

Voices of Indigenous Oaxacan Youth in the Central Valley: Creating Our Sense of Belonging in California

By the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team/
Equipo de Cronistas Oaxacalifornianos [ECO]

U.C. Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California
Research Report No. 1, July 2013

University of California
Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California
Research Report, Number 1
July 2013



Oaxacalifornian
Reporting Team

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1	Preface Juan Santiago
9	Introduction Jonathan Fox
29	Chapter 1: The Voices of the American Experience Club Minerva Mendoza
41	Chapter 2: Immigrant High School Students in Action José Eduardo Chávez
51	Chapter 3: Oaxacalifornian Urban Youth Space: Los Autónomos Sarait Martínez
61	Chapter 4: The Central Valley Youth Association Ana Mendoza
79	Chapter 5: Young Farmworker Activists Juan Santiago
89	Chapter 6: Gender Roles and their Influence on Civic Participation Ana Mendoza, with Sarait Martínez and Minerva Mendoza
99	Chapter 7: Grounding Civic Participation in Cultural Organizing Juan Santiago
115	Epilogue: The Civic Pathways of Young Indigenous Migrants: Identity, Language, and Gender Gaspar Rivera-Salgado

Preface

by Juan Santiago



ECO team retreat/training session with UC researchers, Santa Cruz, July 2011. Photo: José E. Chávez

The seeds for this project were planted at the July 2010 “Roundtable on Latino immigrant civic and political participation,” held at the Fresno City Hall and organized by the Pan Valley Institute of the American Friends Service Committee. During this event, key Latino civic leaders, community organizers and scholars were invited to spend a Friday afternoon together to share insights from their respective experiences. They all provided lessons learned about civic organizing in California’s Central Valley. They suggested ideas and recommendations on how the momentum from the immigrant rights mobilization could be translated into long-term active political participation in the Valley. Recognizing the emergence of immigrant youth civic participation in the region, young organizers were invited to share their experiences, on their own panel. All three presenters later became members of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team (*Equipo de Cronistas Oaxacalifornianos* -ECO): Ana Mendoza, José E. Chávez and myself. At that forum, we reported from our experiences with grassroots organizing for comprehensive immigration reform in Madera. We shared our strategies and efforts to increase participation within the indigenous and farm labor communities in Madera, particularly the Oaxacan community. One of the scholars at that forum was Dr. Jona-

than Fox, an ally of the immigrant community and a professor in the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of California in Santa Cruz. Together with two other colleagues, he delivered a summary of the findings of a national report he had coauthored, “Context Matters: Latino Immigrant Civic Engagement in Nine US Cities.” That same project had previously sponsored a report on Fresno and Madera’s experience with Latino immigrant’s political engagement, from the 1970s through 2009. Because of our presentation, which highlighted our strategy and personal stories as new community and cultural organizers, Dr. Fox was very interested to learn more about our experiences.

More than eight months later, Dr. Fox called me to talk about an opportunity for a possible new study about the trends among young indigenous Mexican organizers in the Central Valley. At that point, Ana, José and I had gone through more community organizing experiences, such as volunteering for a national campaign for comprehensive immigration reform, organizing community through different cultural events, interning at local non-profit groups and starting our own organizations. I knew that at some point I needed to put my experiences as a cultural organizer in the San Joaquin Valley into perspective, but that opportunity arrived earlier

then I expected. When I was contacted by Professor Fox to see if I would be interested in helping to lead this research project, I did not hesitate. I knew the importance of documenting our community's personal testimonies and stories, particularly the ways we organize. This is a continuation of the organizing efforts we are doing here in the Central Valley. We want to understand how this new generation of organizers engage with public affairs, especially civic and cultural organizing. Furthermore, this research opportunity allowed us to be able to address important questions such as: How are indigenous Mexican youth organized in the valley? Is immigration the only concern for the indigenous communities? Do indigenous youth call themselves organizers? What are some of the factors that have strengthened or limited community organizing? What issues are youth-led organizations addressing?

I was even more interested because it would be a participatory action research (PAR) project. I got introduced to this type of research while doing an apprenticeship at the Pan Valley Institute. They promote principles of Popular Education, which include PAR. What I discovered is that in a participatory action research project, often the researchers would be people from the target community, and they would be asking questions based on their own experiences within that community. PAR tends to be very inclusive within the target community because it collects inputs and contributions through broader participation, including those who otherwise would refuse to be interviewed if the researcher was a stranger to them.

I often get contacted by national or foreign researchers to provide them with contact information for potential interviewees, but it has been my experience that people in my community tend to decline to participate sometimes because they do not know the person or simply because they do not grasp the intention of the research. As a result, the researcher ends up interviewing me or some other community organizer. However, as you will see, this participatory action research style, whose original goal was to "document and analyze the civic

engagement decisions and practices of Mexican indigenous migrant young adults in the central region of the San Joaquin Valley," will fill those gaps.

Not only did we include input from a wide range of community actors, such as those young immigrant farmworkers who rarely get contacted to provide research interviews, this PAR-oriented research also allowed some of the interviewers to be interviewees, reporting from our on-the-ground experiences. Indeed, as members of the target community ourselves, we developed the questions in ways that would maximize the focus group's contribution. Our approach tried to avoid being either too vague or too specific, to create a conversation where interesting facts and perspectives would emerge from the interviewees without necessarily needing to ask the questions directly. We followed this strategy because we knew if we were to ask people — let's say, about their involvement with civic events — perhaps they would say that they do not have any such experience. But if we started off by asking them to describe what a day of farm work looks like, they would get deep into the conversation and we would take off from there to stimulate the discussion. In short, the process we used while developing the questions was long and intensive, which eventually led us to consider writing three additional chapters.

Our original plan was to organize both the focus group interviews and the chapters for this report around five youth-led organizing spaces — (1) a high school club that became a community organizing group, (2) a current high school extracurricular club, (3) an urban youth group, (4) a regional Dreamers' organization, and (5) young immigrant farmworkers. The ideas for the three additional chapters emerged during our team's conversations about how to discuss the arrangement of potential interview questions. We concluded that three crosscutting topics would be relevant to this study: (1) gender roles and their influences on civic participation; (2) cultural organizing and civic participation; and (3) how the connections between identity, language and gender affect the civic pathways that young indigenous migrants follow. We were



ECO (Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team) and allies. Photo: Jonathan Fox

able to expand and elaborate on these important issues because our research team members came from many backgrounds, with a wide range of organizing experiences.

Most members of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team are from Mexican indigenous descent and our team agreed that our indigenous background has influenced our community involvement, as well as those who we planned to interview. The weight of gender roles in our communities is a particularly relevant topic for this research because it explains, for example, why very few women participated in political events after high school, whereas in high school extracurricular clubs it was the women who predominated. At least that was the experience of

the Madera Academic Youth Alliance (MAYA). The authors compared the experiences of the Central Valley Youth Association, a young adult group that predominantly organized in the political arena with the experiences of MAYA, a Madera high school club.

After our grant proposal was approved by the University of California Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California (CCREC), we began the research project by inviting other already active young adults to be part of the core group. This was my first role, after becoming a research partner for this project. I sought to recruit a group of ten people, keeping in mind that in this participatory action research project, the

interviewer or the researcher would seek answers and ask questions to the interviewee based on his/her experience as organizers themselves. It was important to select those who had tied with their communities or social organizing groups, as in the case of Minerva Mendoza, who at the time was President of the American Experience Club, and Sarait Martínez who was an active member of Los Autónomos. Recruitment for the research team focused on other young people who were politically, culturally or socially active in the region. This meant that we would (1) develop research questions based on our experiences, and (2) establish relationships with those we interviewed, and (3) deepen our understanding about organizing from our counterparts in the Valley. We also hoped that this project would not end with the findings, because we committed ourselves to translate them into measurable community engagement in the Valley.

While reaching out to potential members of what became the Oaxacalifornia Reporting Team, we sought a mix of young adults with different ages and levels of formal education. Once we had identified a group of organizers who might be interested in joining the research team, we selected a group that ranged from a senior in high school to community college and university students. Some brought political insights to the table, while others drew from experiences with traditional dance groups and local community groups. Aside from academic research papers for school, none of us had engaged into this type of research project. We all needed knowledge and to learn practical lessons from more experienced researchers who had conducted PAR projects previously. Our very first group gathering was to learn from University of California at Santa Cruz professors and graduate students who were either doing or had finished their research projects and has applied some aspects of participatory research project's concepts and practices for their research.

The retreat in Santa Cruz served more than just as an event to learn about Participatory Action Research methodologies, it also gave us the op-

portunity that we often lack in the Central Valley, which is a time and place to discuss common challenges and the strengths of the different projects and visions that we are working on as individual groups. Very rarely do we get together as a community to reflect on our experiences (in contrast to action-oriented gatherings, rallies and cultural events). The retreats we had during this research process gave us many of those opportunities. In addition to the retreat in Santa Cruz, we also came together in a series of home-based workshops, during the process of developing the interview questions and script writing. As a matter of fact, it was during one of the house meetings where we had a very rich conversation about gender roles. That was when we decided that we needed to devote a chapter to this important topic. These gatherings also provided us with a space for us to establish trust amongst ourselves and to get to know our research advisors and other colleagues who supported us in the process.

Once we had done the focus group interviews, we moved into the analytical phase of our work. First we had to identify trends and patterns that resonated throughout the interviews and tried to put the personal testimonies of the interviewees into perspective. Most of our team members participated as an interviewer, and each was responsible for analyzing the material from that discussion. Some of the script material and the chapters were written in Spanish, while others were first written in English. Mauricio Sánchez from Mexico City, an anthropologist with experience working with indigenous communities in Oaxaca, translated the chapters written in English into Spanish. The dynamics of working in the two languages was not a strange situation for us, as we also make sure while organizing that most of our publication material, such as leaflets and flyers, is also in both languages. We wanted to do the same with this research, which is why our publication is both in English and in Spanish.

The writing process required additional group meetings. We traveled back to Santa Cruz, and

other times we met individually in Fresno and in Madera to move the writing process forward. Given our team's somewhat dispersed locations and complicated schedules, some of our conferences took place via Internet and other times via phone conferences. It seemed that the writing phase was the most challenging part of this task; mostly because of our multilingual experience. When I came to this country back in 2001, I was only fluent in Zapoteco. I spoke very limited Spanish, so when I was in junior high I had to learn not only English, but Spanish as well. I learned English at school and Spanish within the community, but without knowing Spanish, learning English was very difficult. Certainly the writing part has remained a challenge for me. This was very troubling because when I got into high school, I was required to pass the English language exam of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which required writing assessment. Many of my friends did not graduate because they passed the math exam but not the language part. This is a common trend in our community, as many of us encounter this dynamics of having to learn both English and Spanish at the same time, while still speaking our native languages. Regardless of this language barrier, we managed to conclude this work with great success.

All this extensive work was possible thanks to the dedicated members of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team. Each member contributed his or her experiences, capacity, expertise and ideas to the study. They sacrificed many school and family hours and sometime energy away from their community organizing work to dedicate themselves to this research project, which started in the summer of 2011 and concludes with the publication of this report in summer 2013. Unpredictably, when we began this project none of us thought it would take us two years to accomplish, but the realities can be understood by considering the challenges of our daily life as first members of our families to pursue a higher education or as undocumented students. In my case for example, in summer of 2012 when Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) was announced, I not only had to adjust my agenda to apply for my own work permit and driver's

license, but I also had to assist the community. This certainly took energy and countless hours away from the research, but it was a very important development for me and for my community in Madera. At the end, all this community work enriched our experience and enabled us to report some of those learning in this report. Similar life transitions happened to other members: one member graduated from high school and moved on to university, others graduated from university and started to look for work. These different life transitions help to explain the pace of this research project, but again I owe very sincere thanks to all the members for their unique contributions.

Sarait Martínez, of Zapoteco origin, joined the team while she was finishing her masters' degree at California State University in Fresno. She reported from her experience as the current binational youth coordinator for *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales* and as a community worker at *Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño*. Sarait was the key person who put us into contact with Los Autónomos in Fresno. She was also very involved with coordinating other focus groups and providing peer reviews, as well as transcribing interviews.

José Eduardo Chávez, of Mixteco origin, joined the team while he was a senior at Madera High School (at the time, all of the other team members were college students or graduates). José was the main coordinator of the high school focus group. He shared his experiences as the son of a single mother and an undocumented student and a political organizer with the Central Valley Youth Association (CYVA). As mentioned earlier, some of us became interviewees as well, and José was one of those who took both roles, as he was interviewed because of his involvement with the MAYA club and in CVYA.

Ana Mendoza, of Mixteco origin, then a senior at CSU Fresno and editor of the campus newspaper, provided her expertise as a news reporter, led the discussion with CYVA, and transcribed one of the longest interviews. Ana brought her experience as

someone who has been involved with local community issues in Madera. She also provided logistical support, including organizing one of the key house workshops at her dining room table.

Minerva Mendoza, of Mixteco origin, then a Madera Community College student, was the contact person with the American Experience Club and when the interview was conducted she was the club's president. Now, Minerva is a student at CSU Fresno pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Teresa Gonzalez, a student at Fresno City College was the only non-indigenous core group member and her participation was essential throughout the research process, particularly in developing the questions because she challenged us on how would we respond to the needs of high school focus group, where several of the interviewees were non-indigenous participants. Teresa also drew from her experience as a Mexican folk dancer in the Central Valley and she helped with organizing meetings.

Luis Solano, of Mixteco origin, was the only core group member currently living outside of Madera and Fresno. However, he had lived in Madera earlier, where he was active in organizing civic and cultural events, such as the May 1st March, La Guelaguetza and the Tamejavi Festivals. Luis, who studied at San Joaquin Valley College in Bakersfield, also contributed to the development of the research questions and helped to organize the focus groups.

Lastly, Cornelio Santos, also of Mixteco origin and previously a member of the Central Valley Youth Association, was a cofounder of Los Autónomos and played a very important role during the initial phases of this research. I also want to thank Jessica Fernández, Psychology PhD student, who came to Madera twice to help us with note taking and transcribing the transcripts for CVYA and farm-worker chapters, as well as Xochitl Chávez, Fe Moncloa, Tania Cruz Salazar, Tracy Perkins, and Liz Gonzalez for sharing their work at our first gathering at UC Santa Cruz.

We had two distinguished allied teachers from the University of California, who unconditionally assisted and responded to the needs of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team to make this research project possible. They adjusted to the realities and challenges within our working team. For example, originally we planned to have this project done within a year, but given the unforeseen activities of some members of the core working team, we took almost another year. Also, originally, we thought that a weekend retreat in Santa Cruz would be enough time to learn and ask questions, however, we learned that it was not enough and both professors came to Madera twice to meet with us – and some of us returned to Santa Cruz as well. We want to thank them for their patience, flexibility and encouragement throughout this research project. They also provided professional advice and guidance as scholars who know our community well.

Dr. Jonathan Fox was not only the one who kept us on track but also the one responsible for making this research project a reality. He provided us with peer review, suggested ideas for additional chapters, and guided the process in all aspects, from encouraging our discussions about how to decide on the title to the smallest detail of question development, script writing, analyses, editing and publication. Besides his involvement as an academic researcher (as a Fellow from the University of California Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California), I personally view Professor Fox as a mentor who has assisted me and other members beyond this research project in our professional careers. Thank you, Dr. Fox for the many reviews you provided for each of the chapters, and for responding to our emails in a timely manner, and above all for believing in each of us.

Dr. Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, who himself is a Mixteco, is a researcher and activist who is seen as a role model by many of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team members. Dr. Rivera-Salgado brought his experience to this research as someone who has

paved the way for many of us-the new emerging community organizer. During our discussions, he shared his experiences as a co-founder of *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales*, the same organization where I started my community organizing experience. He also assisted us in many aspects of this research project, from providing feedback on many of the drafts to guiding discussions during our retreats and home-based workshop gatherings in Madera and in Santa Cruz.

I also want to thank the University of California Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California, which sponsored this research. We praise their commitment to make California a better place to live, through the various research projects that they have sponsored thus far, including this one. We share their vision of making it possible for community groups to work together with university researchers to work collectively to find solutions to the many issues facing our region particularly the Madera and Fresno counties. I want to thank CCREC for having granted the extension that we requested for this research. Another institution that I want to thank is the Fresno-based Binational Center for the Development of the Oaxacan Indigenous Communities for their support, as our fiscal partner. We commend the CBDIO for its committed support for youth projects like ours.

As most of us have experienced from our organizing journeys, not everything goes well as we plan in our events. There are many challenges - some are inevitable while others occur because of the nature of the activities that we organize. This research project was not exempt from such challenges. First, bringing together such a talented and hard working group was very challenging because everyone not only has to attend to their personal life, but also all the team members were involved in a wide array of community events, activities, and commitments. Also, there was a moment where the momentum slowed, and as a consequence one of our core members left the group. Secondly, for us, this type of research approach was unheard-of. We

had to learn not only about Participatory Action Research, but also the processes needed to carry out a study. The theory behind PAR was also a challenging concept to learn and to practice. Most of us are used to having our professor tell us how to direct our research paper, but here we were the ones making those decisions. The team met these challenges, and that is how we reached our readers with this publication.

My participation and that of my colleagues at the Round Table Discussion on Latino Civic and Political Participation in summer of 2010 was the beginning of this research project. For the past two years, members of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team have reflected together with indigenous Mexican youth, focusing on our/their civic engagement decisions and practices. Our goal was to analyze the trends in community involvement, as well as the challenges faced, as we/they become visible in the region -- a region which we are beginning to call home. As young indigenous students, this participatory action research enriched our academic experiences and equipped us with skills and knowledge for potentially deeper research in the future, as we move forward with our careers. Furthermore, this project provided us with the opportunity to reflect back on our own organizing experiences and on our communities -- and to give voice to a group of young people who are often ignored by mainstream researchers. We conclude this research project knowing that great challenges await us ahead, particularly the struggle for comprehensive immigration reform. Regardless of the outcome of the current debate on immigration policy in Washington, some of us will continue organizing our communities to promote cultural and civic participation. This will give us more organizing experience, but in the meantime we share with you these essays on our lives so far as new immigrants, and on our contribution to the broader effort to promote good citizenry through community involvement in the Central Valley.

Introduction: Indigenous Oaxacan Immigrants and Youth-led Organizing in California

by Jonathan Fox



Newly-elected Binational Youth Coordinator, Sarait Martínez, addresses the assembly of the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations in Oaxaca. Photo: David Bacon

How do young adults who grew up in Oaxacan immigrant families in California's Central Valley get involved in civic life? How do indigenous migrant youth build on their peoples' cultural legacies while integrating into both Mexican and American communities in the Central Valley? They face the challenge of having to navigate several different cultures at the same time—the indigenous cultures that their parents brought with them, the broader Mexican culture that their communities are a part of, and then the dominant U.S. culture. Linguistic diversity is a central part of their lived experience—their parents often speak an indigenous language at home, they speak Spanish with friends (including other indigenous young adults whose parents speak different languages)—and they learn English at school. Most become bilingual, some even trilingual.

Young indigenous migrants in the Central Valley grow up immersed in these different cultures, accompanying their parents' struggles at work for survival as farmworkers, and aware that education can be a pathway to better jobs—for some, at least. Yet some families migrate seasonally up to

the Pacific Northwest, causing a late start to the children's school year. While parents often remain engaged with their communities of origin, what about those who grew up in the US? Along the way, they frequently experience racial discrimination, both in Mexico and in the US, leading some to deny their indigenous heritage. At the same time, those immigrants who attend school in the US learn about the civil rights movement. In this context, how do indigenous young people decide how to commit to social change?

This report analyzes the civic engagement pathways of indigenous migrant youth in California's Central Valley. This participatory action research (PAR) project was carried out by a team of seven young adults who are active in their communities' civic and cultural life, in partnership with two university-based advisors, and with modest funding from the University of California's Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California (CCREC). Juan Santiago's preface to this report reflects on the process. The team members all grew up in the Central Valley, most are from indigenous Oaxacan farmworker families and are

now college students or graduates, including three with BAs and one with a masters' degree. This team calls themselves the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team (*Equipo de Cronistas Oaxacalifornianos*, or ECO, in Spanish). This term "*cronista*" (literally "chronicler") refers to a tradition within Mexican writing that provides reader-friendly, in-depth analysis through a combination of story-telling and interviews. The term "Oaxacalifornia" refers to the shared cultural space linking Oaxaca with California, created by the migration experience. The term was coined by the late Michael Kearney, an anthropologist at the University of California, Riverside, who pioneered balanced partnerships between researchers and Oaxacan migrants (e.g., Kearney 2000).

According to the literature on youth-led organizing, this project would be considered a "youth-adult collaborative partnership," in which decision-making was shared (Delgado and Staples 2008: 69). Yet the study's focus is on documenting fully youth-led organizing experiences, which are often invisible to the outside world (e.g., Cammarota and Fine 2008). The focus here is on learning from young adults' developing commitments to civic engagement, even if their collective action and concern for the public interest unfolds outside of the mainstream public sphere.

Immigrant youth from indigenous families experience many of the same issues shared by most children of first-generation immigrants – most notably learning English, becoming interlocutors between their families and the dominant culture, – as well as adapting to public schools that are not well understood by their parents. At the same time, they also face both challenges and opportunities for civic engagement that are distinctive, shaped by cultural and linguistic difference, including legacies of racism in both Mexican and US societies. Nevertheless, as this report shows, the young adults whose experiences are documented here share one feature that cuts across differences of culture and national origin – *joiners are joiners*. Savvy young adults from Oaxacan families are tak-

ing their place in the Central Valley's public sphere as part of a new generation of community leaders. The existing literature on immigrant youth – like the literature on immigrants more generally – tends to treat Mexicans as an implicitly ethnically homogenous group. Yet even using the Mexican government's narrow definition of indigeneity, which is based on language use, rather than race, culture or sense of belonging – 10.5% of the national population is officially recognized as indigenous (CDI 2009). Yet according to the government's still widely-cited traditional census category, which only counts language speakers over 5 years old, only 7% of the population is indigenous. The official estimate rises to 13% of the national population when including residents of households in which indigenous languages are spoken (CDI 2009). The government's National Institute of Indigenous Languages now recognizes 68 different language groups in Mexico (INALI 2010).

This high degree of linguistic diversity among Mexicans is largely invisible to US public schools, which face the challenge of increasing their sensitivity to ethnic and linguistic difference among Mexican immigrants. Many schools have had difficulty making immigrant parents of all kinds feel included in their children's education, especially since many have had limited formal education themselves, and speak limited Spanish – so lack of cultural sensitivity to indigenous parents compounds this broader challenge. Partnerships with indigenous-led community-based organizations can include parents in their children's education, as in the case of the Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities' civic engagement work in Fresno (Flynn 2005). Yet many US schools still treat all Mexican immigrant students as Spanish-speaking, and racialized slurs against students who are not Spanish-dominant are widespread (Barrillas-Chón 2010, Gálvez-Hard 2006, Kovats 2010, Ruiz and Barajas 2012, Stephen 2007). This issue recently came to public attention when the Oxnard, California Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project launched a campaign called "Don't call me 'little Oaxacan,'"

persuading the school district to ban the epithets “*oaxaquita*” and “*indito*” (Esquivel 2012).

This report profiles the civic engagement trajectories of young indigenous adults whose drive and sense of self survived the challenges posed by ethnic prejudice and cultural misunderstanding. As the chapters that follow show, ECO members are active in a wide range of organizations – some are social or political while others are more cultural. Some are engaged in multi-issue initiatives, while others focus on single issues. Some work primarily with other indigenous immigrants, while others involve multi-ethnic participants. Some are focused primarily on their communities in the Valley, while others are also involved with their families’ communities of origin. Some of their forms of collective action are youth-specific, while others involve multi-generational partnerships. While their parents’ civic engagement tends to be organized around their communities of origin, young adults raised in the US focus their civic energies on the right to equality in the US. That’s where they see their futures, regardless of their immigration status. Yet at the same time, many are committed to preserving their families’ cultural legacies. While sustaining their languages is an especially difficult challenge, they nevertheless reproduce other forms of indigenous cultural expression in the US, including forms of social and civic organization. The team’s research focuses on lessons learned from their diverse mix of civic engagements.

This report presents ECO’s own analysis of youth-led organizing experiences, strategies and repertoires among young adults of Oaxacan origin in Madera and Fresno counties. This study contributes to filling several gaps. First, immigrant civic engagement in California’s Central Valley more generally is just beginning to be documented (Martínez-Nateras and Stanley 2009). Second, a growing literature is addressing specifically Latino youth-led organizing (Camarota 2008, García Bedolla 2005, Moreno 2008, Seif 2009). But it does not yet address the ethnic difference among Mexicans noted above. Third, the literature on Mexican migrants has only recently begun to

address the experiences of 1.5 and 2nd generation indigenous young adults (Barillas-Chón 2010, Cruz Manjarrez 2012, Cruz Salazar 2012, Hernández Morales 2012, Kovats 2010, Nicolás, 2012, Ramos Arcos 2012, Stephen 2007, Vargas Evaristo 2012, Vasquez 2012).

The report is organized around chapters that document distinct pathways for youth-led participation, including five on distinct organizations and two that address the cross-cutting issues of gender and cultural expression. These five spaces for youth-led organizing include: the American Experience Club (a Madera-based youth organization), mainstream high school clubs in Madera, a Oaxacan youth urban community space in Fresno called “Los Autónomos,” young indigenous farmworker activists outside of the educational system, and Dreamers, who come together with allies in the Central Valley Youth Association. The report focuses on how these distinct arenas for specifically youth-led civic engagement emerged from the experiences of ECO members. Each chapter includes both narrative description and quotes from a series of focus group interviews that were organized exclusively by ECO members. These focus group discussions, as well as extensive deliberations among ECO members, also informed the chapters on changing gender relations and on experiences with diverse forms of cultural expression, which all involve “coming out” as Oaxacan or indigenous in the public sphere. This process of self-identification is especially significant in light of widespread social pressures to “assimilate” into the broader Mexican immigrant and US communities. Though each chapter has one or more primary authors, ECO members all contributed to the content, interviews, transcriptions and selection of quotes. The academic advisors provided editorial assistance. The names of focus group participants have been changed, except for those interviewees who are also ECO members and chapter authors.

The report begins with a preface by the participant who originally convened the team, followed by two chapters on formative high school experi-

ences. This is no coincidence, since high schools function either as gateways or gatekeepers to full membership in US society, depending on whether or not they respect immigrants' cultural and social capital (e.g., Valenzuela 1999). The difference in life chances between those who do and do not finish high school are well known – including effective citizenship in terms of rates of voter participation and civic engagement (CIRCLE 2012). Even though civic engagement is a learned skill, few high schools actually teach students how and why – for example – to register to vote (Fox and Glass 2012). Meanwhile, high schools do often offer high-performing, mainstream students the opportunity to develop their leadership skills, but the menu of options for students who are not among the school elite, or those still working on their academic English, is much more limited. At the same time, for students of all kinds, one of the most important spaces for developing leadership skills are high school clubs. But what kinds of student clubs are welcoming to immigrant kids? This is where the story of these young adult community activists begins...

Youth-led responses to exclusion in High School: the American Experience Club

Immigrant kids in Madera High School who did not feel included by the conventional options created their own organization, the American Experience Club. With support from a dedicated teacher, this organization began as way for indigent youth students to gain access to the classic "enrichment" activities that the school curriculum took for granted, but were not part of their family's experience -- like educational trips to San Francisco or Yosemite. For many, it was normal to have never seen the ocean. Their experience with running their own organization allowed them to set their own terms of engagement with the immigrant integration process. Remarkably, the founding members stayed together as a club long

after they graduated, developing new organizational and leadership skills, and eventually becoming community leaders. For example, in 2006 they spearheaded local public awareness campaigns about immigrant rights following immigration raids in Madera.

The name these high schoolers chose for their club raises interesting questions about what it means to be an American, and who decides. Seen from afar, the club's name "American Experience" sounds like old-fashioned assimilationism, which implies leaving one's culture behind. Yet these students remained proud of their Oaxacan roots — for them, the group's name both underscored their own sense of exclusion from the "American Dream," and their claim for the right to be able to enjoy the rites of passage — to see the world — that their US counterparts could take for granted, on their own terms. They created and sustained this club as their own autonomous platform for engaging with the dominant society (e.g., Gibson 1988)

Mainstream high school clubs in farmworker towns

Schooling has long been the principal gateway for children of immigrants to integrate into US society (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995). Yet English learner programs are falling far short of their goals - consider the shockingly low pass rate from English Learner to mainstream classes (Flores, Painter and Pachón 2009). By the time they get to high school, over half of California English learners are considered "Long Term English Learners," stuck in a dead end, falling further behind with each year outside of mainstream classrooms (Olsen 2010, 2012). This problem may be related to high schools' lack of recognition of their students' cultural assets (Camarota and Fine 2008). Consider the powerful process of "subtractive schooling," in which some high schools push their students out by devaluing their cultures, denying their dignity and setting them up for failure (Valenzuela 1999). This is not a new issue, however. In spite of roman-

ticized images of the ostensibly rapid assimilation of prior generations of European immigrants, the contemporary pace of cultural integration and English language acquisition is happening at least as quickly as in the past – though there are now fewer pathways to good jobs for those who lack higher education (Perlmann 2005). Yet academic and policy studies have focused more on the role of schools in encouraging immigrants' English language acquisition and access to the labor market than on their civic learning. Here the role of schools is no less important.

Mainstream high school club activities range from highly-structured, adult-led programs to much more autonomous, student-led initiatives. A classic case – student government – has elements of both pathways of participation. While many Central Valley high schools have gone through dramatic demographic change over the past two decades, as the Latino share of the youth population has increased, mainstream high school student clubs have responded unevenly. Some have proven more open and accessible to immigrant kids than others. In Madera High School, the student leadership organization Madera Academic Youth Alliance (MAYA) illustrates this process. While this club started out as a mainstream academic support group, leadership changes led the group to add the mission of building respect for Mexican culture in the school, including respect for the cultural traditions of the club's many Oaxacan members. Interestingly, the group's MAYA acronym led many to assume that it was Mexican-oriented.

Oaxacalifornian urban youth space: Los Autónomos

Young people from Oaxacan families also come together based on their shared experience of growing up together, in the same or similar urban neighborhoods. They grew up hearing their parents speak Mixtec, Zapotec or Triqui, but they learned English fast. They grew up hearing their parents' music and participating in the festivals

organized around their communities of origin, but they also grew up listening to the music that the rest of American youth enjoyed, from hip hop to heavy metal. In one of Fresno's more Oaxacan neighborhoods (Casas San Miguel), several young adults came together to create a safe social space to support each other, and to share their evolving ideas about culture and identity. Miguel Villegas, a member of the Autónomos, even pioneered trilingual rap – in Spanish, English and Mixteco (Univisión 2012, Villegas 2012). He is also a community outreach worker for the Binational Center for the Development of the Indigenous Communities. Other members used the new cultural space to rethink their gender roles and sexual identities. The many borders that they cross are not necessarily the same as those their parents confronted (Stephen 2007).

This organization's name also evokes multiple meanings. This chapter recounts how these young adults came together and deliberated about how to name themselves. Autonomy is a relational concept – so autonomous from whom? Autonomous from their parents' organizations, like the Mixteco hometown association from San Miguel Cuevas? This immigrant community, rooted in Fresno, had led a long-term, successful, neighborhood-based environmental justice campaign for restitution, leading some to relocate from substandard housing located over a toxic site to a new, middle-class housing development – with support from the Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities. Autonomous from the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB) – the binational indigenous immigrant rights organization that some of their parents were involved in (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004, Fox 2006, Martínez Saldaña 2004)? All of the above – yet at the same time, the members of Autónomos participated *both* in their own organization *and* in these other community-based adult organizations. This shows that their understanding and practice of autonomy is not either/or – they sustain their own youth space, while also collaborating with their community's broader, multi-generational indigenous organizations, and Gaspar Rivera-Sal-

gado's epilogue reflects on the implications.

Informal farmworker youth networks

The Reagan administration's 1986 mass amnesty for undocumented farmworkers both allowed the regularization of first generation indigenous agricultural workers and also permitted many mestizos to pursue more stable, better-paying jobs. This transition in turn opened up the bottom rungs on the ladder of the farm labor market, and new indigenous migrants increasingly filled these racialized jobs, including those that involve the most extreme physical exertion (Holmes 2006). By 2010, an estimated 120,000 indigenous migrants worked in California agriculture – about one third of the Mexican farmworker population in the state - plus another 45,000 children lived with these workers (Mines, Nichols, García and Runsten 2010). Another estimate suggests that 17% of California farmworkers are indigenous (Kissam et al 2010). Map One (below) shows the geographic distribution of self-identified Latinos of indigenous origin in 2010. Box One (below) shows the census data for the top twenty California counties, which report more than 200,000 self-identified Latinos of indigenous origin – a 30% increase over the 2000 census. Because of the undercount, however, it is not clear whether the population itself grew, whether self-reporting increased, or both.

Most of the young adults interviewed grew up helping their parents work in the fields. For those who worked alongside their parents in the field in Mexico, they grew up thinking that child labor was fully legal there, even for the youngest children – because it was so widely accepted. Enforcement of child labor laws in the US is much stricter (and harder to hide than some other violations) – leading most immigrants who came at a young age to go to school. Yet not all Oaxacan-origin youth who are in California grew up in California. Some come as teenagers or young adults who did not get linked up with schooling or adult education

systems and thus do not have the opportunity to get involved in the public institutions that socialize people into mainstream society. Many kids in rural Mexico migrate with their families from one state to another, interfering with their schooling there. When they finish lower secondary school and turn 15 or 16, they see their job options at home as limited, and see their access to higher education as uneven to say the least – especially if their schools did not prepare them well. Plus, for those living in communities with a tradition of migration, the decision to cross the border becomes widely accepted as a rite of passage, so migrant youth and young adults may not even be seeking to build their future in their home community (Cruz Manjarrez 2013, Cruz Salazar 2012, Stephen 2007).

