

UC Berkeley

Berkeley Planning Journal

Title

Transnational Communities, Regional Development, and the Future of Mexican Immigration

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3ss8m4sn>

Journal

Berkeley Planning Journal, 10(1)

Author

Alarcon, Rafael

Publication Date

1995

DOI

10.5070/BP310113060

Copyright Information

Copyright 1995 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THE FUTURE OF MEXICAN IMMIGRATION*

Rafael Alarcón

This article examines the relationship between regional development and labor migration to the United States in the context of NAFTA. The article develops two principal arguments. First, the current migration process between Mexico and the United States is not only the result of push-pull economic factors, as is generally assumed, but also the result of well-developed social networks and the implementation of U.S. and Mexican government policies as manifested by the formation of a number of "transnational communities." This observation leads to a second and related argument: the additional job creation resulting from NAFTA will not necessarily stem the international migration flows from regions with a long tradition of migration to the United States.

Introduction

Illegal immigration from Mexico continues to be one of the most delicate and controversial issues affecting relations between Mexico and the United States. In November 1994, 59 percent of California's electorate approved Proposition 187, suggesting that the anger towards undocumented immigration had become endemic in a state historically characterized by immigration. Proponents of the initiative very successfully portrayed undocumented immigrants as criminals who deplete the coffers of cities and the state through their use of social services. They used questionable data to substantiate this assertion and to depict migration as an unstoppable flow.

This image intensified with the realization that the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) had failed to reduce illegal immigration. In 1986, the U.S. Congress enacted IRCA, which contained three principal measures: an amnesty for undocumented persons already residing in the United States, sanctions against

* An earlier version of this article was published as a working paper by the Chicano/Latino Policy Project of the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California, Berkeley under the title: *Labor migration from Mexico and free trade: Lessons from a transnational community* (Alarcón 1994). I am greatly indebted to Guillermo De la Peña, Macrina Cárdenas, Wayne Cornelius, Rachel Moran, and Martin Sanchez Jankowski for their valuable comments and assistance.

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

employers who “knowingly” hire undocumented workers, and increased enforcement at U.S. borders.

Congress passed IRCA to stem the flow of illegal immigration to the United States. Its supporters argued that the legislation would solve the problem since it contained measures that would affect both the supply and the demand for the labor of undocumented workers, in addition to providing a generous amnesty program that would benefit a large number of people who were already in the United States illegally. There is a growing consensus, however, that IRCA has not brought about the sought-after reduction of undocumented immigration from Mexico. Apprehensions at the border – an imprecise measure of actual flows but a good indicator of trends – rose sharply in 1990. This increase showed that the reduction in the number of apprehensions observed between 1987 and 1989 was only a fleeting result of legalization under IRCA: people who had previously crossed the border illegally now had proper documents (Castañeda and Alarcón 1991).

Several studies have found little evidence that the new law has deterred illegal immigration. In a study conducted in 1988 in three traditional sending communities in Western Mexico, Cornelius (1990b) found no evidence that IRCA had reduced the heavy flow of workers to the United States. On the contrary, he found that IRCA seemed to have augmented that flow, at least in the short term, through the legalization programs. Bean, Edmonston, and Passel (1990) concluded that the studies they reviewed generally suggested a decrease in the flow of illegal migrants as a result of IRCA. However, they indicated that a large proportion of the decrease was due to the legalization programs and that some recent data suggested that undocumented migration flows continued to grow in the post-IRCA period. Donato and her associates (1992) more emphatically stressed the failure of IRCA. Their study of seven Mexican communities showed little evidence that IRCA had significantly deterred undocumented Mexican migration. In their view, the few small effects brought about by IRCA were little to show for the millions of dollars and thousands of hours invested to implement the Act.

In this context, President Salinas de Gortari in 1991 proposed the establishment of a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He claimed, among other things, that it would reduce migration from Mexico to the United States. According to President Salinas, “Mexico prefers to export its products rather than its people.” In part because of this reason, the U.S. Congress narrowly approved NAFTA in November 1993.

Berkeley Planning Journal

The Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development was an ardent supporter of NAFTA. The Commission was chaired by Diego C. Asencio, former Assistant Secretary in the U.S. State Department. It was created by Congress as part of IRCA, to examine the conditions in Mexico and other sending countries which contribute to unauthorized migration to the United States in order to explore mutually beneficial trade and investment programs to alleviate such conditions. By creating the commission, Congress sought to emphasize that the ultimate solution to illegal immigration was to promote economic development in sending countries.¹

In 1990, in its final report titled *Unauthorized migration: An economic development response*, the Commission stated that

the 1980s witnessed unprecedented levels of global migration – much of it unauthorized – from developing to developed countries. [These movements] have created regional tensions, exacerbated economic problems in host countries, taxed international humanitarian support systems, and created what some refer to as "compassion fatigue" in many receiving countries. (Commission for the Study of International Migration 1990, 9).

