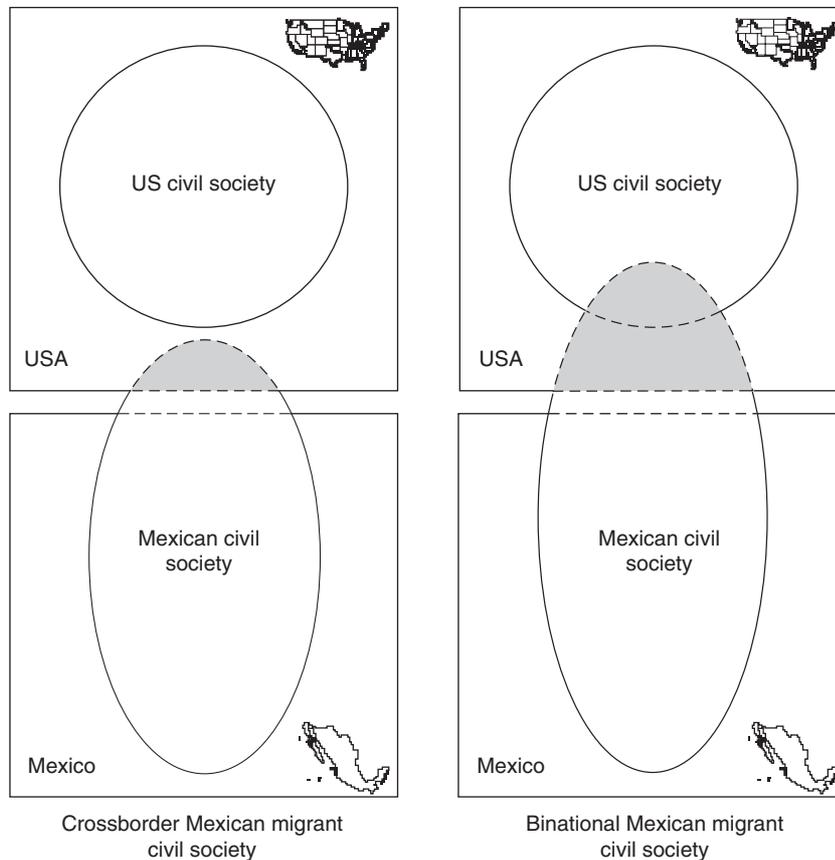
**Figure 10.2.** Mexican civil society in the USA: crossborder and binational

recognition associated with the right to vote, migrants could mobilize to defend their rights vis-à-vis the US nation state. Ross' vision of Mexico as a 'new nation without borders' is not only cross-border, but binational as well. If 'cross-border' refers to 'a people divided by a border', as New York's Tepeyac Association put it, then 'binational' refers to engaging with both societies at the same time. In this sense, a migrant civil society that is engaged across borders may or may not be engaged binationally.

## *Migrant Civil Society Feedback Effects*

If exit indeed can be transformed into voice, that voice can be directed either back toward Mexico or within the USA. Mexico-focused civil

322 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

society advocacy 'feedback effects' can be unpacked into at least three different arenas: the impacts of migrant associations on home communities and states, migrants' potential impact through electoral processes, and their potential engagement with the challenge of development.

## 1. What are the Social, Civic, and Political Impacts of Migrant Associations in Their Hometowns and States?

How do migrant hometown clubs affect public life in their communities of origin? At least until recently, many clubs actively considered themselves as apolitical, or even 'anti-political', partly in response to associations of politics with corruption (Fitzgerald 2000; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Yet such attitudes appear to be politically contingent, both in terms of engagement in home communities and in the USA. Do hometown associations encourage local democratization? Do they affect women's opportunities for participation and representation?[71] The evidence is not yet clear, though many participants and observers *expect* that HTAs have democratizing impacts. Returned migrants certainly play key roles in public life as individuals. According to a survey carried out by the Michoacan state government migrant support agency, 37 percent of the 113 mayors who governed in the state from 2002–4 were former migrants (Bada 2004*c*).[72] Indeed, cases of local social movement leadership by returned migrants date back to the 1920s (Craig 1983).