Once these Oaxacan young adults get to California, while they may have little contact with mainstream civic and social institutions, they find their own ways to build community and to remain socially engaged. For many, their main focus is on their community of origin, putting in as many hours as possible to save for both family and collective remittances – a form of grassroots philanthropy through hometown associations or small, informal foundations. Many share strong collective identities with their *paisanos* through their communities' self-organized annual religious festivals. Others get involved in civic life in the US through public interest groups that advocate for their rights as workers – as in the case of the United Farm Workers' recent marches from the Central Valley to Sacramento, to advocate for the right to overtime pay. Yet the focus group interviews found that many did not identify their active community participation with concepts like membership or organizations.

Oaxacan Dreamers in the Central Valley Youth Association

About 4.5 million children in the US have at least one undocumented parent., about 1 million children are themselves also undocumented (Passel

and Cohn 2011: 13). Many came at very young ages, and were socialized into US life through the public school system. Though most feel as American as their neighbors, once they finish high school and begin to pursue higher education or a job, their undocumented status casts a shadow over the optimistic, meritocratic worldview that high schools attempt to promote (Abrego 2006, Gonzales 2011, Pérez 2009, 2011). This is the context for the Dreamers, a youth-led immigrant rights movement that is campaigning for a federal immigration law reform that would create a path to residency for those who “play by the rules” and go to school or serve in the armed forces. More than a decade ago, the proposed Dream Act was seen as a modest, (then) bipartisan compromise that had the potential to build a legislative coalition broad enough to transcend the stalemate over comprehensive immigration reform – a down payment, at least, from the point of view of the immigrant rights movements. Since then, hard-line anti-immigrant forces succeeded in blocking Republican support.

Following the failure of a bipartisan compromise for immigration reform under President Bush and then Obama’s 2008 election, Dreamers began to come together in a bold and tenacious national movement, creating both a new public presence and a new collective identity. Increasing numbers of students dared to “come out” and tell their stories. In response, the Obama administration first declared that deporting Dreamers would be considered ‘low priority.’ This turned out to have little impact and Dreamer activists then turned up the heat, combining high profile protests (such as occupying Obama presidential campaign offices) with sophisticated legal strategies that involved recruiting prominent law professors to persuade Obama administration lawyers that they could indeed use executive authority to semi-regularize Dreamers’ status. Under pressure to inspire Latino voters – and to call off occupations of his campaign office – President Obama announced his Deferred Action policy in June, 2012, creating a process that would suspend the threat of deportation and allow the right to work and drive for

many undocumented youth under 30. By January, 2013, almost 400,000 Deferred Action applicants had been accepted (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013, PBS Newshour 2012, Preston 2012). These young people have shown extraordinary faith in “the system,” since in order to apply they must, in effect “out themselves” as undocumented. At the same time, since the process requires applicants to document their continuous residence in the US since 2007 while undocumented, many potentially eligible young people lack a consistent paper trail. Note the contradiction – the undocumented are required to document themselves.

For some Oaxacan youth, the Central Valley Youth Association became the vehicle for their struggle to become full participants in US civic life – a pattern consistent with other recent surveys of Dreamer activists (Pérez et al 2010, Terriquez and Patler 2012). New research is beginning to chronicle Dreamers’ campaigns, including their creative use of new media, “coming out” storytelling, and their relationship with the broader immigrant rights movement (e.g., Zimmerman 2012). Yet in the Central Valley, though Dreamers and the broader immigrant rights movement inspire passion, they do not have access to the dense institutional support system of allied civic and social organizations and influential elected officials that their counterparts in Los Angeles or the San Francisco Bay Area enjoy. Research is only beginning to address the importance of these regional contextual differences for the immigrant rights movement (Bada, Donnelly, Fox and Selee 2010, Silver 2012). As a result, Central Valley Dreamers had to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, and in the process they initiated numerous efforts to build alliances, both inside and outside the region.

Changing gender roles

Historically, most rural communities in Mexico, including indigenous communities, sharply limited women’s rights and personal autonomy. These traditions were not fixed, however, and practices have

been changing rapidly over the past three decades. Decades ago, indigenous women were denied the right to “voice and vote” in Oaxacan communities, yet today, rural women have gained recognition of their citizenship rights in many villages (Velasquez 2004). While many of the grandmothers and mothers of today’s young indigenous women were married very young -- and not by their own choice -- this pattern has changed significantly. In addition, for young rural women in Mexico accustomed to intense scrutiny of their daily lives by family and neighbors, migration can represent a pathway to much greater personal autonomy. For some young indigenous women growing up in small towns in the US, however, strict family controls persist -- including over marriage choices (París Pombo 2008). At the same time, cross-border migration also involves much greater surveillance by the state (Stephen 2007).

While indigenous migrant communities reproduce some inherited ideas about gender roles, they also experience rapid change. Young women from indigenous families in the US experience degrees of autonomy that their mothers could not have hoped for. Plus, change is happening so quickly that younger sisters have more autonomy than older sisters, as many interviewees pointed out. Yet parents still forbid many young women from going out at night - or even staying after school for club meetings -- which seriously constrains their capacity for civic engagement (as CVYA members noted). Yet meetings held during school hours are not a problem -- and in the case of the American Experience Club, the parents’ familiarity with the group built trust, which allowed female participants more room for participation. In other words, young Oaxacan women in Madera and Fresno actively seek to participate in civic life, often more than their mothers were allowed to, but they still face gendered obstacles.

Young women in Oaxacan families also reported that they are still expected to wash their brothers’ dishes and take care of younger siblings. The chapter on changing gender roles draws both on

focus group interviews and on team members’ own reflections, following extensive dialogue within the ECO team. The findings reveal a wide range of perspectives, yet many agree that gender roles reflect family and individual choices, rather than reflecting fixed or predetermined cultural expectation. After all -- like 2nd generation immigrant women from so many different national and cultural backgrounds - the difference between the degrees of autonomy experienced by young Oaxacan women in the US and the sharply limited choices experienced by their grandmothers is remarkable.

Public cultural expression

Among the many distinctive cultural traditions that Oaxacan immigrants bring with them -- including food, spirituality, language, music, dance and community service -- one of the most important is the Guelaguetza. The celebration, originally Zapotec, underscores Oaxaca’s ethnic diversity, highlighting a wide range of dances that are characteristic of the state’s eight regions. The Guelaguetza promotes a collective Oaxacan identity that celebrates indigenusness through a pan-ethnic lens. While the Guelaguetza began as a grassroots, community sharing of food, music and dance, it was also turned by local elites into an official annual festival starting in the 1930s, and has since become Oaxaca’s major tourist attraction. For many immigrants who came to the US from rural areas, back home the official Guelaguetza in Oaxaca City was often inaccessible - far away and expensive. Many did not learn about the significance of this event until they crossed the border. Once in the US, however, many Oaxacans come together to organize their own community-based Guelaguetza festivals, often in partnership with local schools, student organizations, business associations and cultural groups. Several ECO members who have led the youth organizations mentioned above have also been quite involved in the multi-generational Guelaguetzas, as Rivera-Salgado details in his essay in this report.



Sarait Martínez and Juan Santiago, along with Jonathan Fox, presenting their research at the Strategies for an Equitable California Conference in Berkeley, CA. September 28th 2012. Photo: CCREC

Currently, at least 16 migrant Guelaguetzas are celebrated annually throughout the US – mainly in California, but increasingly in other states as well (Los Angeles (2), San Diego county, Fresno, Oxnard, San Jose, Bakersfield, San Marcos, Santa Rosa, Santa Maria, Santa Cruz, Seattle, WA, Poughkeepsie, NY, Salem, OR, Odessa TX, Atlantic City, NJ – many are recorded on youtube videos). These large-scale public cultural events draw on huge investments of volunteer community labor, and therefore serve as an indicator of the density of Oaxacan society in the US. There is one specific kind of Oaxacan organization that none of these events could do without – the dance troupes. Years of training are required to develop the skills needed to perform, and now the festival circuit is large enough to keep dance groups busy throughout the summer. For several years, Madera was

the home of one of these popular dance troupes, Se'e Savi ("son of the rain"). As many as 100 different people participated at one time or another in this one organization. These Oaxacan dance troupes are distinctive in that they are remarkably multi-generational. For many, this participation was a transformative experience, allowing them to "come out" as indigenous Oaxacans in the most celebratory, dignified and supportive public space possible. In this context, Se'e Savi became another autonomous pathway to social and civic engagement for young Oaxacan adults.

Many Oaxacan communities in the US also organize large-scale festivals of music, dance and food to honor their hometown saint's days. These community dance festivals – and support for counterpart dances back home – can also become a

powerful cross-border cultural unifier for diasporic communities that are deeply divided by other issues, as in the case of political polarization in Yalalag, in Oaxaca's northern Sierra (Cruz Manjarrez 2013). The experience of the Coatecas Altas hometown festival in Madera, California, described in one of Santiago's chapters that follows, is emblematic of the reproduction of indigenous community traditions in the Central Valley, attracting *paisanos* from all over the West Coast (Wozniacka 2011). This community festival also shows the capacity of young immigrants to become cultural leaders in social contexts usually controlled by elders. Indeed, several ECO members have become self-identified "cultural organizers" (e.g., Cammarota 2008: 10-11).

When considering the important cultural repertoires for indigenous collective identity, the role of language is also central. Mexican indigenous identity has long been closely identified with language use, both by society and by the state – so how will 2nd generation immigrants reimagine their indigenous identity when language preservation is such a challenge? Indigenous languages continue to bear the burden of social stigma, both within Mexico and in Mexican communities in the US. In spite of the political and cultural breakthrough achieved by the Zapatista rebellion, by confronting Mexican society with the reality of indigenous citizens' second-class status, the stereotype of the "indio" is still associated in Mexico's dominant popular culture with poverty and ignorance, and indigenous Mexicans are still denied recognition and respect in the mass media and the educational system, with the notable exception of now eleven Intercultural Universities created over the past decade (Sánchez-Álvarez 2012). Scholars and opinion-makers in Mexico have barely begun to address the ways in which racism is expressed today (Carrillo Trueba 2009, Castellanos Guerrero 2003). Notably, the term "*dialecto*" continues to be widely used to refer to indigenous languages—

both in Mexico and in the US – with the implication that they are second-class languages. Some indigenous people themselves use the term "dialect" to refer to their own languages, which suggests an internalization of their own subordination.

Many indigenous language speakers pursue "silence as a strategy," and do not pass their languages on to their children (Perry 2009). One new study even proposed the concept of "family language policy," to account for the decision-making processes that influence which languages Zapotec immigrant children learn (Pérez Báez 2013). In Mexican households where at least one parent speaks an indigenous language, about 53% of children aged six to eighteen also report speaking the language (Yoshioko 2010: 21). In addition, not all speakers of indigenous languages explicitly self-identify as indigenous; Mexico's 2000 census reported more than one million more indigenous language speakers than the number of self-identified indigenous citizens (Kovats 2010: 24-25, citing Bartolomé 2005: 38). Yet Mexican census data also show that 58% of self-identified indigenous people speak an indigenous language (Yoshioko 2010: 15). In Oaxaca itself, indigenous language speakers who are actively preserving their linguistic heritage use the term "lengua" rather than "dialect" (e.g., Call 2011: 96).

Children of indigenous migrants tend to learn Spanish in the US first, then English. In this context, some parents are concerned that promoting trilingualism would pose an undue burden on their children (Cruz Manjarrez 2013, Kovats 2010, Pérez Báez 2013). Yet the children may then ask, "If my parents are indigenous from Oaxaca, and I have learned Spanish and English, how can I say that I am an India from Oaxaca?" (cited in Cruz Manjarrez 2013: 128). That said, some 1.5 generation migrants who come to the US with little Spanish focus primarily on learning English, ending up trilingual, with Spanish as their *third* language.

Conclusions

As young adults from indigenous Oaxacan immigrant families create their own terms of engagement with California's Spanish and English-speaking worlds, they also face the challenge of defining their sense of identification with their communities of origin. This raises the question of how "peoplehood" is defined – keeping in mind that the term "*pueblo*" in Spanish has a dual meaning – it encompasses both "people" in the broad sense of a whole society as well as a more localized sense of "community of origin." Young indigenous adults who grew up in the US are very aware of their parents' communities' deep appreciation for cultural authenticity, an idea that encourages respect for ancestral languages and customs, while at the same time complicating the ideas of membership experienced by the many indigenous immigrants who did not grow up speaking their community's language.

In Oaxaca, many indigenous communities have survived with a high degree of de facto autonomy and cultural survival in part because of their strong sense of what it means to be a citizen of the community – and that is the term that is used. To be a member in good standing, the rights associated with voice and vote are accompanied by high levels of responsibility (Fox 2006). Indeed, some communities have reconfigured their criteria for sustaining membership, to encourage ongoing inclusion of their diasporas (Kearney and Besserer 2004). In the context of this high bar for sustaining full citizenship in the community of origin, the second generation faces the challenge of deciding how and whether to identify with their roots. Do they identify with their parents' community, which they may barely recall, or may have never visited? Do they identify with a broader, ethnic sense of peoplehood defined by their parents' language? Or do they opt for an even broader, pan-ethnic sense

of collective identity, as embodied by the term "*Oaxaqueño*?" Kovats found, in her interviews with younger children of Oaxacan parents in San Diego, that "very few children associated where they were 'from' with their specific hometown or their parents' town, especially those that were not born in Oaxaca. Instead, Oaxaca itself became the abstract 'hometown' for many of the children." (2010: 58) This self-identification is part of Oaxacan migrants' broader shift from previously localized, hometown-based identities to a broader, "scaled-up," pan-ethnic identity (Fox 2006).

The essays that follow explore the civic engagement pathways of young adults who grew up in Oaxacan families in the Central Valley. In their own words, the members of ECO document their experiences and the lessons they have learned along the way, combining their narratives with highlights from extensive focus group interviews with their counterparts. Listen to the members of the Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team, as they share how they find their own ways to express themselves, creating their own sense of community, and defending their rights. Their stories have just begun.

Box 1: What does the US Census tell us about indigenous migration?

The US census categories allow for self-identification both in terms of race and ethnicity. These two separate categories allow indigenous migrants from Latin American to self-identify by checking both the American Indian box and the Hispanic/Latino box (Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2004, Humes, Jones and Ramirez 2011, Stephen 2007). Those who choose to respond to the census in this way are claiming both identities.

This de facto, self-combined census category of Latinos of indigenous origin is limited for several reasons. First, many indigenous migrants may not “find themselves” in the umbrella racial category, preferring their community of origin, or linguistic group – so they may check the “some other race” box. Second, the American Indian census category’s request for official tribal affiliation comes across as unfamiliar to most indigenous migrants, so very few answer this question (Norris, Vines and Hofel, 2012: 17). The concept of “tribe” is very rarely used as a form of self-identification in Mexico and Central America. Third, in addition to self-identification issues, indigenous migrants are likely to be undercounted. For example, because the census requires respondents to make a special effort to provide information on residences with more than 5 people (because of the forms), those additional residents often go uncounted and unidentified (Kissam and Jacobs 2004).

The official census data on self-identified indigenous Latin American migrants should be understood as a minimum estimate – the actual population is likely to be much larger, in spite of recent progress towards reducing the undercount (Kissam et al 2010). Approximately 95% of indigenous Latin American migrants in the US are of Mexican origin, though significant indigenous Guatemalan communities also live in Florida, Texas and California (Ed Kissam, personal communication, Dec. 17, 2012).

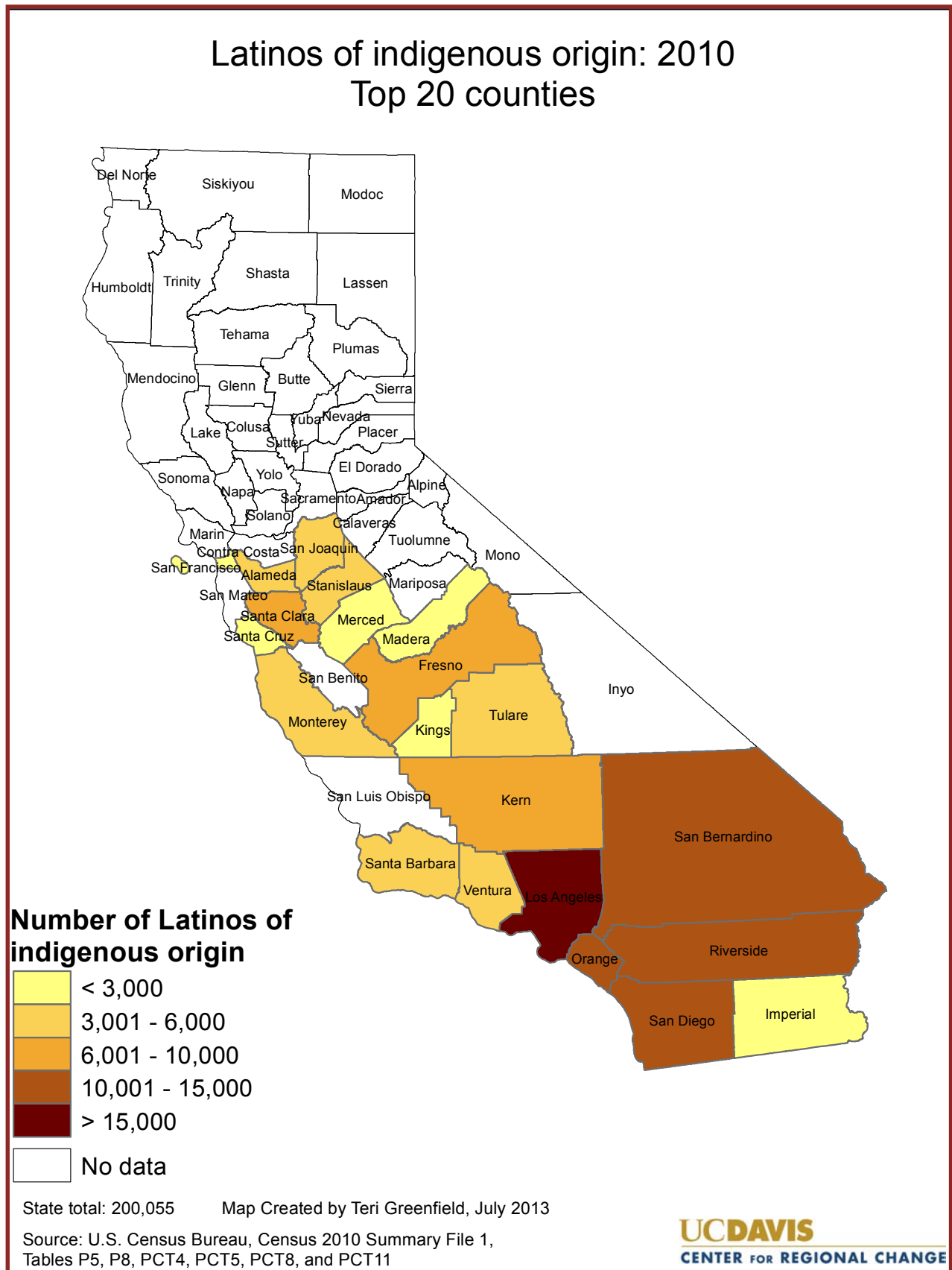
The census count of Latinos of indigenous origin in the US who identify as having one race reached

685,000 in the 2010, a 68% increase over 2000 (Humes, Jones and Ramirez 2011). In other words, they do not self-identify as mestizo, or mixed-race. Two-thirds of this population lives in six states (see Table One). These reported increases reflect some combination of both actual growth and changing self-identification patterns.

If one uses the more flexible category of those Latinos who also identify in racial terms as “American Indian alone or in combination,” the population of Latinos with indigenous ancestry reaches 1,190,000, a 76% increase over 2000. This category would include those of mixed US Latino-Native American descent, as well as migrants of mixed indigenous/non-indigenous parents. Plus, one should recall that historically, many native Californians blended in to Mexican communities, going underground in response to the California state government’s official policy of extermination in the 19th century (Almaguer 1994).

California alone accounts for one third of the single-race indigenous Latin American migrants, reporting just over 200,000, a 30% increase over 2000. Los Angeles county alone has more than one fourth of the total population, reporting almost 54,000 – yet at the same time, Los Angeles reports little growth between 2010 and 2000 (see Table Two). In contrast, Central California counties report very high growth rates (Central Valley, Monterey and Ventura counties). Notably, Madera County – a main focus in this study – reports the highest percentage of indigenous migrants in California, with 1.6% identifying as indigenous (a 55% increase over 2000), rising to 2% of the county population when accounting for those of mixed indigenous heritage. Yet to give a sense of the difficulty with documenting this population, while the 2010 census put Madera County’s indigenous migrant population at approximately 3000 (with 2400 reporting “one” race), an Associated Press report estimated the population at 5,000 (Wozniacka 2011) and Ed Kissam estimated 7,000 (cited in Brown 2011).

Map 1:



Map 2:

Latinos of indigenous origin: 2000-2010 % Growth Top 20 counties

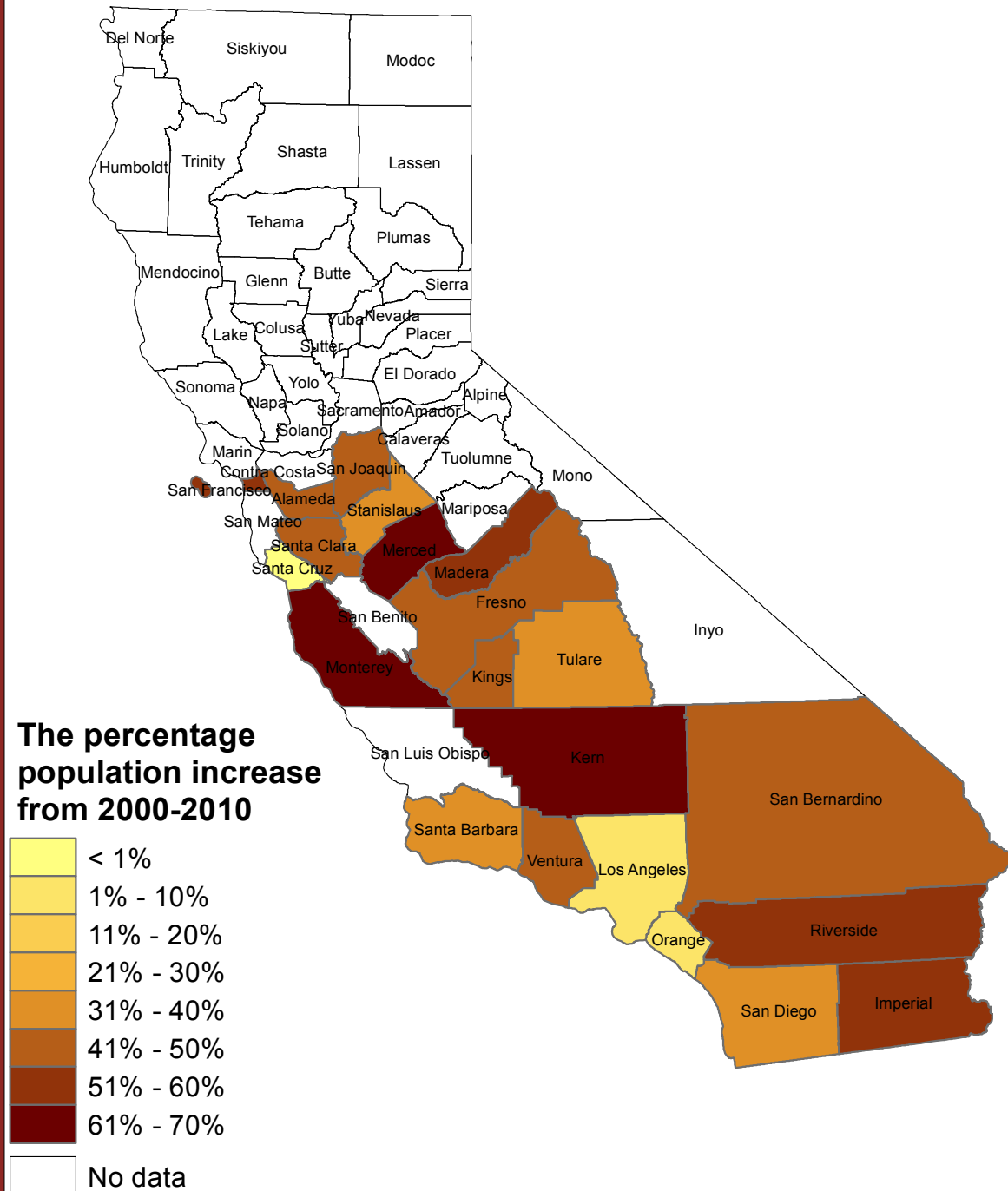


Table 1: Latinos of indigenous origin, top 20 California counties.
Self-identified, US census

	2000 total	2000 percent	2010 Total	2010 Percent	Growth, 2000-2010
California	154,362	0.50%	200,551	0.50%	29.9%
1. Los Angeles	51,379	0.50%	53,942	0.50%	5%
2. Orange	11,492	0.40%	11,916	0.40%	3.6%
3. San Bernardino	10,111	0.60%	14,166	0.70%	40.1%
4. San Diego	,084	0.30%	12,242	0.40%	34.7%
5. Riverside	8,033	0.50%	12,779	0.60%	59%
6. Fresno	6,567	0.80%	9,670	1%	47.3%
7. Santa Clara	6,080	0.40%	8,918	0.50%	46.7%
8. Sacramento	4,289	0.40%	6,433	0.50%	50.0%
9. Kern	4,114	0.60%	6,783	0.80%	64.9%
10. Ventura	3,929	0.50%	5,679	0.70%	44.5%
11. Alameda	3,840	0.30%	5,610	0.40%	46%
12. San Joaquin	2,846	0.50%	4,017	0.60%	41.1%
13. Tulare	2,726	0.70%	3,670	0.80%	34.6%
14. Santa Barbara	2,649	0.70%	3,642	0.90%	37.5%
15. Monterey	2,420	0.60%	4,103	1%	69.5%
16. Stanislaus	2,193	0.50%	3,032	0.60%	38.3%
17. Contra Costa	2,182	0.20%	3,138	0.30%	43.8%
18. Sonoma	1,912	0.40%	2,905	0.60%	51.9%
19. San Mateo	1,594	0.20%	2,184	0.30%	37.0%
20. Madera	1,518	1.20%	2,346	1.60%	55%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1, Matrices P8 and P10.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1, Tables P5, P8, PCT4, PCT5, PCT8, and PCT11.

Table 2: Latinos of indigenous origin, top 6 US states
Self-identified, US census

State	2000	2010	Growth %
California	154,362	200,551	30
Texas	49,503	90,386	82.6
New York	29,962	52,988	76.8
Arizona	22,509	39,103	73.7
Colorado	15,259	24,766	62.3
Illinois	12,774	25,114	96.6
Total US	407,073	685,150	68.3

Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data Census 2000 Summary File 1, Matrices P8 and P10
 Census 2010 Summary File 1 100 - Percent Data Summary File, Tables P5 and P7

Thanks very much to Nidia Bautista for her assistance with census data analysis.

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Chapter 1: The Voices of the American Experience Club

by Minerva Mendoza



American Experience Club members after a meeting in Bakersfield in 2011. Photo: Anon

Migrants who come to the US as a child or teen face an educational system that is very different from the schools in their native country. Like many other young people who migrated to California's Central Valley from Mexico in the early 2000s, I came to this country with my family, at the age of ten. We have similar backgrounds and all shared some common obstacles in pursuing our education. Some of us come from Mexican indigenous communities and speak an indigenous language as well as Spanish, others come from urban areas, like Mexico City, but a group of us all came together through belonging to a program designed to help us to navigate the school system, with the ultimate goal of joining the regular students to learn the mainstream curriculum. In the city of Madera, the English Language Learners (ELL) program created a shared experience of learning how to master the language in school. This program succeeded in uniting a group of us as one community, enabling us to establish long lasting friendships that became the basis of the American Experience Club.

ELL students launched the American Experience Club back in 2004. It began with four Madera high school students. The students needed extra help with the homework and a teacher, Mrs. Frick, offered to help them after school. She also began to teach them about the history of the United States. Those four students began to stay after school and then invited others. Eventually, this group grew to fourteen members, including me. I remember that I had tried to participate with other clubs that were part of the school, but I never really felt the connection. I had not given much thought to the reason why I felt that mainstream clubs were not for me, but when I found AEC, I knew why. AEC was different — not only did we share the same experience of being in the process of learning English, but we were also all trying to navigate a system that was foreign to us. Plus, in high school everyone has their own little informal group — there are the skaters, the “nerds”, the gangs, the popular kids, the football team and cheerleaders, but we didn't have a group that made us feel welcome or felt that we could be part of. We also shared the same background, since we came from farmworker families.

Our family situations varied, depending on our different migration journeys — some lived here with immediate family but not with their parents. Unlike many kids, we did not have the opportunity to go to Disneyland or to other recreational parks during the summer, but instead we worked in the fields along with our families. I remember that my first summer in the United States was spent working, picking strawberries and blackberries in the state of Oregon at the age of ten. When it was time for us to go back to school, when other kids were sharing stories about their family travels and their fun activities, the only thing we had to share was how awful it was to get up at 4 a.m. to go to work in a hundred and something degrees. What were we supposed to write, when the teachers asked us to write about our experience in Disneyland? We had never been there, but in order for us to be able to share in the kind of experiences the other kids had, we began to organize fundraising activities. Our work eventually paid off, and the club did its first trip in 2005 to Yosemite National Park. Even though Yosemite is very close to the city of Madera, only 58 miles away — or an hour and a half — many of us had never had the opportunity to visit. This initial organizing work turned out to be the first step towards longer-term commitments, since many of us became major community activists, leading committees and linking up with organizations beyond the Central Valley.

The second trip was to Monterey, California. For all of the members, it was the first time we had been to the aquarium, the sea and the Missions in the Bay Area. I remember that some of the members were so excited to see the sea for the first time that they did not hesitate to get in, even though it was a cold afternoon. I can recall it because since they had not brought extra clothes with them to change afterwards, they were freezing on our way back home — but that did not matter to them, what mattered was that we experienced something new in our lives. We also went to San Francisco for the first time, where we visited Chinatown, Fisherman's Wharf and the Golden Gate Bridge. We had a wonderful day, full of new experiences and learning. That night everyone returned

home happy, even after we found the window of the van that the teacher had rented for us to make the trip broken into — money, clothing and souvenirs were stolen. Even though whoever did that was able to take material stuff, we went back home pleased because they did not take our memories of that day. We then visited Sequoia National Park, also for the first time. We were able to see snow falling, and like kids who have never seen snow before, we began snowball fighting, made angels and even tried making a snowman.

Fundraising is a big part of what we do in the American Experience Club. We began our first fundraising activities by buying clay animals, painting them by hand and selling them to people we knew — like teachers, friends and even family. We knew that our painted clay animals were not the best and people probably did not even like them, but when they heard what we were doing, they would buy them. We also have also done many carwashes. Some didn't pay off in terms of the work, but we took them as an opportunity for us to be together and even strategize about how to make them work better next time. That is something I can say that I admire about my fellow club members, that even though there might be a storm and we are in the middle of it, they will always try to see things in a positive way. The practice of positive thinking was good, because not everything has been wonderful for us. One of the biggest challenges we had was organizing a dance. We had never done anything like it. We invested a lot of money in this dance, paying for the venue, security, DJ, decorations, drinks and insurance. All of this money came out of our pockets and from what we had saved from previous fundraising events. It was not a very successful event and we lost money, but in the end, we learned how to organize an event. We needed to put our social skills to work and establish relations with those who can facilitate and mentor us through the process of organizing big events. We have also done yard sales with clothes, toys and other items donated by ourselves or our family members, but new city policies allowed only one per month. This has not slowed us down — on the contrary, we have come up with new ideas to

continue the fundraising. One of these new ideas is to have a “mole” sale. Each member is responsible to pre-sell tickets, to have enough money to buy the ingredients. Usually the members prepare this Oaxacan delicacy at one of our homes, with one of our mothers’ help.

them of their rights. We knew that for many of them, the reason that they did not speak to us was not because they were trying to be rude, but because they feared retaliation.

The next summer, we took a different approach to public education and began to hold informational community forums in Madera. We brought many speakers to these forums, such as an immigration lawyer to explain about civil rights, to answer questions about issues regarding immigration cases people had pending and give them advice on how to prepare in case the government passed an immigration reform. We also had forums on education and national parks, specifically Yosemite National Park. During a period when Madera residents where being deported, we began to go door-to-door, to inform people



A fundraiser yard sale in 2011. Photo: José E. Chávez

The American Experience Club members have also participated in many community service activities. In the summer of 2007, for example, we went out to the fields to inform farmworkers of their rights, such as having water nearby, taking breaks - plus employers need to provide shade for their breaks. I remember that not everyone took this so well, especially the supervisors. Some of the farmworkers did not speak to us or just simply ignored us. I heard an older man tell a younger one “no les hables” (“don’t talk to them”) while others were more willing to speak, they said that they did get the shade, water and restrooms. I am not sure if this was really true, but at least we had informed

about what to do, what rights they have in case an ICE officer came to their house. This happened during the summertime, because we were on our summer vacations. I received a call from another member telling me about the situation, we agreed to call the rest of the members and met at a park that afternoon. We were all there and made our plan of what we would do and how. We made copies of the informational documents we wanted the community to have, in case this happened to them.