The Commission's most important recommendation was its support for NAFTA. According to Barkin and Lopez (1991), the Asencio Commission was so interested in promoting NAFTA that 30 percent of its recommendations centered on the issues of free markets and trade integration. Among other things, the Asencio Commission recommended that the United States change its import quota allocations for textiles, apparel, and steel to encourage Mexican exports of manufactured goods. The Commission also recommended that the United States support Mexican requests for funds to develop *maquiladora* activities, although it urged the two governments to be vigilant about protection of workers' rights and labor standards. The Commission further suggested that the United States condition bilateral aid to sending countries on their taking steps toward structural adjustment.

In addition to firmly supporting NAFTA and its anticipated macroeconomic effects, the Commission recommended three strategies to foster regional and local economic development as a way to diminish the pressures for undocumented immigration:

1. *Targeting migrant-sending regions for economic growth.* Since migratory flows originate in specific regions, the Commission suggested that development efforts be targeted not at resource-poor areas with meager development prospects but at nearby

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

regions with greater potential to offer improved economic alternatives to prospective migrants.

2. *Developing small business.* Since the informal sector often serves as a refuge for the urban poor and provides employment to an increasing number of women, the Commission suggested that national and international development agencies work with governments to reduce legal and bureaucratic impediments to the development of small business.
3. *Channeling remittances into productive small businesses.* The Commission found that most migrant remittances are used to pay for basic necessities, and that little goes to productive investment. The Commission recommended that individual migrant remittances be complemented by other financial resources from public and private institutions to support the development of the small business sector. The Commission singled out the Agency for International Development to take the lead in fostering such cooperative financing arrangements.

In the remainder of this article, I use the case of a traditional sending community in Mexico: (1) to examine the relationship between regional development and labor migration to the United States; and (2) to evaluate the potential impact of NAFTA and the Asencio Commission's recommendations on the flow of undocumented migration. Tlacuitapa, with a population of 2,300 inhabitants in 1988, is located in the Los Altos de Jalisco region in Central-Western Mexico and has a nearly one-hundred-year-old tradition of migration to the United States. People in Tlacuitapa form a "transnational community." This term describes the social organization of some rural Mexican communities that have specialized in the production and reproduction of international migrant workers and that have developed "daughter" communities in the United States through the concentrated settlement of families (Alarcón 1992). Transnational communities have evolved in a more complicated fashion than simple push-pull economics can explain. In particular, most sending communities are located in regions that have experienced economic development; yet they nevertheless persist in sending large numbers of migrant workers to the United States.

Research in the Los Altos de Jalisco region was conducted at El Colegio de Jalisco between 1986 and 1988. Data from Tlacuitapa come from field work and a survey conducted in the town and in California as part of a research project sponsored by the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego in 1988 and 1989.² A little more than half (54 percent) of the 374 households in Tlacuitapa were surveyed in that time. In cases where

Berkeley Planning Journal

empty houses were found, an attempt was made to interview the families in their places of residence in California.

The article is divided into three sections. The first part describes the historical development of Tlacuitapa as a transnational community. In the second section, the development of the Los Altos de Jalisco region is described, and Tlacuitapa is compared to other localities that have been able to stem migration flows to the United States. The final section draws on these findings to discuss the implications of the existence of transnational communities for the future of Mexican migration to the United States.

Tlacuitapa: The Development of a Transnational Community

To someone arriving in Tlacuitapa, the immediate presence of *El Norte*³ is evident. Due to the absence of young males, women and teenagers drive pickups that transport cattle feed. Most of these pickups have California plates, although there are some from Oklahoma and Nevada. The fifteen satellite dishes in this town of 374 households demonstrate the availability of money and the competition for status. One neighbor states "Thanks to God and to *El Norte*, the people of Tlacuitapa have been able to make progress." According to the survey, 48 percent of those aged 15 or older had gone to the United States on at least one occasion.

People in the village combine corn farming with dairy cattle raising. Nevertheless, many households depend on remittances that arrive from the United States. Every day at three in the afternoon, people gather around the store where the mail is distributed to receive the news and the money sent by migrant workers.

According to the 1988 survey, the majority of the homes (63 percent) and of the lots (65 percent) that were not inherited had been acquired with income from the United States. For this reason, people in the town bury U.S. coins in the foundation of their homes as a symbolic gesture to acknowledge that housing has improved because of money from the United States.

Apparently, remittances from the United States have substituted for Mexican government credits and are used to sustain agriculture and livestock. The government extensionist in the area considers the Tlacuitapa *ejido* to be the most prosperous in his zone because of money arriving from the United States. According to him, "in Tlacuitapa the people do not live off their parcels of land; their parcels of land live off *El Norte*."

