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Mapping Mexican Migrant Civil Society [1]

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comments welcome

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Mexican Migrant Civic and Political Participation
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Summary:

This paper "maps" the diverse patterns of Mexican migrant social, civic and political participation in the US, reviews current research and poses analytical questions informed by a binational perspective. While some migrants are more engaged with organizations focused on the US, others participate more in groups that are concerned with Mexico. At the same time, some Mexican migrants are working to become full members of both US and Mexican society, constructing practices of "*civic binationality*" that have a great deal to teach us about new forms of immigrant integration into US society. These different forms of participation are analyzed through the conceptual lens of "migrant civil society," which includes four migrant-led arenas: membership organizations, NGOs, communications media and autonomous public spheres. This focus could help to understand changing patterns of naturalization among Mexican permament residents, and can help to inform balanced cross-sectoral coalition-building strategies. More generally, a binational approach can help to understand migrants' distinctive perspectives, priorities and organizing repertoires -- in other words, "where they are coming from."

Resumen:

Esta ponencia "elabora un trazo" de los diversos caminos de participación civica, social y política entre los migrantes mexicanos en los EEUU, revisa la literatura actual, y plantea preguntas analíticas informadas por una perspectiva binacional. Mientras algunos migrantes colaboran más con organizaciones que se enfocan en los EEUU, otros participan más en grupos que se enfocan en México. Al mismo tiempo, algunos migrantes están trabajando para ser miembros plenos de ambas sociedades nacionales, forjando prácticas de "binacionalidad cívica" que tienen mucho que enseñarnos respecto a nuevas formas de integración a la sociedad estadounidense. Estas diferentes formas de participación son analizadas en el marco de la "sociedad civil migrante," un concepto que abarca cuatro ámbitos conducidos por migrantes: organizaciones de base, organismos civiles, medios de comunicación y espacios públicos autónomos. Esta perspectiva podría ayudarnos a entender los cambios en las tendencias hacia la ciudadanización entre residentes permanentes mexicanos, y puede servir para informar estrategias equilibradas para fomentar coaliciones multi-sectoriales. En términos más generales, un enfoque binacional nos ayuda a entender las perspectivas, prioridades y estilos de organización propias de los migrantes – en otras palabras "desde donde vienen."

* Nota: para una versión previa de esta ponencia entera en español, véase "Repensar lo rural ante la globalización: La sociedad civil migrante," Conferencia Magistral, Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Rurales, Quinto Congreso, Oaxaca, mayo, 2005, en www.wilsoncenter.org/migrantparticipation

Recognizing migrant civil society

The more than 10 million Mexicans who live and work in the US represent approximately one in eight adults who were born in Mexico (Suro, 2005b: 14). They also represent 3.6% of the US population. While the growing *numbers* of Mexicans in the US are widely recognized, the presence of Mexican *society* in the US has not been widely acknowledged. Though organized migrants are now more visible than, say, a decade ago, the full breadth and depth of migrant collective action is still not well understood. This paper "maps" the diverse patterns of Mexican migrant social, civic and political participation in the US, reviews current research and proposes conceptual questions informed by a binational perspective.

Many tens of thousands of Mexican migrants work together with their *paisanos* to promote "philanthropy from below," funding hundreds of community development initiatives in their hometowns. Some are now signing up to exercise their newly-won right to cast absentee ballots in Mexico's 2006 presidential election. Others are more engaged with their US communities - as organized workers, parents, members of religious congregations and naturalized voters. In addition, some Mexican migrants are working to become full members of *both* US and Mexican societies at the same time, constructing practices of "*civic binationality*" that have a great deal to teach us about new forms of immigrant integration into the US.

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

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

In contrast, Mexico-based lenses see a broad panorama of cross-border migrant collective action, as migrants organize as Mexicans -- yet they have difficulty accounting for patterns of continuity and change in terms of migrants' integration into US society.

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

Powerful discursive frames can make it difficult to see the ways in which migrants are engaging in collective action. Consider some of the conventional terminology. For example, the term "flows" is quite common, often used in the context of the powerful economic forces that pull and push people around. US critics of migrants go further, speaking of a "brown tide" (Santa Ana, 2002). Then there is the classic term, "wave" of migration, which is not far from "floods." One does not have to use the tools of academic discourse analysis to observe that all of these terms refer to liquids, whose flows are difficult to stop, pulled by higher powers such as gravity. Sometimes flows come together, sometimes they disperse. They always find their niches, through capillary action. Yet this discourse obscures a great deal. First, migration is not only a structural process, it also responds to specific public policy decisions. [2] Second, the conventional discourse leaves out the role of *agency*: migrants' capacity to make choices, to act, and sometimes to act collectively. Migrants are not only acted upon, they are also actors.

Increasingly, to account for both migrant collective action and patterns of continued engagement with their home countries, scholars have worked with the concept of "transnational communities" Transnational communities are groups of migrants whose daily lives, work, and social relationships extend across national borders. [3] This idea helps to reveal relationships that are not visible when migrants are seen only through the lens of their engagements in the US, yet the concept also risks tilting too far in the other direction, leaving out migrants' engagements in the US.

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[2] This is not to deny the power of structural forces. Note the dramatic correlation between the rate of annual Mexican migration to the US with the US employment rates, documented most recently by Passel and Suro (2005: 10). However, the push factors on the Mexican side are closely related to government policies that directly impact employment, most notably in agriculture. The percentage of the population economically active in agriculture fell from 24% in 1991 to only 15% in early 2005, according to the Labor Ministry's National Employment Survey (Fox, 2005c). NAFTA, together with changing government public investment strategies, appears to have accelerated and deepened long-term structural changes that undermined family farming, especially in the rain-fed sector. For an analysis of the Mexican policy decisions in the early 1990s that encouraged increased out-migration later in the 1990s, see Fox (1994). See also Cornelius (2002).

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

To get conceptual leverage on Mexican migrant collection action in the US, this paper proposes to explore the idea of *"migrant civil society."* Transnational communities provide a social foundation for, but are not the same as, an emerging migrant civil society, which also involves the construction of public spaces and representative social and civic organizations. Just as only *some* migrants are members of transnational communities, only *some* transnational communities become the building blocks for representative social and civic organizations of migrants themselves. This idea is the point of departure for a *comparative approach* to analyzing Mexican migrants in the US, which involves recognizing the diverse and sometimes overlapping patterns of migrant collective action in the US.

Most often, in migration studies comparative analysis refers to one specific approach, the comparison of different national origin groups. This approach, most often used in survey research, has generated rich findings. [4] Yet the Mexican migrant population in the US is so large, and so diverse, that national-origin averages can mask key variables, such as ethnicity, region of origin, or region of settlement. For example, migrants from different Mexican states organize hometown associations at widely varying rates. Mexicans from the same states organize at different rates in different regions of the US. Among indigenous Mexican migrants, members of some ethnic groups organize much more than others, in some regions more than others. Sectoral differences may also matter, insofar as we have not yet compared participation trends across hometown associations, worker organizations, neighborhood associations or religious communities. In the literature on naturalization and voting patterns of new citizens, it turns out that national samples can hide significant regional differences. Migrants in California have followed a much more highly politicized path than those in Texas and Florida, in terms of their rates of naturalization and voting (Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura, 2001). These differences only become visible once one takes a comparative approach – across regions, sectors and patterns of participation.

One of the main puzzles to think about here is whether the models of civic and social engagement that we work with, the lenses that we use to see how and why people engage in collective action, see engagement "back home" as somehow "instead of" engagement in the host society, or possibly "in addition to." Is the relationship between these two kinds of participation "win-lose" or "win-win?" Some see the answer as culturally predetermined, but this review of the research available finds no predetermined response. We can find both trends at the same time in the same communities. We can also see change over time. In other words, the relative mix of win-lose and win-win is not fixed, it's subject to change – as in the case of the recent growth in the rate at which Mexican legal residents become US citizens, to be discussed below. This suggests that strategy and action matter. If this proposition holds up, then one could go further and suggest that strategies for encouraging civic participation "here" that *take into account* engagement "there" can increase the degree to which each kind of involvement can

[4] See, among other recent studies, DeSipio, et al (2003), DeSipio (2004) and Guarnizo, Portes and Heller (2004).

bolster the other. In this view, fully inclusionary strategies depend on mutual understanding and partnership between US social and civic organizations and those migrants who are becoming themselves collective actors.