What is Tamejavi?

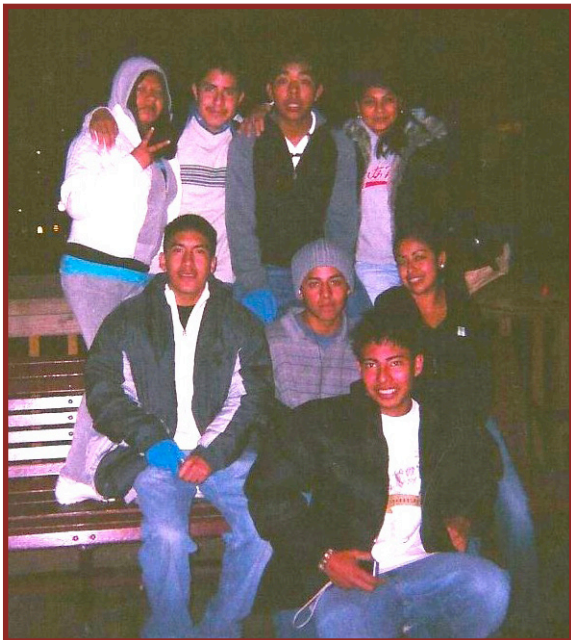


"Tamejavi is a space where diverse cultures converge to express and share stories, music, food, traditions, and ways of interpreting the world. Through cultural exchange and artistic expression, Central Valley immigrants participating in Tamejavi join voices and create new bonds, thus forming a solid sense of community and establishing foundations for active civic engagement."

www.tamejavi.org

We have also often volunteered and partnered with other organizations' community cultural events in the region, one of them is the Tamejavi festival, which is organized by the American Friends Service Committee's Pan Valley Institute. The focus of the Tamejavi festival is to bring together people of different cultural backgrounds, such as the Hmong, Iranian, Native American and Mexican indigenous communities.

The Pan Valley Institute was established with the vision of "providing a learning and gathering space to immigrants as they strive to achieve full citizenship in the civic, economic, and political life of the Valley — and to stand with them as they overcome economic, social, and political oppression" (<http://www.tamejavi.org/pvi.php>). Pan Valley Institute is one of the many programs of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker organization that was established during World War One. Their "work is based on the principles of the Religious Society of Friends, the belief in the worth of every person, and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice" (<http://afsc.org/about>). At this festival, we were volunteer leaders and planning committee members. The day of the event is busy, so we had to get up really early to go help to set up and decorate. Throughout the festival, we helped by selling flowers, working in the informational booth and even playing a role as security. Even though the day was busy for us as volunteers, we made time to be part of the event as an amazing experience of sharing (*convivencia*) with people of other cultures. We each took turns to cover someone else's role in the festival, so that each club member was able to go and visit the crafts section, to eat traditional food, to see the different groups as they danced their traditional dances and to listen to the music.



Club members during a trip to San Francisco in 2009. Foto: Mrs. Frick

We also volunteered to help with another major festival in the region, one also dedicated to promoting the exchange of immigrant cultures. The Guelaguetza is a traditional Oaxacan music and dance festival that highlights the different traditions of the peoples of the state's diverse regions. More than a dozen migrant-led Guelaguetzas are now held each year, throughout California, as well as in Texas, New York and Oregon. These festivals are organized by different kinds of Oaxacan groups, depending on the city. The annual Guelaguetza is organized in Fresno by the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB), a community-based, cross-border indigenous rights organization with roots in the region. American Experience members helped out by selling traditional Oaxacan food.

We also worked closely with the FIOB on another annual community event. Back in 2009, our two groups partnered to organize the *Copa Benito Juárez*, a local basketball tournament for the Oaxacan migrant community. This was the opportunity to put our organizational skills to the test. We learned a lot from this collaborative work with FIOB. It took a great deal of time to put this event together, but it was a very successful one.

One of the memories of this event that I will never forget was towards the end - it began to rain and even hail, but the people were enjoying it so much that they stayed. They tried to find a place to cover themselves, and once it was over they came back until the end. Our grand finale was memorable as well, people of all ages began to dance as the band played "*chilenas*." No one wanted to leave. As some of our interviewees put it:

“Folks are really happy with the event.”

“Everyone was dancing and for me, when folks dance it means they feel happy.”

“I think they felt like in the hometown festivals, where folks dance to a band.”

“With the people happy, that showed that we did a good job.”

“When folks dance, you know that they feel good, at home. To see the people dance is satisfying, and knowing they are happy feels good.”

“Through Tamejavi, I learned about my culture, and the many cultures that are here in Madera and Fresno.”

The Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB)

[Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales]

The FIOB is a cross-border social justice organization, based in California, Oaxaca and Baja California. The FIOB is membership-based, with local committees in California. The closest one to us is in Fresno California. Their mission is to “Contribute to development and self-determination of indigenous peoples, migrants and non-migrants, as well as fight for the defense of human rights with justice and equity of gender at the binational level.”

www.fiob.org

The American Experience is a structured club that has a leadership committee. At first, we didn't have this committee, but eventually we developed one. Currently, this committee is elected by members to serve for two year terms. Members meet once a month, usually on the last Sunday of every month. The location always varies because we lack our own physical space where we can get together. When it comes to taking decisions, the majority decides what to do. The mission of American Experience, as its name implies, is to provide a vehicle for all those who come to visit or to stay in the United States to explore the wonders of nature, historical landmarks and over all to cherish their experience by making its exploration possible.

Currently, there are a total of eight members in American Experience. Five members are from different parts of Oaxaca. Another member is from Michoacán and one is from Mexico City. All of the members speak Spanish and most of them speak English. Two of them speak their native languages, Purépecha and Zapotec. The majority of members graduated high school in 2007, which brought new challenges to the club. The graduates then got jobs and or attended school, and this made it difficult for them to participate as they used to when they were in high school. Some managed to keep participating in activities with AEC, while others found it challenging to do so. Those still in high school found it difficult to continue, with the majority of members now gone. In 2008, towards the end of the year, we decided to bring AEC out of high school into the community. The last AEC high school member graduated this year. As of today, a few of us are completing our higher education, while others have stopped due to personal reasons, but plan eventually to continue.

We wish we can go back to the high school that saw the club grow, but unfortunately it's no longer possible - or at least it has been challenging to do so. Due to policy changes, it has been harder and harder to visit students and even staff at the campus. After so many years since we were in high school, it is hard to establish a connection with the new ELL students who are now facing what we did. I wish I could go back and talk to them, not as a speaker but as a friend who was once where they are at now. Maybe this would inspire them to join us or to create something of their own, unique, like the American Experience Club.

“It's hard to maintain contact, we are doing our own thing and for me personally, it seems hard to go and talk to the teachers, to say that I'd like to do a workshop, say, about how to apply for scholarships, because now the schools have their curriculum set.”

“It's tough to get allowed in to the school, it's not like it used to be – now you have to be talking to the teachers to get an appointment, and if you don't come with an appointment with the teacher they don't let you in. It's not easy to get access to the school to do these things...”

Member voices:

Why did members join the American Experience Club?

Youth begin to define their future in their high school years. Many choose to do sports and join clubs, while others decide to join gangs or drop out. Then there are those students who don't fit in to any group, such as those students that have migrated to this country at an age that makes it hard to adjust to the educational system. When this group of young people find themselves isolated and feeling the need to belong is when they decide to form their own group, like the American Experience Club. The members of the club shared with us some of the many reasons why they decided to join AEC instead of joining the traditional clubs that were already established.

“I got involved because I didn't know anybody, I didn't know what clubs were so I never got involved, and that was when they invited me.”

“In high school it's very popular to get involved in gangs, and those who brought me in weren't part of that. They were inviting me to something good, so I got interested.... Others encourage me, because I am not too involved in the community. That's what keeps me here with them, because I know they have another vision that I can help with.”



Club members on a trip to San Francisco in 2009. Photo: Mrs. Frick

Our distinctiveness

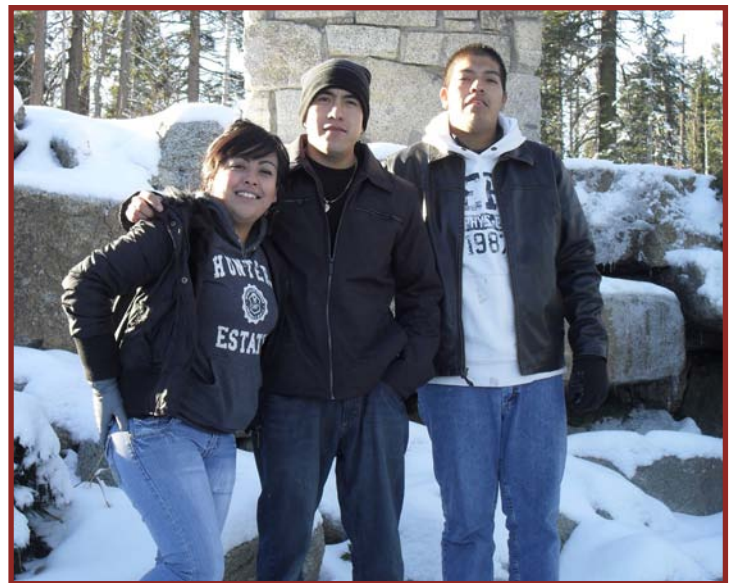
“For us the main thing is to have something different, where anyone can join.”

“Our club’s mission changes, depending on the situation we’re in at the time.”

The members feel that AEC is a unique club to them. It offers more than a space where they can be. It provides a way to bring ideas together and to put them into practice. It also offers them friendship, and in many instances the members began to feel that the rest of the members are part of their families. In addition, the club does not have specific goal or set agenda. American Experience is a flexible group in that it is open to different causes and goals that go according to the needs of each member. American Experience has worked in many events and activities with other organizations, such as *See’ Savi’* (a Oaxacan dance group, see chapter 7), Pan Valley Institute and *Frente Indigena de Organizaciones Binacionales* (FIOB).

How AEC has helped

AEC members proudly say that AEC has had a positive impact in their lives. AEC has helped this group of youth not only in feeling that we belong to a group, but also to learn about our roots. In addition, it has given us the satisfaction of overcoming the hardship that we encounter.



AE Club Members on a trip to Sequoia National Park.
Photo: Juan Santiago

Language

The members had divided opinions on whether we need to learn English in order to succeed in this country. Nonetheless, we all agreed when it comes to preserving our native languages. We all speak at least two languages, though there are only two members who also speak their native indigenous language, Zapoteco and Purépecha. One understands Mixteco and the rest only speak Spanish and English. Each of them has learned to navigate speaking, reading, and thinking in more than one language.

The differences in opinion can be attributed to our life histories, I would say. In the past, our communities have been discriminated against and looked down upon because of the language we speak, the way we dress and the way we eat. To me, this has led many of our families — and now us — to feel that we need to integrate into the mainstream system, to avoid being discriminated against. Some of us have been fortunate enough to be able to navigate both ways, while others — because of the challenges they have found in preserving their culture — have instead decided that assimilation is the way to go.

“

I would like to hold on to my language, even though it might only last two or three generations more and then it could disappear. I am aware of that, but even when I am not here I will have done my part to try to preserve the language.”

“I don’t think it’s a necessity, but it would be good [to preserve the native language].”

“It’s that... I think that my grandparents spoke Mixteco more with my parents, that was where I began to learn, but since my parents always spoke to us in Spanish, we didn’t get the opportunity to learn it.”

“I don’t see the need to speak Mixteco... your language helps you to speak with many from your hometown, and to translate, but I don’t see how else it would help me, because most speak Spanish. I see the value in the sense that it’s part of the culture and that one should learn it, it would be ideal to not lose it. But how will it really help me?... The things I’ve learned [in school], I’ve learned in English, so I think in English. For family things, I think in Spanish, but just up to a point, because I got here when I was 14 and that was when I began to speak Spanish....I knew what it was, but I didn’t speak it much. I learned it in a year and now it’s what I use the most, With my family I try to speak my own language because I love it, I enjoy speaking it, that’s what I was born with.”

Gender

In our culture, males are allowed to be out late, to go out, and to be involved in the community. For many years, the woman only participated in the community if the husband allowed it, and it was merely for the purpose of doing gender-related activities, such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of kids. The newer generations have fought this, but many times, it was a lost battle.

However, in the AEC things are different. Since the families know each other and the club members trust each other, this has allowed both the males and females to participate. In fact, families support this group in any way they can - even by offering their front yards for a yard sale, among other things. Many of us have opened the path for our younger siblings. Now our younger sisters and brothers have the privileges and freedoms that in a way we can say we fought for.

“I think that it also has to do with trust. I remember that from when I began in American Experience. Now, since they [the family] now know [about it], and I tell them that I am going with Juan, with Edgar, with Juana – they know who I am with. We didn’t have that trust at the beginning, but now they let us stay out late because they know I am at someone’s house making churros, say we’ve gone to Edgar’s house, and his family already knows us. That’s one of the benefits.”

“We’ve created this circle of trust between the mothers and fathers.”

“Wherever we are, they offer us their roof and there’s no problem because they know us already, they know who we are.”

“As a woman, they didn’t let me go out or to stay out till whenever I wanted, and that prevented me from participating in [club] activities.”

“I remember once that AEC went camping and I couldn’t go because my parents wouldn’t let me spend the night away from home.”

“The parents have a lot to do with it in the sense that it doesn’t matter what time the men go out, with whom, or when they get home, but the women always have to be in the kitchen when they [the parents] get home, to clean, to look after the little sisters and brothers. Women... can’t go to a meeting at 8 at night, or spend all day in a meeting, or go to San Francisco for a meeting. Women can’t do that. In addition to being a woman, another issue is how old we were at the time. They [parents] look after us, they worry more about the women.... I didn’t like to have to make explanations, so it was better to just go to avoid problems.... They don’t say anything to the men, but they do to the women, especially if we come from not so liberal cultures.”

Working in partnership

As mentioned before, AEC is very flexible when it comes to the activities we participate in and the organizations that we work with. We are able to work together because of our similar background, and we all have similar interests, like informing our community and promoting our culture.



*Club members and family after a soccer game in 2011.
Photo: AE Club member*

Looking towards the future

American Experience Club has existed for eight years now and we hope that it continues for many more. We hope that if this club ever stopped existing, there will still be that bond between us. In our own words, some members described AEC as "friendship," "family," "commitment," "leadership," and something that will always unite us is the American "experience."

“We work with any organization that is willing to let us help and that supports us.....Pan Valley has been very generous because if we ask them to use their office, they are willing to come and open the door and then come back and close up.”

“If it’s something that we are interested in doing with that institution and they are doing it, we are more than willing to work with them. For example, the FIOB - they have something in common with us, an interest and we go there because it’s not like we can land just anywhere. It’s something we are interested in - if we weren’t, we wouldn’t go.... I think they take us seriously, and give us the opportunity to show that we are young people, but we can contribute.”

“We have a great connection, we will always be able to relate to each other, even if the group ends.”

“I don’t think we are “Good Samaritans,” it’s just something moral, we need to help them. Plus, being part of AE makes us stronger, doing what we do. AE is not just a club, it’s something more. There is a stronger bond.”

“I hope that we will stay friends, that we will be able to do something that not only some organizations will identify with us, but something bigger. In the future, that is the way we see ourselves.”

Chapter 2: Immigrant High School Students in Action

by José Eduardo Chávez



José E. Chávez at the age of six at a river near his grandmother's house in Oaxaca. Photo courtesy of José E. Chávez

Being a high school student involves many responsibilities. Students are getting ready for college, taking honors classes to get ahead, working a part-time job to help their parents or being actively involved in their community. However, we have all been high school students and we know that the majority hang out with their friends, or many just aren't at the stage to get interested in their education.

At Madera High School, however, there is a small group of students who are dedicated both to their educations and to community service – and many of them are Oaxaqueños. Madera is a town located in the heart of California, 45 minutes west of Yosemite National park, where a biology teacher and a small number of teenagers gather and talk about community events. This enables them to take leadership and to organize activities that will deepen their understanding of their culture, which has long been ignored. Some of these students already have many years of organizing experience and

are involved in different local, state and national organizations, including the United Farm Workers. The majority of these students come from low income families, which at times is a big barrier for students who want to get involved – since in many cases parents ask their kids to help them by working to save money, which makes it hard to do volunteer service. With this in mind, these young Maderans have managed to become active participants in their community.

It's ironic how I came to this moment in my life in this country. I recall being a child, only four years old, standing under a mango tree together with my uncle, who held me back so I wouldn't follow my mother. It seems that the road was cut by a river, which made it hard to cross. As the years went by, I kept studying and at the same time growing corn, beans, green beans and local fruit, to survive while working on other people's farms. Over time, I understood and envied my cousins, seeing them together with their whole families, including their



This picture of Oaxaqueños tells the story of thousands of undocumented immigrants who make the dangerous journey across the desert (family photo taken in 1998). Courtesy of José E. Chávez

fathers. I recall how I played in the trees while minding the livestock. I also remember playing with hoses filled with sand and running around my school. It seemed like the richest one had the nicest and biggest hose. It was an experience I will never forget, very humble but with great moments. For example, my grandmother was named the cook for the community festivals, so I had the chance to stay by her side, breathing the smoke but at the same time getting to eat the leftover bones. It was like being rich for the day.

In 2004, the time came when my mother came back from El Norte and decided to bring me back with her. My departure was especially sad for my grandmother. I didn't get to say goodbye because she didn't want to let me go, so they took me away secretly. We crossed all of Mexico, until we got to the feared border. I remember every detail of everything that happened on that dark border. We crossed the desert, and we were caught by the Border Patrol, so I experienced jail for the first time in my life. We were deported back, but were

successful crossing the border the second time. That's how we got to a house in Arizona, filled with people with tired faces filled with sweat, just like me and the other 20 people who came with us. That was my crossing, my adventure at the young age of ten where I learned how to eat cactus to survive thirst and how the U.S Air Force practices (among numerous other experiences). We got to Madera, where I began adapting to life in the United States, facing plenty of barriers, like others who immigrate at a young age. For starters, I got nine vaccinations at once.

There were several of us in the English Language Learners class in middle school, and though we all went through the same educational system, I ended up distancing myself from them. It was in high school where I discovered my passion and my duty. I got involved in a student club, MAYA – the Madera Academic Youth Alliance, and that's where I began growing, by working with different organizations.

High school student organizing

Madera High School was founded in 1894. The school colors are Royal Blue & White, with the coyote as its mascot. Enrollment for the year 2011-12 was 2,048 students according to the school's website. Approximately half of the school population is Latino or Hispanic. MAYA (Madera Academic Youth Alliance) is an academic organization at Madera High School, established to guide students to pursue post-secondary education, to instill cultural awareness, to develop self-advocacy and to commit to community involvement. MAYA was created in 1987 by students, and its current advisor is Ismael Sanchez. Since 1987, MAYA members have participated in numerous events, such as serving soup to the homeless at the Madera Courthouse Park; fundraising for college scholarships for graduating seniors. The club fundraises by selling snack bags and food during "food frenzies" on the school campus. MAYA is well known for being one of the oldest clubs on campus and for being active all year round, in the community as well as in school. The club is led by a structured committee, with one year terms. Currently there are approximately 55 members.

As Lila put it, "I don't know how [MAYA] started, but it wasn't based on culture at all — now it's more about Mexicans. MAYA it is supposed to be in general for everyone, but since MAYA sounds Mexican and a lot of people don't go... A lot of people think that is [the] Mexican American Youth Alliance but it's the Madera Academic Youth Alliance."

The Madera Youth Committee of the United Farm Workers was launched in mid-2011, when thousands of supporters pushed for Fair Treatment for Farm Workers legislation to become a law by marching, lobbying and rallying across California. This new law would make it easier for farmworkers to have a union and thus have the opportunity to speak up and protect themselves from injustice in the fields, where growers and contractors can no longer continue to disregard the laws.

The mission of the Youth Committee is to raise awareness among students on issues affecting the farm worker community; is an open space where youths from the community can take leadership.



José E. Chávez at the age of six. He is observing the making of chicharrones by his uncle, Aquilino Chávez in his hometown of Santiago Yosondúa, Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo: José E. Chávez

Why do high school kids work with the UFW?

Lila: I do it because my parents work in the field and I've worked there too. And I've seen different places where they work, how they treat different people, and, like they say, the clean-up of those places. I've seen some people who are well cared for and others who aren't cared for at all...I like helping in certain areas because I know or I have seen what they've been through. So it's easy for me to relate to them and feel...stronger in helping than if I don't really know the cause. Then it's just helping because I want to help but I don't really feel, like, passionate about the cause. There are things that I like doing because I'm passionate of whatever it is. I guess you can say the roots.

Guillermo: It's like what she said. I also see my parents, see how they work, see how they experience their work. I experience what they do, that's why I joined this group so I can help them at least get more like information.

Pablo: More rights...

Lila: So it's not as hard for them?

Guillermo: Yeah, so it's not as hard for them. They are right there, each day in the sun.

Teresa: Since my parents work in the field, I like to inform them of their rights so they don't take advantage of them.

Lila: I know it was to get an act passed... for fair treatment for the workers, we got a bus from Madera to Sacramento...they met in the park and marched to the capitol.

The committee is designed to educate their members on laws that protect farm workers and to promote equal working conditions for all.

The UFW Youth Committee reaches out to young people and to the community in general to take action through forums and monthly meetings and to inform the community of their rights as workers and current laws that protect them. There are now 10 active members, most are sons and daughters of farmworkers, and some are farm workers themselves. The Youth Committee is a structured group, led by a committee that serves for a one year term.

The Oaxacan population at Madera High is large; unfortunately not every oaxaqueño is currently involved in extracurricular activities. When I went in search of Oaxaqueños for our focus group interview, it was very difficult to persuade them to participate, but I found six of the best students, either from Oaxaca, or with parents from Oaxaca. The other four were from Michoacán, Mexico. Most Oaxacan students are embarrassed to say that they are from Oaxaca. However, many set an example through their leadership. They step up and get involved, regardless of their ethnicity. Many don't want to talk about their experiences with discrimination because they assume they are the only ones going through their situation. Plus, some parents believe that extracurricular activities are all a waste of time, so they don't let their students get involved. For other parents, being protective plays a role in their everyday life. "They think it's dangerous for a girl to be out," according to a participant from our focus group at Madera High School. Teens who are ready and willing to get involved in school clubs and community organizations face many barriers.

The focus group interview brought together members of two different organizations to share their experiences, the Madera Academic Youth Alliance and the United Farm Workers Madera Youth Committee. Each teen's own interests play an important role in the process of deciding where to belong. Students can choose among many different kinds of clubs, not to mention the numerous organizations and clubs in the community.

Why get involved in clubs and community service?

Maria: Because my sister suffered anemia, if people wouldn't have helped her or my family survive the situation, she would have died. She survived because everybody helped us.

Milagros: I joined because it's fun.

Maria: I want to go into international business and she wants to go into law... you need to know a lot about your community and about communication because if you cannot communicate, how are you going to do business? ...So I have to learn different languages and travel to do business. ...If I am shy - 'cause I used to be shy -- I wouldn't talk like I am talking right now. So I got involved in all of these clubs... that's what opened up for me, so I can communicate more...

Lila: My dad never went to school or anything so he doesn't really know how to read or write, but like I see everything that he accomplished in life and... if he can do that [when] he didn't grow up with an education, then nothing can stop me. He has his own house, he owns it and everything... so that motivates me to see all the effort he's made to, like, keep going...

Lorena: I joined (laughs) because I want my college application to look good.

José: ... since I want to be in the medical profession, I like participating and helping out in the childrens' hospital because one of my dreams is to work there, And helping out other people.

Guillermo: The same thing as him, sometimes like I don't have nothing to do after school and that is why I like to help.

Lila: [Why do we help folks?] Because we know how they suffer!

Maria: Because we always see our parents working in the fields, and we know that, who knows? At least we have food. But there are folks who can't work, who need our help to survive.

Lila: Cause we want to be leaders... or I want to be a leader.



José E. Chávez has been documenting the lives of farmworkers since 2006. Photo: José E. Chávez

The role of gender

As Oaxacans, we come from a tradition where the man has more freedom than a woman. Of course Oaxaca is large — the state is divided into eight regions, and each region's people are different — but in most of the state machismo plays an important role. If we pay attention to their conversations, the men often say, "My first child has to be a boy." And what happens if that doesn't happen? From my own experience, I have heard conversations where men and even other family members are talking about new fathers having a girl, and the first thing they say is, "He really knows how to make kids" if his first child is a boy, but if his first child is a girl they say, "He really doesn't know how to make children". This mentality has been passed on for generations. Oaxacans have brought it with them across borders, like so many other ideologies and traditions from that region. Some of the first Oaxacans that immigrated to this country in the 1980's now view this concept in a different light, in contrast to the thousands of Oaxacans that have spent less time here.

Just being a woman is difficult enough, but it is even more difficult to be a woman who is involved in activism or extracurricular activities. Various factors help to explain these barriers. Ironically, in many clubs at the Madera high school, the majority of the members are women, and six to eight women in MAYA are Oaxacan. There aren't many men who participate consistently. We have to understand that these clubs meet during school hours, and of course they do community service and go on field trips. Unfortunately, Oaxacan girls or girls with Oaxacan parents almost never participate in these activities.

I was in charge of all of the MAYA events, so I was aware of these participation issues. After certain events, I personally talked with the girls and asked them why they didn't participate. Almost all of them responded that their parents did not let them go, or that they had to stay home and watch their siblings. One of the girls responded, "My dad does

not let me go anywhere." During the conversation, it became apparent that this is how their parents typically think. All of the participants said very naturally that their parents were worried that they would become pregnant. They were obviously bothered by this, because they added that they know they would not become pregnant just by participating in events.

One of the boys said that his parents put him in charge of his sister, and that if he participated his sister could participate too. On the other hand, one girl said that she had a single mother who let her participate. The girls also mentioned trust. They have to earn the trust of their parents. It's difficult for Oaxacan parents to understand all of the activi-

Based on your experience as a young man or woman, have you noticed that being male or female influences the things you do or the things that your community organizes?

Lila: They think it's dangerous for girls to be out.. My mom thinks I am going to get married and never come back.

Maria: But guysb can do whatever they want. Like my mom is more protective with me.

José: Well in some issues it is because sometimes the parents are more protective than others because you don't want the girl to go somewhere else and get like pregnant and stuff that's why the parents sometimes do that and they don't want the girl to be in gangs and stuff and sometimes they also do it to the guys.

Juanita: Sometimes the parents should at least trust the daughter, at least once.

ties that the school organizes, because for many of us the younger generation is the first to receive an education. In my experience, being a male raised by a single mother, it was difficult for me to participate in activities. It all depends on the parents.

Education

This leads us to another question: do parents know how the educational system works in California? In my experience, I can say that the majority of them do not. Many parents know that their children go to school, but what happens next? They don't know what follows high school or what their children need to continue their studies. The Madera high school organizes meetings for parents, but if the students don't attend then the parents definitely won't. Many parents might be used to the system in Oaxaca. Parents don't participate in their children's education. According to Juan Santiago, "My parents know that education is important, but they don't encourage it."

Many of the Oaxacan students in this country were brought here at a very young age, but many of us still experienced the educational system in Oaxaca. We arrived with the Oaxacan mentality that teachers and adults are the highest authority. "Be good, because if you aren't the teacher is going to paddle you" my grandmother used to say. Bringing this mentality with us is the first barrier that we need to break down, which is difficult for many of us. For example, after coming into the educational system in California with the mentality that the teachers are the supreme authority, even just the language barrier makes us feel at the bottom of the social ladder.

In my experience, the four years of high school were interesting. I was in the process of figuring out what I wanted to do with my future, but when I first enrolled in high school, I didn't feel like I belonged there. I was scared of speaking the

language, because I knew I didn't speak it very proficiently. My classmates dressed differently, and they looked at me sadly sometimes. It hurt to hear comments or jokes about Mexicans, which made me even more embarrassed about my culture. The most interesting thing was when I realized that those who criticized our people the most were our own people. After a few months, my family and I found some stores in Fresno, CA that we had never seen before. That was where we first bought new clothing, and I started to copy my other classmates. I wanted to dress like those students who looked like they belonged to a higher social class. In the process I saw my other classmates with students who I knew were Oaxacan, and they were doing the same thing, except they were imitating *sureños*, the gangsters "south siders."

I was the only Oaxacan male in my Advance Via Individual Determination (AVID) class, along with three females, more or less. I told my Oaxacan friends who were not in that class what I was learning, but they almost never listened to me. A lot of my classmates "*se iban de pinta*" (ditched class). That same year I learned about my status as a migrant, but I still didn't understand what it meant. Looking at the decisions that my classmates made brings us back to the barrier created by some Oaxacan parents, by not encouraging education. We have to keep in mind again that as many as half of the Oaxacan students are undocumented and have possibly suffered even more than that, whether because of crossing the desert or from discrimination. It is difficult to concentrate in an environment where parents who work in the field are leaving before dawn and coming home at dusk.

However, these parents are the inspiration of the participants in the focus group, due to their sacrifices and experiences. Their sacrifices motivate their children to achieve their goals. Even though some give up, others continue fighting.



Clockwise from top left: MAYA Club sells newspapers for Kids Day in 2012 Photo: José E. Chávez.
José E. Chávez harvesting cherries in Fresno. Photo: Odilia Chávez.
José E. Chávez working tying grapevines to help pay his tuition at Fresno Pacific University. Photo: Patricia Vazquez

Immigration

This is one of the most important topics for Latinos. In a 2012 article, the Pew Hispanic Center says there are approximately “4.4 million” students living in the shadows in the United States, making up part of the 12 million undocumented migrants in total. Thousands of these young people are also Oaxacan, and many live in the Central Valley. I am undocumented, and in my second year of high school, I learned what that really means: fewer opportunities and a more difficult path to achieve my goals. Thanks to MAYA, I learned about a group of young people called the Central Valley Youth Association (CVYA) who were working to establish the immigrant rights movement in Madera. In my case, immigrant’s rights advocacy was one of the biggest factors in my decision to become involved. Injustice and discrimination were what pushed me to join the movement.

The participants in the focus group that see the immigration system as unjust also added that without farm labor in the Central Valley, the economy would decline. The majority of them said that their parents are undocumented, and all of them responded that they are farm workers. Some of the participants mentioned that they themselves were undocumented. Perhaps immigrant rights are a factor for these youth on becoming civically involved. On the contrary, only some of them said that they had participated in a pro-immigrant march or rally, some because they are very young and others because they have not had the opportunity. Most of these kids are just supporters, which can be explained by their interests: some want to be doctors, entrepreneurs, nurses, etc. In my experience, when there is an event having to do with immigration, I have first invited all of the people I know that will benefit directly from it, and then the allies and supporters. Sadly, it is the allies who participate the most. A lot of people don’t participate because they are afraid that someone will find out that they are undocumented, or they just aren’t interested in going. But for undocumented students, their immigration status impedes them from participating in certain activities.

For example, as a leader of the student body, I was not able to drive very often when we participated in events outside of school. I was afraid that at any moment a police officer would pull me over and ask for my license, which I don’t have. The only license I have is the one God gave me.

Immigration ideas

Susana: I think [the DREAM Act] should pass, to give other people that don’t have papers the opportunity to learn and go to college.

Juanita: Usually they put it on the news like it’s just [about] Hispanics, [but] they should do it for [people from] other countries as well.

Lila: We are all immigrants.... many people don’t understand that.

Maria: They also say that we don’t do anything... well many people depend on welfare, but there are also a lot of people who grow the crops which California is based on....California does not have harsh immigration laws because they know we are part of industry.

Every person has his or her own interests, and many people are born with a passion for helping those who are oppressed. I ask myself sometimes, if I were not an undocumented migrant would I have become involved anyway? After considering it, I realize that under any circumstances, I, and others like me, would have the same passion for helping others and for being their voice. Initially, it bothered me and hurt me when I was discriminated against, but now I’m used to it, and I know that discrimination motivates me to show that I can overcome. Everyone in the movement can identify the same way.

Migrating between states

As the month of May nears its end, high school students in Madera County are excited about finishing school and ready to have another memorable summer break. Many will travel to visit family members around California and the U.S, and perhaps around the world. Plus, there are others who -- right when the last school bell rings -- take off to another state here in the U.S, to work in the fields once again. All summer long. These students also work throughout the entire year here in the Central Valley. That is what weekends are for, also national holidays such as Presidents Day - not to mention spring break, sometimes an entire week of work. Parents, mostly from the poor southern states of Mexico such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla and Guerrero, are accustomed to teach their sons and daughters "how to suffer," as they would say. There are times when parents say, at least in my own experience, "you better keep hitting those books or you will end up here, like us" -- referring to farmworkers. It is for us as students to keep going on the right path and put more effort in school to succeed. At the same time, though, it's still a routine for students to work in the fields.

A summer trip to the states of Oregon and Washington is common among Oaxaqueños, at least a twelve hour drive from Madera, CA. Normally when Oaxaqueños travel, the entire family comes along. It's a neat thing where everyone gets to do it. One common type of transportation is the Chevrolet Astro van. These people are not only migrating to escape the hot summer in central California, which can sometimes reach up to 115 degrees, but to work in the fields to harvest blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries. Also, the northern states are known to farmworkers as places where growers allow kids and teenagers to work along with their parents. But for those students who have to migrate, they sometimes wish they could stay in school longer.