Cattlemen, Knitters, and Migrants

Tlacuitapa was originally a settlement of peons and sharecroppers who worked in nearby haciendas. The community received *ejido* land

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

in 1937, during the most active phase of Mexico's agrarian reform. By 1988, the community had a total of 157 *ejidatarios* who worked 2,248 hectares. Only 5 percent of the land is irrigated, 67 percent is rain fed, and the rest is pasture land or has other uses.⁴ The survey found that 44 percent of the economically active population whose primary residence in 1988 was in Tlacuitapa worked in agriculture. Fourteen percent were employed in services; 8 percent in retail commerce; 8 percent in construction; and 26 percent in light manufacturing, mostly in-home garment-making (Cornelius 1990a, 9).

As in the whole Los Altos de Jalisco region, because of the poor quality of the soil and lack of water, cattle raising for milk production has been more important than crop cultivation. Since the 1940s, milk has been sold to large processing plants located in the city of Lagos de Moreno, nearly 20 miles away. The dairy producers range from those who sell 2 liters of milk a day to those who deliver 200. Households involved in the production of milk generally implement two kinds of arrangements. First, while men go to the United States, the elderly and women are in charge of agricultural production. They hire day laborers to perform the work. Since many of these day laborers have moved from smaller surrounding localities, they replace the migrants who are either absent or not willing to work in Tlacuitapa after having worked in the United States for higher wages. Second, when the whole household moves to the United States, animals are left in the care of relatives and land is given to sharecroppers.

Like other women in the region, Tlacuitapeñas have long engaged in domestic handicrafts. Embroidery and knitting are activities inherited from Spanish ancestors. In the 1950s, substantial domestic production began when a merchant from San Juan de los Lagos, a nearby city that houses the second most important sanctuary in Mexico, took embroidery frames to Tlacuitapa for production of bedspreads. Women later began to embroider shawls. This work ended in the mid-1960s, when women were allowed to enter churches without covering their heads. Since the beginning of the 1970s, the knitting of baby clothes has expanded in Tlacuitapa. At present, almost half of the working women in the town knit as a principal or secondary occupation. Women knit in their homes with yarn given to them by merchants or by other women who pay them for the work completed. Women who work in this activity say they do not earn very much.

Social Networks and Labor Markets in the San Francisco Bay Area

Since the beginning of this century, Tlacuitapeños have been increasingly integrated in U.S. labor markets. Three generations of

Berkeley Planning Journal

migrants have worked at various jobs and in different places. At present, Tlacuitapeños concentrate in several areas of the United States. A city in the San Francisco Bay Area has the largest concentration. There are other smaller, related communities in California – near Sacramento and in Los Angeles – as well as in Oklahoma, Texas, Nevada, and Oregon.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the population of Tlacuitapa, according to place of residence in 1988. It illustrates the extent of migration to the United States. Nearly half the males (46 percent) and 15 percent of women resided in the United States in 1988. Although migration by women has been increasing as more families settle in the United States, men still migrate more.

Table 1

*Place of Residence of People Born in Tlacuitapa
(Persons Aged 15 to 64), 1988*

n = 774

Place	Male (%)	Female (%)
Tlacuitapa	52.5	81.8
Other place in Mexico	1.3	2.6
Northern California	16.7	8.2
Southern California	7.6	2.3
Illinois	2.9	0.8
Nevada	1.8	1.5
Oregon and Washington	2.4	0.5
Oklahoma	7.8	2.1
Texas	6.0	0.3
Other place in the U.S.	1.0	0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies Household Survey, 1988

Of all of the current concentrations of Tlacuitapeños in the United States, the most populous and institutionalized is the one in the San Francisco Bay Area, where close to forty families have settled. The San Francisco Bay concentration began at the start of the 1970s with the gradual displacement of Tlacuitapeños who had previously settled near Sacramento. The principal reason for moving was a desire to leave

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

farm jobs that were seasonal to seek urban employment that was more permanent and higher paying.

After three decades of work experience, the San Francisco Bay migrants have managed to gain access to the labor market in the region. Most of them work in restaurants and hotels and in janitorial work. A few – especially those already legal residents – work in a salt factory, in companies that build chain link fences, or in construction. Others work in a mattress factory or as farm workers in flower growing and nurseries. Women, besides doing farm work in the flower industry, work in dry cleaning and in housekeeping in hotels, restaurants, and private homes. They also provide child care at home.

The social life of Tlacuitapeños, which includes cooperation and conflict, is intense in this city and centers on a charismatic Tlacuitapeño whose house has a garden next to the street. This place, called the *Plaza de Tlacuitapa* or the "gossip," is very important to the interrelationship of Tlacuitapeños who exchange information and favors there. In years past, a soccer team, the "Tlacui-boys," also served to solidify the community.