What is *migrant civil society*?

What are some of the implications of putting together three words: "migrant civil society?" Civil society doesn't have to be a fuzzy theoretical term. Simply put, migrant civil society refers to *migrant-led membership organizations and public institutions*. Specifically, this includes four very tangible arenas of collective action. Each arena is constituted by actors, while each set of actors also constitutes an arena.

1) **Migrant-led membership organizations–** Membership organizations composed primarily of migrants can range from hometown associations (HTAs) to worker organizations and religious congregations. The Mexican consulates have registered well over 600 such clubs (Rivera-Salgado, Bada and Escala Rabadán, 2005) and other estimates exceed 2000 (Orozco with LaPointe, 2003: 31). Each has a core membership of perhaps an average of two dozen families, some with hundreds more. They are primarily concentrated in metropolitan areas. Many HTA members are relatively established, and much of their leadership has relative economic stability and are either legal residents or US citizens. HTAs have in turn federated into associations that bring people from one state in Mexico together in another state in the US, as in the flagship case of the numerous Zacatecas Federations.

It is difficult to measure how many migrants participate with any precision, especially given the wide variation in the size and activities of each HTA and federation. In addition, the official consular registries include some clubs that exist only on paper, while some active associations choose not to register. A Sacramento Bee reporter recently estimated that Mexican HTAs have an active membership of 250,000-500,000 (Hecht, 2005). An unusually large-scale survey of relatively recent Mexican migrants found that 14% of respondents belonged to some kind of hometown association (Suro, 2005: 8). Whether this is considered a large or a small percentage depends on one's comparative frame of reference.

HTAs have a long history, with the first Zacatecan club in California dating back to 1962 (Moctezuma, 2005). But their numbers and membership boomed in the past fifteen years, as the result of several converging factors. Within the US, the massive regularization of undocumented workers that followed the 1986 immigration reform facilitated both economic improvement and increased cross-border freedom of movement for millions of migrants. On the Mexican side, the government deployed the convening power of its extensive consular apparatus, bringing together people from the same communities of origin and offering community development matching funds to encourage collective social remittances, through the 3x1 program. Though this policy began as a response to pressures from organized Zacatecan migrants, it also served as a powerful inducement for other migrants to come together in formal organizations for the first time. After all, many transnational social and civic relationships unfold outside of

the clubs and federations (Fitzgerald, 2000). In addition, the Mexican state changed the tone of its relationship with the diaspora by formally permitting dual nationality for the first time (Castañeda, 2003, 2006). While many clubs emerged from below, many of the state level federations were formed through engagement with the Mexican state (Goldring, 2002). [5]

At least until recently, many Mexican migrant organizations *were* disengaged from US civil society. For example, back in 1994, Mexican hometown associations participated little in the broad campaign against California's notorious anti-immigrant Proposition 187 (Zabin and Escala Rabadán, 1998). In contrast, a decade later, when the main state level immigrant rights advocacy campaign involved the right to drivers licenses for the undocumented, hometown association members were actively involved, working the phone banks at the headquarters of Los Angeles' trade union movement. [6] The leadership of the Southern California Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations has now joined the fray of state politics (Rivera-Salgado, Bada and Escala-Rabadán, 2005). Some Mexican federations have also joined the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, especially in the Midwest. [7] These kinds of alliances would have been hard to imagine a decade ago. [8]

Mainstream US Latino politicians and public interest groups are also reaching out to Mexican HTAs like never before. [9] Here it is worth quoting a recent Sacramento Bee account in detail:

> "They are a force to be reckoned with if they make up their minds to engage themselves politically in the United States," said state Sen. Martha Escutia, D-

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

[6] On the role of Los Angeles trade unions as channels for political participation by non-citizens, see Varsanyi (2004, 2005). On the drivers license campaign in California, see Seif (2003), and more generally, see Ansley (2005) and Waslin (2002).

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

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

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

> Whittier, leader of the California Latino Legislative Caucus. "We as policymakers need to make sure they become engaged civically in this state"….
>
> "Our goal has been to help our communities in Mexico. Now it is time to help our communities here," said Salvador Garcia, the owner of a Los Angeles-area demolition company who serves as president of the Consejo [of Mexican HTA federations] as well as the hometown Federación de Jalisco.
>
> Recently, Garcia was chairman of a meeting - conducted in Spanish - at Sebastian Dominguez's auto body shop with leaders representing collective hometown associations from eight Mexican states. They talked about raising money to pay for college scholarships for immigrant children and for soccer fields in Spanish-speaking communities in Los Angeles.
>
> A few weeks ago, Mexican politicians from the states of Michoacan and Oaxaca stopped by the auto body shop for the hometown associations' support in encouraging Los Angeles residents to vote in the 2006 Mexican presidential election.
>
> On this night, the featured visitor was Ann Marie Tallman, national president and general counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund.
>
> Tallman proposed a partnership, offering the Consejo presidents use of office space at the legal defense and education fund's Los Angeles headquarters, business leadership classes and media training. She pledged to work with the hometown groups on legal and policy issues affecting immigrant communities.
>
> "We really need to reconnect with our roots," Tallman said later. "They (hometown associations) are the eyes and ears of the community. This is a bona fide movement. ... Shame on us for not noticing before." (Hecht, 2005)

This reflects a major shift, especially when contrasted with the once widely-held view among Latino civil rights advocates that home country engagements were potentially in conflict with encouraging immigrant participation in the US. [10]

While HTAs are one of the main forms of expression of Mexican migrant civil society, they represent one among various forms of expression of Mexican migrant civil society. The broad category of migrant membership organizations also includes worker, religious, community-based and indigenous organizations. Some include migrants of diverse nationalities, while others are primarily or exclusively Mexican – as in the case of a growing number of trade union locals (discussed further below). Consider, for example, the notable case of Líderes Campesinas, a membership organization of women farmworkers in California, mainly from migrant families. Founded in 1992, Líderes organizes *mexicanas* to create and occupy public spaces in small rural towns. They

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

literally take the streets, marching to challenge domestic violence and impunity, showing that the barrier between public and private can be challenged. Like many other US grassroots organizations with a primarily Mexican migrant membership, Líderes Campesinas is led by a bilingual, US-born daughter whose parents participated in the United Farm Workers movement of the 1960s and 1970s.[11]

2) **Migrant-led communications media** – They can range from local and binational newspapers to radio programs, independent video and now numerous internet discussion for a oriented to hometowns or regions. [12] For example, the Oaxacan community in Los Angeles is now sufficiently large and established to support *two* serious newspapers, El Oaxaqueño and Impulso de Oaxaca. The first publishes more than 30,000 copies biweekly and circulates both in California and Oaxaca. In additional to regional community service-oriented publications, the broader Mexican migrant voting rights campaign now has its own binational monthly magazine based in Chicago, MX Sin Fronteras. The migrant-run Spanish language public radio network, Radio Bilingüe, is broadcast on approximately 50 stations in the US and 20 more in Mexico.[13] In addition, for many years Radio Bilingüe broadcast the only regular programming in indigenous Mexican languages. For many migrant farmworker communities, Radio Bilingüe is their principal news source, and internal evaluations have found that it really reaches them.

Beyond the nonprofit media is the huge world of commercial Spanish language media. Though for-profit enterprises fall outside of most definitions of civil society, these media nevertheless play key civic roles, not only informing their publics, but also encouraging public service. Spanish language media have actively encouraged both US citizenship and voter turnout (Rodríguez, 1999, 2005). Such practices contrast sharply with critics' assumptions that the persistence of Spanish is associated with an unwillingness to join US civil society (e.g., Huntington, 2004). At the same time, migrant-oriented media is not necessarily the same as migrant-owned, so Spanish language media institutions therefore only overlap partially with a strict definition of migrant civil society. In many cases, however, key media decision-makers, such as editors and reporters, are most often migrants. This is increasingly the case in English language mass media as well, at least in California, where fully bilingual professionals have made important steps up the media ladder. Here, as with the media more generally, there are gray areas where civil society and the corporate sector overlap. The concept of migrant civil society includes both institutions and individuals. For example, the civic role of Spanish language media personalities has yet to be fully documented, but appears to be quite significant. [14]

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[11] See biography of Mily Treviño Sauceda, 2004 winner of the Leadership in a Changing World award. See http://leadershipforchange.org/awardees/awardee.php3?ID=218.