But the fact that some migrants return to fill local leadership roles does not answer the question about the civic and political impacts of HTAs. In at least one high-profile case of a migrant elected mayor, the so-called 'Tomato King', his leadership turned out to be very controversial.[73] More generally, to what degree do the HTAs reproduce the political culture that dominated Mexico in the twentieth century? Optimists often suggest that organized civil society generates democratic values and practices, and this is sometimes the case. But civil society also carries the weight of history, and is crosscut by hierarchies

[71] For binational analyses of migrant organizing and gender, see Goldring (1998, 2004) and Stephen (2006). For a case study of the relationship between migration and women's empowerment in a home community in Oaxaca, see Maldonado and Artía Rodríguez (2004).

[72] Such roles are also very common in Oaxacan towns and villages, many of which retain high expectations in terms of their expatriate citizens' duties and responsibilities (Kearney and Besserer 2004; Mutersbaugh 2002; Robles 2004).

[73] For reports of his abuse of power, see Valadez Rodríguez (2005). For background on his campaigns, see Cano (2001), Castañeda (2004, 2006), and Williams (2004).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   323

and inequality between genders, classes, and ethnic groups, as well as the legacy of less-than-democratic political ideologies. After all, many of the federations, as well as some of the HTAs, came together in response to Mexican government initiatives. If one interprets this relationship through the lens of state–society relations in Mexico, then this government strategy represents both a response to real demands from below, while also serving as an institutional channel to regulate relationships with migrant civil society.[74] In principle, in contrast to similar government efforts *in* Mexico, one might expect that migrants in the USA would be less vulnerable to clientelistic manipulation, but some recent reports indicate that such practices persist.

The broad question of home community impact needs to be unpacked in at least two ways. First, to what degree do the HTAs themselves generate democratic values and practices? De la Garza and Hazan address this question in terms of their contributions as agents of integration into the USA (2003). So far, research that compares the internal practices of different state federations finds a wide range of practices, from more to less democratic (Rivera-Salgado and Esacala Rabadán 2004). The second question would focus on their impacts in home communities. These questions are distinct because, in principle, hometown clubs could be highly representative of their constituencies, but not necessarily of the nonmigrant population.

Why might one expect migrant clubs to encourage democratization in home communities? Those that send collective remittances for community investments are taxing themselves for the benefit of others. Historically, those who pay taxes are accustomed to demanding some form of representation, which recalls the metaphor of exit, voice, and loyalty. In this view, collective remittances are possible thanks to migrants' exit, they exist because of their loyalty, and then tend to encourage the exercise of voice.

A new wave of research suggests that HTAs tend to hold local governments accountable (Burgess 2006; Williams 2004). However, even if most clubs were internally democratic, and even if they held local governments accountable, this would not necessarily generate democratization within the home community. Accountability refers to a power relationship, checks and balances, in this case between a specific constituency and the local government—but not necessarily vis-à-vis the majority of the community (whether defined in local *or*

[74] The government's role in inducing the formation of HTA federations recalls and parallels Mexico's experience with the National Solidarity Program, which both induced the formation of only nominally participatory committees from above in some areas, while in others bolstering representative social organizations that took advantage of this partial opening to consolidate (Cornelius, Craig, and Fox 1994).

324 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

translocal terms). Do the nonmigrants play any role in determining how to invest collective remittances? How are choices weighed between infrastructure projects that the migrants use on their annual visits home, versus those that may have a greater impact on the daily lives of nonmigrants (e.g. rodeo rings versus water systems)? It should be no surprise that relationships between migrants and mayors are not always easy, especially now that local elections are more democratic in many regions of Mexico.

Future analysis of the impact of organized migrants on Mexican government accountability needs to be more clearly specified in terms of both mechanisms and actors. Field research by Xóchitl Bada suggests that Michoacan HTAs have been able to improve the allocation of infrastructure funds for underserved communities by using their political access with state government officials to amplify the voice of hometown villages that otherwise would be excluded by municipal presidents. Thanks to Michoacan HTA efforts, 75 percent of the Three-for-One projects during 2002–4 were allocated to villages outside of town centers, though generally not in the poorest municipalities (Bada 2006: 12). Yet the HTAs' lack of partnerships with dense local social and civic actors limits HTA capacity to follow up and monitor the actual implementation of community development projects (2006: 3). Indeed, Michoacan state government Migrant Affairs officials report that the local 'parallel committees' that are supposed to supervise project implementation are working well in less than 10 percent of the cases (cited in Bada 2006: 11). More generally, in the government's 'Three-for-One' matching fund program for community development projects, 'HTAs have been more able to denounce irregularities than to prevent them' (Bada 2006: 5).