When these migrant families set out on their journey, many have their mind set that they'll be back as soon the harvest season is over. Students already know what this means; late school registration for the next school year. In one particular case, a family from San Juan Coatecas Alta--a small town in the state of Oaxaca, who immigrated to the United States in search of a better living currently established in Madera, California, says that they have to travel to other states to find better deals and save more money. Talking to Reyna, who is a freshman at Madera High points out that at an early age back in Mexico, she remembers traveling to Sinaloa following the tomato season with her family. She says that she joined her parents' migration to the U.S when she was nine years old and since then she's been traveling year after year to the state of Oregon. Her biggest concern after being in the state of Oregon is that she wishes she could return on time for school registration. She continues "I enter school late and [when I come back by October] the students are more advanced." Reyna is only one of dozens of other migrant workers who return late to school, and as a result they receive low grades. Reyna wants her summer routine trip to change, with a free summer so she can only focus on school.

The most interesting fact about this famous trip among Maderan migrants is that families from San Juan Coatecas Alta are among those who most tend to go, followed by other migrants from different parts of Oaxaca who also migrate following the crops. These are necessary challenges that Reyna and her other fellow classmates have to face; it is the only way at their young age to support their families financially. But these young migrants also want the opportunity to study, so that education can give them alternatives to farm work and migrating year after year.

Chapter 3: Oaxacalifornian Urban Youth Space: Los Autónomos

by Sarait Martínez

Changing demographics in US cities bring a wave of new ideas and forms of expression. This is happening in Fresno, which is a unique place for many reasons. The rich cultural diversity that indigenous immigrants bring to the Central Valley, and to places such as Fresno, is often neglected. According to the Indigenous Mexicans in California Agriculture study by Rick Mines (2009), the Central Valley region has about a third of the state's population of indigenous farmworkers (www.indigenousfarmworkers.org). However, knowledge of the indigenous community is almost nonexistent among the rest of the population, even though many communities every year celebrate their village *fiestas del pueblo*.

Immigrant indigenous youth and young adults face many barriers growing up in the United States, often because of assumed homogeneity and labels. In the social and political arena, all immigrants are considered to be Mexicans and it is assumed that we all speak Spanish. For us, as youth, this becomes clear as we go through the school system. Teachers' lack of information and sensitivity allows our Mexican peers to discriminate against us and to make us feel inferior because of being from Oaxaca, to the point of calling us names, such as "oaxaquitas." This has pushed indigenous youth and young adults to feel excluded, and has led us to create and/or to join organizations that allow us to express ourselves freely; this is the case of Autónomos. As one of the members of the group stated in a local Spanish language newspaper after our first event, *Naa Indandosoy Nee Ikixio*: "A year ago, we realized that there is no support group for young Oaxaqueños, a place where they can share their stories and experiences. During several events, we used to see each other and began to notice many things we had in common, not only in terms of our language and culture, but also in our approach to education and experiences growing up in the United States. Then we decided



Autónomos members holding a banner they made. Photo: Autónomos

to create a space where we could meet to share our thoughts and feelings to celebrate and be proud of our culture" (C. Moreno, "Jóvenes oaxaqueños buscan su identidad," *Vida en el Valle*, October 18, 2011).

Autónomos is a space created by and for youth and young adults who were looking for a place to fit in, and claim as our own space. In addition, we created this space as a way to reclaim our roots. "I have noticed that when they are born here, they are ashamed of their culture. They do not identify with Oaxaca; they identified with the United States and therefore they do not attend the cultural events. They forget who their parents are and avoid speaking their language. I do not want to be like that... I do not want other Oaxaqueño youth to start the trend to deny who they are" (C. More-

no, “Jóvenes oaxaqueños buscan su identidad,” *Vida en el Valle*, October 18, 2011).

Everything started on the afternoon of October 29th, 2010. This was not a normal day for a group of young Oaxaqueños. It was a special night, since 15 teens and young adults, from the ages of 15 to 25, came together for the first time. Two weeks earlier, a flyer had gone out, inviting them to the meeting, to share their culture and to talk about what it meant to be Oaxaqueños.

The first meeting started with introductions: name, community of origin, and what we like to do for fun. The answers were broad, ranging from dancing, eating, learning, playing an instrument, and rapping. After nearly two hours of talking, the meeting ended with the question, would you like to be part of creating a group of young Oaxaqueños? Everybody there said yes. After more than two and half years, *Autónomos* has about sixteen active members who meet once a week. We are all at different stages of our lives, with different interests, and passions, but it is our culture, language, and traditions that keep us together.

In the meetings that followed, we talked about our experiences, culture, school, as well as our individual interests. After the next couple of months, the group felt ready to start drafting the group’s mission statement and name. The process of drafting the vision was long, since all of our ideas and opinions were taken into consideration. Four weeks later, the group defined its mission statement: “*jovenes oaxaqueños* preserving our culture and our indigenous languages with equality, pride and respect in our communities.” The group’s activities would depend on each member’s interests, as long as they relate to the mission. If someone has an idea for an event, the group will collaborate to make it happen. The person taking the initiative becomes the coordinator, the spokesperson, and guides the rest of the group.

The group’s name came up in a conversation and was called out by one of the members who wanted the name to reflect our autonomy. This idea refers

to freedom from outside group influence, and from any member imposing ideas on others. Each member has his or her own ideas and is respected by the rest, as we create a collective autonomy with a shared vision.

A unique aspect of the group is its organizational structure. Nobody holds a title or an official position. Every week, we take turns facilitating the meeting. Participants agree to listen and to respect others’ views. This structure enables those who are shy to voice their opinions. Over the past year, we have witnessed how members have attained and polished their leadership skills, which has allowed them to discover and reveal their hidden talents.

Support from other organizations has encouraged the group and has allowed us to be more consistent, including the Binational Center for Indigenous Oaxacan Development (*Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño*, CBDIO) and the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (*Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales*, FIOB). CBDIO, as a non-profit community support group, has provided *Autónomos* a safe and free place to hold meetings. In addition, thanks to CBDIO, *Autónomos* has been able to apply for mini-grants to cover the cost of events. Since the group’s formation, CBDIO has provided access to the electronic materials and other resources available in the office.

As Leoncio Vasquez, CBDIO’s Executive Director, stated, “when he [Elio Santos, one of the founders of the group] and several members of the board met, they did not know what to do to create a space for them, but allowed them to hold meetings in the office while discussing the issues that were important to them.” In addition, he added, “We will always encourage and support the efforts of our young people when their goals are positive. I know that the most important thing for them is to make sure to preserve their indigenous languages and the culture of equality with pride and respect” (C. Moreno, “*Jóvenes oaxaqueños buscan su identidad*,” *Vida en el Valle*, 2011).

UNA ISU (Mixteco is a language)

Mixteco es una lengua, no es un dialecto
 Es oro que guardo en un paño, aquí te lo presento
 Ahora soy trilingüe, ya no me harás menos
 Esto va para los que insultan, a todos mis Oaxaqueños
 Pequeños pero corazones de guerrero
 Preservando la cultura, seguiremos creciendo
 Chii reip kuu rap ntoo, kumii naa ntatukuundo (porque mi rap es tu rap, tengo lo
 que buscabas)
 Naa keiin luluu tuun tavi, tanaa intantoso ntoo (Voy a hablar un poco de mixteco,
 para que no lo olvides)
 Ikuu suu ntoo kachii naho, chi kuvii samanaa, nishi ntakaanii inii ntoo
 (no se duerman, dijo abuela, porque les pueden cambiar la forma de pensar)
 santaviinga ntoo Cachiinaa koo chuun ntoo
 (les engañarán, les dirán que no valen nada)
 Ugh from Mixteco to Inglés, Bolígrafo representing Oaxaca, hell yes
 Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui, we all culturally rich
 And nobody takes it away from me, my memories, my dignity
 A native from Nuu yuu kuu (encima del monte) I will always be
 Mixteco hasta la Muerte until I D.I.E.
 Let me be free, and spit everything I feel
 Hoping one day to see, my prophecy fulfilled
 The unity of my people together as equal
 This is dedicated to my brothers and my sisters

-Bolígrafo

Our group's first organized event was to share those talents with the rest of the community. On October 7th, 2011 we had our first gathering of young Oaxaqueños in Calwa Park, a south Fresno Neighborhood Park. The event was called NA'A INTANTOSO YOO NEE IKI'XIO, which in Mixteco means, "let's not forget where we come from." The gathering included a display of art, pictures, and cultural artifacts from Oaxaca. In addition, Autónomos had a special, first-time performance from Bolígrafo and Mixtek, two new hip-hop artists and active members of the group, from San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca. This first public event was intended to share pictures and objects from our communities of origin with our community in Fresno. Through art and hip-hop, we also hope to promote a different way of learning and preserving our Oaxaqueño culture. Around 50 community members from different backgrounds attended.

In the box above there is an example of Bolígrafo's powerful lyrics from the song Una Isu, which means "Mixteco is a language," performed for the first time at the Autónomos event.

Bolígrafo (Miguel)'s unique form of expression reclaims his language in a way that allows him to create a space for him and to share his talent with the rest of the community. This is crucial, since as youth and young adults we are told to be certain way or to "assimilate" into the dominant culture. Bolígrafo's rap makes a strong statement that even with all of the pressure from society to fit into certain standards, we, as young indigenous migrants, can find ways to rescue our culture and language.

Another way to reclaim and to preserve our culture is by continuing with the cultural traditions from our communities of origin. This essence has inspired Autónomos to recreate those traditions. A clear example was last year, when Autónomos celebrated el *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). Autónomos created an altar in one famous coffee-house in Fresno, to proudly show the traditions of their communities. The process of putting the altar together was a fascinating learning experience for everyone. Creating the altar involved the discovery of and exchange between two different cultural traditions: the Mixtec and the Zapotec. To plan the event, we had different planning meetings that ended up as learning sessions. The members' cultural diversity is what makes the group unique. In addition, this event created a channel for us to talk with our parents and elders, since we had to ask about the details and meaning of the altar. At the end of three days of set-up work, Autónomos created an altar with *cempazuchitl* flowers (marigolds), fruits, and food for the spirits that come to visit the altar and for the rest of the Fresno community.

The Autónomos have created a space for young Oaxaqueños where they can find and reclaim their identity. It is space where teens and young adults can finally call our own.

The voices that follow are from seven active members of the organization, who participated in the focus group conducted by the ECO team. Most of the youth interviewed came to the U.S. as children and one of them was born in Fresno. The members of the group are predominant from *Nuu Yuku* (Mixtec for San Miguel Cuevas) and from *Guegozunñi* (Zapotec for Ayoquezco Aldama), although it is important to mention that gradually members from other communities from Oaxaca and Guerrero are joining the group. The age range is from 15 to 25 years old and recently we have experienced the participation of youth as young as 10 years old. We have different levels of formal education, from a Masters' degree, Bachelors' degrees, some are currently attending community college, some of them are dedicated to community education, and some are not currently attending school.



Autónomos members after setting up the Day of the Dead altar. Photo: Sarait Martínez

Aut6nomos' youth voices

During the Aut6nomos focus group interview, different ideas came to light, which made us find out more about each other. Even though we have met for the past two years, the focus group helped us to contextualize our own experiences. We were able to describe how we participate, get involved, and how this has allowed us to create a space for us to learn about our cultures. This legacy is gradually being forgotten because we have been denied places where we could learn and recreate our culture.

“I think it's a place [Aut6nomos] where we learn a lot about our own culture, which growing up here sometimes we forget, especially if our parents adapt to the customs here and do not teach us much of the customs of our community - something that is happening in my family. “

“We should meet, talk about Oaxaca, our culture, and have pride, no one can take that away. Because when we came here, we leave it behind. But, I still have it within me because I was born there [San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca] and have not forgotten it, because I go to the dances, and the festivals, and I still remember. It is very sad that young people are forgetting where they come from.”

“[We're] able to have this space to develop our talents and the leadership ability that we all have. Because, I think we are all leaders and we can all develop that, right? That is why we have always said and affirm that we don't have a structure.”

Youth involved in Aut6nomos seek a space where we all treat each other as equals, something that's promoted within the group. So, there are no hierarchical rules and everyone has the opportunity to express themselves and to act as leader.

“We can joke about everything. I like the part that there is no structure, so that no one is specifically in charge of something. If you want to take charge, go ahead, you can take charge.”

“It means being independent, as there is no structure here, everyone can learn to be a leader ... We are horizontal: everyone can exercise their voice and say this yes or not. That says a lot, right? Because many organizations have structure and it's up or down, right?”



Elio and Miguel working to tie the fruit for the Day of the Dead altar. Photo: Sarait Martinez

Another issue that came up repeatedly in the focus group is that youth get involved to express their, their feelings, and ideas. In our communities of origin, we do not participate and when we do, adults/elders do not respect our ideas. Consequently, we look for spaces where we can freely express ourselves and be heard with respect.

“It’s the older people who organize [the community festivals] ... we almost have no voice. I think this also discourages us from trying to participate in the organization. But mostly they are the adults who are responsible for [the festivals].”

“Many times the adults do not take into account the opinion of young people ... or at least, we do not notice that they do. But there’s a real need ... I felt that I, like other young people, needed a space where we can have something in common, place that can also prepare us to become better leaders in the future.”

In our search to find a place where we could fit in, before the group was formed, some of us were involved in other activities. Some of us were already involved in other youth groups, or volunteered in the Guelaguetza, or were part of dance groups in school.

“Danza is part of our culture ... and it will always be, because part of my identity has to do with dancing “chilenas,” and when I made rap, I also talked more about my culture, because it’s something I have to express. I don’t know, I feel it, and I have to say it.”

“Because I want to know more about my culture, I choose certain activities, such as the Guelaguetza, or to be part of Autónomos, or occasionally to do volunteer work with FIOB. I want to know more and I think that’s why I choose to relate to organizations that work with projects or something related to Oaxaca or with indigenous issues...”

“I think the simple fact that we participate says a lot, right? So, I participate and collaborate with organizations which I have a personal interest in ~ not because it will benefit me. As for the promotion, knowledge or defense of peoples’ rights, as women, as indigenous, I participate in organization such as Autónomos, helping in whatever way I can and learning from others, because everyone has some experiences — in their music, their work, and their education”



Demonstration of Oaxacan art at the event Naa Indandosoy Nee Ikixio in Calwa Park, Fresno. Photo: Yenedit Valencia

We face discrimination because of our physical appearance: if we are short, dark-skinned, speak a "dialect," we are a "*Oaxaquita*." Discrimination is something that Oaxaqueño youth listen to growing up, especially while going to school, and it caused us to deny we are from Oaxaca to avoid

bullying by our schoolmates.

So we get involved in different activities, such as folkloric dances, school activities, or join clubs, as an act of empowerment and because we want to represent our communities.

“If we talk about right now, I identify as 100% Oaxaqueño. This group gives me more energy and pride to say I am from Oaxaca. I was born in Oaxaca, which is something that I also want to use in my music. That way I can give a voice to other Oaxaqueño youth like me.”

“Before, when I arrived here, when I was seven, I spoke Mixteco, only Mixteco and some Spanish. Over time, I grew up and witnessed taunting at school, in which there were not many Oaxaqueños – most were from other parts, such as Sinaloa and Michoacán. They made fun of me and made me deny where I was from. I think many of us have experienced that, when we were little, and it hurts a lot, because it hurts your pride and forces you to not say where are you from, to lie, because you feel scorned.”

“From what other people say, how they make fun of us, they treat us as inferior, so they make us feel inferior... I think that had a lot to do with me joining this group, because I needed to find a place where I could identify with others who came for the same reason, since I denied where I came from. When you meet people who come from other parts of Mexico and try to talk to them ... they don't understand, because they don't come from Oaxaca.”

“My [motivation] is more political and more to tell people: yes, we are from Oaxaca and I am Mixteca from San Miguel, and what? What are you going to do about it? So I take it as something that empowers me, that gives me the tools so that others to see the good fortune and privilege that we have. How many people wouldn't like to know where they come from and how you say that in your language?”

“Oaxaquita, Oaxaca, just by looking at you they would say ‘he is from Oaxaca’”

“Why do you talk to that Oaxaquita?” they said. “Because he's my “paisano” and I can talk to him” (One member mentioned that physical appearance does not correspond with what their peers think is the stereotype of a person of Oaxaca).

“In high school ... many people from Oaxaca did not play sports, and I did. Well, I represented Oaxaca ... because hardly anyone from Oaxaca played sports ... “

“When I danced, I had to shout it out with pride (as in folkloric dances, where the person usually yells their place of origin) “Oaxaca” many were surprised, because many do not shout it out ... Others say that I am not from Oaxaca, that I'm from here, what do you mean I am not from Oaxaca? Others say, “I'm from here” ... Why do you deny where are you from?”

Autónomos members described two of the activities we have organized since the group started. The first event was at the park, in which two group members rap in Mixtec, Spanish, and English. We also painted murals for other group members, and for the community to express their talent. The second activity was during the Day of the Dead celebration in which all of the members helped build an altar in order to continue with the traditions of our towns. This activity also served to learn the ways, a little different, that Mixtec and Zapotecs celebrate this festivity. For us, both events represented the possibility to continue with our traditions and language - modified and translated, thanks to the talents we possess.

Autónomos is a group in which we have found a space to explore our talents, far from the oppression and racism of society. It's an open space, which is often denied, and that we have created to rescue our culture, something that is slowly disappearing, and that, even though we are in this side of the border, we struggle to maintain. But at the same time, Bolígrafo's talented trilingual rap is a form of expression that promotes our native language among our generation. Talents like Miguel's are fostered and developed in healthy and open spaces, which Autónomos provides to all its members.

“The event that I enjoyed the most... was the one at Calwa Park ... Maybe because it had to do with not forgetting where we came from, and I liked it ... Everyone contributed with what they could, and eventually worked out. There was Mauro, an artist, they did rap, the murals were cool ... After the event we played “chilenas,” and you know, it was fun.”

“What did you like about the event at the park? ... The rap ... well, I was not thinking of rapping, but my friend's mom really liked how we rap and said we should put out a CD, or something like that, but we are barely starting.”

“I also liked that Miguel raps in Mixtec, and that's something I have not seen much.”

“Your songs have a message? ... The message has to be, I think, a little more political, against the system, against the police, or against what happens here in Fresno ... Yes, it's about practicing free expression, but it has to be a message of war, of justice. “

“I liked the altar the most, because everyone worked together in one way or another, like we merged both cultures, the Mixtec and Zapotec, and it brought us together.”



First photo of the Autónomos group at the event NA'A INTANTOSO YOO NEE IKI'XIO. Photo: Autónomos

Box 1: Oaxaqueño Youth Gathering in California

July 7, 2012 was a special day for many Oaxaqueño youth residing in different parts of California. That day, different youth groups met in Oxnard, including Autónomos and Tequio, an indigenous youth group based in Oxnard, as well as other Oaxaqueño youth who do not identify with a specific group. About 35 people attended, including one adult. They shared their life experiences from their hometowns and the places where they currently reside.

The interesting thing about this meeting was the experience of exchange and what every participant brought to the dialogue, since the purpose of the meeting was for everyone to get to know each other and to think about different ways in which we could collaborate in the future. Among those present were students who are pursuing higher education, such as their bachelors, masters, PhDs, and high school students, which helped to enrich the conversation with their different experiences. An important point in the conversation was the "Don't call me Oaxaquita" campaign, organized by the Tequio youth group.

Talking about the campaign provoked many feelings among the participants, since most, directly or indirectly, have experienced discrimination because they are indigenous. To be called "Oaxaquita" is something that has always been present in our lives. This is a form of bullying, since Oaxaqueño students are taunted by their classmates. The campaign was approved by the Oxnard School District and it prohibits this type of bullying. The campaign's success inspired the rest of the youth and instilled hope that things can change, and at the same time led some to want to start replicating this action where they live.

This meeting was just the beginning of future collaboration between youth groups throughout California. It was a key moment of unity, where youth learned from each other's experiences. The meeting led to an agreement to continue thinking about other forms of collaboration, and how to follow up in the future.

Box 2: Resolution for the Respect of Indigenous Peoples

Resolution for Respect of Indigenous Peoples

For the School Districts of the Oxnard Plains

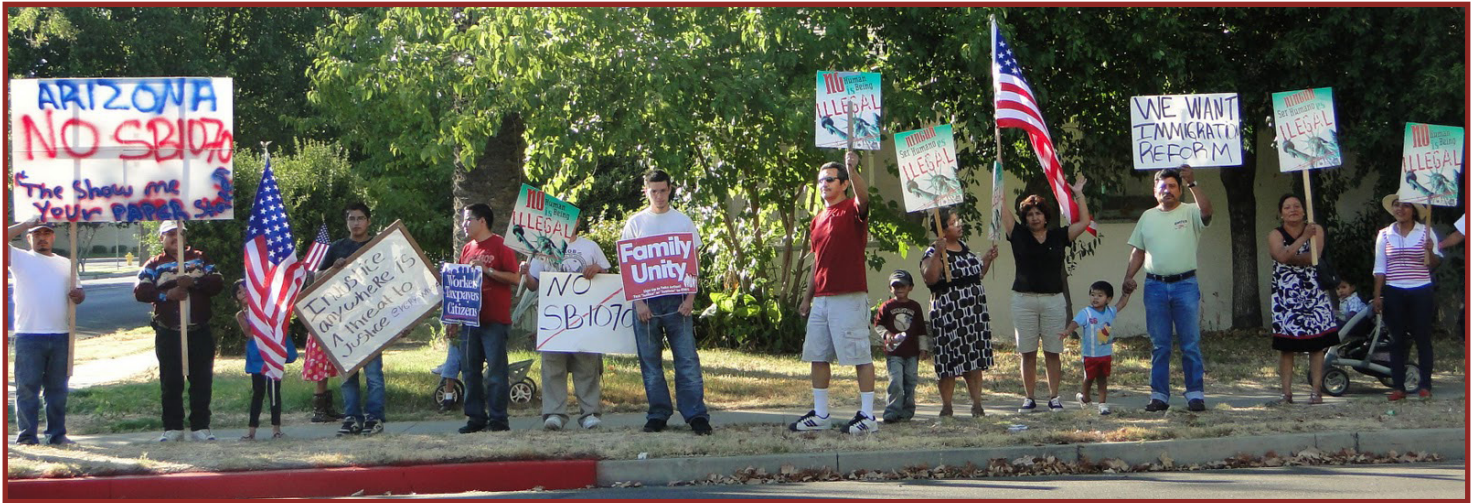
- **Whereas** mutual respect for all cultures and ethnicities is a key to healthy communities;
- **Whereas** student success and achievement is greatly enhanced in an environment which actively promotes such mutual respect and embraces cultural diversity;
- **Whereas** 20,000 residents of Ventura County who speak Mixteco regularly face bullying and denigration of their culture and language through the use of words such as "Oaxaquita" and "Indito;"
- **Whereas** the Mixteco-speaking population has come together through MICOP's "No me llames Oaxaquita" campaign to combat such bullying and its effects on our young people;

Be it resolved that:

- Our School District resolves to prohibit the use of the denigrating terms "Oaxaquita" and "Indito" in its institution.
- Our School District will promote a climate of cultural respect and diversity by supporting the formation of an anti-bullying committee consisting of administrators, teachers, students, parents and community members. This committee will monitor problems relating to bullying and will make recommendations for promoting a respectful environment. It is anticipated and desirable that representatives from all ethnicities, cultural groups, and sexual orientations will participate in the district committee.
- Our School District will promote Mexican Indigenous History within their curriculum.

Chapter 4: The Central Valley Youth Association

by Ana Mendoza



Closing ceremony at the 48 hour candlelight vigil in Madera CA. July 30, 2010. Photo: CVYA

The Central Valley Youth Association (CVYA) was created after the 2008 presidential race, in response to the political moment in the immigration debate. Participants had previous civic engagement experience with other groups, and they have now evolved into active community leaders. All of the participants involved are students with access to and knowledge of broad social networks. They have expanded their leadership skills through travel, leadership workshops, and collaboration. CVYA has been the byproduct of non-profit organizations, the political atmosphere and the experiences of undocumented young adults.

CVYA's activities have been shaped by participants' personal experiences, including their family dynamics, and their indigenous immigrant farm-worker backgrounds. Their gender has also played an important role in their civic participation. While the group holds its own autonomy, they are very focused on the policies of the United States government. More than other groups studied in this project, CVYA is highly political, dealing with the political system to campaign for their cause.

CVYA's goal is to collaborate in the passage of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors, also known as the DREAM Act, and a comprehensive immigration reform. "We are a group of young people who were focused at first on trying to pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform," according to a CVYA student co-founder. The students involved either are or have experience with being undocumented. All the students interviewed were from Oaxacan families, with strong ties to their culture, language and communities. The ages of the participants range from their late teens to mid-twenties.

Group members are actively involved in leadership training and lobbying efforts, as well as trips to Sacramento and Washington D.C. As one CVYA member put it, "the goal was to pass immigration reform, or at least the Dream Act, and we worked on this in different ways.... We began to recruit more people to be part of the campaign. We went to the swap meets, here in Madera on Sundays, to collect signatures and find support among the people. We visited our congressional representatives, including Republican George Radanovich – who didn't support the Dream Act. We also met with Democrat Jim Costa, who offered his support."



Madera residents during the May 1st march in 2013. Photo: Juan Santiago

The students are well-informed about recent immigration laws, and about the issues faced by the undocumented communities in the Central Valley. One of the CVYA's most well-known events was a 48 hour vigil in opposition to the Arizona law AB1070. Members are also actively involved in and informed about farmworker rights and experiences. When describing their lives prior to their civic involvement, participants acknowledged they were uninformed about the issues affecting them. They began to feel involved after being informed by organizations, from sources independent from the mainstream media, and by finding the right networks.

Family dynamics also play an important role in the development of and level of civic participation among CVYA members. "My parents they always told me, 'Why are you going to be involved?' 'Why is that going to benefit you?' 'You know the govern-

ment is not going to do anything just because thousands of people march in the cities or across the country.' 'The government is there to make money.' All these ideas were rolling in my head," a new CVYA member said. "But like I said, it's the voice of the people that makes those changes, and it's not something they come up with and they just do it whether people like it or not, which sometimes happens. But I strongly believe [that] united, we as the people can come together. So... I always tell my parents, 'well, I am out there because I want to help...' I want to be part of this community. I don't want to just sit while there is all this destruction. When families get torn apart. You know, I want to do something about it. I don't just want to watch the news. I want to be there," the student said.

All CVYA members interviewed were men, and they reported that gender, family dynamics and birth order play a very important part in their civic

involvement. As one young man, the oldest of his siblings, put it, "For me, I kind of have to convince my mother, but that almost never works. Whatever she says, goes. So that's basically my whole life. I mean, she's a single mother, so I have to listen to her all the time. Sometimes, it is frustrating because she won't listen to reason. I tell her about stuff and how it is, but she doesn't see it that way. She wants to keep her family together... [but] if there's going to be any change, like, 'you have to make some of the changes yourself.'" According to the participants, however, this family questioning is not an isolated phenomenon. "It's just the way we are, the people from my village. Many of them tell their children 'this is our life.' 'This is the way we were meant to do.' Anything beyond that, they don't want to cross that border, I guess. They'll be upset. This is our way of life. Just work, live, day after day."

CVYA members were excited to tell their stories, and selections from their focus group interview follow. This interview was led by Ana Mendoza, edited by Jonathan Fox, and translated by Mac Layne. Three members of CVYA are also members of the ECO team, so they chose to be identified here by their names, while others are identified by pseudonyms.



José E. Chávez, a member of CVYA, at Madera Court House Park in summer 2010 at the 48th Hour Vigil against SB1070. Photo: Jaun Santiago

Who are we?

Juan: We are a youth group...that was founded in 2009 after the election of Barack Obama. In his campaign, he promised to reform the immigration system. We were really excited by the joy of the 2008 campaign and wanted to turn it into a nation-wide movement, so that comprehensive immigration reform could be passed by May of 2009. We were recruited for a campaign called Reform Immigration for America (RIFA), and they invited us to a training in Washington D.C. Those of us that attended were undocumented, but we knew that it would be a good opportunity to learn about what was happening at the national level and what other students are doing.

What do we do?

José: We inform the community about what is happening, because many people don't know, such as our migrant friends and family. For the most part, many of them get home late from work and don't watch the news. One of our activities was the 48-hour vigil, as well as the marches that we held here in Madera. We are not only informing immigrants, but also Anglos and citizens who were born here. Many of them don't know what the Dream Act or Immigration Reform are, or how they benefit our community.

Luis: I'm in Bakersfield, and there was a small group that went to Arizona in a caravan. I was at the march against the SB 1070 law. It was really interesting because when we were going there, they asked everyone that had documents to hand them over before getting on the bus so that we would all go undocumented, as one...we were really energized when we arrived. All of us were there until night. The trip helped me after I returned, because I had a deeper understanding of what was happening...It was an experience that also helped to inform the community.

Why get involved?

Luis: Well, for me, my dad is from a remote little town in Oaxaca. He hasn't had anything to do with the government his whole life...we work so we can eat. We harvest corn and beans. I think that when he came here, he didn't want to get himself into any problems. He wanted to continue living like he did over there. He wanted to work, care for his home, and continue in the same routine day after day. But being second generation, I think it's more difficult for me to just sit around. It's more difficult to not say anything, and I feel like I should go out and help people. It's something more; we're not talking about a little ranch anymore. We're talking about the United States, about a big state like California, where a lot happens. You have to make your voice heard.

José: I arrived here when I was nine years old, in 2004. I get here and they put me in school because I can't work in the fields. I study, I learn English, and they tell me that I'm undocumented. I already knew that I wasn't from here, but I didn't know that I needed to have documents so I could live a normal life like any other United States citizen. When I was in 10th grade, I joined a club called MAYA. The Madera Academic Youth Alliance is a group where the goal is to preserve our culture and our Latino heritage, and to promote higher education. So I go to one of the club's meetings, and they tell me about an event that's going to take place in the park outside of the court here in Madera. Coincidentally, it

was an event organized by the Central Valley Youth Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CVYA). And when I went there, that was the first time I met Juan, you know? It was really interesting to me because they showed a movie called "In Search of a Future," which was about police raids here in Madera. It interested me because I could



*Madera's group, the first to arrive at the Las Vegas Rally in April, 2010.
Photo: José E. Chávez*

connect with the stories that were being told; farm workers, immigration police passing as *raiteros* [people who charge, and often take advantage of, undocumented immigrants for rides in personal vehicles] coming into homes to arrest people. My interest was to connect with the community but I didn't know how...so it was then... that I joined the group because I felt the interest and the need, more than any-

thing, to be able to stand up for myself and for the immigrant community...

In the beginning my mom helped me a lot...She is a single mother, she has three children, and I am the oldest. It's really difficult for me to be more involved, because it is my last year of high school and I have to take care of my siblings. My mom works nine hours and commutes for an hour and a half... A lot of times...you just have to do what your mom says...because we have to do our part while they work. They're still supporting us, but I will always have my mom's help, even though she wasn't always there [at home]. But it's a little difficult to be involved, especially as a single mother.

Juan: Before coming to CVYA, I climbed about twenty steps, each one being a different organization. I started with a folkloric dance group, where I stayed for three years. I danced to ten songs in Oaxaca's

Guelaguetza, and that's where I came in. Then I went to an organization called the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations [FIOB by its Spanish acronym]. There I became politically involved on an international scale, in Oaxaca, Baja California, Tijuana, and all of California. I was elected to lead the FIOB here in Madera. From there I went to Radio Bilingüe and – it's still hard for me to believe – became a programmer to handle the technical side of the show “La Hora Mixteca.” And now I have been recruited by the CVYA.

The reason why I joined, which I imagine is the same for the other members, is that aside from being a moral act, I believe it is a responsibility that we have not only to our family but also to ourselves. Why? Because we had — and continue to have — this amazing opportunity to go to school, learn English, learn about American laws, and integrate ourselves – not completely – but enough to understand the culture here, right? It helps us and gives us a huge advantage in bringing the message to our homes and to our parents. In my case, I come from an indigenous family that doesn't speak Spanish, much less English. As a student, I can't expect my people, my relatives, to defend themselves in the fields when their rights are violated, when not even I— as a student— understand the basic rights. So one of the reasons why I joined is so that I can train and prepare myself, through trainings and conferences, student meetings, and lectures. So that when I return home to my community, I can tell people what we should and should not do, and understand our basic rights.

Back in 2006 there was a series of police raids in the city of Madera. My family was deported, and neighbors were deported. And there were times when they called me to the scene, but what could I do? But because I have been involved in the community, through the CVYA and other organizations, I have contacts that I can refer them to. I also took action myself. I called the organization Pan Valley Institute, and they came immediately and gathered, not evidence, but testimonials. The next day they took action and eventually the documentary that José was talking about, “In Search of a Future,” was

made. The film even made it to Congress. So little actions one takes -- everyday people, not leaders or activists -- have a big impact.

Now in the case of my parents, it's a little bit difficult. We come from a culture where –I was even talking to my mom yesterday, and I told her, “You have to register to vote in Mexico.” And my mom said, “They don't do anything for me. I don't have any reason to vote.” That's how people see it, right?

MAY 1st MARCH


Wednesday May 1st 2013 • 5:30PM 7:00PM

MADERA COURTHOUSE PARK

(Yosemite Ave & Gateway Dr.)

- ☐ Know your rights
- ☐ Update on immigration debate
- ☐ Opportunity to take action

Bring your
American
flags!



More Info: David Martinez (559) 514-5290 or Jose Chavez (559) 416-6266

-Event organized by: The Central Valley Youth Association-

"This land is your land, this land is my land
From California, to the New York Island
From the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters
This land was made for you and me"

Because we come, sadly, from a government, a nation in which people have very little trust in the government. So when we arrived here, my parents see me in marches and say, “What are you doing there?”, especially because normally...the news only shows a small part, or they show both sides but not at the same time, you know? For example, when they show the marches on television, a lot of times what we see is when the police arrest someone. My mom says, “Why do you still go to the marches if they arrest people?” What she doesn't understand is that those people are exercising civil disobedience...So I became involved so I could tell her, “No,

mom, what those people are doing is really good, it's something that we should all do." [And she said], "Oh, now I understand." So that's what I had to explain to her, and I have even gotten her involved. I have a photo of my mom marching with me in Los Angeles, and that makes me really happy. And every march is a party for me because my mom brings our lunch and we go there with the whole family, you know?