Regional Development and Migration in Los Altos de Jalisco

The debate over the ratification of NAFTA generated a number of studies that examine the agreement's effects on migration patterns from Mexico. Calva (1991), for instance, foresees a chaotic situation for Mexico as a result of NAFTA. In his opinion, free trade in agricultural and livestock products will cause the virtual demise of Mexico's domestic production of its most important grains (corn and beans) and the emigration of nearly 15 million people from rural areas. In a similar way, Hinojosa-Ojeda and Robinson (1992) argue that while complete liberalization will increase U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico, it will also speed up out-migration from rural areas of people who will show up in Mexican urban and U.S. labor markets. For this reason, they propose a long transition period to allow time for needed infrastructure investments in rural areas and to smooth the process of labor absorption in the Mexican industrial sector.

Cornelius and Martin (1993) contend that, even with the anticipated dislocations in small-scale agriculture, future levels of total Mexican migration to the United States (both legal and illegal) may not increase in response to trade liberalization. First, many rural dwellers already have diversified their sources of income, making them less dependent on income earned from producing agricultural commodities. Second, a free trade zone will induce more U.S. agricultural producers to expand in Mexico in the 1990s creating additional jobs there. Third, the increase in internal migration may not translate into a great deal of international migration. Finally, following

the European experience, free trade and economic integration can be structured so as not to cause significant emigration.

One can argue that NAFTA and the policies suggested by the Asencio Commission should reduce the flow of migrants from villages like Tlacuitapa. Tlacuitapa's economy is based on agricultural activities that do not require large numbers of workers, and the industrial activities carried out by women at home are low paying. Two observations, however, challenge this prediction. First, Tlacuitapa is located in an already economically dynamic region that has seen the proliferation of small businesses, many of them started with migrant remittances. Second, the rapid growth of the manufacturing industry in the nearby city of Lagos de Moreno has not affected the migration patterns from Tlacuitapa.

Tlacuitapa is part of Los Altos de Jalisco, a region located in an arid plateau in the northeast of the state of Jalisco.⁵ Like other regions in Western Mexico, Los Altos de Jalisco is considered a "traditional sending region"; and it has a one-hundred-year-old history of U.S.-bound migration. Researchers have long recognized the importance of Los Altos de Jalisco as a migration region. As early as the 1930s, Paul Taylor (1933), an economist from Berkeley, conducted the first study in Arandas where he found that recruiters sent from the United States played a key role in developing migration from that town.

The region has specialized in cattle raising since colonial times. At the beginning, this activity was aimed at producing meat and draft animals destined for the mines of Guanajuato and Zacatecas. In the last four decades, the area has become one of the principal dairy production regions in Mexico due principally to Nestlé's setting up a plant in the early 1940s in the city of Lagos de Moreno.

The establishment of the Nestlé plant prompted cattle ranchers to shift from meat production to milk production. In addition to large farming companies that produce for the national market, there are three types of dairy production farms that operate on different economic levels. *Large production units* have a substantial number of first-class livestock, excellent technical conditions to produce fodder crops, and a steady workforce of contract salaried workers. Because of the farms' capital, they can raise dairy cattle at a high profit or redirect their investment if this activity becomes unprofitable. *Medium-sized farms* are the units that predominate in the region and are preferred by the local enterprises that process milk. These production units engage in cattle raising activities which are complemented by the cultivation of fodder crops that in most cases are insufficient. These units tend to be characterized by the installation of a mechanized dairy stable, the production of fodder, and the diversification of activities which permits

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

them to operate even during times of crisis. *Family farms* are the smallest peasant units; they cultivate corn and beans for their own consumption and for their livestock. Work on these farms is generally carried out by the household unit itself, which is barely able to subsist and therefore expels a significant portion of its workforce. According to researchers of the Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural Maya (1985), the sale of labor in the United States permits the reproduction of these units and even a modest expansion. Thus, remittances sent by family members represent a significant income without which these farms would not survive.

Besides dairy production, the manufacturing industry began to grow rapidly in the region during the 1970s. Enterprises dedicated to the production of dairy products and clothing were set up. Four of the most important manufacturing firms in the state of Jalisco are located in Lagos de Moreno: Pasteurizadora L de M and Cremería La Danesa, which produce dairy products; and two transnational corporations, Nestlé and Swissmex Rapid, S.A., which produce metal products (Alba 1986).

There are also several medium-sized industries, as well as a great number of small family workshops dedicated to producing clothes and knitting, work shoes and gloves, and dairy products. The proliferation of small workshops has radically changed the economic profile of many towns. The clothing industry in Los Altos is based on small *maquila* workshops and home work in which women play a predominant role. Beginning also in the 1970s, the southern part of the region, around the city of Tepatitlán, developed a new type of entrepreneurial poultry farming that requires large financial resources and channels its production toward the large urban centers of the country.