In Michoacan, HTAs have had more success gaining representation in the executive branch of the state government than at the municipal level, gaining official representation on the advisory council of the state government's Migrant Affairs office, composed of seven migrants and seven state officials (Bada 2006: 10). In this sense, both at the state and municipal level, HTAs and federations began to improve accountability. At the same time, however, the governance structure of the Three-for-One program reproduces long-standing patterns of corporatist interest representation. Originally, the federal matching fund program was called 'Citizens' Initiative', and any local group could provide the matching funds, migrant or nonmigrant. Under pressure from the Zacatecas Federation of Southern California, the program rules changed in two significant ways. First, only organized migrants could participate. Second, only hometown clubs that were part of state federations could participate, and their proposals required the validation

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   325

of federation leaders. This policy gives federations monopoly powers of representation, and its accountability impact depends heavily on each state federation's degree of internal democracy and pluralism.

The Three-for-One Program's potential for reproducing corporatist-style interest group politics was underscored by the declarations by leaders of California's Michoacan, Jalisco and Zacatecas Federations of support for the National Action Party's presidential campaign, in apparent exchange for the PAN's support for the Three-for-One Program. They were flown to PAN headquarters just a month before the 2006 election (Herrera Beltran 2006). They gave their support nominally as individuals, and there is little evidence that they consulted the rank and file of their federation membership. The PAN's campaign manager had previously served as Social Development Minister, and in that capacity had negotiated with them to implement the Three-for-One Program. According to one report, 'Rosalío Platas, of the Federación de Clubes Michoacanos Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, even said that she would "demand" that her members vote for the PAN' (Nuñez 2006). At the same time, the head of the Southern California Zacatecas Federation was running for congress with the PRI, as an alternate.

## 2. How can Disenfranchised Migrants Gain Political Representation?

The issue of how migrants can gain political representation poses a puzzle. If they lack voting rights in their host country, then host country politicians have little electoral incentive to make the political investment necessary to enfranchise them. If they also lack voting rights in their home country, then their home country politicians will lack political incentives to enfranchise them. This presents a 'chicken and egg' problem—migrants need to gain electoral clout for politicians to pay attention, yet they need politicians to pay attention to get electoral clout.

In Mexico, the recent approval of the absentee ballot represents a first step toward overcoming this problem, though the voting procedures discouraged participation.[75] The complex mail-in balloting, combined with the impossibility of registering abroad, was approved by a near-total consensus in the Mexican congress. This allowed congressional representatives to show their recognition of Mexican migrants'

---

[75] For the most sophisticated critique of voting rights for migrants, within a framework of democratic theory, see López Guerra (2005).

### 326 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

citizenship rights without actually risking a significant change in the composition of the electorate.[76]

Mexico's electoral authorities were very cautious about defending the security of a national voting process that only recently had won the trust of the electorate. Mexico's congress, moreover, built measures into the law that were designed to limit the possibility of external intervention in an extraterritorial voting process. As a result, to limit possible abuses, only those migrants who already hold a Mexican voter registration card can use the new vote-by-mail system (constituting an estimated electorate of 4 million of the more than 10 million Mexicans in the USA).[77] Mexican political parties are not allowed to campaign abroad, candidates cannot travel, and campaigns cannot receive funds from abroad (though migrants might contend that their funds are not 'foreign').

This experiment in migrant voting poses a paradox, as suggested by a *Los Angeles Times* editorial (September 21, 2005). Recalling dissident José Vasconcelos' 1928 presidential campaign in the USA, the editors noted that that before Mexican migrants had the right to vote, they could do politics freely in the USA. Now that they have the vote, they are prohibited from doing politics. This ban appears to have compounded the severe procedural obstacles that kept the number of migrants who signed up for ballots to approximately 55,000 (of which approximately 14,000 were rejected).[78] While the representation of migrant electorate in Mexican national politics will be slow and largely symbolic, two state governments have created legislative positions for migrant representation, as well as the possibility for migrants to run for mayoral office (Zacatecas and Michoacan).