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

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

[14] Consider an effervescent immigrant rights street march in Chicago, led by Spanish language radio host and inspired by a local Mexican priest's call in to denounce the claims of the "Minutemen". The priest later

3) **Migrant-led NGOs** –While many non-governmental organizations, or nonprofits, *serve* migrant communities, in this approach only those that are *migrant-led* would be considered part of migrant civil society. Here one must keep in mind the clear distinction between NGOs and membership organizations – a distinction that is side-stepped by the fuzzy US term "community-based organization." [15] In some cases migrant membership organizations have spun off their own NGOs, as in the case of the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB), which has set up its own NGOs in California and in Oaxaca, to provide support services and to invest in community development and public education projects. [16] In addition, many migrants in NGOs, both as individuals and as organizations, joined with membership organizations to lobby the Mexican government for voting rights abroad (Rodríguez Oceguera, 2005).

To continue recognizing gray areas of overlap, this category within migrant civil society can also include those migrants who, *as individuals*, have gained positions of leadership within established US nonprofits, including foundations. They are strategically located to make major contributions to the capacity-building of other migrant civil society institutions. [17]

4) **Autonomous migrant-led public spaces** – This term refers to large public gatherings where migrants can come together to interact and to express themselves with relative freedom and autonomy. Here culture, religion, sports and recreation are key. For example, in California, indigenous Oaxacan migrants now organize huge annual music, dance and food festivals known as Guelaguetzas. They are the embodiment of the imagined cultural and civic space known as "*Oaxacalifornia*." [18] Specifically Oaxacan migrant civil society in California is now sufficiently dense that migrants put on five *different* Guelaguetza festivals each year. [19] They are held in parks, high school

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commented that "una cosa muy triste fue que los clubes de oriundos de las federaciones no quisieron participar ya que la manifestación sería en el sur y eso no causaría ningún impacto y porque la marcha era organizada por dos personajes de la radio…." (Martínez and Piña, 2005: 8). The turnout was unprecedented, with estimates ranging from 30,000 to 50,000 (Raûl Ross, personal communication, Oct 27, 2005).

[15] In Spanish, the often preferred term for NGO translates into English as "civil organizations."

[16] See www.fiob.org, Domínguez Santos (2004), Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004) and Ramírez Romero (2004).

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

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

[19] Two are held in Los Angeles, including the longest-running California Guelaguetza, led by the Oaxacan Regional Organization, as well as the largest one, organized by the Oaxacan Federation. The Coalition of Oaxacan and Indigenous Communities in northern San Diego County holds theirs at California State University, San Marcos. Two different branches of the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations hold

auditoriums, college campuses, and the largest is held in the LA Sports Arena – the former home of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team. In each one, hundreds volunteer their time so that thousands can come together, so that parents can share their culture with their children. Indeed, probably few had had the opportunity to see such a festival when they were living in Oaxaca. With so much activity, California's multi-generational Oaxacan migrant dance groups are in high demand, and they represent yet another network of membership organizations. [20] Each of the five annual festivals reveals an x-ray of the social networks and organizational styles of different strands of the web of Oaxacan civil society in California. For example, some work with local Latino politicians and organizations, others collaborate with the PRI-controlled Oaxacan state government, while others keep their distance.

Do organized Mexican migrants represent the US branch of Mexican society, or the Mexican branch of US society?

Having reviewed these four different arenas of migrant civil society, how might we think about their relationships with *US* civil society? Is migrant civil society the *US branch of Mexico's civil society*? Or is it the *Mexican branch of US civil society*? The concept of migrant civil society proposed here would include both, because it is defined by the migrants themselves rather than the national arena within which they are active. The hometown associations would be the clearest example of a branch of Mexican civil society that is *in*, but not necessarily *of* the US. They have created a public sphere that is clearly Mexican, not only because of its participants' national origin, but also because of its culture, organizational style, symbolic references and principal counterparts. In contrast, for examples of Mexican branches of *US* civil society, we could look at the trade union locals that have become majority-migrant and migrant-led, as in the case of several major agro-industrial, service and construction unions in California, or the probably hundreds of religious congregations that have become Mexican spaces within US churches. [21]

To pursue this conceptual question, one way to think about this distinction between migrant civil society *in* the US versus *of* the US, is to think about two words that

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Guelaguetza festivals as well, one in the central valley in Fresno, the other on the Ventura County coast in Santa Maria.

[20] See Cruz Manjarrez (2001).

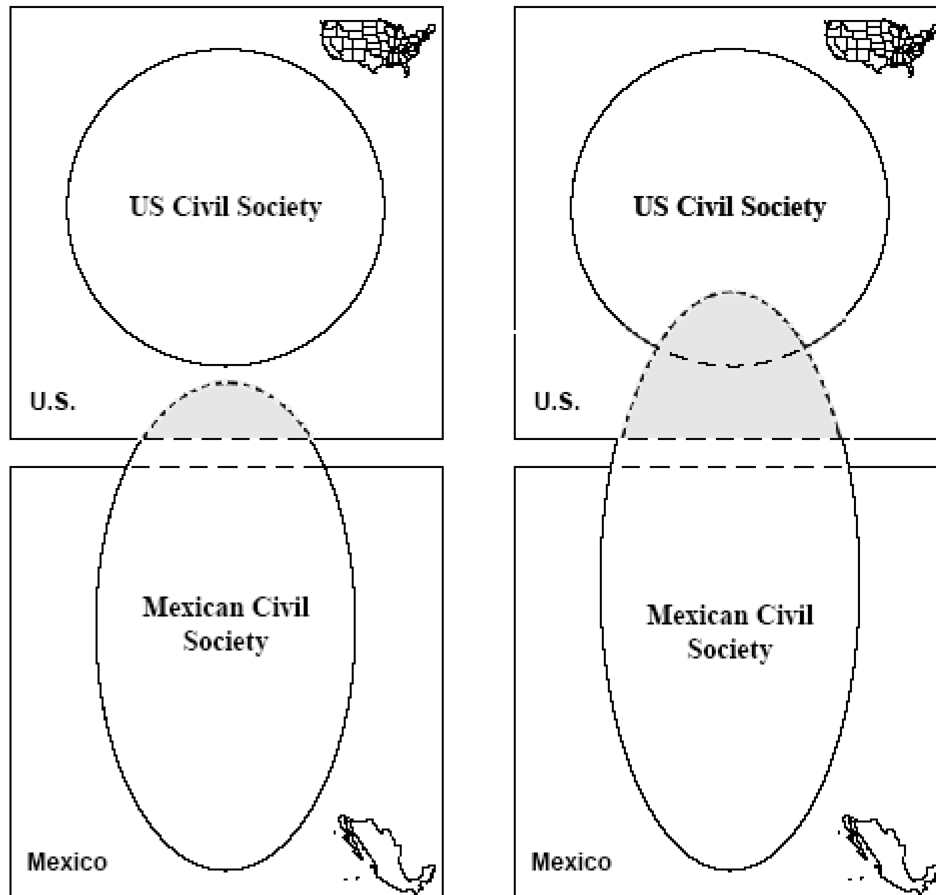
[21] More research is needed to determine the degree of specifically Mexican presence within the US Catholic church with greater precision, including comparison across regions, dioceses and religious orders. See Rivera Sánchez (2005). Industrial Areas Foundation-related community organizing campaigns are well known for their close partnerships with churches, as well as their deep roots in Mexican-American communities, though it is difficult to tell from the available research how IAF campaigns relate to Mexican migrants (e.g., Warren, 2001). At least one major campaign involving a primarily Mexican and Guatemalan migrant base among meatpacking workers in Omaha, was made possible by intense collaboration between IAF organizers, trade unions and local churches (Bacon, 2002, Fine, 2006). Curiously, Omaha has also been targeted by the federal government for especially intense immigration law enforcement (Bacon, 2005).

are usually treated as synonyms: *cross-border* and *binational*. Here "cross-border" refers to Mexican society broadly defined, located both inside and outside the physical borders of the homeland. [22] "Binational," in contrast, would refer to being *of* both nations, an overlapping sphere or space of convergence, in which civil society actors are simultaneously part of both Mexican and US civil societies. In both cases the membership of the organizations may be similar, but in the first case their goals, strategies and coalition partners are focused exclusively on Mexico, while the second arena would also include US-oriented goals, strategies and coalition partners.