The city of Lagos de Moreno, located 20 miles away from Tlacuitapa, has experienced the most rapid industrial development in the region. Table 2 shows that manufacturing in Lagos de Moreno grew faster than that of the state of Jalisco in the period 1960-1990. The newly created jobs there, however, have not attracted the population from Tlacuitapa, which continues to migrate to the United States in great numbers. Instead, the industrialization of Lagos has attracted numerous population groups from neighboring rural communities. The few families from Tlacuitapa who live in Lagos de Moreno moved there in order to start businesses.

In contrast to Tlacuitapa, the establishment of local small businesses has allowed two communities in the Los Altos de Jalisco region to break their dependency on income earned in the United States: Los Dolores in the municipality of Arandas, a community

studied by Juan Luis Orozco (1992); and Villa Hidalgo, a small city studied by Wayne Cornelius (1990a). Los Dolores was originally a community of dairy farmers with heavy migration to the United States. In 1979, on the advice of priests and members of a nearby cooperative, residents of Los Dolores began to organize a cooperative to buy livestock feed. Along with two other cooperatives, they began to make their own livestock feed, which was better and less expensive than the feed they purchased. In 1984, the three cooperatives bought a plant to process milk, and three years later the cooperative was able to produce 800 kilograms of cheese.

Table 2

Employment by Industry in Lagos de Moreno (Municipality) and Jalisco (State), 1960-1990

Industry	Lagos de Moreno			Jalisco		
	1960	1990	Total % change	1960	1990	Total % change
Agriculture	11,380	8,492	-25.4	393,116	234,016	-40.5
Mining *	101	90	-10.9	7,255	11,669	60.8
Manufacturing	1,624	7,467	359.8	118,413	372,498	214.6
Construction	642	2,490	287.8	33,686	124,512	269.6
Commerce	1,209	3,186	163.5	84,045	242,790	188.9
Transp. and communic.	400	757	89.2	24,723	67,211	171.9
Services	1,355	5,819	329.4	91,716	447,452	387.9
Not specified	139	1,090	684.2	4,047	53,054	1210.9
Total	16,850	29,391	74.4	757,001	1,553,202	105.2

* Includes oil and gas extraction and public utilities

Source: General Census of Population and Housing, Mexico, 1960 and 1990.

In 1988, the cooperative had 240 members, 80 of whom were from Los Dolores. The cooperative offers the highest price for milk and buys all its members' production. Most of the cooperative's profits are reinvested. The cooperative also employs 80 people (11 of whom are from Los Dolores) and tends to hire members or children of members. Orozco (1992, 381) believes that the cooperative has played a key role in reducing the flow of migrants to the United States – a flow that peaked in the period 1968-1978. Today, a family can enjoy a relatively good standard of living by remaining in Los Dolores and participating in the cooperative. Despite all of this, young people still

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

go to the United States for short periods of time when they have to save for a wedding or the construction of a house.

Villa Hidalgo provides another example of a small city that successfully reversed the trend toward out-migration to the United States. Although Villa Hidalgo lost population during the 1950s and 1960s, the city gained population through immigration in the 1970s because a large number of jobs were created in approximately 200 small, family-owned textile and garment factories established beginning in the late 1960s. The industrialization process began when a former migrant worker invested his savings in two manually operated cloth weaving machines. By the end of the 1970s, the town had become a key supplier of clothing to major department stores in large cities. Cornelius (1990a, 31-32) states that the initial investment came from savings accumulated through employment in the United States, although commercial bank credit became available later. He considers that jobs could have been created faster and in larger numbers with Mexican government and international agency support through low interest loans, training, and assistance in developing domestic and export markets. However, Cornelius suggests the need to be cautious in generalizing from this case. A similar initiative – that of Nochistlan Zacatecas production of clothing and shoes – failed because local producers were unable to compete with large producers from bigger cities.

Unlike Los Dolores and Villa Hidalgo, Tlacuitapa remains a substantial source of international migrants – despite the growth of manufacturing and the proliferation of small businesses in Lagos de Moreno. Thus, the Tlacuitapa story demonstrates the need for a closer assessment of the Asencio Commission's claim that economic development in nearby regions will deter migration to the United States.

Final Considerations

The migration process from Los Altos de Jalisco, like all social processes, resists simplification. In contrast to the widespread conception in the United States, the case presented here calls into question the image of Mexican migrants as people who were poor and unemployed in their own country and who come to the United States desperately seeking work. Labor migration from Los Altos de Jalisco takes place in the context of a region that has experienced economic growth and where dedication to work has distinguished a population that in the last fifty years has made up one of the most important dairy regions in Mexico despite an adverse environment. In addition, the development of a number of large and medium-sized manufacturing firms and the proliferation of small workshops have created jobs that

captured part of the labor displaced from agriculture. However, the massive emigration from the region, both to other cities in Mexico and to the United States, shows that the rate of regional economic growth has not been able to keep pace with the expectations of a large segment of the population.