---

[76] Consider one of the less visible obstacles to migrant voting. The new procedures require voters to send in copies of their election card by registered US mail, which costs $9. This does not include the time required to go to a post office during working hours, which could add an additional hour or two of lost wages to the price of voting. Requests for ballots sent by regular mail were considered invalid. To compound the confusion, Mexican migrant voters were told to send their forms by 'correo certificado', a term whose English cognate refers to 'certified mail'—a postal term that refers to a purely domestic mail option. As is so often the case with access to voting rights for the disenfranchised, the devil is in the details.

[77] In the Pew Hispanic Center's survey of Mexican migrants, 87% report an interest in voting in presidential elections. Of those who came within the last two years, 64% report having the Mexican voter registration card with them, falling to 42% for the survey group as a whole (Suro 2005: 1). Yet a subsequent survey found that 'more than half (55%) of Mexicans in the U.S. were not aware that a presidential election is taking place this year' (Suro and Escobar 2006). See also Marcelli and Cornelius's earlier estimate of the size of the likely migrant voting population (2005).

[78] Data from the Instituto Federal Electoral, as of February, 22, 2006. For an overview of the process, see Molina Ramírez (2006).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   327

## 3. Why is there a Persistent Disconnect between Analysis and Action Involving Migration and Development?[79]

In light of the clear overlap between the challenges of migration and rural development, one might expect high levels of dialogue and convergence between the analysts and social actors involved. After all, the growth in migrant worker remittances, combined with the spread of organized HTAs, has provoked widespread optimism about prospects for investing in cross-border community development. Yet analyses of Mexican migration and development continue to engage only sporadically, for reasons that are not well understood. Each agenda tends to treat the other as a residual category, while fully integrated approaches have yet to be developed. Specifying the nature of the linkages between migration and development turns out to be easier said than done. For example, does sustainable/fair trade coffee production and marketing provide an alternative to migration, does it serve as a source of funding for more migration, or do remittances end up subsidizing coffee production because demand at fair trade prices is insufficient?[80]

So far, the huge volumes of remittances have attracted most of the public and policy attention. The framing of migration and development issues through the lens of remittances draws attention to questions of how financial institutions can capture the funds. While 'banking the unbanked' is certainly important to those sending remittances, the connection to broader development remains uncertain (Zarate-Hoyos 2005). For migrants and their families, the most tangible impact of the widespread public discussion has been the significant recent reduction in transaction costs, driven in part by increased private sector competition.

From a development point of view, most of the policy discussion involving remittances has focused on the Mexican government's cutting-edge efforts to support collective social remittances through its Three-for-One matching fund program. The program now has a significant track record that analysts are carefully examining, but its high public profile contrasts remarkably with its practical application. In 2004, the Mexican Social Development Ministry budget invested about $18 million, less than 1 percent of its budget, matching migrant-generated funds for social development projects in migrants' home

[79]  This section draws on Fox (2006*b*).

[80]  For one of the few studies to directly address the relationship between coffee and migration, see Lewis and Runsten (2005). For an in-depth economic analysis of co-op coffee dynamics in Oaxaca, see Calo and Wise (2005). For an overview of sustainable coffee issues in Mexico and Central America, see Gliessman et al. (2008).

## 328  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

communities. Few of these funds supported productive projects. Those that did, involved family-based rather than collective enterprises and had a high failure rate (Bada 2005). Meanwhile, individual private remittance investments concentrate in the service sector, and tend to reproduce preexisting inequalities in access to education and land (Massey and Parrado 1998).

Indeed, in spite of almost a decade of public discussion about the potential of remittance investments to create development alternatives, in Mexico there is still little tangible evidence of remittance investments that generate sustainable jobs beyond a few microlevel cases. This should not be surprising, given the dearth of investment opportunities in so many sending communities, as well as the critical need for on-the-ground entrepreneurial and technical capacity. The issues of economic viability are compounded by the structure of the decision-making process. When migrants pool their hard-earned money for hometown projects, they place a premium on those investments that provide benefits to the community as whole. Most job-creating investments, in contrast, directly affect only a small subset of the community. In addition, the benefits of productive projects may be perceived as at risk of being captured by local elites—in a context in which 'long-distance accountability' is difficult. This dilemma suggests the importance of identifying those productive investments that can also have 'public goods' effects, such as improved coffee-processing infrastructure in those communities where most people depend on coffee and already have years of experience working together in a marketing co-op whose leadership is publicly accountable. Yet this category of potential investment projects has yet to be linked to migrant collective action.