The two diagrams that follow are intended to illustrate the conceptual distinction at the most general level, rather than to describe any specific organization or relationship. The two diagrams might reflect a process of change over time, given the important shift in hometown federation goals towards a binational agenda over the past decade (Rivera-Salgado, Bada and Escala-Rabadán, 2005)

[22] This distinction is compatible with Fitzgerald's distinction between "long-distance nationalism" and "dual nationalism" (2004b), as well as his related point about "extraterritorial citizenship" (2000). For further discussion of cross-border civil society networks, in terms of social sectors that include but are not limited to migrants, see Brooks and Fox (2002) and Fox (2002).

Mexican Civil Society in the U.S.: Crossborder and Binational



Crossborder Mexican Migrant Civil Society

Binational Mexican Migrant Civil Society

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

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

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

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

The proposition here is that once the social actors are in action, they can campaign on various fronts at the same time. In this view, once having achieved the unifying experience, and the dignity and recognition associated with the right to vote, migrants could mobilize to defend their rights vis-à-vis the US nation-state. Ross' vision of Mexico as a "new nation without borders" is not only cross-border, but binational as well. If "cross-border" refers to "a people divided by a border," as New York's Tepeyac Association put it, then "binational" refers to engaging with both societies at the same time. In this sense, a migrant civil society that is engaged across borders may or may not be engaged binationally.

When organized migrants go public – as immigrants, as workers and as Mexicans

A key part of forging civil society involves migrants "coming out" as public, collective actors, representing themselves rather than relying on advocates. To illustrate this process, here follows a brief comparison of two different ways in which migrants have entered the US public sphere. In the first one, organized migrants came together through the 2003 cross-country Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride. This initiative was led in part by the broadest multi-racial set of US civil society organizations -- the trade union movement. This convergence was made possible, in turn, by the growing voice and clout of Latino leaders within the mainstream labor movement – most notably in California. [23]

[23] On US worker organizations and Mexican migrants, see Bacon (2004, 2005), Delgado (1994), Fine (2005, 2006), Fitzgerald (2004a), Gordon (2005), Johnston (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005), Mellor, Kath and

By highlighting the historic legacy of the Freedom Rides, migrants of many nationalities explicitly reached out to diverse US constituencies by framing immigrant rights under the historical mantle of the African-American civil rights movement. Migrant organizations, including California′s Oaxacan Federation, were officially represented on the ride. [24] In several areas of recent Mexican settlement in the US, such as Nashville, the Freedom Ride permitted migrant organizations to become public actors for the first time. [25] Old habits die hard, though, and some Mexican migrant bus riders were frustrated with what they described as their trade union handlers′ ‶mania for control.″ This cross-cultural disconnect erupted at one point into a brief, behind-the-scenes ‶rebellion″ by migrant riders against the coordinators of one of the buses. [26] This small but revealing incident is emblematic of how much more work is needed to build and sustain cross-cultural coalitions. Overall, the Freedom Ride made unprecedented inroads in terms of projecting humanizing images of migrants in the mainstream media.

In contrast to what could be called the Freedom Ride’s "integration strategy," Mexican migrant-led organizations also construct and deploy their *own* collective identities as their primary basis for claiming a space in the public sphere. For example, not long after the Freedom Ride, the *Asociación Tepeyac* -- a New York-based, Mexican faith-based membership organization – led its own mass traveling collective action for immigrant rights. Tepeyac′s second annual relay Torch Run traveled through several of Mexico′s ‶sending″ regions and arrived in Saint Patrick′s Cathedral in New York City on December 12 (‶*Antorcha Guadalupana Mex-NY*″). Along the way, the runners, called ‶*Mensajeros por la Dignidad de un Pueblo Dividido por la Frontera*″ [Messengers for the Dignity of a People Divided by the Border] prayed to the Virgin for the right to

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Bulger (2003), Milkman (2000, 2005), Ruiz Cameron (2000) and Waldinger et al (1998). Most of the literature on Mexican workers in the US, both scholarly and practitioner-oriented, frames them in terms of the umbrella concept of Latino, reflecting the political-cultural reality of the US and the legacy of the civil rights movement. However, by downplaying the relevance of national origin, this practice makes it difficult to understand the specific experiences, attitudes and organizational repertoires that migrant workers bring with them, as well as the possible binational dimensions of their decisions to engage in collective action. So far there is little in the literature on Mexican workers in the US to compare with Fink’s richly nuanced analysis of a primarily Guatemalan immigrant worker organizing campaign (2003). Fitzgerald is a notable exception (2004a).

[24] The two returning Oaxacan migrant federation representatives on the ride were honored with a photo on the front page of the Los Angeles-based El Oaxaqueno newspaper (Oct. 18, 2003, 4(116). On the importance of “framing” for social movements and collective identity formation, see various perspectives in Morris and McClurg Mueller (1992), among others.

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

[26] They were reportedly turned off by some union staffers′ styles, their lack of Spanish, and their efforts to prohibit Mexican flags while encouraging the display of US flags. See Ehrenreich (2004) and Jamison (2005) for detailed accounts of the Ride.

permanent legal residency. [27] Their repertoire resonates widely, though Mexicans in New York also form hometown associations and worker organizations.

The Tepeyac Association pursues a distinctive strategy for forging collective identity, based around the combined ethno-national and spiritual symbolism of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, together with an explicit effort to build a shared collective identity as undocumented workers. Founded by Jesuits, their New York City social base is organized in 40 different neighborhood *Comités Guadalupanos*. This is very different from the hometown-based approach to migrant organizing. Tepeyac's original US partner was the New York Diocese of the Catholic Church, whose leadership took the initiative that led Tepeyac to form in the first place, by reaching out to Mexican church counterparts. [28]

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

As one considers the idea of migrant civil society, then, migrants are represented through two main pathways. The first is the most straightforward: organizations that are led by and made up of migrants themselves. The second is less straightforward because the boundaries are more blurred, and takes the form of US civil society organizations that have effectively been *transformed* by migrant participation. This would describe many Catholic parishes, trade union locals, worker centers and parent teacher associations. Notably, an estimated 170 of Chicago′s innovative elected School Councils are primarily Mexican -- they allow non-citizen voting (IME, 2005).

Mexican workers are an increasingly important part of the trade union movement in those regions and sectors where unions are dynamics and organizing new members. By 2004, Mexican-born workers represented 2.3% of all union members, over 360,000, with unionization rates much higher for long-term residents (Milkman, 2005: 5). In regions of high union density, Mexican migrants are well-represented in the membership of unions that represent primarily low-wage workers, like UNITE – HERE (garments, textiles, hotels and restaurants), SEIU (services, including health care workers and the legendary Justice for Janitors campaign), UFCW (food processing) and the Teamsters (agro-

[27] See www.tepeyac.org.

[28] See Galvez (2004), Rivera-Sánchez (2004a, 2004b) and Solís (2001, 2002). More research is necessary to document the full picture of cross-border collaboration between Mexican and US churches. For a historical perspective, see Fitzgerald (2005). On religion and Latino migrant political participation more generally, see Jones-Correa and Leal (2001).

industry). [29] Further research would be needed to map Mexican workers' presence across sectors and regions with precision. Additional research would be needed to determine how many of those union locals are migrant-led, and therefore part of migrant civil society, as defined here. [30] Clearly, however, in terms of both sheer numbers and the impact on members' daily lives, unions are by far one of the most important institutions for the representation of Mexicans in the US.