Luis: I [also] started with the folkloric group Se'e Savi, and that's where it all began. Before that, I just went to school, came home, and did my chores in the afternoon. But I think that was a historic moment in my life. That was where I started to notice how, where I started to open my eyes and see what's out there – after learning about all of the injustices that are happening. So now you can no longer turn a blind eye to these problems. In 2006, we started holding other events, going to May 1st marches.

Then I moved to Bakersfield, where I joined another group called Dream League, and I was also involved with the California Dream Network. After that, some other classmates and I formed a small group called United Scholars. We recruited high school students – undocumented seniors who were about to graduate – to help them raise money to go to college and buy their books.

Have these organizations created a network that has been helpful to you?

José: Yeah, it has created a connection, a lot of contacts, you

meet a lot of people that are in the same situation or who are fighting for the same cause, but that are completely different from you – each person has their own career, and they are involved in other organizations that do different types of work. For example, law. In school, I was known as "the guy who defends rights". So anything that they saw that was happening in the news, some law or another, they already knew me and would come to me and ask about it.



48 hours candlelight vigil in Madera in protest of Arizona's SB 1070 law. July 29, 2010
Photo: José E. Chávez

José: Thanks to the CVYA, I have had a wake-up call. I'm more open to having conversations with people. I'm more social since I have joined this organization. In school, I'm involved with various groups. One of them is the student body, but I am also part of the California Scholarship Federation and the science club. Thanks to my involvement with the CVYA, I have been more involved with the youth committee of the United Farm Workers [UFW]...my mom was one of the people who marched from Madera to Sacramento last year, and I have participated with Pan Valley.

Macario: For me this has really helped a lot. What I'm learning from all of them I never knew before. Throughout my high school, it was just me doing all the work, I never asked anybody for help... But what you can learn from somebody else, and after high school, [with] my friends, we are all like very dedicated to our education, and we all want to go into math, science or engineering. And that is great because that way we can all help, it doesn't matter where we are. [We go to] different colleges, but we'll all help each other.

José: I remember in the 48-hour vigil, I took photos every half hour, every hour, of what was happening. I would take a photo and then upload it to a social network, you know? So people would see that we were there the entire time, so they couldn't say that we were lying, you know? ... A lot of the people that participated found out about the event through social networks, in case they wanted to support us. It's more help, right? It's another way of communicating or warning the people.

Juan: I want to add that there are also the networks that we have created. For example, there is the network that we created through the Tequio project. We were involved in so many activities that required us to leave Madera. For example, we got invited to San José, we got invited to Los Angeles. As students that work two jobs to support ourselves, we want to go to the march in San José, we want to go to the Guelaguetza in Los Angeles, but just paying for gas is expensive. But with the networks that we have, we can go to someone's house and they give us petates [woven mats] to sleep on and a simple meal, and we stay there. In San José [they said] "Hey, the people who are bringing the band up for us are passing through Madera. Do you want them to pick you up? That's what will draw the crowds." So these networks help our effort, not for free since we have to put in our time, but in a way that allows us...these networks make that easier for us, "Hey, you can stay here even though it's just a mat to sleep on."

José: I also want to talk about something really important that we have done. We have written letters and we walk around to local businesses downtown to ask for support. A lot of them say, "we're in an economic crisis", but there are also a lot that do help us.

Luis: Well yeah, in one way or another, like I told you, we get help from our classmates, neighbors, friends, businesses, wherever we can, you know? For us, it's about getting out, helping, and making our voices heard.



*José and Odilia Chávez preparing for the march on April 29, 2012.
Photo: Jesus Castaneda Chávez*

How do you integrate your cultural roots into your everyday life?

Juan: I understand that I have to be a humble person, a modest person. With my parents...I speak to them in Zapotec at home. It's hard for me, because you know what the culture here teaches us: speak English and be mainstream. So I'm fortunate to have had an education that says, "you know what? You have to be a modest person to be able to talk to different people. At home, I have to act differently. In politics and everything I like to do, I'm different from my parents. There's a division there, you know? Sometimes I don't even want a computer in

the house, because if I have one there I would spend all my time working. [Now I can] talk with my parents to learn more about my roots, keep speaking Zapotec, and cook with my mom sometimes.

José: Sometimes, you forget your roots as a farm-worker. A lot of times during vacation, I don't rest for even one day. I went to work in the field, so we also have that side of us, you know? I had a student body meeting at school, where you're with students who don't even know what farm work is. So that's another side of us.

I also remember when I was really young, we were living in a little village, on a rural ranch in the middle of nowhere. But I think that I have grown up really Catholic...in each town we have a patron saint. We celebrate them every year, and I grew up with that. I came here and all we did was go to church. But I met Juan and I joined his hometown association.

Luis: When I was in Oaxaca...my grandparents followed all of those traditions of going to mass to celebrate saints. Sometimes we traveled a long way to pay homage to a saint, to be there, go to mass for a while and then leave and enjoy ourselves for a little bit. But coming to this country, it's a little different. [The pace of] life is faster; it's not like over there. Here there's the job, you go home, and the day goes by and you didn't do anything, you know? Until three years ago, when I got involved with San Juan Coatacas Altas here in the United States.

José: Yeah, the town of San Juan Coatacas Altas is big here in Madera, and also in other places here in California and in Oregon. So we met Juan, and like he would say, "We can't tell him no," you know? So we have been more involved with his town than our own. Of course, we help out with donations and whatever else the people in our town ask for, you know? The *tequío* [community service], as they say.

Juan: Something really interesting that is happening here in the Central Valley is that our Zapotec brothers and sisters, their civic participation is very limited...[Because] I want them to be involved...I called

a community meeting in Madera with the help of some other members, and about 120 people showed up, mostly adults between 30 and 50 years old. My idea was to form a committee that would become a community project. They elected me based on our traditional customs. In other words, they said, "I nominate Juan," and everyone said yes and I became president. For that three year term, I asked them, "What should we do now that we are elected?" They said, "We could have a celebration for the patron saint Juan Evangelista." We took the initiative, we organized the celebration, and to our surprise more than a thousand people showed up. The event has gotten to the point where people travel here from Washington, Oregon, and from all over the state. They meet at the fairgrounds and enjoy this beautiful celebration that has food, traditional music, and a mass. The San Joaquin church fills up. [There is] folkloric dance, tepache [a traditional drink], musical groups, families that come and bring their Guelaguetza, their flowers,

DEMONSTRATION FOR COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

SATURDAY MAY 1, 2010 • 3:00PM

AT: MADERA COURT HOUSE PARK

(Yosemite Avenue and Gateway)

MADERA CALIFORNIA



- Music live
- Speakers
- Opportunity for taking action
- Open microphone for everyone

**Bring your
signs and flags**

More info: Juan Santiago (559) 706-9582 or Martha Zarate (559) 346-8072

Event organized by: Central Valley Youth Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform in collaboration with Reform Immigration For America Campaign

REFORM IMMIGRATION

FOR America

and their donations for San Juan, and we name the Tequatecano of the year. That's how I participate. We can do all this thanks to the networks that we have.

What languages do you speak with your families? What language are you most comfortable using?

Luis: Unfortunately I don't speak another [third] language. I would like to, even though my family didn't follow the tradition. My great-grandparents knew Mixtec, but they didn't teach it to my grandparents...they told them, "No, you're going to learn Spanish and that's all." Now I'm really interested in learning other languages. For example, the more interested I become in learning other languages, I don't just want to learn Zapotec...I want to learn Mixtec, where I'm from...and in some ways I

need it because I want to learn about my culture, I want to learn more about my roots and the traditions that are followed where I'm from. I also want to go to other countries. Not just Mexico, but I want to go to other countries [like] Japan, China, Asia, Europe – a little of everything. I know it's going to be really difficult learning all of those languages, but I would even like to learn just a little, you know? Just enough to carry on a conversation with people from other countries besides Mexico, from the different cultures that are out there.

José: The only person who spoke lower Mixtec was my grandfather. My grandmother understood it but never spoke it. This is because we didn't have the right to be indigenous before, you know? So basically, the Spanish-speakers said, "Why are you speaking that?" Spanish was my first language, and then I learned English when I came here, right? Obviously I feel more comfortable with Spanish. I also learned that Zapotec is less difficult than Mixtec. I'm learning Zapotec, I'm learning the numbers from one to twenty-nine and I'll go up from there, you know? Learning and connecting more with my culture, you know? ...One of my goals is that I want to travel to Oaxaca, to see all of the remote villages, all eight regions of Oaxaca. So I would like to connect more with my city, my ancestors, my roots.

Macario: For me, English has always been better because that's what is spoken here, you know? There's not a lot of Spanish. I have relatives who speak really fast and you can't understand anything. But we speak Triqui a lot, even though we are not really involved in our culture. We speak it at home and with relatives when we go out and I am not ashamed of that. I like the fact that I know the language and I like speaking it. It's more expressive, you are able to say things in that language that you can't say in English or Spanish. That is the pretty cool thing about it. At school, of course, I don't like speaking it but the people that you know, they say "What's that you're speaking? Is it something like Chinese?" It's the language I feel more comfortable in - school and anything else is in English.

MAY FIRST MARCH

SUNDAY MAY 1, 2011 • 3:00PM 5:30PM
MADERA COURT HOUSE PARK
(Yosemite Avenue and Gateway Drive)

- ☐ Entertainment
- ☐ Opportunity to take action
- ☐ Keynote Speakers

Bring your
signs and
flags



More info: Jose Eduardo Chavez (559) 416-6266 or Odilia Chavez (559) 479-1166

Event organized by: The Central Valley Youth Association

Juan: [Juan speaking Zapotec]. What I just said is a Zapotec phrase that means “I speak in Zapotec since it is my first language and it is the language that I still speak.” A lot of people ask me, “What language do you think in?” It’s the first thing they ask me: Do you think in English, Spanish, or Zapotec? And some teachers think that I’m thinking a little bit in Chinese. “You think in Chinese,” they tell me. In my mind I think in Zapotec. But unfortunately Zapotec isn’t a written language. So the whole academic aspect doesn’t exist. There are Zapotec books, but in another [variant of] Zapotec. I come from the Zapotec of the Central Valley.

I want to write a poem and song, but it would be really difficult. Even more so for a person like me that left his community when he was eleven years old. We don’t use the herbs or the flowers much

here, that’s why it’s taking me a while to remember what they are called. But for example, the conversation that we’re having here is your average, everyday conversation so it’s easy, you know?...

I have never taken a class to learn Spanish grammar. So now I want to express myself, I want to write my story, I want to write a book, but it’s complicated because I don’t know any languages. That’s why I decided to take matters into my own hands. I want to at least get a Master’s in English too. But I think the language I speak the most is Spanish, given my involvement in Radio Bilingüe, which is a Spanish network. And with the majority of my friends, with

the people who I talk to, we speak Spanish. But of course, I can have a basic conversation in English. [Editor’s note: this is an understatement].

I think speaking Zapotec is incredible. A lot of times we take it for granted, but how beautiful is it that I speak a language that a president of Mexico, Don Benito Juárez, also spoke? I think it’s a huge advantage for me. More than anything it’s a language that helps to set me apart from the rest. I’m not talking about finding work. People who look at what I do say, “Wow, you speak Zapotec?” I say, “Yes.”

When I’m with other Zapotecos it’s different. For example, if you sneeze I can’t say, “bless you” or “salud”. That doesn’t exist in my culture. We have to act differently. In my culture, giving a hug is uncommon. It’s taboo in my culture. So...a lot of people think it’s just a language, but it’s a nation, it’s a culture. It’s a lifestyle. So aside from speaking a language, I have a nation by my side.



48 hour candlelight vigil in Madera protesting Arizona's SB1070 law.
Photo: Producciones Real

Luis: I only speak English and Spanish. I spoke Spanish in Mexico. I came here and learned the language [English], and one day I was driving and suddenly a thought came to me. I was thinking normally, you know? I stopped and said to myself, “Wow, Luis, you’re thinking in English. What’s going on?” And from then on, I started to speak, and sometimes I’ll be speaking with somebody and I forget which language I’m speaking. Sometimes the person doesn’t speak English and I go like two, three minutes speaking English and the person won’t say anything to me, I’m just talking and talking. Afterwards I’ll say, “Oh, I’m sorry. I don’t even know what I’m speaking sometimes.”

How do you identify yourselves?

José: I identify myself now as Oaxacan. We have different ways of identifying ourselves. It depends on the place, because a lot of people don't know Oaxaca. For example, an Anglo-Saxon person or someone who was born and raised here in the United States [might ask], "And what part of the world are you from?" Well, I'll tell that person [I'm] Mexican so they at least have some idea. [If they ask] what part of Mexico, then you have to tell them the whole story. For me, there's like three stages [of saying where I'm from]. I'm Mexican, Oaxacan, and Mixtec. But before, I didn't say I was Oaxacan. I said I was from D.F. because when I got here I was humiliated. I felt ashamed of my culture. I was called *chaparro*, *moreno*, *indio* [short, dark, Indian]. But I didn't know that being that was a privilege. So thanks to joining, I also learned about my roots, about my culture, about being Oaxacan and being thankful for that. Above all, [Oaxaca] is one of the states with the richest culture. So now I identify myself as Oaxacan.

Macario: Really, I don't know how to identify myself because I've been in a lot of situations that, some aren't bad, but they make you feel differently, you know? I'm from Oaxaca but my family tells me things because I'm taller. Even a friend of mine from Oaxaca says that I'm the tallest person from Oaxaca he's ever seen. And there are people that... think that because you're from Oaxaca you're a bad person. I am not ashamed of what I am but I don't want to show it if people are not willing to accept [it].

I had a friend when I was in high school. We were OK, he said "hey buddy" every time we saw each other. But when I saw him in college he treated me differently. I'm not sure how the conversation started, but he was telling me things like, "I know you are a cool dude and all, but I am with the law and you being here illegally, people like you should be deported back and they shouldn't pass the DREAM Act cause that money should be used for something else." And that makes you feel like something else... you can't say stuff [like that], one person

to another. You deal with people differently. That's how I see myself right now. I have to keep changing who I am.

Juan: We're village folk, sandal people, donkey people, river people, and feather people. My dad only took me to the city of Oaxaca once. We're not glass people or car people, you know?... We're indigenous and I say it with pride now. I think that when we went to the city, there was glass in the bank that we went to, and we ran into the glass door. That's something we'll never forget. It proves the stereotype of us when people say, "Hey, indio, what are you doing here in the city?!" Because of my experience in Mexico, where there's a lot of prejudice toward indigenous communities, there were situations where I denied that I was Oaxacan. I even said that I was from Guanajuato one time. Now though, I identify myself as an indigenous person and I'm fighting to make it known.

Luis: Before when I started, when I had just arrived here in the United States, they would sometimes call me *oaxaquita* [little Oaxacan], *hijo de rancho* [ranch boy], things like that, you know? But it almost never, maybe there were one or three, two or three times that it offended me... I always say I'm from Mexico, and they ask me, "But what part of Mexico?" And then I tell them Oaxaca. But more recently, now that I started to learn, you know? Since 2006, 7, 8 things changed a little bit. Now I don't say I'm from Mexico, but now [when they ask me], "Oh, where are you from?", [I say] "Oh, well I'm from Oaxaca, Mexico." And now more recently they think I'm Filipino or Asian. And now I just play around and say I'm Filipino. And the Filipinos ask me, "From what part?" [laughter]. And now that I work in a hospital, there are a lot of Filipinos working there, you know? So now I'm learning to speak a little Filipino. I was also talking with a person from Iraq and I was telling him where I was from, you know? About my town and how it was on my ranch, caring for the cows, the donkeys, the goats. And there really wasn't much of a difference. He told me about his town, about his ranch. It was like he lived on my ranch too.



48 hours candlelight vigil in Madera in protest of SB 1070. July 28, 2010. Photo: José E. Chávez

How do you deal with discrimination?

Martinez: It always makes me feel bad, you don't feel accepted, you know, and that is the thing. You want somewhere where people would just get along.

Juan: There has always been prejudice toward my own Oaxacan race, toward my own Mexican race... In school I felt prejudice from my classmates. But where I experienced the most discrimination was in the agricultural fields when I was working with my parents. For all that they expect from us as workers, they don't expect us to know our rights. The way they treat you there is "hurry up". Like slaves, you know? In fact...[there have been] very few times, I have not experienced discrimination from my Anglo classmates. It has been mostly in the fields.

José: Yeah, I had the same experience...but now people think a little differently. What I have ex-

perienced recently, we were working in a nursery where a lot of different people were working... [from] states in Mexico... We arrived with the whole crew, only Oaxacans from Madera. And a lot of the other crews...are from Hidalgo, Guerrero, etc. Sometimes we did work together, and a lot of them don't know the correct term for oaxaqueño [Oaxacan]. So a lot of our people got offended because they said, "Oh, you're a oxaquita." [The people who say that] are people who are uneducated or people who are actually educated but just say it to bother people. Who knows? So this happened to my aunt, [but] because she has been involved and has attended conferences, she...knows how to defend herself. I think that is the beauty in becoming involved too, to know how to defend ourselves against what they say to us. To make them realize, to turn around and tell them, to educate them about what is the correct term and about who we really are, and how we live. [To show them] how rich we are to know [who we are], to be oaxaqueños...

This happens a lot to me in school: people tell me, or a lot of people think that we don't know anything...Thanks to the fact that we are educated, we're showing them that we are actually very intelligent, that we have a lot of capacity to learn, to understand things – our culture, American culture, English, Spanish, in Juan's case Zapotec...Most importantly, we are defending ourselves, thanks to us taking the initiative. But in the fields, people still suffer [discrimination]. I have experienced it recently, when I was working in the field two weeks ago.

Luis: Well yeah, coming to this country the simple fact of not knowing the language [is difficult]. I remember very well the first day that I arrived...for some reason everyone thought that I was going to speak English, even my Latin American classmates who have been here a long time or Chicanos who were born here. They would come up to me and say, "What's up, how are you?" in English. I was really shy, [and I would say], "I don't know English." So then there started to be little jokes about [how I was] "ignorant and didn't know anything." *Oaxaqueño*, *Oaxaquita*. That affected me a little, you know? But after a few months I said, "I have to learn English. I have to show them that I can do it." And little by little, I started to defend myself more and more, and even though they still say some things here and there, it's not as bad as it was before. But I had to decide if I was going to be affected by it or not. So I decided to not let them talk about me [like that].

I feel like we're all brothers and sisters, like we're all the same - the same body, the same system, the same brain, just from different cultures and different ways of thinking. I feel like in this day and age there is no reason for someone to feel ashamed of who they are. We are fortunate to be who we are.

From your perspective as young people, what differences have you noticed between being a woman or a man?

José: I think it depends on the person that, it depends on how parents educate women and men... Men have more advantages than women. For example, we had a girl in this group who couldn't join us in the afternoons because her dad wouldn't let her.

Macario: In my experience, it's not because I am a man but because I am the oldest that I have to do more things, be more responsible, and that means my mom yells at me a lot. Even if it's not my fault, I have to be responsible for my siblings. I always have to do everything, so I've never had much freedom. My mom is single and I have to help her when I can. My sister has always had more freedom. She calls her friends, goes to concerts...Sometimes my mom gives me more things to do than my sister...just because to do more things you have to know how to drive. [Laughs]

Where I lived in Mexico, the man had the advantage...In my community, there are a lot of women who are single mothers because the men come here and get married again. Well, they don't get married but they end up with other women and have other children and forget the rest. They have freedom because that's how they are educated in my town, the women have to go along [with what the men do]... But here it's different, a little better. We're all equal.

Juan: We have been talking a lot about how beautiful Oaxaca is – sixteen indigenous languages, a mosaic, the Zapotecs discovered corn there. But even though Oaxaca is beautiful, it also has a dark side. What we are experiencing here is machismo... It's the same in my community. Unfortunately, we are a nation where men still govern. Women still do not have their own space; they still do not have a voice...

Unfortunately, my parents and my siblings all [have that idea of] machismo, because they were raised in

our culture. I think that we immigrants, as children, as young people...have to choose whether to be machistas with our wives or to be liberal, progressive. I have had the privilege of living with my family for a long time, but also...I'm around other classmates, the American culture, where women are in charge, you know? This is how we live now, we as young people have the privilege of choosing where we want to go. But this also influences the process of community organizing. For example, here – why are there only men? That's the question that we should answer, right? I think that the best answer I can give is that the parents of the girls who would want to be here won't let them come. They won't let them, or it's more difficult for them. For instance, maybe one of the girls was going to come today, but her parents never taught her how to drive, to keep her from going out very often. Now she has to get a ride here with her dad, but maybe he was late coming home from work. So maybe it's not that her dad doesn't want her to be here, but the way her family is set up doesn't allow her to come...We've seen this in almost all of our meetings, there are never any women. It's not that we don't accept women...for me it's really unfortunate that machismo still exists.

What problems do you face in your life here or in your country of origin? Is there a specific issue that concerns you either here or in Oaxaca?

Juan: Yeah, I have a problem in mind. I come from a community with a high rate of alcoholism. With the indigenous Oaxacans, the man comes home and brings his beer with him. And those corridos, that aren't even ours but people like them...[the songs] talk about drugs, sex, [and giving] little support to your children. I ask my siblings, "How much are you saving for your children and for their schooling?" They don't answer me.

I've broken down a lot of barriers, but there are

not many people like us. Because a lot of us back down the moment we're told, "You know you don't have papers. You can't go to college." And since we don't want to fight and look for information, we say, "You know what? I'll just stay where I'm at." A lot of our classmates get stuck. And staying here makes life really miserable. You just work, shower, eat dinner, and go to work again. My poor mom, if you touch her hands [you'll see that] she has been a farm worker for more than fifty years. Since she was really little, she was picking tomatoes and cucumber in Sinaloa. So now if you touch her hands or my father's hands, they are hard, really strong, [but] worn out. My mom's foot and back hurt.

I remember when I went with my parents while they worked in Culiacán [Sinaloa]. I saw the planes that come and spray pesticides, and we just hid our heads in the bushes or covered them with buckets, or sometimes we would go under the truck...These tough experiences still happen now. For example, you might be pruning and hit yourself in the eye. After having lived these experiences with my parents, I don't want anyone else to live with the consequences of these immigration conditions...This is a problem that I'm concerned with – stopping immigration from Oaxaca. What can we do? I think it's extremely important that the current government supports education and invests in projects that offer productive jobs...in our own country...

It's not so that we can be rich. The only thing we want is to have a small house and clean drinking water, that's all. What more can you want? But that doesn't even exist in our states. When I was in Oaxaca there wasn't even drinkable water. I still brought water from the well. So I hope that the government, that we stop immigration...as much as possible, and also contribute to the preservation of our languages and our traditions. Because immigration causes – look I just showed you that I'm forgetting vocabulary that I haven't used. In other words, immigration is destroying our cultures. Stopping immigration would also help us preserve...the richness of our traditions and culture.

Luis: That, and also what worries me is the unequal-

ity, violence, corruption, and everything that's happening. Not just here in the United States but mainly in Mexico...it's alarming...

José: Also, a lot of my classmates haven't been able to survive the education system, you know? A lot of them drop out, [or] an exam is really hard for them and they get held back.

The *narcocorridos* [drug ballads] also worry me a lot. Because of those *narcocorridos* and other kinds of music, our people are forgetting what traditional music is. I have a Oaxacan cousin, the same age as me, and he's ashamed of Oaxacan culture and the traditional music. So that's what worries me the most – the young people. Their parents are at fault too. They have the responsibility of showing their children...what tradition is.

And also the workers. A lot of them don't know their rights. When I went to my last day of work, it was good that I was informed about the rights of farm workers. I grabbed the cards they give me and told them, "If you need anything, remember that you have rights. If by chance the immigration authorities show up or there is a raid, take this card. It explains your rights."

What worries me also is what we are experiencing, the Dreamers, the undocumented students. A lot of us, once we graduate from college, aren't able to start our career or have a profession because we don't have documents.

But there are so many problems in the world that we can't fix, unfortunately, like pollution. But we have to work to contribute what little we can.

Macario: ...We came here as immigrants, but the life we choose is our own. Since I was little my grandmother brought me here. When my uncle came back, they just asked me, "Do you want to go see your mom?" because my mom came here first. I hadn't seen her in years, and that's why I came. But since I was a little boy, I was always had an imagination. When I lived in Mexico I wanted to be an astronaut. I have always been curious to learn new

things. Instead of watching cartoons on the television here, I liked watching the Discovery Channel, things like that. I like learning about science but... they put barriers in your way, with all the laws...

My people, people in my village get used to what they have, you know? Just their lifestyle, but for me like why do I want more?... Is it really that bad to want a little bit something better for yourself? Should you be happy with what you have already? That's the stuff I deal with most of the time, with immigration laws.

Juan:...They don't care about us in Oaxaca. I experienced tremendous discrimination when I lived in Mexico City. I...went to work in Culiacán. In

**Central Valley For
Comprehensive Immigration
Reform Youth Coalition**

SPEAK UP

TIME

We are a group of youth activist who have organized to become the voice of immigrants in the Central Valley by doing press conferences, and visiting congress officials office's in quest of a COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM!

In our next demonstration event, we will be joined by local community leaders, faith representatives, students and among other reformers, who believe that it is time to fix our country immigration system. This is a national effort to ask our local representatives and the congress as a whole to set immigration as a top priority this year. **Will you join us!**

We will demonstrating two typical stories, dealing with the need of an immigration reform.

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Join our text messaging campaign by texting "JUSTICE" to 69866 to receive the latest information in regards to R.I.F.A. campaign.

**Location: Madera Court House Park (Gateway and Yosemite)
210 West Yosemite Avenue
Madera California 93637**

**Date: Friday, February 26, 2010 Time: 3:00PM-7:00PM
For more information contact: Juan Santiago @(559)-706-9582**

those big trailer trucks. That's where we were, and we would all come home from work tired because the trailer made so many turns and it was so dark inside. They were like boxcars. I worked there, and I risked my life so many times. Then in the desert, I crossed the desert. Here in the fields, there is migration from here to Oregon, where people risk their lives in the snow...María Isabel [Vásquez Jiménez, an agricultural worker] died in Stockton [working in the field, of heatstroke]. So the question

is: Where can we live in peace? Where? Here, the government doesn't want us, in Mexico we're discriminated against, and in Oaxaca [the government] promises bridges where there isn't even a river.

[There is] a question [that] I started to think about when the Oaxacan government fought with the people [in 2006]. Here in the United States they don't like us – and we know it, because we're not from here. In Mexico, they're tired of us. But our own government in Oaxaca doesn't even like us. They don't even respect our most basic rights. The question is, where do we indigenous people belong? Where can we live in peace? The answer is: we don't know where. That being said, we're here in the United States. But we have to go deeper. We have to understand why immigration occurs...

The hard-line position on immigration worries me, because the arguments that are being used to defend it aren't very good. There's a phobia here... they're afraid because we Latinos are growing really fast, and they want...[our growth] to slow down a little bit. They know they're not going to win... now they're saying that they won't give documents to our children, even though the Constitution allows it. How can you just make an amendment like that to the Constitution? They're talking about closing the borders and everything.

But at the same time, I am against passing immigration reform that makes [immigration] really easy. "Oh, you don't have papers? That's OK, we'll give them to you." No way. I think that people have to earn it...People should not just have to learn English, they should have to go to school. I'm a big advocate of education. We have to educate ourselves.

What role does religion play in the activities you are involved in?

Juan: Faith...plays a really important role in the work we do with the group...For example, the vigil that we had. Think about it, what a conflict we got ourselves into. It started as just an idea, but I think

we went through with it because what was happening in Arizona was something very inhumane. We wanted to stand with them. But if you think about it, we live in a very Republican town here, it's really conservative. Some crazy person might grab a pistol and come shoot us because of his ideologies...

We're fighters, but...[we] have faith that everything is going to be alright. It's like putting on a mask. We were there [at the vigil] for three nights and a lot of people came to yell at us. But we didn't realize that a person could shoot us because of different ideologies. What would it matter to [that person] to go to jail for however many years if he was able to get his message across, to kill us or at least shoot at us? What kept us going was faith.

The same thing happened when I got invited to Washington D.C. Since I studied political science, taking a trip to Washington D.C. was incredible, it was my passion. They called me one night and said, "We're going to nominate you for this training. Do you want to go?" I said, "Let me think about it" because if I went and they arrested me in the airport – this was in 2009, so there was a lot of security – I would lose everything. But my faith was so strong that I said, you know what? In the work that I do, I'm not going to rob anybody, I'm not going to kill anybody. I'm going to do what I have to do, which is educate myself, live, and fight for immigration reform. Months later I went to Washington D.C. again – and look, here I am.

...I'm Catholic. I'm not saying I'm in church every Sunday, but I believe that the Lord is with us. I believe that the Lord is with the people who support us [pro-immigration] as well as those that don't [anti-immigration]. God loves everyone.

I understand as long as there is a constructive dialogue, to hear what they have to say and to see what we ourselves are doing wrong. I believe that God is with everyone. Basically, He provides nourishment. He nourishes everything I do, and He gives me strength and the faith that we will achieve what we are working toward.

This is how I see it: a lot of Latinos, a lot of African-American leaders opened the door for us in the 60s. They told us “yes we can” in this country. You fight for rights...in this country, if you can, more than you have time for. I think that the Latinos who came before us, like Cesar Chávez, paved the way. Now it’s our turn to light the torch and carry the baton, right?

I don’t think that our work will be appreciated ten, twenty, or even thirty years from now. But fifty years from now people will see what we have done. Our children and grandchildren will be able to look back and say, “You know what? A lot of people had to fight for what we have today, for me to be here as the governor of California.” I believe that this is

the work that the Central Valley Youth Association is doing – making the voice of the youth, and everyone, heard. We are currently focused on immigration reform, but like our name says, we’re open to any current issue.

I believe that we at the Central Valley Youth Association hope that our work continues to promote civic participation, especially for those young people whose past is a cultural grab bag. I believe that we use our culture, our traditions, and our work ethic to create a joint effort. I’m very happy that we have lasted for three years now, even though at times the political climate hasn’t favored us. I believe that we all have faith that one day we’ll be able to claim victory.



March in Madera, May 1st 2012. Photo: José E. Chávez

Chapter 5: Young Farmworker Activists

by Juan Santiago



Planting almonds in Stanislaus County. Photo: José E. Chávez

Known for its agriculture, the San Joaquín Valley region has also been home to many migrant communities throughout its history. Migrants of European origin came from the East Coast to settle here in search of gold and religious tolerance, followed by loggers. In the 1930s, the drought in Oklahoma and Nebraska led a massive wave of migrants towards the Central Valley and Mexican migrants came during the Second World War, with the Bracero Program. Today, indigenous Mexican communities are among the migrants who are still coming to the San Joaquin Valley.

One of the reasons why indigenous Mexican migrants come to this region is the opportunity to work in agriculture, including many from the Zapotec community of Coatecas Altas. Accord-

ing to figures from the Popular Committee of the Coatecas Altas Community (Comité Popular del Pueblo Coatecas Altas), more than 1500 people from that town live in the Central Valley. One distinct characteristic of indigenous communities is that they migrate together with other members of their ethnic group, and that they tend to migrate to agricultural regions – in Mexico as well as in the United States.

Some indigenous communities, like Coatecas Altas, used to migrate to the agricultural fields of the state of Sinaloa, México. I still remember that right after the Day of the Dead, the loud-speakers (in my home town) announced that jobs were available in Sinaloa. As señor Pablo Vásquez Martínez put it: "Days after the celebration of the



*Installing an irrigation system in Stanislaus County.
Photo: Lorena Hernández*

Day of the Dead we signed up with the contractors to travel to northern Mexico, where we went as families to work in the seasonal chile and tomato harvests." Hundreds of families responded to their calls, signing up for their bus tickets. Whole families went on these odysseys.

All the kids went, from the newborn to the young students in primary or secondary school. For indigenous teens, finishing their studies or staying for the whole school year was not an option. Not for my brothers and sister, who interrupted their schooling to accompany my parents to migrate for work. My brother Nicolás Santiago Ramírez left third grade when he left for his trip (all the way) "North" as we call the US. Now when my mother sees a young person my brother's age, recently

arrived from Oaxaca, she regrets having pulled him out of school, sending him north with someone from our community. As she says, "When I see that young person I feel bad about having sent my son there... from a really young age [15 years old] he was already working in the apple fields. I asked him "Do you want to go to the US?" My son told me, "If you want I'll go, and if you want, I'll stay." There are more stories like mine. My mother and I stayed in our community. I was learning math and grammar in the third grade, but the needs were too great and so we decided to make the trip North as well. There are many similar stories with migrants leaving their homes, their pets, and their lands to be looked after by a close relative.

We're going North

As an eleven-year-old, one of the things that I still remember are the moments when we had to say goodbye to my sister, who couldn't migrate with us because she was married. I also remember the stops that the buses made in the big cities during the trip. The whole family would get off, and we would look for a place to have lunch together. No one in the family knew what city we were in, the only thing we knew was that we were in a big city. After a long trip, including crossing the desert in Arizona, I arrived in Madera, California, where my brothers were living. My parents' intention of bringing me with them was not the same as the goals of previous generations of immigrant parents. The idea was for me to go to work, not to go to school. Maybe it's not my parents' fault, since in our country it's normal for children to work. Once in the US, the parents continued with their practices of sending their children to work in the fields in California, only to be fired within hours. Nevertheless, even though I was underage, I worked in the fields. One anecdote that I can't forget is that I had to change rows, so the supervisor would not realize that I was working, since I was underage. My first job in agriculture was in Fresno county, picking grape leaves. It was one of the easiest jobs I did, because afterwards I picked

tomatoes. I could only bear it for one day since I got sick with a fever.