Creative practitioners and analysts are beginning to address this longstanding disconnect between migration and development agendas. The University of Zacatecas-based *Migración y Desarrollo* international research network is making a critical contribution, as is the Chicago-based public interest group *Enlaces Américas* that helps Mexican and Central American migrant organizations build their capacity to engage in local, national, and international development policy debates.[81] Yet efforts to bring migrant organizations into the broader development policy debate are still incipient.

In an effort to craft a new way of framing the relationship between migration and development, Mexican rural development strategist

---

[81] For further details, see www.migracionydesarrollo.org and www.enlacesamerica. org. Enlaces has consistently tried to bring together migrant leaders and Mexican peasant advocates (see Chacon, Shannon, and Miller 2002) as did the Mexico-US Diálogos project's binational multisectoral exchanges between social constituencies in the 1990s (Brooks and Fox 2002).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*   329

Armando Bartra bridges the migration, development and rights agendas with the call for respect for 'the right to not [have to] migrate' (2003). After all, the Mexican Constitution's Article 123 still speaks of citizens' right to 'dignified and socially useful work'. The 'right to not migrate' recognizes that while migration is an option, it is a choice made within a context imposed by public policies that enable some development strategies over others. The idea also shows how the term 'migration policy' is deceptive insofar as it is often limited to those policies that *deal with* migrants, such as matching funds for projects, or protection from police abuse on the way home for the holidays. The idea of 'migration policy' should also take into account how the full range of public policies, such as the withdrawal of support for family farming, affects the decision to migrate. Yet the apparently limited impact of the 'right to not migrate' concept suggests that translating an evocative frame into practical strategies for grassroots organizations turns out to be a serious challenge.

In Mexico, migration to the USA is increasingly recognized as having become a fully nationwide phenomenon, remittances are widely seen as a development resource, and practitioners and analysts working on migration increasingly acknowledge the need to take dynamics in communities of origin into account. What then might explain the persistent disconnect between the analysis of migration and development? Perhaps the roots go deeper and one needs to look at the basic frameworks used to define strategies for change. In the Mexican rural development context, migration is still seen as occurring *outside* the dominant analytical framework. Migration is treated as an external process happening 'around' the grassroots development process, as a residual category, whereas for *campesino* families, migration is *inside* the box, a central component of a diversified survival strategy. In contrast, for most practitioners and analysts working on migration, the development dimension of the relationship between receiving and sending community focuses on the 'philanthropy from below' process, including the challenges of raising and sending the funds, and finding high profile, 'something for everyone' projects. But who decides how to invest the funds, who ends up managing the projects, how sustainable are they? How do longer-term development impacts figure into the decision-making process?[82] Where do the rest of the government's social, economic, and environmental policies fit in?

[82] For a heterodox critique of the conventional discussion of remittances and development, see the Cuernavaca Declaration from the Migration and Development Network, at www.migracionydesarrollo.org. For an English translation, see *Enlaces News*, No. 10, August 2005 at www.enlacesamerica.org. It is worth noting that researchers have yet to agree on the validity of the official remittance data, the share of the Mexican population that receives remittances, or on the degree to which they reach the poorest communities (e.g. Muñoz 2004).

330 *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

One indicator of the challenge of engaging the migration and development agendas involves the uneven landscapes of the relevant community-based organizations. Mexican migrants, for example, have generated a broad and diverse array of membership organizations, but they vary widely in their density and distribution. They are much more widespread in major US cities than in smaller towns and rural areas, and they are most prominent and most consolidated in Los Angeles and Chicago. At the same time, the map of those Mexican migrants who are organized does not correspond directly to the map of where migrants come from home towns that have community-based economic development. Notably, as many as one-fifth of all Mexican HTAs in the USA represent the state of Zacatecas; while those from states that account for a greater share of the migrant population appear to be less densely organized. 'Mapping' the organized world within Mexican migrant society is still in its early phases, and more work needs to be done to trace its contours with precision.[83]