The case of Tlacuitapa illustrates how deeply certain rural communities in Western Mexico are socially and economically integrated with the United States. These transnational communities have largely resulted from policies implemented by the United States and Mexico. From the turn of the century to the mid-1960s, U.S. immigration policy encouraged temporary Mexican labor migration. This was the overall intention, despite the deportations that took place in the 1930s and 1950s. During the first two decades of this century, direct recruitment in Central-Western Mexico and the implementation of lenient immigration policies by United States stimulated the formation of transnational communities. Between 1942 and 1964, the Bracero Program strengthened the linkages between U.S. employers and many Mexican workers; and it expanded the migration experience of many rural communities, as well as their economic dependence on money earned in the United States. During this period, the Mexican government allocated a disproportionate share of Bracero contracts to the Central-Western region to dilute political opposition (Cross and Sandos 1981). Later, the maturation of social networks and U.S. immigration policy that facilitated family reunification reinforced the formation of "daughter communities" in the United States.

The concept of transnational communities draws on a long tradition of research in the social sciences. Social network theory has been applied to migration studies since the 1920s (Massey et al. 1987, 5). More recently, Mines (1981) used the approach to study a sending community in Zacatecas; and Reichert (1981) used the term "migration syndrome" to describe how the improved standard of living perpetuates the migration process by generating a demand among the population for maintaining such a living standard. In *Return to Aztlan* (Massey et al. 1987), we found that once international migration begins, social networks develop to make foreign employment increasingly accessible to all classes of a sending society. These networks consist of social ties that link sending communities to specific points of destination in receiving societies. These ties bind migrants and non-migrants within a complex web of complementary social roles and interpersonal relationships that are maintained by an informal set of mutual expectations and prescribed behaviors. Social networks based on kinship, friendship, and community origins ease the cost of migration and provide a good environment for new immigrants.

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

In 1988, I called "nortefización" the process by which a Mexican community becomes socially and economically integrated into *El Norte* (Alarcón 1988 and 1992). At the same time, Durand (1988) pointed out the existence of migration circuits between Mexico and the United States. Rouse (1988 and 1992) used the term "transnational community" to describe sets of geographically distant communities in Mexico and in the U.S. among which there is a very active circulation of people, money, information, and goods. According to Rouse, it is very difficult to consider these communities as separate – despite distance and international borders. He later contended that migration has been analyzed in bipolar terms as a movement of people between essentially autonomous communities and that people steadily shift their focus of attention and the locus of their principal social ties from one community to another. Contrary to this, he proposed that settlement has been accompanied by the emergence of a transnational circuit in which migrants have developed and maintained transnational involvements. This term seems to be more appropriate and therefore is used in this article.

A transnational community consists of a "parent" rural community in Mexico and one or more "daughter" communities in the United States. For members of transnational communities, some processes in the United States become more relevant than processes occurring in Mexico. For example, the creation of jobs in the United States is more important for these Mexicans than the existence of similar opportunities in Mexican cities. Thus, Tlacuitapa is "closer" to the San Francisco Bay Area in California than to Guadalajara or Mexico City. In general, transnational communities experience similar processes: (1) since people achieve a better standard of living through work in the United States, they become dependent on these remittances (Reichert 1981); (2) local economies experience dynamic growth or stagnation due to the infusion of dollars (the direction of the trend depends on the regional context); (3) international migration predominates over internal migration as people in the community gain more access to labor markets in the United States; (4) people adapt their social and cultural structures to make migration possible; and (5) the migration process evolves from a temporary and seasonal migration pattern to a more permanent settlement (Alarcón 1992).

In this context, transnational communities are sites where social networks have reached a very high level of development. The social science literature has documented the existence of several transnational communities in Mexico. In Michoacán the following communities have been identified: Jaripo (Fonseca and Moreno 1984), Gomez Farías (López 1986), "Guadalupe" (Reichert 1981), Aguililla (Rouse 1988), and Chavinda (Alarcón 1988 and 1992). Corralillos

Berkeley Planning Journal

(Orozco 1992) and Tlacuitapa (Cornelius 1976) are located in Jalisco. Finally, Mines (1981) and Goldring (1992) conducted research in Las Animas, Zacatecas.

Policy makers should be aware of transnational communities that are located in the most important sending areas of Central-Western Mexico. Some areas in this region and therefore some transnational communities could benefit from NAFTA through the arrival of foreign investment, the relocation of U.S. plants to Mexico, or the expansion of competitive Mexican industries that enhance the creation of jobs. However, the case of Tlacuitapa demonstrates that although jobs are created in a nearby city, the international migration flow from transnational communities is not affected. In theory, migrants from these communities will stop emigrating when they can earn salaries that provide the same standard of living that they have achieved through work in the United States. Until wage parity is achieved, however, the transnational community will continue to channel workers to labor markets in the United States, because of contacts with employers and social connections.