Perhaps the most emotional goodbye was when we migrated to the US. When we used to migrate to work in Sinaloa, we knew we were going home after the harvest. But coming to the US, we didn't know if we were going to survive crossing the Arizona desert. We didn't know anything, just that we were going North. I came to this country by my parents' decision, not my own. That explains why so many young people are living in the US as undocumented.

We are known as Dreamers, young people who study in academic institutions, volunteer with civil society organizations, contribute to the economy with our labor, pay our fair share of taxes (contribute to SSN and Medical), and voluntarily register with Selective Service System. We are Americans! But we don't have Social Security cards or drivers' licenses. As a result, we are not eligible for government financial aid for school, and some accuse us of stealing jobs from others. The truth is that we are individuals with talents and the will to get ahead.

In my third year of high school, my desire to succeed academically led me to be a candidate for programs that help you go to college. But my immigration status prevented me from participating. I still remember my English class, when I got the note that told me about the appointment to give me the news. That was one of the most unpleasant moments of my four years in high school, getting rejected because I didn't have a social security number. That experience motivated me to participate with groups where I learned that I was not the only one in that situation, and to resolve the problem required organization and advocacy for comprehensive immigration reform.



A young farmworker from Madera picking grapes in 102° heat. Photo: Juan Santiago

I became completely committed to the cause in 2006, when I realized that I was part of a very large movement – that was the year when the anti-immigrant law was presented to congress. The Latinos responded in the streets with marches, and I had the opportunity to participate in Los Angeles, in one of the largest in the history of California. That march was so large that I felt like water in an endless river. In 2009, I worked as a volunteer in the Reform Immigration for America campaign, based in Washington, D.C., which brought me to the nation's capital for training, followed by a march to the Capitol. That's how the Central Valley Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform was born, as a new effort to raise awareness. The goal was to organize people locally to call their congressional representatives, to demand a comprehensive immigration reform, including press conferences and visits to congressional offices.



*Clockwise from top: Melon pickers near Huron. Cherry pickers in Fresno. Odilia Chávez, ready to begin work in Stanislaus County.
Photos: José E. Chávez*

Indigenous farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley

Many migrants bring with them knowledge of how to plant corn and beans, from the preparation of the soil to the art of making plows from tree trunks. But they lack experience with industrial jobs. It is important to note that the women bring with them artistic skills, such as how to make *petates* and *tenates* (woven palm mats and baskets), and how to weave *huipiles* (embroidered blouses). Since they are familiar with agriculture, these migrants tend to migrate to regions with that kind of work, like the San Joaquin Valley, settling from Bakersfield to Stockton.

The arrival of indigenous Mexicans in the Central Valley, like the Zapotec community, has contributed to demographic change in the region. Those who are undocumented face obstacles in their daily lives. For example, many have their cars confiscated for driving without a license when they are coming home from work, or when they are on their way to pick their kids up from school. At the same time, the arrival of the indigenous Mexican community also offers a new platform for civic participation, because the communities organize their hometown festivals, the Guelaguetza, and some do fundraising for development projects in Oaxaca. To better understand the political panorama of indigenous Mexican farmworker communities, and especially the young migrants and young people from indigenous Mexican families, we convened a group of four people, three undocumented and all identified by pseudonyms.

The participatory action research method guided us in the process of this research. The interviewers come from backgrounds similar to the focus group participants, and we developed the questions based on our own experiences. This allowed the conversations to go deeper. The participants all migrated to this country at a young age, two of them did not go to school in the US, but they all remain active in their communities.

The goal of the interview was to understand young farmworkers who are involved in community organizing, in spite of all the constraints they experience. Many only attended primary education in Mexico, and they work under triple digit temperatures in the fields of California. Moreover, after their arduous work they still attend community meetings. However, it is important to mention that in their perspective, they do not see their activism as part of “civic engagement.”

We began our conversation with the focus group of young migrant farmworkers by asking about their participation experience with any organization. It’s important to note that in our community, the concept of grassroots organization is expressed and understood differently, so we asked about any kind of organization or participation. During the interview, we did not use term “activist,” since in our communities that word was also not understood in the same way as it is in English, in the US context. In my community, for example, one of the only civic activities is the *mayordomía*, where each year two families are tasked with organizing religious festivals. In our conversation, we found that while they didn’t use the word “organizing,” they did use the concept. For example, doing fundraisers or participating in marches. They call this kind of involvement in public service or a cause *compromiso* (commitment). This kind of commitment is very important in our communities, and that is why Maria organizes tamale fundraisers to help children in Oaxaca.

In the first part of the conversation, we tried to learn about the reasons why young farmworkers participated, or joined with others, taking into account that in the Central Valley there is no group specifically focused on organizing youth, and especially not young farmworkers – who have different needs. We asked them to tell us about how they got involved, and the goals of the organizations that they identify with.

“Nowadays I don’t participate in any organization, as you know. But I participated with the American Experience Club.... I served as treasurer, just one time, but yes...”

“Our trips were to visit places, and as we used to say, that time [together] was to know more about the history of the United States.”

“What I liked about [the Guelaguetza in Fresno] were the dances, and after dancing we went to see the other groups, and the stands with clothes, food, regional clothing from Oaxaca, aprons, lots of things that I bought as mementos for my family and my mother”

“I think that some people, they are embarrassed to speak their languages...everyone else makes fun of them, and points at them.. As paisanos, as Oaxacans, we have to support each other. We are organizing ourselves to be bigger.”

“For my part, there is something that worries me [referring to the problems in Oaxaca]. Now many communities are emptying out because so many are emigrating to look for work in search of a better life here.... My community is lonely, it’s a ghost town, with only seniors left.... The houses are closed up, empty.... because we are all here now. My community isn’t the only one...”

“In my family, from what I have seen and heard, my parents brought us here so we could have a better life, maybe... [The idea was that] we would work and would return to Mexico but... it’s very difficult to return to Mexico, to stay. Because one gets used to it here, each person has their life, their job, their studies, so it’s hard. The goals of each family... were to work and save money and return to their community, but that’s not the way it turned out.”

—Azucena

One of the participants was Azucena, a former member of the American Experience Club, which introduced her to knowledge about the US government and history through a series of field trips to museums, including trips to observe the landscape of California, such as Yosemite National Park. These experiences enabled Azucena to become engaged in the community, doing fundraising through car washes.

She is among those young adults who came here at a very early age and who chose to attend school. However, she only finished high school and then started working in the fields. Outside work, Azucena continues to be involved in the community by helping to organize cultural events in Madera and Fresno county. In addition, Azucena was involved with the Cultural Group Se’esavi, a dance group dedicated to preserve and promote traditional dances of Oaxaca (see Chapter 7).

Jorge García Muñoz also participated in the focus group interview. He was one of those Oaxacans who migrated when he was very young. At a very young age, Jorge decided to migrate to Mexico City, to work in factories, on assembly lines, sending his earnings to his parents in Miahuatlán, Oaxaca. But soon Jorge decided to migrate to the US, with the goal of finding a job similar to the one he had in Mexico.

As Jorge put it, “I didn’t have plans to do farm labor when I thought about coming to the US.” In California, Jorge changed his mind and decided to explore farm work, and he liked it. For about five years, he worked in California and Oregon, joining the young migrant workforce in the US. His migrant path was different from that of other young people. Jorge, at 25, decided that his future was not in the North. He got tired of getting up at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. He got tired of the injustices in the field and the hard work paid at minimum wage, which inspired him to join a march to Sacramento to demand fairer laws for California farmworkers. Before this research project was over, Jorge returned to Mexico.

“Well, they say that here [indigenous languages] aren’t good for anything. Because only paisanos [folks from our hometowns] can relate to it. And if you are going to work anywhere, you have to speak English or Spanish. You’re not going to speak Zapotec or Mixtec, unless your labor contractor is Zapotec or Mixtec”

“To come here, work, make money and return to Mexico... I’ve done it... I haven’t left [yet] but I think in two months I’ll go to Mexico... I’ve been here five years. Now I’m ready to leave, to set up a business and be my own boss – and to create jobs for other people who don’t have one. I don’t know business, really, but this is just a start. Thanks to God, I reached my goal. It’s no big deal, really. But I did what I came here to do.

“If you don’t have education [to organize] you can’t develop, you get embarrassed or afraid. It’s not because you didn’t want to study, but because there was no [opportunity]. I barely finished secondary school.... That’s why our people don’t organize, they are afraid that they are going to get in too deep... First they think a lot about the Migration [police], and they are afraid of their lack of education... so I think there is a lot to do here, for sure.”

“I’ve informed myself about the rights one has in this country. That’s why, if someday the Migration [police] picks me up, I will demand my rights. I may not speak English, but I’ll find someone who can speak for me, and I have to demand my rights. Maybe they’ll take me to Mexico. Could be...”

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I don’t participate in any event and I don’t have much to say. I just focus on my job. Juan sometimes invites me to participate in events like marches, his hometown festival... which is really big and seems simple, but...”

“I’ve informed myself about the rights one has in this country. That’s why, if someday the Migration [police] picks me up, I will demand my rights. I may not speak English, but I’ll find someone who can speak for me, and I have to demand my rights. Maybe they’ll take me to Mexico. Could be...”

—Jorge García Muñoz

“Well, what can I tell you, Juanito? I don’t participate in any organization. But I have gone to marches, plus I participate, for example, with my aunt, helping poor children in Oaxaca. So I help her to sell food to raise funds... The truth is that even though I would like to be in an organization, I don’t have enough time.”

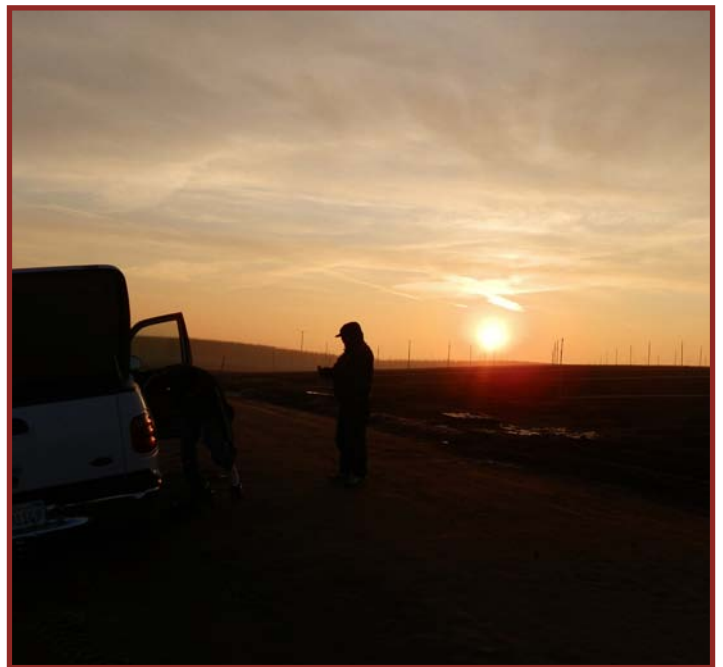
“Well, I’m proud that there are people helping poor children, and back there we also have a teacher who is helping us, sending us photos and information from the doctor – We can show this to people here, since as you know some folks will ask questions if there is no information [on where the funds go]. So that’s what I do when there’s time, helping my aunt with this.”

“I don’t know, maybe because I know what’s it’s like back in Oaxaca. In my case I didn’t suffer, but my parents have told how they did suffer... So I do this because they went through that.”

“Once I said I was from Oaxaca and they asked me “how do you say that? [in Mixteco]? They thought I was ashamed of it, but I don’t have the good fortune to speak a[n indigenous] language, since we came when we were all very young.”

—María Martínez

We also talked to María Martínez, who at the beginning of the interview insisted that she didn’t have much to say in terms of organizing experience. Maria explained “I don’t participate with any group.” But after getting in to the conversation, it turns out that together with her family, she organized home cooked food sales for the community to raise funds for needy children in Oaxaca. María mentioned that she used her rest breaks in the fields to announce their events and to take food orders. One weekly fundraising event caught the attention of the local newspaper, the Madera Tribune, in a report by Elsa Mejia: “Poor childhood inspires Maderan to help needy” (March 3, 2011). Young Oaxacans like María are real organizers, but that term is not used in our communities, instead the concept is understood as community service (“*tequio*”).



*Farmworkers ready to begin their day in Stanislaus County.
Photo: José E. Chávez*

Raúl also participated in this focus group. His story embodies the spirit of this participatory study. Raúl came to the US with the goal of working to support his mother, who lives in Madera. Then he discovered what many other young people find when they get here. California labor laws prohibit the hiring of under-age workers. Many parents find this surprising, since in Mexico it is widely accepted for children as young as five to work (even though on paper, federal labor law sets the working age at 14). If they don't work, they accompany their parents to the fields, as I did when I migrated with my parents to the fields of Sinaloa. Once he learned that he couldn't work, Raúl signed up for school – something he does not regret, because even though he did not graduate, he liked the experience, and at that same time, it influenced his decision to work to organize the migrant community in Madera.

After a while, Raúl left school to work and he got married. At the same time, Raúl formalized his activism, and he became the Madera representative for the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB), organizing farmworkers. Raúl, like other farmworkers, travels to Oregon each summer following the harvest. There they pick strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries. People like Raúl travel there to work to escape the high temperatures here in the Valley, but also because in Oregon some farmers allow children to work at their farms, allowing the parents take advantage of their kids' summer breaks. I used to travel to Oregon every summer until I got a stable job in Madera in 2007.

Another reason why people migrate up North is the fact that Oregon used be one of the few states that issued driver license regardless of immigration status. However, a few years ago, Oregon stopped granting drivers' licenses to the undocumented immigrant community. Sadly, in recent years some counties of Oregon have collaborated with immigration agencies, as part of the Secure Communities Program.

Raúl was amongst those affected by this program. In the summer of 2012, he was detained by Woodburn, Oregon police and was turned over to Immigration because he was driving without a license. As a result, he was deported to Mexico soon afterwards.

“Now I am the local coordinator of the FIOB here in Madera....We have recently organized forums on the issue of heat stroke, so that our *compañeros* who work in the fields can know their rights. We've mainly done these workshops... but starting a year or two ago, as members of the FIOB, we have also organized the [Benito Juárez Cup] basketball tournament and that's been a big event.”

“I would like for our children to speak Mixteco, Spanish and English, the three languages – and if they can learn another one, all the better.” [But] we are in a country where, in reality, languages other than Spanish and English are not used.... [so] today, many children don't know the language...”

“For sure, I have personally experienced [discrimination] at work, in the chile harvest I was a supervisor and they asked “where are you from? “From Oaxaca,” I said.. and instead of saying my name they called me “Yuku” [short for Yukinicocol], making fun of me.”

-Raúl

Conclusions

Many assume that the only young people who are actively involved in their community are those who manage to get an education in the US or those who come educated from Mexico. This interview shows that youth (non-students as well as students) play a major role in the development of the indigenous community in Central Valley.

Regardless of whether an indigenous youth was enrolled in school for a couple of years or never sought an education in this country, they can discover the passions, values, and beliefs and affiliate with those who share their interests. They participate in churches, cultural dance groups, ad hoc committees, and rallies. As we discovered in these conversations, the one and a half and second generation immigrant youth are major players in indigenous community organizing in the Central Valley. They advocate and organize on issues like farmworker labor conditions, pesticide regulations, preservation/promotion of indigenous culture, civic/political advocacy for better wages, plan and coordinate fundraising events to assistance people in Mexico and some of them offer countless of

community volunteer hours to churches and religious events.

Something that these young adults have in common is that they are interested in the opportunity to serve their community, rather than membership benefits. Another common observation is that they are in constant communication with those who they work to support. When they are asked how they pass along information, they respond by saying, "we tell those who we work with about our events and get them come to support us."

Young farmworkers may not consider themselves to be community organizers, in spite of the grassroots work that they do. Many do not appreciate the work that these folks do, leaving their organizing work hidden. Nevertheless, as one sits down and talks to these young adults, one discovers that they are serious community organizers in California's Central Valley. They organize using practices that are not visible to traditional organizers. That's why ECO was committed to recognizing their experience.



A worker taking a break from the fields in Stanislaus County. Photo: José E. Chávez

Chapter 6: Gender Roles and their Influence on Civic Participation

by Ana Mendoza, with Sarait Martínez and Minerva Mendoza

The migration of indigenous communities has caused an interaction between different cultures, and with that the evolution of gender roles. Male dominance is still seen as the norm, but this outlook is changing and evolving among the indigenous youth participating in this study. Male and female participants acknowledged that they are bound by gender roles, but also acknowledged the need for change. They have shown signs of rebellion against male dominance in their families and in their civic involvement. While gender seems to contribute to the level of civic involvement of participants, birth order also plays an important part in who is given more or less freedom by parents. This analysis is based on focus group interviews with members of the California Valley Youth Association (CVYA) and Madera High students. The groups differ in the number and ages of participants, generation and gender dominance, but all of these factors seem to contribute to how attached members are to their gender roles.

In groups like CVYA, the influence of cultural male dominance seems evident because of the low number of female participants. On the other hand, young women predominated among high school club participants. In contrast to CVYA, female high school participants seemed to be less affected by gender roles, which might be due to several factors, including sibling birth order, migration history, age, historical patriarchy, immigration history, and tradition of involvement among family members.



Sarait Martínez voting in the FIOB Congress in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico, in October of 2011. Photo: Archives of the FIOB

“Mijo Syndrome”

Participants acknowledged and agreed that in past indigenous generations there was a patriarchal approach to gender roles. Some assumptions have survived, such as what may be called the “Mijo Syndrome.” Women are seen as fragile and in danger of getting pregnant if not watched closely. Men are seen as strong and capable of self-protection. Some interview participants constantly questioned and rebelled against these assumptions.

“[Males] can do whatever they want, like if they have a tournament they can go, even my sister had a tournament on Saturday at seven and she was not able to go. But if we go somewhere, me and my sister, no someone else needs to go with [us].”

-Female High Schooler

Parents assume their “mijos” or sons will take care of them when they reach old age. Men are seen as an investment, since they will carry the family name and would not be tied down by their children. In contrast, women are not seen as a good investment, since they are at risk of single motherhood or leaving and never coming back after marrying. “My mom thinks I am going to get married and never come back,” one female high school student said. “She tells me that.” This is not only seen in indigenous communities, but also in other cultures, where male children are preferred.

Fear of single motherhood

Women are also blamed for single motherhood. This fear from parents leads to protective parenting and societal blame of women. “There are a lot of girls that mess up, or like they do something and then they regret it, but you can’t blame anybody for your mistakes,” one female high school participant said. “I think it is up to the person, because you can have the most protective parents in the world but you can turn bad.”

“Sometimes the parents are more protective... because you don’t want the girl to go somewhere else and get, like, pregnant and stuff,” a male high school participant said. “They don’t want the girl to be in gangs... and sometimes they also do it to the guys too.”

“There seems to be some resentment for the unequal treatment of both genders. I think it’s weird or not cool, they say the guys can go out and do their stuff and get girls pregnant. They don’t realize that they are part of the blame too, but we are [the ones who are] gonna get pregnant and suffer the consequences. What about their son that went out and got another girl pregnant and they are gonna have a baby, yet there is no responsibility because he is the guy. I don’t think that is fair.”

-Young Woman

Women are given more liberties with certain conditions, such as chaperones, lack of transportation, curfews and constant phone calls from parent. “They think it is dangerous for a girl to be out,” said a young female participant from Madera High School. “But a guy can do whatever they want,” responded another female participant when asked about gender limitations imposed by their families.

Female participants reported that they have curfews, depending on the event, but they all have to be home no later than 12 a.m. Female participants also shared that in certain scenarios, community involvement is also frowned upon, which sometimes discourages them from participating. “For church, I think, they are all guys and am the only girl,” said a high school participant. “People get the wrong impression. They don’t tell me anything but I am sure they think something but they don’t tell me anything,” she added.

Birth order

Sibling birth order also plays an important role in their freedoms and responsibilities. Degrees of freedom vary between older and younger siblings. A young female high school student shared that her older sister had more freedoms than she did or younger siblings because of her age. Participants who were older siblings also shared the responsibility of being the first. "Since I'm the oldest, I have to set a good example," a female high school participant said.

A male member of CVYA member also shared that he has experienced unequal treatment from his mother due to his gender, and because he is the oldest. "My mother is single, so I have to help her as much as I can. My sister has had more freedom," he added. "She calls her friends, they go to concerts and wherever." He also shared that unlike his sister, he was allowed to learn to drive.

When asked about gender roles in the US, members agreed that in the United States there were few to no differences between the sexes, compared to back in Mexico. They recalled the differences in Mexico and their native towns.

In addition, one of the few male high school interview participants shared that when going somewhere with cousins, he had to bring his sister with him "since she is like the girl, she is like the youngest one, not spoiled, but special."

CVYA male members agreed that their sex has allowed them to have more freedoms such as driving, outings and other freedoms, but they have also had other disadvantages and additional responsibilities — like having to play the role of protectors and being a role model for their younger siblings.



Male and female Autónomos members working together to set up the Day of the Dead altar. Photo: Sarait Martinez

“In my hometown, many women were single mothers because the men come here [to the US] and they get married again, or they just get together with other women, have more kids and forget about the other ones. They have freedom, but the way they educate them in my community, the women have to do what the men say. But here it's different, a bit better, we are all equal.”

“You can see the difference because, not in the sense that they let me do more things... But ... since I got here, since the first day of school: ‘well, how are you going to get home’ ‘well, how are you going to get to school?’ For the women it’s different: ‘we’re going to take you to school’ or ‘we’re going to pick you up at school...’ [Plus they ask the girls] ‘Do you need this, or that?’ But from my perspective, [they ask] ‘Let’s see if you get a job somewhere so you can buy what you need.’”

-Young Man

“I think that we as immigrants, as sons, as young men, we have a choice about whether to be *machista* with our wives, or whether to be liberal, progressive. Unfortunately my parents and brothers are *machista*, because they were raised in our culture. I have the privilege of living with them for a long time, but I also spend time with other *compañeros* and in American culture, where the woman is in charge, right?”

-Male CVYA Member

“Maybe it’s not that her father doesn’t want her to be here, but the way the family is organized doesn’t allow it. This is reflected in our organizing, and we have seen it in almost all of our meetings, where we need more participation.”

-Male CVYA Member

Historical experiences

Participants compared their experiences to previous generations and proudly identified the limitations they were still subject to, but they also spoke about their new roles and advantages after their culture collided with the United States’ culture.

The impact of gender on civic engagement

The impact that gender roles have on organizing seems evident for CVYA, since all of its members are 1.5 generation and there are few female participants.

A young female participant verified that her gender caused her parents to question her involvement in some organizations. “Maybe there are some organizations or something that mostly guys are involved in, and not a lot of girls, so if you are the only girl, your parents can be – ‘like why are you the only girl with all these guys?’” While the statistical impact of the effect of gender roles is unknown, female students seem to be more aware of the limits imposed upon them because of their gender. This awareness has allowed them to increase their civic involvement.

Conclusion

“Mijo syndrome,” birth order, age, historical patriarchy, and immigration history, among other factors, influence the level of civic participation and responsibilities for both males and females. While many historical patriarchal traditions continue to be evident, many of the members interviewed see an evolution of ideas that changes many traditions. Exposure to diverse ideas and cultures caused youth to question the set of imposed norms.

Personal experiences of ECO members

Ana Mendoza:

The development of an individual is based not only their culture, but on their nurturing environment as well. While listening to several stories from interviews done for this study, interviews I have done for short articles, and from listening to my cousins' experience, I have come to the conclusion that I don't have a normal family. The evolution of feminist ideas, higher education, and other new ideas have changed my family's history. This has made us different from other indigenous families.

I have always been interested in the effects of nature versus nurture in people's lives. There are eight children in my family, six of whom have received a Bachelors or higher degrees. Of the remaining two, my youngest sister is currently in her second year at University of California, Davis. My youngest brother has Down's Syndrome, which has made higher education harder for him to achieve. While higher education in my family is no longer an option, but rather a requirement, this has not been the case for our extended family, or for many other Latino or indigenous families I have met.

My family and personal experience has been the result of generations before us. Our family memory begins with my paternal grandmother who was forced into a marriage. She supported her family by selling food to school children and to residents in our small town, San Mateo Tunuchi,

Oaxaca. Her husband, my paternal grandfather, even though he outlived her, was much older and forced her to support the whole family, including her husband. She was a strong woman who helped my mother evolve into who she is today. My mother, who before becoming a teenager was a provider for her growing family, began believing women were equal to men when she noticed she made the same or more cotton *costales* than grown men. Her father, who lost his right hand at the age of 15, lost his first family due to his alcoholism and domestic violence. For this reason, he tried to raise his second family differently. To help support her family, from the ages of 7 to 17, my mother and my grandfather would travel to other Mexican states to do farm work. As he would tell my mother many times while she worked beside him, she was his right hand.

Working in the fields was how my father met my mother. He remembers first noticing my mother when she was having loud debates with her male cousin over women's rights and equality while working on the fields of Veracruz, Mexico. At the time, my mother had decided she was never going to get married. Instead, she was planning to build a business with her family in Oaxaca. My mother dreamed of being independent, though she, like many other women her age, was denied an education. Her goal was to be independent and to not be tied down by men or children.

While her dream of independence never became true, her goals were passed on to us, her children. Education was denied to my mother because of her gender, but she talked to all of us about the importance of “being somebody in life” (“*ser alguien en la vida*”) by getting an education. My mother was never been able to read us a book or help us with homework but she always encouraged us to achieve higher education. Since I was a little girl, I remember her telling us about our indigenous background, and how we should all be proud of our heritage. She told us all about the negative stereotypes Oaxaqueños go through in Mexico and in the U.S. My mother would constantly remind us

that we had to prove everybody wrong and prove to the world that Oaxaqueños were not ignorant, and that we were just as smart, or smarter than everybody else. That sense of superiority encouraged one of my older brothers to form a club named M.E.X.I.C.A, or Mexicanos Indígenas and Centro Americanos, while he was in high school. He felt that no other club could represent the large number of indigenous students attending the school. The club disintegrated after all of my older brothers finished high school, but revived when my younger sister and I were in high school. However, it died due to lack of funding, leadership and interest by teacher advisors and students in the years that followed. In 1994, while attending Fresno State, my brothers began another club, which they named Mixtlan, to promote culture and provide an outlet for indigenous students.

Pride in our culture has always been high in our family. While other teenagers denied their Oaxaqueño heritage, I remember my older brother dancing *Quebradita* and wearing his belt with the words “Viva Oaxaca.” My older brother, who was called “the computer” by his teachers and classmates because of his good memory and his ability to do math, graduated from high school with honors and learned English in just three years. He was accepted to Fresno State, where he received his B.S. in Construction Management and is currently pursuing certification as an architect. My older brother reached what my parents and my seven siblings saw as something impossible, and we all followed. In my family, including my sisters and brother-in-law, there are three with Bachelor’s Degrees in Construction Management, Industrial Technology, Photography/Journalist, Teacher, Physiologist, Political Science, and myself with a BS in Political Science and Journalism. My youngest sister is currently pursuing Environmental Science and my husband is a Business Management major. My mother always told her daughters of the importance for women to get an education, saying that we have “more to lose.” She gave very few liberties to her first daughter. She had more freedom than other Oaxaqueñas her age, but very little

when compared to American standards. Once my older sister moved away to college, she was free and her newfound freedom was also given to the younger siblings such as myself. I was allowed to attend dances, go out with friends and come home at any hour as long as my parents knew where I was and I had my sister, my uncle or my brother’s friends as chaperones. This changed with my little sister. My youngest sisters had even more freedoms and didn’t need any chaperone.

The only condition that we all had, regardless of gender, was no alcohol. Plus, my parents had to meet our friends and their families to make sure they were a good influence for us. I vividly remember my brothers bringing their friends to my house while I was growing up. Some of their friends were involved in gangs or dressed like gangsters. My mom would invite all of my brother’s friends to our house, where she would serve them dinner and talk to them about their future and the effect of gangs— or dressing like a gang member— on their self-image and future. After my brother’s friends left, my mother would always give us a speech about how we could be friends with whom-ever we wanted, but it was our job to encourage them to get an education. She always reminded us that we had to attend a university and major in whatever we wanted, but get a BS or higher.

My parents met while they were both working in the fields of Mexico. My father’s family were farm workers and moved constantly, so he dropped out of school when he was in third grade. When he had a few kids, before I was born, my dad dreamed of studying for a career and leaving the fields. He always told us, he was not born to do farm work his whole life. Encouraged by my mother, who always cherished education, my father received training in electronics. My father, like my grandmother, opened a small business.

Regardless of my mother’s progressive ideas, she always fulfilled her expected gender role and taught us ours from an early age. When my brothers were attending college, my older sister was re-

Minerva Mendoza:

sponsible for doing my brother's dirty laundry and make tortillas every day. I was in charge of ironing their pants and shirts. My mother, sister and I would spend every weekend washing, cooking and ironing for my brothers. I remembered hating to do it and promised myself I would never do that for my husband. I have ironed, cooked and cleaned for my husband, but he has done that for me too, which has fulfilled our marital roles.

Education has been present in my family. It began as a dream by my parents who worked really hard to make their dreams come true in us. When I see the difficulties that other families, including my cousins, friends, in-laws, have to go through because they didn't have the opportunity to achieve a college education, I feel very lucky that my parents gave us no option. I am glad they were strict and involved in our lives. I am very excited to see our family evolve. We have great hopes for the new members of our family. The gift of education has fortunately been passed on to our children.

Even with the tools and great examples given to me by my family, some gender roles are hard to get rid of. While I consider myself a feminist, motherhood is a non-negotiable part of being a woman. With each of my kid's births, I took one year off from school to take care of them. While motherhood is very challenging, I am happy that I enjoyed their first year of life fully. The days I did not attend school, dinner and housecleaning were expected of me. During midterms, finals and special assignments, I would arrange with my husband so he would buy food and help me clean afterwards. While my husband is also Mixteco, from a very conservative family, the U.S. influenced him while he was in the Marines and while attending American schools and colleges. This has turned him into an understanding and supportive husband. While still conservative in some matters, his support has helped me to achieve my academic and professional goals.

When we first arrived here, my whole family worked picking strawberries - three older brothers and a younger sister along with my parents. We would all get home tired and hungry. Nonetheless, the girls had to go directly to the kitchen and cook while the men would shower and sit down to watch television, waiting for the food to be ready. We, the girls, had to cook and do tortillas, make sure they ate, and wash dishes. After dinner we were able to go and shower. However, after the shower it was not over because my mother still had to make lunch for the next day of work.



Odilia Chávez picking blueberries in Fresno. Photo: José E. Chávez

Ten years later now, things have not changed much. When my brothers come over to visit, they expect to see everything ready for them to eat. One of the frequent confrontations I had with my brother was

because I did not want to bring him a simple fork. When it is time to eat and my brothers are sitting at the table and for some reason I forgot to put a fork or spoon at the table, they will ask me to go and get it for them. I get frustrated and my typical question would be, 'Why can't you get it yourself? I believe you also have your own feet to walk over and get it. You have your own hands to grab it.' Their typical answer is a no.

When we were younger, the expectations were different for both genders. The males were allowed to stay up late, go out and even date. The girls in my family were never allowed to go out after dark. We couldn't receive phone calls from the opposite gender, and being able to date was not even a topic to discuss. When I asked my parents why they were different with us, they answered was 'because girls need to be protected, unlike boys who can do it themselves.' I believe there is some truth to this but nonetheless I feel they went to an extreme. These are just some examples of small things that can spark confrontations. At first, I didn't question what they said, but as I grew up I started to. I have to admit this has changed over the years. I am not sure if it's because my constant confrontations have actually made a difference, or because my family is becoming more "Americanized" over the years.

Unlike me, who at first was afraid to speak up against what I believed to be "machismo," my younger sister is very open about it. She would not hesitate to "talk back" when she feels something is unfair, like the fork situation. It does again bring tension, but in a way, my parents let her get away with it. For me, this was not the case — I would have had to get my brother the fork even if I did not want to. She has been allowed to receive phone calls from the opposite gender. She is allowed to dye her hair, pluck her eyebrows, wear makeup, go out with her friends, and even stay out late. Yes, this might sound normal. Well, for me this is shocking because I was never allowed to do this. I did rebel against them and dyed my hair and plucked my eyebrows at the age of 17, but got scolded for it. I feel that, in a way, I created the path for her.

Sarait Martínez:

One important fact about the women who participate in the Autónomos [group in Fresno] is that most of them do not attend all of the meetings, like the men in the group do. I do not want to claim that it is because their parents do not let them go. However, the reasons are subtler than that. I do remember this was, in part, why I was not active during my high school years. I say this in part because as a daughter of farmworkers, it was always difficult to be involved in different activities when your assigned role was to stay home and help mom with cooking and the house chores.

Currently, I do not live with my parents because I left for college, a huge step for a traditional Oaxacan family. However, even far away from home, I often feel the pressure of following the traditional roles — not so much from my parents but from my grandparents and extended family. They believed that the role of a woman is to get married and have children. This experience is also shared by another Autónomos member:

“Mama never told me ‘you can’t do this because you are a woman, and you can’t go out because you are a woman..’ but I always hear it from relatives who grew up that way, where the woman had to stay home, to cook, had no reason to go to school. Sometimes, when they come to visit and I’m not there, the relatives get started with ‘and how do you know that she is there? Why do you let her do that? She should be here helping you to cook.’ That makes me want to stay out more because, well, I’m a woman and I can do it...”