Nevertheless, trade unions face many structural, institutional and cultural constraints in their efforts to organize immigrant workers. In response, a new set of institutions has emerged to try to fill the gap between traditional workplace-based unions and low wage immigrant workers. Worker centers include a wide range of grassroots organizing initiatives that operate separately from trade unions. Sometimes they coordinate, and sometimes they are in tension. A comprehensive recent survey found 137 worker centers across the US, 122 of which work closely with immigrant workers (Fine, 2005, 2006). Of the 40 studied in depth, about 17 have a significant Mexican constituency, and 13 of them are predominantly Mexican. [31] Central Americans have played a key leadership role in worker centers, in part because of their home country organizing experience before escaping the repression of the late 1970s and 1980s. Some worker centers operate more like NGOs, while others are membership-led. While some were originally founded by US activists a decade or two ago, it appears that leadership is tending to shift to migrants. The National Network of Day Laborers brings together 29 worker centers from 11 states, with half in New York and California. [32]

Worker centers that are migrant-led could be seen as institutions of migrant civil society. If the first approach to unpacking migrant civil society involves distinguishing between organizations in terms of whether they are US institutions transformed by migrants, or whether they are "migrant institutions," a second approach would involve unpacking the participation of migrants as *individuals*. The same people may participate in both arenas of migrant civil society, though sometimes separately, a form of "*doble militancia*." Note the case of Oregon's farmworker organization, the Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United (PCUN), whose membership combines Mexican-Americans, mestizo Mexican migrants and indigenous Mixteco migrants from Mexico's state of Oaxaca. While PCUN is very much a US organization, some of its Mexican members are also active in their own hometown associations. In the case of some of the

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[29] Sometimes community-based organizations, churches and trade unions work together to organize Latino immigrant workers, leading to a rare breakthrough in the case of Omaha Together One Community and the United Food and Commercial Workers. See the case study in Fine (2006), as well as Bacon (2002, 2005, 2006).

[30] See references in note 23.

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

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

Oaxacan HTAs, they have as many as a dozen branches spread across the US, each raising funds to support community development projects back home. [33]

PCUN is one of several regional farmworker organizations, each one with thousands of members. [34] Some have won tangible victories, which are especially notable in the overall national context of eroding union bargaining power. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a trade union based in the Midwest and North Carolina, recently won an unprecedented contract for 7000 Mexican H-2A workers. The FLOC has long pursued an unusually internationalist, cross-border worker organizing strategy, and recently opened its own office in Mexico. [35]

Florida's Coalition of Immokolee Workers recently won a major victory from Taco Bell, thanks to a combination of a mobilized base, highly effective media strategies and strong alliances with students, churches and unions. They combine direct action with legal strategies, which have even jailed labor contractors on charges of forced labor. The CIW led their own Truth Caravan, with 80 workers traveling to 15 cities by bus. Their rank and file is 50% Mexican (many from southern states), 30% Guatemalan and 10% Haitian. [36]

Majority-migrant worker organizations, like so many California trade union locals, UFW, PCUN, FLOC, CIW and day laborer organizations, are all are US organizations whose goals are to defend their members' rights, both as workers and as migrants in the US. [37] In some the vast majority of members are Mexican, while others include workers of multiple nationalities, as in the case of CIW. Few have binational or cross-border priorities, characteristics, with the exception of FLOC. Yet their members may have other affiliations, which may or may not be visible to outsiders, as in the cae of PCUN. Only further research could tell whether their members are also organized binationally, around their communities of origin.

While most civic binationality takes the form of *individuals* who do double duty, some migrant *organizations* are following what we could call "fully binational" paths as well. This means being engaged with social, civic or political agendas in both countries. The leading example in the US is the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations, formerly known as the Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front (FIOB). The FIOB is one of the very few mass membership organizations that include organized bases in *both* the US

[33] See www.pcun.org and Stephen (2001, 2004, 2006).

[34] Mexican-born workers represent 75% of the US farm labor force, up from 65% in 1994 (Department of Labor, 2005, Fox, 2005c).

[35] See www.floc.com.

[36] See www.ciw-online.org, Bowes (2001), Payne (2000) and Leary (2005). Leary points out that had CIW been a trade union, its secondary boycott against Taco Bell would have been illegal, and Taco Bell would have been less likely to make concession.

[37] Little field-based research is available on the relationships between the UFW and Mexican migrants over the past decade.

and in Mexico, with thousands of affiliated members organized in branches in California, Baja California and in their home state of Oaxaca. [38]

The FIOB is not a federation of hometown associations, though its members have a strong sense of shared homeland, in the sense of being *paisanos*. [39] Their sense of being *oaxaqueño* is a shared identity that comes out of a struggle against the intense racism they face in northern Mexico and in California, where they face ethnic slurs, like "*oaxaquito*," or "*oaxaco,*" from other Mexicans. In this context, *oaxaqueño* is not just a geographic reference, but rather a term of both respect and self-respect. In the process, regional identity becomes socially constructed as a pan-ethnic umbrella identity, since Oaxaca includes at least 16 distinct ethnic groups. In this context, the FIOB's recent decision to change its name is especially notable. The change in the wording from "Oaxacan" to "Organizations," while keeping the FIOB acronym, reflected the new realities of their mass base in California and Baja California, where indigenous migrants from states other than Oaxaca are increasingly involved (Cano, 2005). Among the new binational leadership commission elected in March, 2005, five Mexican languages are spoken (Mixtec, Zapotec, Mixe, Purépecha and Spanish).

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

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[38] Another migrant movement that is both cross-border and binational is the campaign of the ex-*bracero* workers for the restitution of government wage deductions. This campaign has been active both in Mexico and in the US and involves several organizations, including the Unión Binacional de Organizaciones de Trabajadores Ex Braceros and the Alianza Braceroproa. They took different positions on the Mexican government's recent commitment to make a flat compensation payment of just over $3,000 to each former bracero (Balboa, 2005). No research is available on this unusual movement.

[39] For Oaxacan migrants, the identity of *paisano* is situational. As the FIOB's Oaxaca coordinator put it:

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

Here we see how collective identity "scales up" from home community to shared region of origin in the course of the migration process (from Fox, 2005b).

Five puzzles for future research

Based on this review of the contours of Mexican migrant civil society landscape, here follow five of the many possible analytical puzzles that emerge. In some sectors, significant additional research is needed even to formulate the analytical questions – most notably in the areas of Mexican migrant civic-religious participation, women's participation, worker organization and community organization (as in the case of groups associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation). These are all areas where a binational perspective would shed light on "where Mexicans are coming from" in arenas that have so far been analyzed through exclusively US lenses.

1. How can we explain the uneven-ness within Mexican migrant civil society?

Mexicans in the US are much more organized in some regions than in others, notably in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and Chicago. In addition, migrants from some regions in Mexico are much more organized than others. Clearly migration history and a critical mass of population are key factors, but they are not sufficient to explain the degree and pathways of social and civic organization. For example, even though Mexicans from Zacatecas, Jalisco, Guanajuato and Michoacan all share a century of history of migration, why are some much more organized then others (at least in terms of their hometowns)? [40] Cross-regional comparative research on Mexican migrant associations is just beginning. [41]

Among those who are organized, why do some clubs and federations decide to engage in civic, and even political issues, while others limit their activities to strictly local issues and "philanthropy from below?" At least until recently, many clubs actively considered themselves as apolitical, or even "anti-political," partly in response to associations of politics with corruption (Fitzgerald, 2000, Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). Yet such attitudes appear to be politically contingent. The growing binational civic and political engagements of the California and Chicago HTA federations over the past decade suggest the importance of change over time. Within specific sectors, regional variation is also significant, as in the case of the higher rates of unionization of Mexican workers in California, compared with the rest of the US (Milkman, 2005). We also see different patterns within and between different indigenous migrant groups. For example, the Purépechas have a history of migration from Michoacan as long as the Mixtecos and Zapotecos from Oaxaca, yet they have not entered the migrant public sphere – at least not as Purépechas. [42] This is not for lack of ethnic politicization in their home communities, which are highly mobilized. In addition, among people of Mixteco origin, why do those

[40] On the history of Mexican migration patterns, see Massey and Durand (1987).

[41] In addition to cross-state comparisons in Rivera-Salgado, Bada and Escala Rabadán (2005) and Rivera-Salgado and Escala-Rabadán (2004), see also Lanly and Valenzuela (2004) and Cano (2002, 2004, 2005).