In his comparative review of international migration, Martin (1991) found that migrant recruitment, money remittances, and the return of migrant workers have rarely led to a job-creating economic take-off in sending areas which would reduce the pressures for emigration. In this vein, Cornelius (1990a, 35) argues that the only realistic objective of government intervention in these transnational communities is to try to create viable alternatives to international migration for would-be first-time migrants to the United States. For this reason, he proposes that resources should be targeted to promote development in places not yet integrated into the transnational migration network. Massey (1988) suggests that policies to promote additional economic growth in sending nations will not reduce immigration to the United States in the short run; indeed, these policies may increase migration. For this reason, he believes that it is in the interest of the United States to promote rapid economic development and also to accept a relatively large number of immigrants from Mexico.

The cases of Los Dolores and Villa Hidalgo reveal that international migration has been reduced in sending communities by facilitating the establishment of local small businesses and cooperatives. The Asencio Commission suggested that governments should reduce bureaucratic impediments to the development of small businesses, that ways should be sought to encourage commercial banks to finance these businesses, and that migrant remittances should be complemented by other financial sources from official and private institutions. However, the establishment of NAFTA, so strongly supported by the Asencio

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

Commission, might end up causing the opposite effect by affecting negatively enterprises that already exist, such as those in Los Dolores and Villa Hidalgo. The question remains as to what extent the livestock, dairy, and clothing industries in the Los Altos de Jalisco region will be able to compete with their U.S. and Canadian counterparts when NAFTA is finally implemented.

Transnational communities were originally created by the intervention of the United States through direct recruitment and immigration policy. In great part as a result of this, undocumented migration from Mexico seems to be a permanent feature of U.S. - Mexican relations. Restrictionists, like the proponents of Proposition 187, prefer to ignore history. Like international trade, labor mobility across borders should be included in negotiations between Mexico and the United States.

NOTES

- ¹ The Commission concentrated its efforts in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Over a period of three years, the Commission held nine international consultations as well as several research workshops and hearings in the United States. In addition, the Commission funded 79 research papers that were written by researchers from different countries.
- ² While I was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for U.S. - Mexican Studies of the University of California, San Diego, I participated in a research project directed by Professor Wayne Cornelius. As a result, I wrote the paper: "Migratory tradition, the Simpson-Rodino Law and economic crisis in a Mexican region," for the Commission for the Study of International Migration and Economic Development in 1989. Many of the ideas contained in this article were originally developed in that paper.
- ³ *El Norte* (The North) is the popular term used by people in sending communities to refer to the United States.
- ⁴ Information provided by Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, Lagos de Moreno. 1988.
- ⁵ The Los Altos de Jalisco region comprises the following municipalities: Acatic, Arandas, Encarnación de Díaz, Jalostotitlán, Jesus Maria, Lagos de Moreno, Mexxicacán, Ojuelos de Jalisco, San Diego de Alejandría, San Julian, San Juan de los Lagos, San Miguel el Alto, Tepatitlán de Morelos, Teocaltiche, Unión de San Antonio, Valle de Guadalupe, Villa Obregón, Villa Hidalgo, and Yahualica de González Gallo.

REFERENCES

- Alarcón, Rafael. 1988. El proceso de Norteñización: Impacto de la migración internacional en Chavinda, Michoacán. In *Movimientos de población en el Occidente de México*. Edited by Thomas Calvo and Gustavo Lopez. Zamora, México: El Colegio de Michoacán-Centre D'Études Mexicaines et Centraméricaines.
- . 1992. Norteñización. Self-perpetuating migration from a Mexican town. In *U.S.-Mexico relations. Labor market interdependence*. Edited by Jorge Bustamante, Clark Reynolds, and Raúl Hinojosa. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 1994. *Labor migration from Mexico and free trade: Lessons from a transnational community*. Chicano/Latino Policy Project Working Paper 1(1). Berkeley, CA: Chicano/Latino Policy Project, University of California, Berkeley.
- Alba, Carlos. 1986. La industrialización en Jalisco: Evolución y perspectivas. In *Cambio regional, mercado de trabajo y vida obrera en Jalisco*. Edited by Guillermo De la Peña and Agustín Escobar. Guadalajara, México: El Colegio de Jalisco.
- Barkin, David, and Gustavo Lopez. 1991. Creación de empleos en centros conocidos de emigración: Producción interna y agricultura de temporal. In *Memoria del seminario sobre la migración internacional y el desarrollo económico en México*. México: Consejo Nacional de Población-Gobierno del Estado de Zacatecas.
- Bean, Frank, Barry Edmonston, and Jeffrey Passel, eds. 1990. *Undocumented migration to the United States: IRCA and the experience of the 1980s*. Lanham, MD; London, UK: RAND Corporation and Urban Institute.
- Bilateral Commission on the Future of United States-Mexican Relations. 1989. *The challenge of interdependence: Mexico and the United States*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Calva, José Luis. 1991. *Probables efectos de un tratado de libre comercio en el campo mexicano*. Mexico: Distribuciones Fontamara, S.A.
- Castañeda, Jorge, and Rafael Alarcón. 1991. Workers are a commodity, too. *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April.
- Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies Household Survey. 1988. La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.
- Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development. 1990. *Unauthorized migration: An economic development response*.
- Cornelius, Wayne. 1976. Outmigration from rural Mexican communities. In *The dynamics of migration: International migration*. Occasional Monograph Series 5, vol II. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- . 1990a. Labor migration to the United States: Development outcomes and alternatives in Mexican sending communities. Working Paper 38. Washington, D.C.: Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development.