This is the voice of one of the members of *Autónomos*, and it resonates with me. Growing up, my mother wanted to attend college but my grandparents believed that as a woman, her job was to stay at home and learn how to be a good wife. They believed that women should not attend school because once you graduate, all of the benefits go to the man you marry and not to your family. For this reason, they did not let my mom study. This experience allowed my mom to see the gender inequalities between her and her brothers, who had the opportunity to graduate from *secundaria* (8th grade). This had an impact on her, and for that reason, ever since I was small, she always emphasized the importance of going to school. However, because of the strong family ties, it was hard for my parents and extended family to accept it when I had to leave home for college.

Even though I am away from home, my parents still expect me to fit into “traditional” women’s roles. As a community organizer, I have to attend different kind of meetings. Every time my mom calls and I tell her that I am on my way to a meeting, she says “*otra reunión, mejor quédate en la casa a dormir*” (another meeting, just stay home and get some sleep). They expect me to stay home, get married and have children, especially since I am getting a little too old to start a family, as they say. This is a conversation that my aunts and grandparents have with me every time they see me at family parties. For them, at twenty-six, I should be married and raising my kids. Going to school, living away from home and not being married at my age – it’s something that’s foreign to them.

One important thing that happened in my family is that I opened the door for my younger sister. It has been fascinating to see how my parents react to a new generation. My sister is now a strong, twenty-two-year-old woman who defends her ideals, and who has created her own identity within my family. She was brought to this country as a child, which has allowed her to stay away from “*el ‘que dirán?’*” (what would the others say?”), from the socialization I grew up until the age of sixteen, when my parents brought us to this country.

Currently, she is at the university and is less likely to get criticized by my parents. My sister was first in everything. She was the first to pluck her eyebrows, got piercings and even got a tattoo, something that if I had done first would have been unacceptable, since I had to set the good example. However, in a way, it has been the opposite, I always look up to my sister who encouraged me to be stronger and to stand up for my ideals.

Chapter 7: Grounding Civic Participation in Cultural Organizing

by Juan Santiago



Demonstrating Oaxacan culture in Madera. 2012. Photo: Viviana Osorio Chávez

The San Joaquin valley is an agricultural landscape with acres and acres of crops, yielding many kinds of fruits and vegetables throughout the harvest season. The valley is also a landscape of cultural diversity, which is celebrated every season with cultural festivals. This fertile land is home to many religious, cultural, and social gatherings, hosted by different ethnic groups. For example, for more than thirty years, the Hmong people have gathered in Fresno to celebrate their renowned New Year's celebration. During this one-week event, artisans exhibit their artwork, local farmers sell their produce and traditional cuisine is at the center of the event. In the 1990s, indigenous people from Oaxaca, Mexico started to organize cultural events, such as the Guelaguetza. Today, the Guelaguetza is celebrated annually in Fresno and Bakersfield, attracting hundreds who gather and experience the colorful dances and dynamic choreography, to the rhythm of the bands' traditional melodies. The Tamejavi Festival exemplifies the Valley's culture diversity by bringing different peoples together to create a multicultural exchange.

These cultural events, ranging from festivals that focus on one tradition to multiethnic celebrations, display the artistic and cultural aspects of life, including people who are war refugees and others who are recently arrived immigrants. These types of events provide opportunities not only for appreciating different cultures and customs; they also enable community leaders to emerge, including young adults, as is the case of indigenous Mexican young people. Young leaders play a very important role in the organization of these cultural events, and in the process they gain community organizing experience and skills that allow them to move on into civic and political activism. There are plenty of these trends among indigenous Mexican young adults in the San Joaquin Valley. One way to deepen our understanding of how cultural events influence and encourage civic participation is to first describe what cultural organizing involves. This will also help us to understand why some immigrant young adults do not get involved with civic participation in their communities.

Migration can be a challenge for our cultures

Coming from an indigenous Oaxacan community, rich in ancestral cultural traditions, migration is an obstacle for our cultures. Being outside of our communities of origin puts the continuation of our cultures at risk. Consider the clothing of the women of our community, like what happened to señora Juana Eulalia Ramírez Santiago, my mother, who had to take off her *reboso* [shawl] while inside the bus. Zapotec women who emigrate tend to believe that if they wear their *reberos* they will be subjected to discrimination because they will look like indigenous women. This leads them not to wear them outside of their communities. Though I bought my mother a *reboso* to wear here in the US, she won't use it. She says "what will they say about me, seeing me with my *reboso*?" [But] for Zapotec women, to leave home without their *reboso* is like going out without wearing *huaraches* (traditional sandals). The *reboso* represents a traditional community custom, and is something sacred for Zapotec women. Wearing a *reboso* is so important that when Zapotec weddings (*fandangos*) are celebrated, the bride is honored with the gift of a *reboso*, with guitar and violin below the sacred altar in the bride's family's home. The *reboso* is part of our culture, and migration doesn't respect it.

The issue of migration has been a constant factor in the lives of the Zapoteco community, both as immigrants within México and here in the US. Coming to America was not the first time that we experienced life as migrants, our immigration journeys also took us far from home within Mexico. My parents talk to me about their families' migration experiences to Chiapas, our neighboring state, to work in the cotton fields in the 1970s. Later on, my family migrated to northern Mexico, to work in the agricultural fields of Sinaloa. In the early 1990s, our family's journey continued on America. Today, hundreds of Zapotecos live in

California's Central Valley. The migration process has challenged the preservation of our culture and customs, and this essay discusses several different community strategies for taking this on, including a grassroots folkloric dance group, a hometown cultural festival, a regional festival for intercultural exchange, and broadcast media in our own languages. These cultural organizing strategies are all multi-generational, including young adults.

Bringing Communities Together Through Culture in Madera, California

There is no one single definition of what cultural organizing is, but there is some conventional wisdom. A cultural organizer is someone who brings together a community of people with a shared background/experiences by practicing and applying that community's traditional way of organizing. Often younger organizers also bring in contemporary styles and approaches. This can be accomplished by using the languages and the arts that are familiar to that community. The Pan-Valley Institute, a Fresno-based organization that works very closely with immigrant and refugee communities, considers cultural organizing to be very important for creating inclusive societies. "For immigrants, in particular indigenous people, the interactions of culture, art, and creative expression form a point of departure for organizing and building a new sense of place, and for interpreting and understanding the realities of their new existence." This approach is very important for those non-traditional organizers who serve communities that are very unfamiliar with US-style political and civic community organizing techniques.

In 2010, when we organized political rallies in Madera to show our concern for the inhumane and broken immigration system, instead of distributing flyers with phrases like "Speak up for immigration reform," we first carried out home visits to disseminate information about our planned public

action events. First, we needed to explain to our community what a political rally is. Keep in mind that many of our community members had never participated in a rally, neither in our home country, nor in our adopted country. We extended them the invitation to join grassroots organizing, emphasizing the meaning of rallying in our own language. Language was critical to enable us to reach out to community members who otherwise would not have participated.

We also turned to artwork to spread activism and promote leadership. In 2008, a group of Zapoteca women living in Madera came together to weave mats (*petates*) as part of their effort to help preserve their artistic traditions. Since then, they have remained active community participants, from representing their community at Tamejavi festivals to exhibiting their artistic works at Guelaguetza festivals in southern California. At these venues, the women, besides performing their artisan work, also get the opportunity to share their experiences as immigrant indigenous women.

Analyzing this culturally based participation can explain how participants have understood the link between cultural and the broader community engagement. The planning process is as important as the public presentation of these cultural events, because it is during the planning phase when the organizers get to learn more about local organizations, find support from local government, and seek resources from the community in general. This is how our cultural experience and expertise can be translated into meaningful political and civic participation, often in response to our disappointment with the lack of resources from our own community or from government entities.

It is worth noting, however, that I am not arguing that Mexican indigenous immigrant youth, or any adult for that matter, needs to have a close connection with his/her ancestral cultural heritage as a prerequisite for civic and political involvement – even though most of us have a very rich cultural background, or at least are very interested in re-discovering our people's traditions. When I immi-

grated to the United States at the age of eleven, I did not know much about my identity, nor did I know about my cultural background. I grew very interested in learning about it as I became a young adult. The first step for me was to find a space where I could learn and enhance my understanding about what it means to be of Zapoteco descent. The group that I found was Se'esavi, in 2005, while I was still in high school.

Folk Dancing with the Se'esavi Group

In my junior year in high school, I was invited by one of my classmates to be part of an Oaxacan folkdance group. She told me about the colorful traditional dresses, the rhythm of sones y jarabes and most importantly she talked to me about the Guelaguetza festival. As someone who was looking for cultural identity, all of this seemed very appealing to me, and I eagerly followed her advice and

What are “cultural organizers?”

According to youth studies expert Julio Cammarota, cultural organizing “entails gleaning cultural resources from a variety of sources – both dominant and subordinate – to organize the conditions and experiences of life to better suit the human drive for creativity and self-determination. Cultural organizing is the process by which people reflect on their situation and determine the most appropriate approach for daily interactions, an approach that will ameliorate the conditions of existence and maintain a certain degree of autonomy with identity formations. The process involves “navigating cultural crosscurrents” ... to produce fluid, complicated identities that continuously shift to engage and concatenate the multiple worlds of Latina/o families, peer relations and dominant institutions” (From *Sueños Americanos*, University of Arizona Press, 2008: 10-11)



Juana Ramirez, a Zapotec artist weaving during a petate workshop. Photo: Juan Santiago

became a member of Grupo Folklórico Cultural Se'esavi in late 2005.

The Guelaguetza is an annual celebration of the cultural diversity of Oaxaca's different ethnic groups. The event is celebrated through the dances, songs, food, and the mosaic of indigenous languages. Even though I am a Oaxaca native, I never attended a Guelaguetza there. My hometown is located less than two hours away from Cerro de Fortín (the amphitheater of the official Guelaguetza, in Oaxaca City). There are many factors that can help to explain why many indigenous people, like my family, did not attend this internationally renowned event. Perhaps the major factor is poverty. I sat down with my mother and asked her, "Why were you not interested in going?" Her response was that it was unaffordable — a luxury

for many people in my hometown. She said, "It took me a day to a days and a half to make one *petate*, which I would sell for thirty pesos. Imagine how many *petates* would I have to make to pay for a trip to the [state] capital?" It was very sad to learn this reality, but most astonishing is the fact that the Guelaguetza is proclaimed to be a festival to honor and cherish the different indigenous peoples' cultures, but those who should be honored are left out.

In 2005, after joining Se'esavi, I was informed that if I could manage to learn at least one dance, I could be one of the dancers in Fresno's next Guelaguetza. This is how I experienced my very first Guelaguetza festival in the United States. Since then, I have not missed any. In recent years, I was struck by how many young people took the

lead in many parts of the event, including the master of ceremonies, which was led by a young Mixteco cultural leader. I have also attended other Guelaguetzas across California — San Jose, Los Angeles and in Bakersfield. Besides dancing, the festival gave me the opportunity to rediscover my cultural identity. Each of the Guelaguetza festivals that I have attended has provided me with an opportunity to learn. In 2007, I was invited by an organizer from the Binational Center for the Development of the Oaxacan Indigenous Communities to serve as the master of ceremonies in the Fresno celebration. This was something that I had never done before, but with few tips on public speaking, I delivered my very first public speech in 2007. Indeed, in the same year, I was invited to help to organize the Guelaguetza. This experience enabled me to learn all the logistical coordination and protocols needed to make this event possible. In 2011, organizers from the Los Angeles Guelaguetza invited me to have a Zapotecan artwork exhibition, so together with my relatives and community members we traveled there to have the opportunity to expose our community artwork to a broader public. This is how I discovered this colorful event on foreign soil.

Once with Se'esavi, I not only learned about Oaxacan dances and cultures but also about *tequio* (Oaxacan-style community service). Working with the Fresno's Guelaguetza organizing committee, I met new people and new projects came along. This experience connected me with organizations and people who were working on the political issue that concerned me the most — advocating for immigrant rights. Community activists came during our practice hours at Se'esavi and shared with us the importance of community organizing, unity and actions. They encouraged us to take part in marches and rallies. Immigration was an especially controversial issue the year that I joined this dance group. A group of anti-immigrant congresspeople had drafted a bill that would criminalize all of those people who live in the country without immigration documents, and I was one of those targeted immigrants. After hearing the community activists at our practice, I became very interested

in finding opportunities to be able to help with any efforts that would promote and bring awareness about the need for an immigration reform. I wanted to create opportunities for young adults like myself, who were brought here to the United States as kids. Se'esavi provided me with the pathways to take action.

In April 2006, together with other Se'esavi members, I joined with hundreds of thousands of immigrants and non-immigrants (allies) in downtown Los Angeles to condemn the proposed Sensenbrenner bill, as it was ready to head to the floor for a vote in the House of Representatives. A national movement in solidarity with the undocumented immigrant community gained momentum. Hispanics and other ethnic groups took to the streets in unprecedentedly large numbers. Major media outlets, especially Spanish-speaking television and radio, encouraged community participation. The national radio host Piolín, from Univisión Radio, an immigrant himself, participated in the same Los Angeles march. This was my first time to be in a march outside the Central Valley, to see people from other ethnic groups, and to be in a big city political event. It was also an enormous, once-in-lifetime event. Since then, I have not experienced another rally of this magnitude, and I was present in Washington, D.C. in 2010 when Senators and members of the House announced their support for comprehensive immigration reform. The rally in Los Angeles was an eye-opener, and it motivated me to become interested not only in organizing my community politically, but also to learn about politics more generally. As we know, those 2006 rallies changed the way congress voted on the Sensenbrenner bill. If I had not been a member of Se'esavi, none of these experiences would have been possible. My eagerness to learn about my cultural background within the space that Se'esavi provided was pivotal for understanding why and how I became interested in civic participation in my community long after I left Se'esavi in 2008.

The Experience of the Zapoteco Hometown Association in Madera

The Oaxacan communities are organized in many different ways in the San Joaquin Valley, including the hometown associations, known as *Mesas Directivas* and *Clubes de Oriundos*. In most cases, these community organizations are established for cultural purposes, and they organize many local events. Their cross-border projects raise funds here in US for specific hometown community development projects. According to officials from the Mexican Consulate in Fresno, there are approximately ten registered hometown associations between Fresno and Madera County. Mexican officials encourage them to register with the consulate, to facilitate communication with the migrant community as a whole.

Comités de oriundos emerge because Mexican immigrants who live in the US become interested in working together to support community development projects and infrastructure in their communities of origin. The Mexican government has its “Tres por Uno” matching fund program, which provides incentives for collaboration on both sides of the border. For every dollar that immigrant communities invest in their hometown public infrastructure, municipal, state and federal governments each match that amount. However, not all *comités de oriundos* engage in the matching fund program, some focus on the celebrating hometown religious and cultural events of their hometown here in the US. This has been the experience of *El Comité Popular del Pueblo Coatecas Altas* (COPPCA), in Madera.

When we founded *El Comité Popular del Pueblo Coatecas Altas*, we did not plan to participate in the matching fund program, primarily because all of the committee members and almost all of our community members were not legal immigrants.

None of us would be able to travel back and forth to help to manage the program. Instead, we focused our work in the US and organized a cultural festival that brought together hundreds of Zapoteco people. The process of organizing each of these festivals and events created opportunities for both young and old community members to become cultural and civically involved. The formation of this hometown association is an example how a previously inactive community can come together and get involved.



Andrés Arellanes and Brenda Ordaz doing an interview for Mixtec Hour on Bilingual Radio about the Fiesta Del Pueblo. 2012. Photo: Juan Santiago

In December 2009, a group of young people interested in creating a community leadership group for migrants from Coatecas Altas, invited community members who live in Madera to a first General Assembly. With the support of the first organizers, 120 people attended, including young people as well as older men and women. We formed a com-

mittee with ten members, including two regional representatives for Merced and Fresno, with the goal of supporting the organizing work needed to help to address some of the problems that most affect the Coatecan community here in the US. Our first project was to organize the 2009 Community Festival, which was the first opportunity for Coatecanos who live in Madera to come together as a

community. We were then motivated to encourage the participation of Coatecanos in the 2010 US Census, so we organized a series of informational meetings. Plus, some members of the committee participated in the demonstrations in favor of comprehensive immigration reform.

“Indigenous Mexicans recreate their hometown religious fiesta in California farm town,” by Gosia Wosniacka, *Associated Press*, Dec. 20, 2011

“They couldn’t return to Mexico, so they brought a piece of Mexico to California.

Zapotec Indians in Central California used their hands to build a mud oven to roast hot peppers, garlic and onions in the backyard of their home. They spent the night cooking, and by morning had enough thick, chocolaty sauce called *mole negro* to feed hundreds of farmworkers who would stream in from across California and as far as Washington and Oregon to celebrate St. John the Evangelist, the patron saint of a Mexican village more than 2,000 miles away.

Zapotecs who worked in California once travelled back home to Coatecas Altas and other villages in Oaxaca to attend these fiestas. But as border security tightened and illegal crossings turned expensive and dangerous, many of them found a way to honor their saint stateside, in the small farmworker town of Madera. For the third year in a row, Zapotecs gathered in Madera in the days after Christmas, cooking and eating mole, building an altar, parading giant paper-mache dolls and dancing into the night to brass bands belching out traditional *chilenas*. The fiesta takes place over several days, simultaneously with that in Oaxaca.

‘This is about community service, about coming together to help and support each other’ said Alfredo Hernandez, a volunteer from Madera who helped organize the celebration. ‘It’s important for us not to lose our culture. And since we can’t go back, we do it here.’

The fiesta, which included a run from Fresno to Madera and a basketball tournament, also promotes the Zapotec culture and language among the youngest generations, which are quickly becoming Americanized, Santiago said. On the day of the fiesta, after attending mass, more than 1,000 Zapotecs crammed into a rental hall at the Madera Fairgrounds. They prayed, lit candles and placed bouquets of flowers before a mobile altar of St. John the Evangelist, made to look just like the one in Coatecas Altas. Giant paper mache dolls danced under a ceiling filled with papel picado, colorful wafer-thin paper banners hand-cut into elaborate designs. Platefuls of mole and cups of tepache, a fermented pineapple drink, were handed out to the crowd. At the end, in a special ceremony, Santiago and fellow committee members passed four ceremonial staffs to newly elected committee members and volunteers, who will continue the tradition of community service for the next three years.”

“Oaxacan tradition endures in local fiesta,” by Elsa Mejia, *The Madera Tribune*, Dec. 31, 2012

“Stepping foot in a dirt lot on Martin Street was like entering a small Mexican town — bands playing, folkloric dancers performing, the smell of authentic Oaxacan cuisine and others praying in a makeshift shrine to St. John the Apostle.

Defying the cold weather, with a forecast of rain that did not fall, natives of San Juan Coatecas Altas, a town in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, gathered Saturday along with guests to honor their patron saint.

At least 1,000 people attended the climax of the 4th annual Fiesta del Pueblo 2012. Many ate *mole*, a traditional sauce served with chicken, and drank *tepache*, a fermented pineapple drink. The faithful placed flowers, candles and money before an image of St. John the Apostle inside a small hut made out of bamboo sticks and roofed by a tarp.

While the apostle’s official feast day is on Dec. 27, according to the Roman Catholic Church, residents in Madera opted to celebrate during two consecutive weekends to make it easier for people to attend...”

La Fiesta del Pueblo

Later, when asked what motivated participants to attend the founding meeting of our hometown association, they said that they shared the intentions of the meeting, but perhaps more importantly the message was really clear to them because it was delivered from people they knew and in their own language. They mentioned key words that we had used, like *Lan’ni* (fiesta).

Once again, instead of calling meeting through a leaflet, we decided that a phone bank in our own

language was a better strategy. I vividly remember hearing people ask my brother, who helped me to do the phone banking “what is the gathering for?” and he responded “*Qui’leno ga’vis lomen chen’ve nespar n’save napa’ne nespar dish’ve shamod gack le’ve tu lan’ni par yesh che’ve ne*” (“We are asking the community to join us together this evening to talk about how we can organize a Fiesta for us — the community”). People knew what a Fiesta implies — food, music and gathering of family, so they took the invitation seriously. Even if the participants were not aware of it, they were engaging civically by just taking the initiative to participate in this community meeting — the first time ever in the history of Zapoteco migration to the Central Valley.

That night, as organizers, we asked participants to nominate elders to come up front, to chair the meeting. First, I talked to them about how a Fiesta can be organized, the steps to take and finally presented them with the idea of a community committee — not only to work on the Fiesta, but on other issues as well, including helping our community to be counted in the upcoming 2010 US census. The consensus was to establish a committee. It is worth noting that we used the traditional method of electing the committee members. The planning process was a learning opportunity for all members of the committee, since most of the members had never participated in any similar process. Decisions were made by consensus, following Oaxacan tradition, and the general public was invited to attend any of the planning meetings to make suggestions.

Participants in the assembly nominate someone, and the majority had to respond by saying “yay” until we elected eight community members to be part of this new organizing effort. Organizing this event required the contribution of women, young people, and men to run the planning of this religious and social gathering, which came to known as La Fiesta del Pueblo. This multigenerational approach was different from back home, where young adults have less say in community decision-making.

Every year since its inauguration in 2009, this festival has brought together hundreds of Zapoteco community members from across California, including families who travel all the way from Oregon. La Fiesta has served as an opportunity for the migrant farm workers who travel from region to region in search of farm work, to join together with relatives and close friends, as they enjoy watching the musical, dance, and religious, the components of La Fiesta. This is part of an ongoing effort by the organizers to help to promote and preserve the Zapoteco indigenous culture and traditions among the younger generations, including our language. According to a survey done by the organizers during the 2010 festival, more than 95% of Madera's Zapoteco population speaks our native language. Since then, the festival has expanded beyond one weekend event. In 2010, the Zapoteco basketball tournament was added, in response to community suggestions. The committee has also established an award to recognize a distinguished member of the community, and in 2011 participants had the opportunity to taste the sacred drink of the Zapoteco community, Tepache, an organic drink prepared by community members with ingredients shipped from Oaxaca. In 2010 more than 1,500 attended La Fiesta.

La Fiesta takes a whole year to organize. Active members of COPPCA gather periodically to do the planning tasks throughout the year, except in the summer, when some committee members migrate to Oregon. Each member of the committee takes on the organization of particular aspects of La Fiesta. Some organize the women who cook, others coordinate with the local Catholic Church to organize the mass, and some visit local business to gain sponsorships, and someone else is in charge of the artistic aspects of the event. Indeed, throughout the year committee members visit to chapel of San Juan Evangelista, the saint who is honored that day.

Zapoteco Community Present at Tamejavi Festivals

Tamejavi festivals have provided another very important cultural venue that has helped to increase civic engagement amongst indigenous Mexican youth in the San Joaquin Valley. According to the organizers, the Pan Valley Institute of the American Friends Service Committee, the goal of the Tamejavi Festivals is to provide a space where a host of different ethnic group representatives "meet to share their cultural background...with the goal of achieving a deeper understanding of themselves and others." A host of communities have been represented at Tamejavi festivals; this included the Hmong, Native American, Pure'pecha, Otomí, Indian, Iranian, Cambodian, Mixteco, Triqui and Zapoteco. Each of the festival's components features stories, poets, and dances of each community. In 2006, the event was dedicated specifically to the indigenous migrant community, under theme

Zapoteca Women Share Their Traditions

In 2008, in collaboration with the Pan-Valley Institute of Fresno, we organize a petate workshop designed to give an opportunity to elder Zapoteca women to teach their artistic work to the younger generation. Through the *petate* weaving workshop, two things happened. The Zapoteca women got the opportunity to teach and display their artistic work, but it also influenced their community involvement long after the petate workshop. Zapoteca women became active community participants during the 2007 and 2009 Tamejavi Festivals. Indeed, in the rallies we organized in Madera in commemoration of the May First Day, these very same women showed up. We have also gone to Guelaguetza festivals in Los Angeles and Bakersfield, California, to represent our community and our artistic work.

of “Hands that Forge History.” I was recruited through my participation with the Se’esavi Oaxacan dance group in 2006. I first joined the planning committee to represent the Zapoteco community and consequently served as the volunteer coordinator — a role that enable me to get other young people involved in this nationally-acclaimed space for cultural diversity.

This event is a very unique occasion for those who get the opportunity to participate, because they learn not only about their own culture, they also learn about the cultures and customs of other immigrant communities living in the San Joaquin Valley. Before I joined the first Tamejavi festival in 2006, for example, I was unfamiliar with the Hmong community — their social struggles, and their immigration experiences as war refugees. Plus, Tamejavi not only gave me the opportunity to represent my community through the festival’s many components, including the artistic, pláticas (forum discussions), and cultural kitchens. It also planted the seed of multi-culturalism in me. Now I have come to understand the parallels and common interests that my community shares with other ethnic groups in the Valley. We all envision a region where the cultural aspects of our lives will be recognized and appreciated by new generations within our community, and by the broader society. We also want our cultural diversity to be reflected in our local governments, including a cultural center where our elders who master their arts would pass them to the new generations. We want to live in a vibrant, civically engaged community.

My own community’s cultural project is a living testament that the goal set by the first Tamejavi festival was accomplished. In partnership with the Pan Valley Institute staff, in the Zapoteco community we have organized follow-up cultural events that provide an opportunity for us to enhance our knowledge about our own cultural background, as well as an opportunity to promote the cultural richness of the Zapoteco immigrants in Madera.

Tamejavi Cultural Organizing Fellowship Program

In the process of this research project, I also participated in a fellowship program with the Pan Valley Institute. The 2011-2013 Tamejavi Cultural Organizing Fellowship was a continuation to the previous Tamejavi Festivals, enabling nine community members, the fellows, from of a variety ethnic backgrounds, to come together to learn about and cherish each other’s experiences as immigrants, and refugees. Each participant was selected based on his or her prior community involvement, either in cultural or advocacy/civic work. In the interview, they asked me to talk about the significance that culture has for my community. They also asked if I have ever organized my community culturally. Fortunately, I did not hesitate to tell them about La Fiesta del Pueblo. The fellowship has provided me with the opportunity to engage in unique conversations with other fellows about how similar challenges are shared in our communities. We have talked about how to work together long after this fellowship program ends. For example, at one of the retreats, I was engaged in a conversation about establishing a multi-cultural center, something very

Fandango Zapoteco: Theater for the people, by the people

Based on interviews and research, Teatro del Pueblo, Para el Pueblo is a live theatrical representation of the customary practices leading up to a traditional Zapoteco wedding (called fandango), as celebrated in the town of Coatecas Altas in Oaxaca, Mexico. This collective project enables ordinary Zapotecos to share their knowledge and experience with others. The Fandango project is an opportunity for younger generations to learn about their heritage from the elders. The gender gap and increased cultural and civic participation will also be addressed in the performance. The actors of this communal play are young and old day-to-day members of the town of Coatecas Altas, now living in Madera.



Youths of the Zapoteco folkloric group in Madera for their presentation during the event Nuestra Plaza, Cultura y Tradición Indígena. March, 2013. Photo: Juan Santiago

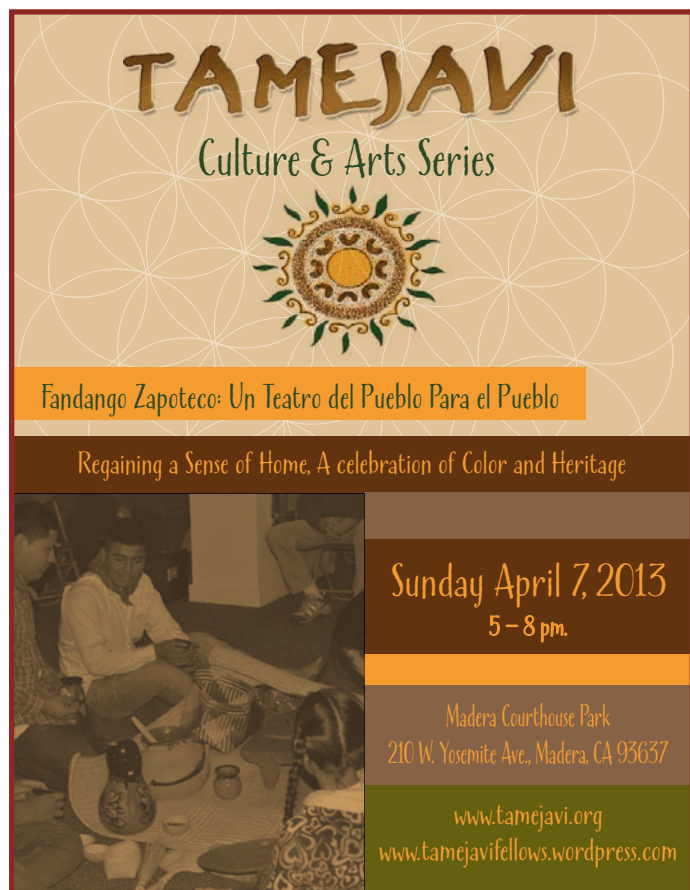
much needed for our people in the Valley. We envision a place where language, music with traditional instruments, culinary, and artistic works can be taught to younger people, a multi-cultural center where we would celebrate our festivals, and just a meeting place to discuss issues of great concern for the communities. While this conversation was only a start, it was unusual in the sense that it was conversation between individuals from very different cultures. Perhaps the most unique experience in this fellowship is the opportunity to put into practice the actual concept of cultural organizing.

The Tamejavi Cultural Organizing Fellowship Program's ultimate goal is to allow people of all walks of life to come together as residents of the Valley to learn and share their experiences and eventually work together to solve many issues confronting residents of the Valley. To accomplish this goal, the program is divided into a fashion that include capacity on matters that would help

us as community advocate to organize, analyze our community by conducting a community assessment, and eventually and perhaps most importantly to put into practice what we learned throughout this process by having a community project as part of our graduation from the program.

I chose to put into action one of my long-time goals. I decided to create a Fandango Zapoteco as my community project, a new theatrical presentation that would describe how traditional weddings are performed in our native town in Oaxaca. Ordinary Zapoteco people with little or no stage experience did the performance. Both the planning process and the final work are key factors that fulfill the goals of the Tamejavi fellowship program, and the process is considered as valuable as the final work. We considered key components of cultural organizing while organizing the performance. First, when I recruited the members of the Zapoteco Tamejavi Working Team, I had to consid-

er the way our community engages into community event. Instead of distributing flyers, I made direct contact to recruit potential participants, both old and young.



Fandango Zapoteco promotional flyer.

The influence of multilingual and community based media outlets: Radio Bilingue

Community based media outlets has been very indispensable in our communities, it gives us the opportunity to take our relevant stories to a broader audience and often times because it is headquartered close home we became deeply involved. One example is the role of Radio Bilingue in the Central Valley. Radio Bilingue is a very important media presence in the Spanish-speaking community and it is the only national US distributor of

Spanish-language programming in a public radio network. The history of Radio Bilingue begins in the early 1980s in downtown Fresno, when farmworkers and community activists gathered to lay the foundation of a community radio. In those early days, Radio Bilingue provided a forum for labor organizers to talk about farmworker rights in the Valley. In 1986, when immigration system was reformed, Radio Bilingue was there, sharing information on this new development for Valley residents, which allowed many farmworkers to regularize their status and eventually become citizens. Since then, the goal of Radio Bilingue has been to serve the underserved communities by delivering informational, musical, youth-based and news programming, serving not only the Latinos, but also other ethnic groups such as the Hmong people from Laos, who arrived in the Valley as war refugees in the early 1970s. Today, Radio Bilingue remains a very important media in the Latino community. As debate begins on comprehensive immigration reform in US Congress, the station has organized community forums to provide a space for undocumented immigrants to share their stories, where legislators were invited to be among the panelists. The radio station has also played a very key role within the new immigrant communities, particular for Mexican indigenous people.

Radio Bilingue dedicates a four-hour program on Sundays for Mexican indigenous immigrant communities. La Hora Mixteca, a volunteer-based program, provides information, music and public service announcements to migrant farmworkers, has been a very unique radio program. It is means of communication by and for the Oaxacan diaspora on both sides of the U.S/Mexico border. Every Sunday the program begins with La Canción Mixteca, "*Que lejos estoy del suelo. Donde he nacido. Inmensa nostalgia invade. Mi pensamiento. Y al verme tan solo y triste. Cual hoja al viento. Quisiera llorar. Quisiera morir de sentimiento. ¡Oh!tierra del sol. Suspiro por verte. Ahora que lejos. Yo vivo sin luz, sin amor...*" a very sentimental and nostalgic song that talks about the feelings of Oaxacan immigrants who now live outside their native *pueblos* (hometowns). During the



Zapotec youth and volunteers working to construct the stage before the Fandango Zapoteco event. Photo: Juan Santiago

last two hours of the program, other indigenous language radio stations in Mexico link up with Radio Bilingue and consequently, indigenous immigrants across the US call in to the Fresno studio to go on air to send their shout-outs to their families in Oaxaca, and vice versa.