[42] For an especially nuanced chronicle of Purépecha migrant experiences, see Martínez (2001). See Anderson on patterns of settlement in the US (2004).

from Oaxaca in California publicly claim their identity and rights as indigenous people, while those from Puebla in New York City do not appear to present themselves as indigenous? Much more robust documentation of actual patterns of variation and change over time would be necessary to get at these comparative analytical questions.

2. What are the social, civic and political impacts of migrant associations in their hometowns?

The discussion of the impact of migration on sending communities has shifted from an earlier focus on the loss of human capital, to a debate over whether family remittances contribute to more than survival for the relatives who stay behind, and whether remittances can become a lever for job-creation (García Zamora, 2005a, 2005b, Goldring, 2004). In terms of the dichotomy often posed between the use of remittances for consumption vs. investment, documented experiences with sustainable job creating enterprises beyond a very small scale are very limited, at least so far. [43] Family investment of remittances in education appears to be much more substantial, though often mis-categorized as consumption. There are many powerful reasons why the results of job-creating investment of remittances have been limited, including a less-than-hospitable policy environment, the greater attraction of public vs. private goods (in the case of collective remittances) and very limited investment opportunities in many sending communities. In the recent high profile discussion of impacts on sending communities, one could argue that the focus on economic flows have "crowded out" recognition of *non*-economic impacts, which can be described as social and cultural remittances (Levitt, 2001).

How do migrant hometown clubs affect public life in their communities of origin? Do they encourage local democratization? Do they affect women's opportunities for participation and representation? [44] Many participants and observers expect that HTAs do have democratizing impacts, though the evidence is not yet clear. Clearly returned migrants play key roles in public life, as individuals. According to a survey carried out by the Michoacan state government migrant support agency, 37% of the 113 mayors who governed in the state from 2002-2004 were former migrants (Bada, 2004c). [45]

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[43] For a heterodox critique of the conventional discussion of remittances and development, see the Declaración de Cuernavaca from the Migration and Development Network, at www.migracionydesarrollo.org. For an English translation, see Enlaces News, No. 10, August 2005 at www.enlacesamerica.org. While the literature on remittances is too vast to review here, it is worth noting that researchers have yet to agree on the validity of the official data, the share of the Mexican population that receives remittances, nor on the degree to which they reach the poorest communities.

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

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

But the fact that some migrants return to fill local leadership roles does not answer the question about the civic and political impacts of HTAs. In at least one high profile case of a migrant elected mayor, the so-called "Tomato King," his leadership turned out to be very controversial. [46] More generally, to what degree do the hometown associations reproduce the political culture that dominated Mexico in the 20th century? Optimists often suggest that organized civil society generates democratic values and practices, and this is sometimes the case. But civil society also carries the weight of history, and is cross-cut by hierarchies and inequality between genders, classes and ethnic groups, as well as the legacy of less-than-democratic political ideologies. After all, many of the federations, as well a some of the HTAs, came together in response to Mexican government initiatives. If one interprets this relationship through the lens of state-society relations in Mexico, then this government strategy represents both a response to real demands from below, while also serving as an institutional channel to regulate relationships with migrant civil society. [47] In principle, in contrast to similar government efforts *in* Mexico, one might expect that migrants in the US would be less vulnerable to clientelistic manipulation, but some recent reports indicate that old habits die hard.

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

Why might one expect migrant clubs to encourage democratization in home communities? Those that send collective remittances for community investments are taxing themselves for the benefit of others. Historically, those who pay taxes are accustomed to demanding some form of representation. If one thinks in terms of the metaphor of "exit, voice and loyalty," collective remittances are possible thanks to migrants' exit, they exist because of their loyalty, and then tend to encourage the exercise of voice (Fox, 2005c). There are classic examples, like the worker from Michoacan who, because of his green card, can get on a plane in Chicago after work on a Friday, get to his hometown at dawn on Saturday. He can then wake up the mayor to begin a day of monitoring the progress of community development projects, with his video camera in hand. Sunday he flies back to Chicago, so he can be back at work early on Monday. He

[46] For reports of his abuse of power, see Valadez Rodríguez (2005). For background on his campaigns, see Castañeda (2003, 2004, 2006).

[47] The government's role in inducing the formation of HTA federations recalls and parallels Mexico's experience with the National Solidarity Program, which both induced the formation of supposedly participatory committees from above, and bolstered representative social organizations that took advantage of this partial opening to consolidate.

shows the video at the next meeting of their club, the following weekend (e.g., Espinosa, 1999).

Such civic practices suggest the broader hypothesis, supported by some initial studies, that the HTAs tend to hold local governments accountable (e.g, Burgess, 2006, Williams, 2004). Even if most clubs are internally democratic, and even if they hold local governments accountable, this does not necessarily generate democratization within the home community. Accountability refers to a power relationship, checks and balances, in this case between a specific constituency and the local government – but not necessarily vis-à-vis the majority of the community (whether defined in local *or* translocal terms). Do the non-migrants play any role in determining how to invest collective remittances? How are choices weighed between infrastructure projects that the migrants use on their annual visits home, versus those that may have a greater impact on the daily lives of non-migrants (e.g., rodeo rings vs. water systems)? It should be no surprise that relationships between migrants and mayors are not always easy, especially now that local elections are more democratic in many regions of Mexico.

3. If a migrant civil society exists, then where do political parties fit in?

Mexico recently joined the 60 countries that permit their citizens to vote from abroad (Badillo Moreno 2004, Calderón Chelius, 2004). In principle, Mexican migrants' right to vote dates from a constitutional reform in 1996, but nine more years of debate and campaigning were required to begin to put the reform into practice (Castañeda, 2003, 2006, Martínez Saldaña and Ross Pineda, 2002, Rodríguez Ocegueda, 2005, Ross Pineda, 2001, 2005).

Mexican politics has unfolded in the US since the time of Benito Juárez, in the mid-19th century, when he met with other exiled Liberals in New Orleans to fight a dictator. He was not only a political exile, he was also a migrant worker, rolling tobacco (Martínez Saldaña, 2004). From San Jose, California, other Mexican workers organized support committees for Juárez's campaign against the European invasion (Pitti, 2003a). During the 1910 revolution, both moderate and radical forces operated from the US. While in exile in the US, intellectual Ricardo Flores Magón pioneered a "fully binational" political trajectory in the sense used here, as both a cross-border participant in the Mexican revolution and a leader of the Mexican wing of the US left (MacLachan, 1991).

Mexico's electoral authorities have been very cautious about defending the security of a national voting process that only recently has won the trust of the electorate. Mexico's congress, moreover, built measures into the law that were designed to limit the possibility of external intervention in an extraterritorial voting process. As a result, to limit possible abuses, only those migrants who already hold a Mexican voter registration card can use the new vote-by-mail system (constituting an estimated electorate of 4 million of the more than 10 million Mexicans in the US). [48] Mexican political parties are

[48] In the Pew Hispanic Center's recent survey of Mexican migrants, 87% report an interest in voting in presidential elections. Of those who came within the past two years, 64% report having the Mexican voter

not allowed to campaign abroad, candidates cannot travel and campaigns cannot receive funds from abroad (though migrants might contend that their funds are not "foreign").

This experiment in migrant voting poses a paradox, as suggested by a recent Los Angeles Times editorial (Sept. 21, 2005). Recalling dissident José Vasconcelos' 1928 presidential campaign in the US, the editors noted that that before Mexican migrants had the right to vote, they could do politics freely in the US. Now that they have the vote, they are prohibited from doing politics.

Mexican political candidates have actively competed in the US for migrant support since 1988, when Cárdenas' campaign provoked a wave of civic enthusiasm in California and Chicago – before he had his own political party. (Dresser, 1993, Martínez Saldaña, 1993). The Mexican federal government responded with new outreach programs, while governors and mayors began making touring to pay their respects to their *pasianos*. Here another paradox emerges, involving the distance between migrant civil society and Mexican political parties. While the three main parties have some presence in California, Texas, Illinois and New York, many observers would agree that in general, they have very little presence in migrant communities.

