"My People is a People on its Knees": Mexican Labor Migration from the Montana Region and the Formation of a Working Class in New York City

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“MY PEOPLE IS A PEOPLE ON ITS KNEES.” MEXICAN LABOR MIGRATION FROM THE MONTAÑA REGION AND THE FORMATION OF A WORKING CLASS IN NEW YORK CITY.

by

RODOLFO HERNÁNDEZ CORCHADO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Cultural Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

“MY PEOPLE IS A PEOPLE ON ITS KNEES.” MEXICAN LABOR MIGRATION FROM THE MONTAÑA REGION AND THE FORMATION OF A WORKING CLASS IN NEW YORK CITY.

by

Rodolfo Hernández Corchado

Advisor: Professor Michael Blim

This dissertation examines the contemporary proletarianization via migration of the indigenous and mestizo people from the Montaña region, in the Mexican southern state of Guerrero, to New York City. The dissertation demonstrates how the region was transformed since the 1980s into a migrant labor supplier and how its inhabitants became proletarians, and a major pool of labor supplying the North American transnational migrant labor market.

Far from being homogenous, the people of the Montaña region are ethnically and class diverse. Based on the oral narratives of an indigenous Mixteco, and a mestizo teenager dweller of the city of Tlapa, the dissertation shows the extent to which labor migration cannot be separated from a broader history of racialized dispossession and labor exploitation, particularly in the case of Mixtecos. I argue that the proletarianization via migration of both indigenous Mixteco and mestizo people in the region has been produced through different rounds of dispossession that in the oral histories are identified as “the abandonment” and “the chemo days” respectively.

By studying the contemporary history of the Montaña region labor migration I examine how geographical and labor connections are being produced between New York City and the Montaña. I argue that the particular process of massive migration from densely populated
Mexican indigenous regions to the U.S. in the aftermath of Mexico’s 1990s economic crisis, help us to interrogate ‘integration’ as a category that was central for post-revolutionary Mexican anthropology to explain the nation formation in the twentieth century.

The role that previous former ethnic and class differences of the Montaña people, as well as racism of non-indigenous Mexicans toward indigenous people influence the arrival, settlement, and labor incorporation of these two segments into an already economic and culturally stratified Mexican community in New York City. Finally, I examine punk as a cultural expression of working-class formation among Guerrerense migrant proletarians living in New York City to show the extent to which punk serves migrants as a language to collectively elaborate social claims about social inequality and politics both in the Montaña and in the United States.
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I dedicate this dissertation to the lovely memory of my father Rodolfo Hernández Leyva and my mother-in-law, Oliva. I also dedicate it to the memory of Professor Graciela Uribe at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. In different and meaningful ways they honored life and I would like to honor them through the pages of this dissertation.

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Introduction

What a brutal paradox for an impoverished region: to be exhausted by misery, poverty, social inequality, violence, and social decay, and yet be forced to witness thousands of your people abandoning the region to produce social wealth and to enrich social and economic life somewhere else. At the dawn of the twentieth century, a region in southern Mexico was transformed into a labor supplier for the North American migrant labor market, and in the process, the people from this region, Mexican indigenous and mestizo people turned into wage workers north of the U.S. border. A region of Mexico thus became a new reservoir of a valuable global commodity: migrant labor.

This labor migration was a mirror of a national trend. In 2008, 558,000 Mexicans crossed the U.S.-Mexican border, many of them undocumented and, as scholars (Chavez 1991, 1998; Sandoval 2007) have noted, the condition of being undocumented becomes a prime vulnerability. According to the World Bank (2011), Mexico was the in the top of emigration countries in 2010 with 11.9 million migrants and the U.S.-Mexico migrant corridor was also in the top in 2010 with 11.6 million migrants. According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Mexico was the leading country of origin among migrants “removed” from the United States in 2013, with 241,493 individuals deported back to their “home” country (ICE 2013). As Mexican migration grows, so do wage remittances and the dependence on wage remittances by families in Mexico. In 2010, Mexico was the third top remittance-receiving country with US$22.6 billions, only below of India and China, and it was the main remittance receiving country in Latin America.

This dissertation is an ethnography and an oral history of migrant workers. It is also a narrative of el pueblo or the people of the Montaña region in the southern state of Guerrero. This
dissertation is a history of those who entered the migrant labor supply as disenfranchised workers. It is a record of people searching in far away cities, selling the only commodity they possessed to contribute to the social wealth. This dissertation is a testament, as a central character in this ethnography once cried in downtown Manhattan, of “a people on its knees.” In this dissertation, I focus on young Mixteco Indians and mestizos from the rural Montaña area and its central city of Tlapa, youth whose parents and grandparents have served as day laborers in Mexico’s northwestern agricultural economy since the 1970, and who in the late 1980s became proletarians in New York City. Common to these teenagers was the reality of having been left behind and the sense of having no future to look forward to in their lives. I also focus on the migrant men and women from the Montaña who, for generations, have been treated as “animals” and “slaves” in their own homeland and have become proletarians in the urban United States.

Far from being homogenous, the peoples of the Montaña region are ethnically diverse, as well as differentiated in terms of economic stratification, land tenure, and access to productive and commercial infrastructure. Nevertheless, most Montaña residents fit the category of infra-subsistence peasants (García 2000)—producing maize for self-consumption as well as working as seasonal labor for local farms, often in the neighboring states of Morelos or Sinaloa or, as is increasingly common, in the United States. A smaller segment of small-holding peasants produce maize and coffee for subsistence and for the market. Medium producers are self-subsistence agriculture peasants and raise livestock. Finally, a small segment of small businessmen combine commercial agriculture (mainly coffee), livestock and commercial activities in the region (García 2005).