I first became a volunteer for Radio Bilingue in 2007, after meeting Filemón López, the longtime host of La Hora Mixteca, during a rally in downtown Fresno. I asked Mr. López, a Oaxacan native, if he would allow to visit him in the studio to watch him live. He not only agreed to welcome me at the studio but also encouraged me to consider volunteering for the program. Months later, together with other community members, I became part of new wave of volunteers. After I received intensive training in radio programming, public speaking and engineering, I joined the team of La Hora Mixteca

in 2009. I would volunteer four hours every Sunday to help with this multilingual programming, often assisting the caller and the person in the studio with Zapotec translation, facilitating the flow of information on working conditions, health and housing. Initially, I was the audio technician, and my responsibility was to control audio quality. After more training, I became the programmer, which enabled me to run the program as a whole. As part of one program that I conducted, I invited representatives from Yosemite National Park to talk about their different outdoor activities, with the goal of increasing the presence of Latinos at the park, particularly indigenous Mexicans. Some of the most memorable times I had during my work with La Hora Mixteca, was when Zapotec people would call the studio and talk to me in our native language. Knowing that the program reaches out to a wide audience both in US and in Mexico, I

Conclusion

would take the opportunity to dialogue with the caller to create consciousness about cultural preservation and the importance of taking measures to avoid heat strokes, as oftentimes the caller would report their on work in the fields. La Hora Mixteca became an open public forum, where people come together to be inform of current issues, exchange messages with the families, and hear the most current *chilenas* (a classic Oaxacan musical style).

In 2011, after completing more than four years of community service at the station, I was chosen for Radio Bilingue's news internship program. I was assigned to report on various issues, including culture, environmental, and other news impacting the Latino community in the San Joaquin Valley. I traveled to rural communities to interview community leaders, state officials, and artists. For example, I attended the International Hmong New Year held at the Fresno Fairground, to interview organizers, vendors and artisans about the festival. Through the interviews, I learned the significance that this cultural festival represents for the Hmong Community. Despite the language barrier, I managed to interview those who speak only Hmong. The Hmong festivity was only one of the "culture beat" stories I produced for the station, which was aired on the Weekend Edition of Noticiero Latino nationally. This internship program exposed me to the dynamics of the Valley's cultural diversity. Long after my internship concluded, I periodically continue to file news stories for the station. My most recent report was on the high rate of Latino dropouts in the Fresno Unified School District. My journey at Radio Bilingue has given me the opportunity to enable others to become heard and to covered issues often ignored by mainstream news media. This is why I believe that independent and community-based media outlets like Radio Bilingue has such an impact in our lives as under-served communities.

It is hard to imagine our community's interactions without these cultural events and gatherings. Not only have we cherished our ancestral traditions and customs as indigenous people, these events have also enabled a broader community dialogue between the older and younger generations, in a US context of cultural differences between elders and those who grow up in the US. Our parents, who come from homogenous communities with oftentimes limited Spanish, have found it hard to share their culture with the broader public, but young people, especially those who have become active in their community, have helped to make that possible. This is very rewarding both for our parents and for us, the younger generation, because not only do we get the opportunity to learn from our elders — their cultural approach to life, their migration journeys and their ongoing concerns — but we also become more connected with our families and communities overall. As this essay has shown, we have worked very closely with our parents, who teach us how our people see community organizing. They bring to the table ideas, which otherwise we, the youth who are trained in the US-style community organizing, would not consider when planning activities and events — especially those activities that involved our community members, like political rallies and cultural gatherings. This is why I conclude that for our communities to embrace civic and political participation, we need to reduce the distance between our parents and the younger generation, both those of us born here or in Mexico. This could be happen through events that have long been practiced in our communities, like Guelaguetza and hometown festivals.

These autonomous community initiatives are crucial not only for teaching young people about their culture, but they also create respectful, safe spaces for young adults to learn and to exercise community leadership. Cultural events can and should help our community to come together and create sustainable ongoing community efforts to better the lives of all of our people in our community. That is how we are creating a shared sense of belonging.

“Fresno Journal: Voice That Sounds Like Home Welcomes Mexico’s Outsiders,” by Randal Archibold, New York Times, June 8, 2009

FRESNO, Calif. — The voice trembled with anguish. “Please,” Esmeralda Santiago pleaded, calling into a radio show here aimed at the poorest of Mexico’s emigrants, indigenous people from the southern state of Oaxaca. “This is for Sylvia Santiago. Please, if you can hear us, call. Our mother is worried because we have not talked with you in a while.”

Filemón López, the host of the show, listened and nodded. He had heard such heartache before. The woman spoke first in Spanish and then repeated her plea — breaking down in sobs — in Triqui, one of Oaxaca’s indigenous languages.

“When there is no communication,” Mr. López, himself a legal immigrant who once worked the fields, said in a break, “it causes such sadness.” On this recent Sunday, there were certainly happier moments on “La Hora Mixteca” (The Mixtec Hour), Mr. López’s show, which is aimed primarily at Mixtec (pronounced MEESE-teck) Indians but draws listeners from other groups in the United States and, via satellite link, in Oaxaca, too.

Soledad Martínez of Fresno wished her mother, sister, brother, cousin — the list went on — a happy day down in Oaxaca. José Ramos of Clovis, Calif., called to invite people to a ballgame in that small farming town. Cesar Cipriano requested a particular corrido, a kind of Mexican ballad. They all turned to Mr. López, who, through the show, serves as an ambassador of sorts, in good times and bad, to a community that keeps its distance from the mainstream.

The Mixtecs — there are an estimated 150,000 of them in California — occupy the lowest rungs on the Latino immigrant pecking order, mocked for

their rural ways, their heavily accented Spanish or inability to speak it, and their low level of education. They snare the most back-breaking jobs here in the agriculture-rich Central Valley — picking fruit and vegetables — and often have difficulty moving up.

They face exploitation and discrimination in housing and employment, and are wary of strangers, a legacy, scholars say, of the relative isolation of their villages in Mexico and history of abuse by outsiders there.

Even in an age of cellphones and online social networks, Mr. López’s radio show has endured since its first broadcast in 1995, picking up its 12th station in the United States a few months ago, in Santa Barbara County. The show is broadcast from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Sunday on Radio Bilingüe, the only Spanish-language public radio network in the United States, and also streams on the Internet.

“‘La Hora Mixteca’ is very important,” said Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, a Mixtec who is project director at the Center for Labor Research and Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. “It is like a replica of the talk shows in Oaxaca where you have a charismatic D.J. who combines a strong personality with lectures on culture and who we are,” Mr. Rivera-Salgado added. “This is really old-fashioned radio that has the special effect of making people feel they are part of this close-knit community and speaking in their language.”

With so few shows of any kind in Mexico’s indigenous languages, Mr. López makes his an eclectic mix of education and entertainment.

Amid the greetings on a recent show, Mr. López played music from his 20 storage cases of CDs, the fruits of a lifetime of collecting; interviewed health care workers about the importance of good child development; paid homage to an Indian activist killed a few years ago in Mexico; and dished out

practical advice — all while swinging effortlessly between Spanish and Mixteco.

"Drink a lot of water — the temperature is rising fast out there," Juan Santiago, his engineer and de facto co-host, who is a Zapotec, said on a recent morning as the mercury edged past 100 degrees.

"Yes, you have to be careful, men," Mr. López added, and then, in Mixteco, reminded his listeners about the dangers of heat stroke, a particular concern for indigenous workers who dominate field jobs.

The Oaxacan Indians, mistrustful of doctors, rely heavily on home remedies and refrain from seeking treatment of serious illness or injury.

That problem has led Mr. López to spearhead a project in which Oaxacan doctors give medical advice in Mixteco by videoconference to immigrants at clinics in the Central Valley. The Oaxacan government is collaborating on the project, and the Center for Reducing Health Disparities at the University of California, Davis, Health System is the lead organizer.

"We consider this population to have among the least access to care in California," said Dr. Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, the center's director. "People are not aware of services, where to receive services. Transportation is an issue. When services are available, they are not culturally or linguistically appropriate for them."

Mr. López knows well the immigrant experience, arriving in the United States from Oaxaca almost 30 years ago to pick oranges in Florida, cotton in Arizona and finally grapes in California.

He eventually moved on to factory work and became a legal resident under the amnesty provision of the 1986 immigration bill. With other Mixtecs, he formed a grass-roots group to advocate for his compatriots, leading to volunteer work for Radio Bilingüe, then a job there and eventually the position as host of "La Hora Mixteca."

While his voice and name are familiar to many Mixtecs, Mr. López goes unrecognized around the farming hamlets near his home — until he speaks. Stopping at a shopping center one recent morning, he met Raquel Rosales, 28, who was selling CDs. She said she appreciated the touch of home his show delivers.

"I speak Spanish," Ms. Rosales said, "but I prefer to listen in Mixteco and hear the music from back home. This is the only way I can hear the news." Mr. López handed her a card. "Call if you want to send a greeting home," he said, as she eagerly accepted it.

"That is what I can do," he said, getting back in his truck. "I may not have work for them, but I can offer a bridge home."

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/09/us/09mixtec.html?ref=randalcarchibold&_r=0

Epilogue: The Civic Pathways of Young Indigenous Migrants: Identity, Language and Gender¹

by Gaspar Rivera-Salgado
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*Central Valley Youth Association press conference protesting Arizona law SB1070 in Madera. July, 2012.
Photo: CVYA*

This project's goal was to explore the diverse pathways followed by young indigenous migrants, both those who came at a young age or were born in the United States, as they become part of civic and political life in the San Joaquin Valley². Building on several years of collaboration with indigenous migrant organizations, this project's two academic advisors closely followed the civic/political strategies of the first

generation (see Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004). Now we wanted to focus on the experiences of the daughters and sons of these migrants. Focusing on the civic/political experience of the second generation immediately suggests several questions. Do they keep participating in the civic organizations that their parents built? How do youth-led organizations compare with those of their parents? What goals drive them? What are the challenges that they face, in their civic and political work?

How well are these young adults integrating into their social context? Of course these questions are not new, and they have been explored in detail for other groups, in other regions, in other periods (Portes, 1996; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Perlmann, 2005). Nevertheless, little is known specifically about indigenous youth in the San Joaquin Valley.

It is important to recognize how the broader US demographic, economic, and political context frames the current discussion of the 2nd generation. In demographic terms, the Latin American-origin population is no longer majority foreign-born. Latinos born in the US are now the majority (PHC, 2011a). This tendency is even more prominent in the Mexican origin population in the US. During the decade of 2000-2010, the Mexican origin population grew by 7.2 million as the result of births and by 4.2 million as the result of new arrivals (PHC, 2011a: 3). This is a dramatic change from the trends of the 1980s and 1990s, when migrants outnumbered new Latino births in the US.

Another demographic issue, linked to the US political debate over immigration, is the fact that the 1.5 generation of undocumented Mexican migrants is very large. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are almost 1.4 million young people between 15 and 30 years old who would be eligible for Deferred Action (known by its acronym as DACA), the program announced by President Obama in June, 2012. In California, an estimated 350,000 young adults would be eligible to benefit from this initiative (MPI, 2012).

On the other hand, poverty rates for Latinos in the US have been growing during the same time period. Nationwide, the poverty rate for Latinos, according to the 2012, reached 28.2% - almost tripled the rate for whites (11.1%) and almost double the national average (16%) (PHC, 2011b). In California, Latinos have much higher poverty rates than other racial groups. Specifically, the Latino poverty rate is 22.8%, while for Anglo families it is 9.5%, for Asian-Americans 11.8%

and 22.1% for African-Americans. The poverty rate for Latino families in which one parent is an immigrant rises to 28.4% (PPI, 2011).

These facts immediately raise a series of questions. If youth are the new majority within the US Latino population, what impact would their political participation have? What impact would their parents' organizing experience have, to face the specific challenges that they face? And most importantly, what factors will determine whether this generation of young immigrants (the majority of whom are US citizens) will join mainstream society with the educational opportunities needed for social mobility, civic engagement and political representation?

The Experience of Indigenous Young Adults in the San Joaquin Valley

The context for this project is a debate in the field of migration studies about the second generation, since the key question focuses on the political socialization generated by youth-led organizations of indigenous migrants, as part of their effort to participate in the civic life of their communities.³ Zhou and Bankston (1998) suggest the networks of social relationships that youth from immigrant families are part of serve not only to support them, but also are systems of control. Smith explores the dual nature of these social networks, in his study of young *poblanos* in New York, seen through the lenses of gender, religion and identity.

This participatory research project involved coordination with a team of seven members (see preface and introduction), who carried out five focus group interviews with different groups of indigenous youth in the cities of Madera and Fresno (with the *Autónomos*, American Experience Club, Grupo Maya-Madera High School, young farmworkers and the Central Valley Youth Association-CVYA). The study also involved written

Identity, Language and Civic Participation

testimonies by the members of the research team, which called itself the Equipo de Cronistas Oaxacalifornianos (ECO), translated as The Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team. The key questions focused on whether the indigenous young people, both 1.5 and 2nd generation, continued to participate in the civic organizations that their parents had created, and to explore the factors that led them to form their own organizations, as well as to identify the challenges that they faced in their civic and political work. This would give us a broad panorama of how these young people are integrating into the social context of these agricultural cities of the San Joaquin Valley.

The dual nature of the social networks in which the everyday experience of these indigenous youth is embedded, is very relevant for the issue of whether they will continue with their ethnic traditions, and participate in the civic organizations their parents built. While framing this study in the context of the study of the second generation, we should not lose the opportunity to follow up on lines of inquiry opened up by various testimonies involving their experiences with racialization, and the racism that young indigenous migrants face in rural California.



ECO members brainstorming . Photo: José E Chávez

The concept of racialization is useful for understanding the experience of indigenous youth in California's Central Valley, since their experience is linked to that of many Latinos, who are assigned to multiple racial categories by non-Latinos, within the dominant classification system in the US. At the same time, they have to navigate the racial system that predominates in the ethnic Mexican enclaves where they live. Rodríguez (2000) explains the racial paradox of the Latin American population in the US, when they shift from being classified by national origin, to being identified as racial minorities in their everyday treatment on the street, while often being officially considered white in the census. Gómez (2007) provides a good historical account of this racial paradox, focusing on the experience of the Mexican origin population that remained in the Southwestern US after the war with Mexico in 1845. Immediately after the annexation of these territories, the US legal framework classified Mexicans as white. Nevertheless – and here is the paradox – their social position was as non-white racial inferiors, since they were considered to be racially impure (mongrel) and were relegated to a marginal status.

Against this backdrop, for young indigenous migrants in the Central Valley, one of their central experiences is their racialization as Mexican, a category that has been socially, politically and legally constructed as a racial group, and has been designated a racial group that is different from the society's predominant map of racial classifications.

Meanwhile, these same indigenous young people, like their parents, have had to face high levels of racism and discrimination where they work and live. For example, for the indigenous farmworkers who represent about 30% of the California's agricultural workforce of 700,000, discrimination is an everyday issue.⁴ This does not only happen at the workplace, with adults, it also happens in schools, where the children of indigenous migrants are the targets of such overt discrimination that the School District in Oxnard, California approved a

resolution banning students' use of the term "*oaxaquita*," as an extreme measure in response to the intolerable levels of bullying and verbal violence experienced by indigenous children in that region's public schools (Esquivel, 2012).

During one of the focus groups with members of the Autónomos group in Fresno, several spoke directly about the burden of being indigenous and being seen as different by their peers. For example, Yenedit Valencia of Los Autónomos related:

“It's also about what other people say, since they treat us as inferior, so we feel inferior. They make fun of us. I think that had a lot to do with why I came to this group, because I needed to find this place where I could identify with other people who would come for the same reason, because I was denying where I came from. I think when talk to people from other regions of Mexico, you try to talk to them but they don't understand you, because they are not from Oaxaca.”

W.E.B. Du Bois writes in his classic on race relations in the US, *The Soul of Black Folks*, originally published in 1904, about the double consciousness that African-Americans develop as they face the systemic racism that they experience in the US. This double consciousness, Du Bois says, is the feeling for always seeing oneself through the eyes of others, and always feeling a dual identity: , “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings...”⁵ (2006: 9). This concept of “double consciousness” helps us to understand the dilemma that young indigenous migrants face when they have to deny who they are (indigenous from Oaxaca), as in the case of Marcos from Autónomos, and at the same time try to incorporate themselves into the Mexican community – and sometimes while having to learn Spanish.

The fact of being and feeling different creates a feeling of isolation and lack of belonging. This comes through clearly in the statement by Eligio Ventura, who reports:

“When I got here, I came at the age of seven, speaking Mixteco, just Mixteco, with some Spanish. As I grew up, I experienced harassment. There weren’t many Oaxacans in the school – they were mostly from other cities, from Sinaloa, Michoacán. So they made fun of me, and that made me deny where I’m from. I think many of us experienced this when we were young, and it hurt a lot. It injures your pride and pushes you to not say where you are from, to lie. They looked down on me.”

One’s sense of belonging is closely tied to language. In the context of the Mexican migrant community, indigenous languages serve as a specific marker of belonging to an ethnic group, and they provoke discrimination (the mocking that Eligio mentioned above) – but they can also be a source of ethnic pride. The relationship with the parents’ indigenous language and its transmission to the second generation therefore becomes very complicated, as can be seen in the following exchange between two indigenous young people who played a leadership role in this study, as they related their participation in the American Experience Club, which they belonged to when they went to Madera High School.

Juan Santiago is a trilingual speaker of Zapotec, Spanish and English, and Minerva Mendoza is of Mixteco origin (from Santa María Tindú) and is a bilingual speaker of Spanish and English:

Juan: Why do you think your father did not speak to you in Mixteco?

Minerva: I really don’t know. But I have noticed that in my community [of origin] they don’t speak Mixteco anymore. Just the grandparents – it’s very rare for the children to speak Mixteco.

Juan: ¿Are you not interested in learning?

Minerva: Not really, because the people who I spend time with all speak Spanish, so I don’t see the need to speak Mixteco. I have seen how you speak Zapotec, your language helps you to speak with people from your community [of origin] and to translate. But I don’t see how it would help me, because almost everyone speaks Spanish. I see the value in terms of it being part of the culture, and ideally one should learn it so that it doesn’t get lost, but in terms of helping me? Not really.

Juan: I understand. In your community there is no immediate need to speak it. Folks speak Spanish.

Minerva: But I would like to see the language preserved, really. I don’t know if it sounds bad, but I don’t see the need, so it’s not one of my priorities.

One gets the sense that Minerva feels guilty about not speaking Mixteco. She sees the need for preserving it, but doesn't see how it would help her, since most immigrants from her community of origin who live in Madera speak Spanish. So learning Mixteco is not one of her priorities, which she says with trepidation, even though it "sounds bad." So even though these young people may not speak the language of their parents, they still experience the burden of being indigenous in the eyes of young mestizo Mexicans. Consider the following exchange from the focus group with young farm-workers:

Juan: Would you have liked to have learned another language?

Azucena: Yes, for sure.

Juan: Why?

Azucena: It's something from our culture – and when we go somewhere else and they say to you – 'you're from Oaxaca, you speak another languages...".

Virgilio: Many say they are embarrassed.

Lorena: It's happened to me too, at work, because since we work in crews, they ask me and they don't believe me and I tell them that my father didn't speak the language. They think [I deny it because] I'm ashamed. They ask me "how do you say this?" and I tell them I don't know... "

Azucena: That happened to me too. Once I said I was from Oaxaca, and they asked me "how do you say this? They thought I was ashamed of it, but I don't have the good fortune of being able to speak an [indigenous] language, since we all came here when I was really little.

This same exchange between two young recognized activists, Raúl, local coordinator of the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB), declared:

Juan: Do you think that speaking Mixteco is another benefit?

Raúl: Believe me, I think that it is not a benefit. We are in a country where, in reality, languages other than Spanish and English are not used.... Those of us who try to speak Mixteco today are trying to help our children learn Mixteco as well, [just as they] should learn English and Spanish. It's for their own good, but we [also] have elders, grandparents and great-grandparents, who unfortunately don't speak Spanish. So we try to speak Mixteco at homes here in this country, so that the children don't forget their languages. Because today, many children don't know the language of their parents, they are born with the mentality of speaking Spanish – not even Spanish, just English – because that's what is needed here. But they should learn Mixteco as well. I would like for our children to speak Mixteco, Spanish and English, the three languages – and if they can learn another one, all the better."

Raúl, who was born in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, and whose first language is Mixteco, has a very pragmatic attitude in terms of the role of languages. He says that “I would like for our children to speak Mixteco, Spanish and English, the three languages – and if they can learn another one, all the better.” For other young adults the issue of language and identity becomes central to their political activism. This is the case for Lilia, of the Autónomos group, who stated:

“My approach is more political, to say yes we are Oaxacans, that I am Mixteca, that I am from San Miguel – and what about it? What are you going to do about it? [The idea is] to take it on, to empower yourself and make [your roots] a source of power, to give you the tools and see all of the others who you know, the richness and privilege that we have because... how many people would like to know where they come from, and how to say something in your language?

In the case of the Autónomos group, there is a deliberate strategy to address young indigenous migrants’ feeling of exclusion, to create a space where they can express themselves freely. The organization of these parallel spaces, outside of the adults’ organizations in their community, paradoxically is not a rejection of their identity as indigenous, but instead is a reaction to their sense of exclusion from the less flexible traditional community organizations built by the first generation of adult migrants. This feeling of exclusion is expressed very clearly by Cornelio Santos in his testimony:

“It’s the older people who organize them [referring to the hometown festivals] and we hardly have any voice. I think this discourages us from trying to participate in organizing [them]. In general it’s the older folks who are in charge.

For her part, Sarait Martínez points out:

“Often the opinions of young people... are not taken into account by the adults- or at least we don’t see it. But there is a great need... and I felt that we needed – me and other young people – a space where we would be able to, where we could have something in common - but also to prepare ourselves to be better leaders in the future.

At first glimpse, the idea that young indigenous migrants go through a process of political socialization that is strongly influenced by the relationships they have with their parents and their community of origin seems very plausible. Nevertheless, as their testimonies indicate, this process of socialization does not begin or end within those migrant social networks – it is broader, drawing on the dominant culture and very intimate interactions with social networks of young people of other races and social identities.

The process of expansion of young indigenous migrants' social networks comes through clearly in the testimony of Minerva, a member of the American Experience Club:

“We have also often volunteered and partnered with other organizations' community cultural events in the region one of them is the Tamejavi Festival. This festival is organized by the American Friends Service Committee's Pan Valley Institute. The focus of the Tamejavi festival is to bring together people of different cultural backgrounds such as the Hmong, Iranian, Native American and Mexican indigenous communities.”



UCSC researchers Adrián Félix and Tania Cruz Salazar help ECO to prepare for a focus group interview. Photo: José E. Chávez

For these young indigenous migrants the key points of contact, conflict and negotiation are the schools, the spaces for youth socialization and other youth organizations. Juan Santiago clearly expresses the importance of the immigrant rights movement, and above all the Dreamers' youth movement, in his political development. As Juan says about the founding of the Central Valley Youth Association (CVYA):

“Who are we? We are a youth group... that was founded in 2009 after the election of Barack Obama. The group was born after an African-American wins a popular election. In his campaign, he promised to reform the immigration system. We were really excited by the joy of the 2008 campaign and wanted to turn it into a nation-wide movement, so that comprehensive immigration reform could be passed by May of 2009. We were recruited for a campaign called Reform Immigration for America (RIFA), and they invited us to a training in Washington D.C.⁶ Those of us who attended were undocumented, but we knew that it would be a good opportunity to learn about what was happening at the national level and what other students are doing. The goal was to pass immigration reform, and we did not achieve it. We then focused on the Dream Act. That's when we founded the Central Valley Youth Association – when we started, we called ourselves the Central Valley for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.... We went to Los Angeles, the headquarters of the campaign in California, and we began to develop a national strategy, with colleagues in other cities..., San José, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino. The goal was to push for the Dream Act.”

Sarait Martínez, another member of the research team who has reached higher education (a masters' degree in Public Administration from California State University – Fresno), writes:

“Even though I am away from home my parents still expect me to fit into what the “traditional” roles of a woman are. As a community organizer, I have to attend different kind of meetings and every time my mom calls and I tell her that I am on my way to a meeting. She says *“otra reunión, mejor quédate en la casa a dormir”* (another meeting - just stay home and sleep). They expect me to stay home, get married and have children, especially since I am getting a little too old to start a family, as they say.

These spaces, outside of the migrant social networks of their parents, have an important influence on the civic-political socialization of these young indigenous migrants. Just to give one example, several of those interviewed mentioned that they belonged to organizations like the Dreamers (like Juan Santiago), and they worked closely with organizations like the Brown Berets and MECHA (as in the case of Sarait Martínez, in her role as Binational Youth Coordinator of the FIOB. This shows that the process of political socialization has broken the limits (and controls, perhaps) of the migrant social networks, to bring in other practices and discourses, such as those of racial minorities (MECHA and Brown Berets) and new hybrid identities, like the Dreamers, who have drawn on practices and discourses from the African-American civil rights movement, as well as discourses from the gay liberation movement (coming out as undocumented).

Gender

The idea of the dual character of the social networks – they both support and control – is very useful for understanding gender dynamics among young indigenous migrants. As an exercise of self-reflection, ECO participants wrote about their own experiences as women in families of Oaxacan migrants. This came from the clear signals in the focus group interviews with members of different civic groups that the young indigenous women had a significantly different experience in their family socialization.

Minerva Mendoza, is originally from Santa Maria Tindu, a Mixtec community in Oaxaca with a long history of migration to the Central Valley, especially Madera, where the majority of people are engage in agricultural work in the local farms. Minerva, who migrated when she was six years old, was very active in the American Experience Club while attending Madera High School. She writes the following regarding her experience about growing up in a traditional Mixtec migrant family:

“When we first arrived here my whole family of three older brothers and a younger sister along with my parent were working picking up strawberries. We would all get home tired and hungry. Nonetheless the girls had to go directly to the kitchen and cook while the man would shower and sit down to watch television while waiting for the food to be ready. On the other hand, we-- the girls--had to cook and do tortillas make sure they ate and wash dishes and then go shower. It was not over after the shower because my mother still had to make lunch for the next day of work. Ten years later now, things have not changed much. When my brothers come over to visit they still expect to see everything ready for them to eat.[. . .]”

As is well-documented in the literature on gender and migration, social networks function differently for women and men, and we see this again in the 1.5 generation in rural California (Stephen 2007 and Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In the cases of Sarait and Minerva, it is interesting how both have been able to reach higher education, but their struggles within their families, together with their activism, have made them doubly conscious of the challenges they face, both at home and in public.

Public Identities

One of the most main issues of concern in the research on the political participation of Mexican migrants in the US today involves multigenerational and intergenerational participation in the organizations founded by first generation migrants in the 1990s. This question is especially relevant for the indigenous Mexican migrant community, whose contribution to migrant political participation has involved the adaptation of their community political traditions to the migrant context (Rivera-Salgado, 2000). At the same time, cultural continuity and the preservation of their identity has also been very important for indigenous migrants. The issue of youth participation in established migrant organizations and their participation in cultural activities has been a key issue, not only for the renewal of their membership but of the leadership of both key spaces for civic engagement.

Recent field observations of young adults' participation strategies in political and cultural spaces in Fresno illustrate the type of decisions that they make, as they become political actors, in relation to the organizations and spaces created by the first generation.

During the 2012 celebration of the Fresno Guelaguetza festival, at the end of September, 2012, one could see the dominant presence of young adults, both in the dance and music performances and in the planning and leadership of the event itself. For the past thirteen years, Fresno's

Guelaguetza has been organized jointly by the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB) and the Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities (CBDIO). Usually these two organizations form a Guelaguetza planning committee with members of the local FIOB branch and CBDIO staff. In 2012, the composition of Fresno's Guelaguetza planning committee changed radically, bringing in a large number of young people. This had a significant impact, both on the event's message and in terms of the people who became its public face.

One of the most important changes in this version of the Guelaguetza was in the team who hosted and moderated the event. Cornelio Santos, originally from the community of San Miguel Cuevas and founding member of Fresno's *Autónomos* group, welcomed the public in Mixteco, Spanish and English. This was the first trilingual welcome, especially with Elio's fluidity. In addition, one of the main hosts of the Guelaguetza was Miguel Villegas, another founding member of the *Autónomos* group, also from San Miguel Cuevas. Miguel has the distinction of being the first trilingual rapper in Fresno with politically aware raps. In the Guelaguetza festival, as host of the event, Miguel played a somewhat different role from that of young, rebel performer. His role as narrator of the festival involved sharing with the audiences the meaning and history of each of the dances, serving to transmit what would be considered the traditionally Oaxacan, preserving the traditional expressions of music and dance, while at the same time serving as a bridge between the traditional Oaxaca and the reality that Oaxacan migrants experience in the Central Valley. To wrap up the illustration of what seems to be the generational shift in Fresno's Guelaguetza, there is the central role played by Sarait Martínez, another founding member of the *Autónomos* group, who was in charge of logistics, coordinating more than twenty young high school volunteers, who handled parking, ticket sales, and an evaluation survey at the end of the event.

Young people are substantially increasing their participation and leadership in spaces previously dominated by adult migrants in political spaces as well as in cultural events. During the FIOB's annual California statewide meeting, held in December, 2012 in Fresno, the young founders of the *Autónomos* played a strategic role, especially those from San Miguel Cuevas. Even though the most senior leadership positions continue to be held by adults with more than ten years of participation in the FIOB, such as the Coordinator and Vice-coordinator positions, both at the binational level and in California—new key positions are held by young people who could be considered 1.5 and 1.75 generation, since they migrated between the ages of 6 and 16. This is the case of the current Binational Coordinator of Women's Issues, Silvia Ventura, a young trilingual woman from San Miguel Cuevas, and Sarait Martínez, originally from Ayoquezco de Aldama in Oaxaca's Central Valleys, who is currently the FIOB's Binational Youth Coordinator. At the local level, both Elio and Miguel hold leadership positions in the FIOB's Fresno committee (Local Vice-coordinator and Youth Coordinator, respectively). Another young Zapotec woman, recently arrived from Oaxaca City, is the FIOB's California State Youth Coordinator.

One way to read the growing participation of these young leaders in the Oaxacan diaspora's cultural and political spaces would be that they occupy multiple spaces. On the one hand, they maintain their own free space, created by the *Autónomos*, as a youth-led organization where they can have their weekly meetings and informal musical events (or as Miguel Villegas calls them, "jam sessions"). On the other hand, they can use their abilities (English, knowledge of computers, tricultural skills) within the FIOB, where they have a much greater impact in the community, since through the FIOB they can connect with broader political debates, involving immigration reform, political rights in Oaxaca and cultural events, projecting [their voices] more widely. The incorporation of these young adults into these cultural and political spaces may be in its early stages, and it remains to be seen whether there will be a real generational shift at

all levels in the organization, beyond those spaces designated for youth.

Though youth participation is still new, it seems quite similar to women's struggle for spaces to gain more representation at the FIOB's highest levels of leadership, and in the hometown associations dominated by adult migrant men. There the results are mixed, with important advances since the creation more than twelve years ago of the women's issues coordinator positions at the binational, state and local levels, as guaranteed spaces for representation and leadership.⁷ Nevertheless, the highest position that women have achieved was the State Coordinator in California, but this has not happened either in Oaxaca or in Baja California. Perhaps with the political skills that these young adults have demonstrated, men as well as women, they have shown that they can break multiple barriers and could reach the highest leadership positions in the organizations and spaces built by their parents.

Conclusion

This study is framed by the debate within the literature about the second generation, and has tried to contribute to this analysis empirical data generated by the young adults themselves. These testimonies of young indigenous migrants shed light on their experiences, and the challenges they face in light of the complex social milieu they are immersed in. This social context expands from traditional indigenous family networks to multicultural settings and diverse political possibilities at school and their places where they live. As their testimonies have shown us, it is not always easy to sort out the multiple and sometimes contradictory messages they receive about issues of identity, gender and community. The experience from their parents has taught them the importance of cultural continuity, but the political realities they face are unique and required a lot of creativity on their part to forge a new path, their own path, to sort out new challenges they are facing such as trilingual-

ism, academic success, youth culture and economic survival outside agricultural work. It is important to recognize their specific demands as political actors, and the organizational strategies they have developed to focus their actions as social actors, to respond to the set of unique challenge they face in their various communities.

We already knew that that Mexican migration to the US is a multiethnic, multilingual process that has a social and economic impact on the indigenous population, in terms of its work experience- and its social relationships with other groups (Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004).

This lesson, applied to the experience of indigenous youth, allows us to see the importance of these local contexts for understanding their civic incorporation the San Joaquin Valley, especially in the cities of Fresno and Madera. Similarly, understanding the local contexts in which these young adults make the decisions that will affect their lives can also help to understand the challenges they face simply as youth, with hopes for a better future in their own time and place.



*Ana Mendoza, Sarait Martinez and Cornelio Santos working on the project.
Photo: José E. Chávez*

Endnotes

1. Translated by Jonathan Fox
2. This study focused on the population considered 1.5 or 2nd generation. There is a broad literature on the advantages and disadvantages of differentiating between the experiences of those who migrated at a young age (1.5 generation) and those who were born in the US (2nd generation). Rumbaut (2004) has proposed the most comprehensive typology, known as decimal generations, arguing that a more fine-tuned approach will contribute to understanding their experiences of incorporation in the US. Rumbaut proposes the following categories for those who migrated young: 1.75 generation (at 0-5 years of age); 1.5 generation (those who came between 6-12 years old); 1.25 generation (those who came between 13-17 years old) (2004: 1181). For children of migrants born in the US, he proposes the following categories: 2nd generation (both parents foreign-born); 2.5 generation (one parent born in the US, one foreign-born parent) (2004: 1197).
3. Several key texts are basic references. See Levitt and Waters (2006), especially the chapters on transnationalism and the second generation and the chapter by Michael Jones-Correa. Other key texts would be Smith (2006), especially the chapters on the second generation, and the study by Zhou and Bankston (1998).
4. See the most recent survey of indigenous farmworkers in California: www.indigenousfarmworkers.org.
5. The full quote reads: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." Du Bois (2006:9).
6. For details about this campaign see, <http://reformimmigrationforamerica.org/>
7. For an extensive discussion of gender dynamics within the FIOB, see Romero et al. (forthcoming).

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