At first, the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) was widely expected to gain the most support among migrants. This was one reason why other parties were unsympathetic to the migrant voting rights campaign. [49] Yet the PRD did not effectively capitalize on the sympathy generated among both migrants and US sympathizers by the 1988 Cárdenas campaign. For most of the 1990s, the PRD's internal structure assigned the task of migrant liaison to its International Relations Department, as though it were comparable to relations with Brazil's Worker's Party or the French Socialist Party. As US-based PRD activists pointedly noted at the time, had the Mexico City party leadership seen migrants as full citizens, then outreach would have been considered a task of the department of organization. [50] Years later, the PRD now has a Migrant Secretariat, and many US-based members also participate in hometown associations. But now the National Action Party has its "Department of Organization

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registration card with them, falling to 42% for the survey group as a whole (Suro, 2005: 1). See also Marcelli and Cornelius's earlier estimate of the size of the likely migrant voting population (2005) and Martínez Saldaña (2005b).

[49] According to participants in the voting rights campaign, one reason why it took so long for the reform to be put into practice is that they had active support from only a minority within the leadership of all three parties (Fox, 2002).

[50] The 1999-2000 migrant advocacy campaign for voting rights did not win the right to vote, but did lead the PRD and the PRI to nominate three migrants to their proportional representation lists for congressional candidates. These nominations did not necessarily reflect a new awareness of immigrants as full citizens with political rights as Mexicans, however. The PRD selection process was internally controversial, and it is very revealing that top PRD leader Jesús Ortega, when he reported this, referred to one of the candidates, Raúl Ross, as the "compañero chicano" (Cano and Aguirre 2000). Ross is from Veracruz and came to the US as an adult. For Ortega to have described him as Chicano was an indicator of the degree to which Mexico City politicians see migrants as 'not really Mexican' once they cross the border (Fox, 2002).

Abroad" and the Institutional Revolutionary Party also has its "Migrant Vanguard." Indeed, pro-PRI migrant leaders have shown a remarkable capacity to win elections in federations that had defined themselves as nonpartisan (as in the cases of the Illinois Federation of Michoacan Clubs, as well as the Oaxacan Federation in California). As a result, it is difficult to predict which political party will have greater support among migrant communities. What is clear is that given the constraints on Mexican political party activities in the US, migrants will have to depend almost exclusively on US Spanish language media to be informed participants in the process, underscoring their critical role.

Consider a comparison with Central American politics in the US. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Central American political parties prioritized organizing within the US, sending significant numbers of senior leaders and organizers. Their goals were twofold: to organize bases within their own diasporic communities, and to build strategic alliances within US civil society and politics. By the mid-1980s, these alliances reached broadly into churches, universities, labor unions, the media, local governments and even reached congress The Salvadorans went the furthest, creating an extensive network of political support committees and non-profit organizations, many of which continue to play key roles in local as well as national immigrant rights campaigns. [51]

In contrast with Mexican migrants, many Central American activists came to the US as political exiles and refugees. But they also came with a different political strategy. While Central American political parties made the "North American front" a priority from early on, Mexican political parties did not make that strategic investment – with the notable exception of politicized *individuals* who migrated, and continued their political efforts in their new setting. In the Salvadoran case, migrant civil society in the US was forged by political parties, whereas in the Mexican case, parties began belatedly to engage with a migrant civil society that emerged basically without parties (though with the strong presence of the Mexican state).

4. How can disenfranchised migrants gain political representation?

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

In Mexico, the recent approval of the absentee ballot represents a first step towards overcoming this problem, though the structure of the voting process is likely to encourage low turnout. The complex mail-in balloting was approved by a near-total consensus in the Mexican congress, allowing representatives to show their recognition of

[51] On Salvadoran transnational politics, see, among others, Coutin (2000), Landolt (2004), Menjívar (1999), Rodríguez (2005) and Van Gosse (1993, 1995, 1996).

Mexican migrants' citizenship rights without actually risking a significant change in the electorate. [52]

In the US, the unrepresented population is huge and growing. In California, for example, 20% of the adult population lacks the right to vote. Avila documents the number of cities with non-citizen majorities and describes the consequences of excluding the growing non-citizen population in terms of "political apartheid" (2003). [53] The discursive frame of "non-citizen enfranchisement" challenges the systemic political exclusion of immigrants, but also blurs the distinction between undocumented immigrants and permanent residents. The reasons for their exclusion are different, as are their possible pathways to inclusion. In the first case, the enfranchisement of undocumented immigrants would require a comprehensive policy reform that included a pathway to citizenship, which in turn would require a dramatic shift in US politics at the national level – an issue too complex to address adequately here. In contrast, in the second case, more active support for the enfranchisement of legal permanent residents would not require major legal changes, and could be pursued by a wide range of actors at all levels of government and civil society.

The size of the immigrant population that is already eligible for citizenship is huge. In 2002, only 42% of permanent residents eligible had become citizens (Morse and Orgocka, 2005: 2). According to the most recent official estimates, for 2003, 7.9 million residents eligible to naturalize are not citizens. This population includes approximately 2.3 million unrepresented people in California, 1.1 million in New York, 800,000 in Texas and 600,000 in Florida. Eligible permanent residents of Mexican origin number *2.4 million people*, or 30.2% of the total (Rytina, 2005, 4-5). [54]

When it comes to immigrant integration, the gap between the dominant ideology and actual US government policy is enormous. As Murguia and Muñoz recently pointed out, the US government currently

> "does nothing at all to encourage or assist immigrants [eligible to naturalize]… "The absence of anything resembling a public strategy to maximize the speed and depth of their integration is extraordinary… Aside from persistent advocacy from

[52] Consider one of the less visible obstacles to migrant voting. The new procedures require voters to send in copies of their election card by registered US mail, which costs $9. This does not include the time required to go to a post office during working hours, which could add an additional hour or two of lost wages to the price of voting. Requests for ballots sent by regular mail are invalid. As is so often the case with access to voting rights for the disenfranchised, the devil is often in the details.

[53] Today, voting rights in the US are assumed to be both inherent in and limited to citizenship (Renshon, 2005), but in historical terms, voting rights and citizenship were distinct. Before World War One, the majority of US citizens could not vote, while non-citizen male suffrage was widespread in many cities and states (see Aylsworth, 1931, cited in Leal, 2002 and Varsanyi, 2004).

[54] The next largest eligible national origin groups for 2003 are from the Philippines (4.1%), Dominican Republic (4.1%), India (2.7%) and China (2.7%) (Rytina, 2005).

within the immigrant rights movement itself, improvements in the naturalization process are also absent from the progressive agenda…" (2005).

Contrast this with the 1986 immigration reform, which was followed by a $4 billion federal investment in immigrant incorporation, administered by state governments (Meissner, 2005). As Murguia and Muñoz suggest, a serious new effort to encourage naturalization would require substantial changes in the priorities of a wide range of US institutions, though civil society actors and local governments do not need to wait for new federal laws to make a difference. [55]

Considering the civic and political implications of the issue, remarkably little research attention has focused on the citizenship process in the past decade. [56] Much of the research data analyzed in the academic literature predates the huge increase in the foreign-born population over the past decade and a half, as well as the Mexican government's recent support for dual nationality. Moreover, few studies of immigrant integration address "where migrants are coming from" by analyzing how home country political cultures inform their decision-making processes. More systematic comparisons of different strategies for promoting citizenship could shed light on which approaches are most effective, and which are most likely to encourage ongoing civic engagement.

5. What are the obstacles to US citizenship for Mexican permanent residents?

In any discussion of immigrant integration, Mexicans stand out in part because of what conservative nationalists perceive as their insularity. They point to lower rates of naturalization, English language acquisition and social mobility compared to other national origin groups, as well as persistent pride in their language and ethnicity. [57] These academic critics see the large concentrations of Spanish-speaking immigrants in major cities as an inherent hindrance to the kind of assimilation that they associate with integration into US society. [58] Yet new forms of integration may be evolving. It is

[55] For a review of current state government programs, most of which are quite modest and appear to have had limited impact, see Morse and Orgocka (2004). For a review of new citizens as an electoral force before the 2004 elections, see Paral (2004).