To contribute more directly to grassroots development strategies on the ground, a next stage of mapping is necessary. Perhaps at the level of a state or a region, it would be very useful to take a map of those communities whose migrants have generated HTAs and lay it over a map of those communities of origin that have also generated the social, civic, and economic development organizations that could serve as counterparts with the organized migrants. Some 'sending' communities in the state of Oaxaca have very limited economic development prospects but others have significant, scaled-up, community-based enterprises, such as organic coffee and timber cooperatives. Imagining alternatives with those organized migrants who come from hometowns with community-based economic development track records could go a long way toward addressing the issues that make productive investments of remittances difficult. Those issues include the need for viable investment prospects, for entrepreneurial experience and reliable technical support, for public accountability to the communities of origin, and for positive social spillover effects beyond the local interested parties. Yet sustained matching of organized migrants to grassroots initiatives has yet to be done. To sum up, the disconnect between migration and development has two dimensions, one involving intellectual frameworks, the other involving civil society actors.

## Conclusions

This chapter mapped the contours of an increasingly visible Mexican migrant civil society. Membership organizations, NGOs, media, and

[83] For further discussion, see Fox (2005*d*) and Bada, Fox, and Selee (2006).

*Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*  331

public spaces each constitute distinct, though overlapping arenas. The process of 'thickening' migrant civil society is driven by the dynamic interaction between each of these sets of actors, as illustrated in Figure 10.1.

The emergence of migrant civil society suggests, in contrast to the widely assumed dichotomy between exit and voice, that exit can be followed by voice. In the short term, migration does involve tensions between exit and voice—what one could call a 'civic opportunity cost'. Especially for those who were active in Mexican civic life before they left, the prospects for change back home may well have been undermined by their departure, as in the case of community-based organic coffee certifiers. Many of those with experience appear to find their place in the leadership of emerging migrant civil society, following Hirschman's principle of the 'transformation and mutation of social energy' (1984), though this process has yet to be well documented. However, there is no evidence to suggest that more than a small fraction of migrants were active before they left. For many rural Mexicans who left their villages to go north, autonomous collective action began *after* they left home.

Exit and voice are both directly linked to the issue of work. Most of the Mexican workers who left their homeland lacked both voice and work. They lacked the kind of voice and representation that could have led the political system to respond by creating jobs more successfully. Indeed, the spring, 2006 migrant mobilizations in the USA could be understood as a call not only as a rejection of criminalization, but also for the right to work—a demand formally enshrined in the Mexican Constitution that has yet to find effective channels for expression.

From the 1990s through the first half of the following decade, at least for many tens of thousands, migrant collective action unfolded in the USA but was primarily homeward-looking—through hometown associations and voting rights campaigns. Yet civic leaders' hopes for widespread migrant engagement with Mexico's 2006 presidential election went unfulfilled, as long-distance voter registration fell far short of even the most pessimistic predictions. From an accountability politics point of view, access to this electoral process was constrained and no political party attempted to represent migrants. Meanwhile, leading Mexican policymakers continued to assume that agriculture will and should continue to shrink dramatically. The Secretary of Agriculture announced that agriculture would only employ 3 or 4 percent of the economically active population, as 'natural consequence of development' (Olivares Alonso 2006). This assumption is not only deeply embedded in conventional economic theory, it is also both cause and consequence of the persistent,

## 332  *Exit Followed by Voice: Mexico's Migrant Civil Society*

systematic underrepresentation of the rural poor in Mexico's political system.

In Mexico's 2006 presidential campaign, some critics of the president's National Action Party spoke of his having presided over the 'expulsion' of two million rural people. A coalition of thirty peasant organizations called for a 'New Pact for a Better Future for the Countryside and the Nation', to avoid the spread of 'ghost towns, where [migrants] build luxury houses to die in' (Pérez-Perdomo 2006). But even though a quarter of the population continued to live in small villages, both rural voters and their social and civil organizations were unable to significantly influence national policy decisions affecting the countryside.

In 2006, Mexican migrant civil society in the USA was just beginning to emerge, after years of coming together beneath the radar of national politics, both in the USA and in Mexico. Organized migrants were just beginning to come together across social sectors, regions of origin, and regions of settlement in the USA. With the exception of the voting rights campaign, organized Mexican migrants also lacked consolidated partnerships with potential counterparts in Mexican civil society. The cross-border debates that would be needed to identify shared agendas and to agree on shared goals had yet to happen. As of 2006, the future of rural Mexico had not yet been imagined jointly, between those who left and those who stayed.