Transnational Communities, Alarcón

- . 1990b. Impacts of the 1986 immigration law on emigration from rural Mexican sending communities. In *Undocumented migration to the United States: IRCA and the experience of the 1980s*. Edited by Frank D. Bean, Barry Edmonston, and Jeffrey S. Passel. Lanham, MD; London, UK: RAND Corporation and Urban Institute.
- Cornelius, Wayne, and Philip Martin. 1993. The uncertain connection: Free trade and rural Mexican migration to the United States. *International Migration Review* 27(3): 484-512.
- Cross, Harry, and James Sandos. 1981. *Across the border: Rural development in Mexico and recent migration to the United States*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley.
- Donato, Katharine, Jorge Durand, and Douglas Massey. 1992. Stemming the tide? Assessing the deterrent effects of the Immigration Reform and Control Act. *Demography* 29: 139-58.
- Durand, Jorge. Circuitos migratorios. In *Movimientos de población en el Occidente de México*. Edited by Thomas Calvo and Gustavo Lopez. Zamora, México: El Colegio de Michoacán-Centre D'Études Mexicaines et Centraméricaines.
- Fonseca, Omar, and Lilia Moreno. 1984. *Jaripo: Pueblo de migrantes*. Jiquilpan, México: Centro de Estudios de la Revolución Lázaro Cárdenas.
- General Census of Population and Housing. 1960. Aguascalientes, Ags.: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática.
- General Census of Population and Housing. 1990. Aguascalientes, Ags.: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática.
- Goldring, Luin. 1992. Blurring borders: Community and social transformation in Mexico-U.S. transnational migration. Paper presented at the Conference on New Perspectives on Mexico-U.S. Migration, 23-24 October, at the University of Chicago.
- Hinojosa-Ojeda, Raúl, and Sherman Robinson. 1992. Labor issues in a North American Free Trade Area. In *Assessing the impact: North American Free Trade*. Edited by Nora Lustig, Barry Bosworth, and Robert Lawrence. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute.
- Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural Maya. 1985. Producción de leche en una región especializada: Las unidades lecheras en Los Altos de Jalisco. Mexico City: Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural Maya. Mimeographed.
- López, Gustavo. 1986. *La casa dividida: Un estudio de caso sobre la migración a los Estados Unidos en un pueblo michoacano*. Zamora, México: El Colegio de Michoacán.
- Martin, Philip. 1991. Labor migration: Theory and reality. In *The unsettled relationship: Labor migration and economic development*. Edited by Demetrios Papademetriou and Phillip Martin. New York City, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Massey, Douglas. 1988. Economic development and international migration in comparative perspective. *Population and Development Review* 14(3).

Berkeley Planning Journal

- Massey, Douglas, Rafael Alarcón, Jorge Durand, and Humberto González. 1987. *Return to Aztlán: The social process of international migration from Western Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mines, Richard. 1981. *Developing a community tradition of migration: A field study in rural Zacatecas, Mexico and California settlement areas*. Monographs in U.S.-Mexican Studies 3. La Jolla, CA: Program in United States-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.
- Orozco, Juan Luis. 1992. *¿El negocio de los Ilegales, ganancias para quién?* Guadalajara, México: Editorial Agata-Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente.
- Reichert, Joshua. 1981. The migrant syndrome: Seasonal U.S. wage labor and rural development in Central Mexico. *Human Organization* 40.
- Rouse, Roger. 1988. Mexicano, chicano, pocho. La migración mexicana y el espacio social del postmodernismo. *Uno mas Uno*, 31 December. México City.
- . 1992. Making sense of settlement: Class transformation, cultural struggle, and transnationalism among Mexican migrants in the United States. In *Towards a transnational perspective on migration. Race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered*. Edited by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 645.
- Smith, Robert. 1994. *Los ausentes siempre presentes: The imagining, making and politics of a transnational community between New York and Ticuani, Puebla*. Ph.D. Dissertation in Political Science. Columbia University.
- Taylor, Paul. 1933. *A Spanish-Mexican peasant community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.