[56] The key studies of Mexican immigrant naturalization include DeSipio (1987, 1996), DeSipio and De la Garza (1998), Garcia (1981, 1987), Jones-Correa (1998, 2001b), Pachon (1987), Pachon and DeSipio (1994), Portes and Bach (1985), Portes and Curtis (1987) and Yang (1994). For one of the most recent studies of the naturalization process, including comparison across counties within California, see Johnson, et al (1999). For broad context, see Aleinikoff (2000).

[57] See Borjas (2005), Hansen (2003), Huntington (2004) and Lazear (2005).

[58] Note that Latino immigrants are learning English at rates that do not differ dramatically from other groups, or from historical experiences, in spite of the huge gap between the supply and demand for English learning services. Murguia and Muñoz summarize some of the research (2005). For context, see Alba and Nee (2003) and Portes and Rumbaut (2001a, 2001b). For historical comparisons of European immigrants with Mexicans today, see Smith (2003) and Perlmann (2006). For US perspectives on contemporary immigrant integration more generally, see Jacoby (2004) and Reitz (2003). Immigrant perspectives on

possible that these communities offer a critical mass within which new forms of civic, social and political engagement can emerge, public spheres in which Mexicans can both continue to be Mexicans and join US society at the same time. Here it is not clear which scenario the ideological critics fear the most, the perceived threat of foreign enclaves within the US, or the transformation of US society itself through the process of immigrant integration.

Naturalization is a classic indicator of engagement with US society, in the social science sense that the successful acquisition of citizenship also reflects other dimensions of the integration process – command of English, length of residence and civic knowledge. [59] Levels of formal education are another key variable that influences likelihood of naturalization, but for those who came as young adults, schooling is a better indicator of their social status in their home country than of their interest in engaging with US institutions. Johnson et al also found that "an immigrant's social capital is a powerful predictor of naturalization," which points to the possible contribution of migrant associations (1999: 32) and is consistent with De la Garza and Hazan's emphasis on immigrant associations as potential vehicles for integration (2003).

Perhaps the most telling point in the conservative nationalists' critique involves immigrant naturalization rates. Mexican migrants have long naturalized at lower rates than other national origin groups, and naturalization rates among eligible legal permanent residents vary significantly across national origin groups. According to a key study by the Urban Institute, the percentage of Asians who had adopted US citizenship in 1995 was 56%. Among *non*-Mexican Latin Americans the rate was 40%. Among Mexican legal residents, only 19% had taken out citizenship in 1995. By 2001, all these rates went up – to 67% among Asians, to 58% among non-Mexican Latin Americans, with the rate among Mexicans almost doubling to *34%* (Fix, Passel and Sucher, 2003). [60]

This data suggest two distinct trends – first, the persistent *lag* among Mexicans compared to immigrants of other nationalities, and second, the sharp *rise* in their naturalization rates within a remarkably short period of time. These trends appear to be contradictory. What factors can explain both continuity and change? Notably, such a rapid rate of change is not compatible with cultural-determinist claims about alleged Mexican migrant insularity, since cultures do not change radically over just a few years. Attitudes, in contrast, can change in the short term, as can perceived risks and benefits.

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integration have received less attention. For an unusual practitioner-oriented introduction to immigrant civic engagement in the US, see McGarvey (2004).

[59] The implications of other lagging indicators of integration that critics cite are more contested, since it is not so obvious about what the indicators indicate. Correlations are easily confused with causality. For example, do lower levels of schooling among Mexican immigrants who grew up in the US reflect 'insufficient assimilation' (Lazear, 2005) or do they reflect institutional and cultural biases against them (Valenzuela, 1999)?

[60] Note that different methodologies produce different estimates of the percentage of Mexican immigrants who are citizens. Based on 1990 census data, Johnson et al estimate that 29% had naturalized – though they recognize that naturalization data are over-reported in the census (1999: 12, 38).

This point recalls the need to get a better understanding of "where migrants are coming from," since the naturalization pattern among Mexicans suggests that something distinctive is still going. The important differences between immigrant naturalization and voter participation between California, Texas and Florida during the 1990s points to the relevance of political context (Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura, 2001)

One could interpret the combination of continuity and change in naturalization rates in terms of two simultaneous trends. One the one hand, in a context in which the dominant political cultures in both countries continue to require people to choose – *either* you are Mexican *or* you are American, but you can't be both -- many Mexicans in the US want to live and work here while continuing to identify as Mexican. The persistent power of the political culture of nationalism *on both sides* could partly account for the persistent *lag* in naturalization rates. On the other hand, in practice, many Mexican migrants are rejecting traditional nationalism and are increasing becoming active members of US society -- while still retaining their Mexican identity. [61] Perhaps the trend towards "civic binationality" might help to account for the recent sharp increase in Mexican naturalization rates.

Upon further reflection, however, this speculative interpretation must be qualified because it relies on an unwarranted assumption. Naturalization rates reflect those who *complete* the citizenship process, not necessarily migrant *interest* in earning citizenship. To get a more precise measure of the degree of interest in naturalization, one would need data on the numbers of migrants who *attempt* to become citizens, rather than relying exclusively on the number who succeed in completing the process. This distinction is necessary because applicants often encounter a series of obstacles along the way, and some of those obstacles may well affect Mexican migrants more than those from other countries. This hypothesis would be difficult to test, since public official data on citizenship petition denials do not mention national origin. Nationally, 1.6 million applicants for citizenship were denied between 1996 and 2002. [62] Leaders of citizenship support efforts for Mexican families in California report failure rates on the order of 50% -- substantially higher than average. [63] Literacy levels are a major issue, though as noted above, they reflect access to services more than qualifications for and interest in citizenship. Less straightforward issues are also likely to matter, such as fears associated

[61] For studies of political culture, participation, dual nationality and citizenship among Mexican immigrants, see Barreto and Muñoz (2003), Castañeda (2003, 2005, 2006), De Genova and Ramos-Zayas (2003), De Genova (2005, Jones-Correa (1998, 2001a, 2001b) and Leal (2001). In addition, new research is beginning to fill an important gap by focusing on the impact of US racialization processes on Mexican political identities and their relationship to citizenship. See De Genova's ethnography (2005) and Arredondo's historical analysis (2006).

[62] See Department of Homeland Security (2005, Table 31).

[63] This estimate is based on a representative sample of a universe of 10,000 Mexican applicants in Monterey County, mainly agricultural and food processing workers. (Paul Johnston, personal communication, Sept. 21, 2005). See also Johnston (2003, 2004, 2005). Note that the actual non-completion rate can be substantially larger than the official denial rate, since many are discouraged by the process and do not wait to be denied.

with the possible consequences of being denied citizenship, as well regional differences in the administration of the naturalization process, as suggested by Pachon (1987). Comparative analysis of actual institutional practices would shed light on what could be called "invisible obstacles" to citizenship. [64] Survey research and focus groups could address these specific issues, as well as broader questions of political culture and nationalism, to get a more precise understanding of the factors that influence Mexican migrant naturalization rates.

Conclusions

The main point here is that migrant civil society exists and involves diverse forms of representation and collective action. When compared to the vast size and diversity of Mexican society in the US, clearly the vast majority remain unrepresented by formal organizations of any kind. Nevertheless, the idea of migrant civil society recognizes that Mexicans in the US are creating their own institutions, as well as joining existing ones. Some are building multi-national and multi-ethnic worker organizations. Others are joining community and faith-based organizations. Some also participate in cross-border Mexican civil society, joining with their *paisanos* in hometown associations and voting rights campaigns, while campaigning for immigration policy reform in the U.S. These actors are just beginning to appear on research agendas. More systematic comparative analysis could help to understand their dynamics, especially if informed by both survey and ethnographic research.

In the US, the conventional approach to understanding migrant engagement concentrates on whether and how they join US institutions. In Mexico, the conventional approach asks whether and how migrants remain engaged with Mexican institutions. Both approaches look more at the results of migrant decisions to participate than at the decision-making *processes* that lead them to participate. To work with the concept of migrant civil society turns the question around, and suggests a more open-ended agenda that focuses on how migrants decide whether to participate, the obstacles they face, how they are participating -- and *on whose terms*. To sum up, researchers could help to inform strategies in support of migrant engagement if they ask "where are they coming from?"

[64] Note that while such institutional obstacles may be invisible to researchers, until they look for them, they may be quite visible to immigrants themselves.

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