The Montaña territory is divided into nineteen administrative municipalities, covering a total of 306,614 hectares (See map in appendix). Land tenure is divided into three main property
regimes: ejidos, communal tenure, and private tenure.\textsuperscript{1} 53.7\% of the land tenure in the region are under ejido and communal tenure (See Table 1). Land tenure is also geographically and culturally differentiated. Ejidal lands are concentrated in municipalities with dense indigenous populations, such as the municipality of Metlatónoc (74.67\% communal and ejido tenure). Municipalities such as Tlapa de Comonfort had the highest number private tenure hectares (see Table 1 and 2).\textsuperscript{2}

Ejidos and communal parcels are largely used for agriculture as well as cattle-ranching (see Table 3 and 4).\textsuperscript{3} However, industrial production is limited to only five municipalities (see Table 5). The 126 ejidos and communal lands in the Montaña, sustain 137,649 ejidatarios and comuneros (communards) (see Table 6). The gender distribution of the ejidatario and communard population are slightly predominantly male with 58.6\% (see Table 7).\textsuperscript{4}

Focusing on the relationships between inhabitants and land, this dissertation demonstrates how a nation-state has transformed its own inhabitants into proletarians in another country. The history of Montaña and Montañeros (people from the Montaña), as I will show, cannot be separated from the broader history of global migration, racialized dispossession, and labor.

It is also the history of a region in which social inequality and migratory displacement among indigenous populations have been the historic norms. As a result of this, impoverished

\textsuperscript{1} According to the INEGI (2007) of the 3,395,479.17 total hectares registered in units of production in the 81 municipalities of the state of Guerrero in 2007, the ejidos and communal land tenure were the greatest percentages with 1,931,904.37 hectares.

\textsuperscript{2} In 2007, 1,259 ejidos and communal lands were registered in Guerrero, a total of 5,006,396.80 hectares. The Montaña region had registered 126 ejidos and communal lands, 603,920.86 hectares), 12.01\% of the total (INEGI 2007).

\textsuperscript{3} Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 recognized three categories of land property: small private property, communal and ejidal. Ejidos are collective landholdings granted through land distribution to its members for its use and usufruct. Communal lands are those lands, forests, and waters granted since the nineteenth century to the populations that demonstrated their possession. These lands belong to all members of the community group and are used for settlement, economic or social purposes. Both ejidal and communal lands previous to the 1992 reforms were inalienable. For an excellent overview of the land regimes tenure in Mexico see Assies 2008.

\textsuperscript{4} Only in four municipalities, Cochoapa el Grande (60\%), Metlatónoc (51.41\%), and Lliatenco (50.95\%), and Acatepec (50.14\%), female ejidatarias and comuneras outweigh the males (INEGI 2009).
Mixtecos turned to poppy production in the 1990s for subsistence or for the local market, thereby abandoning the long-held tradition of maize production. Poppy production thus became a strategy to avoid migrating to the agriculture enclaves in northwestern Mexico, as had been common in previous generations of poor Mixteco families from Montaña. But while growing poppy was an alternative to the inhuman labor conditions away from home, it was nonetheless illegal and brought with it great risks.

As poppy production grew in the region, the Mexican state responded militarily (as it did in the entire country). In the Montaña, illegal detentions and interrogations have been carried out by the army as well as the federal police since this time and residents are now forced to pass through roadside checkpoints when traveling in and out of the central city of Tlapa. Thus, while the production of poppy has allowed for a new generation to stay in their home region, it has also brought new forms of violence and stigmatization for those who reject leaving their homes.

In January of 2010 a friend-colleague, my wife, and I were stopped at a Tlapa military checkpoint in the course of returning to the city from travel. We were subjected to interrogation and given no cause or explanation. Our ID’s where taken from us; my colleague and I were placed against the car and frisked. Throughout this encounter we were intimidated verbally and with weapons. My colleague, a Mixteco anthropologist and historian, became a particular target.

5 1999 the Army in Guerrero destroyed about 7,681 hectares of poppies. One previous year, in 1998 48% of all the destroyed poppy-growing lands by the Army were located in Guerrero and the state of Guerrero was Mexico’s leading poppy producer with 30% of the national production. To destroy the poppy-growing areas, the Ministry of Defense deployed permanently in Guerrero 3,000 soldiers. One of the social and political consequences of this massive deployment is the violation of human rights. The Mexican army has been the main perpetrator of abuses and human rights violation against the civil population in the state in its persecution of guerrillas and drug producers (Gutiérrez 2000). As pointed out by Gutiérrez (2000), indigenous communities in Guerrero have challenged the Army presence in the region and denounced it as an “invasion force” and as “part of an ethnic extermination policy” (Gutiérrez 2000:69).

6 As noted by Gutiérrez (2000), “massive deployment of troops in numerous zones of Guerrero have been constant with patrols on highways and roads, roadblocks that violate the right of free transit, and detentions and illegal interrogations of citizens suspected of supporting rebel groups. The Army has occupied communities, and installed permanent bases and new barracks at the margins of the law, without the authorization of, or any notification to, the Guerrero State Congress” (Gutiérrez 2000:64). All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.
in the encounter, although he was able to resist the soldiers’ racist remarks with sarcasm and wit:

“What are you doing here?” The soldier asked my companion.

“We are just traveling; we went to visit some relatives out of Tlapa,” he replied.

“And what do you do?”

“I am an anthropologist.”

“Oh really? Are you an anthropologist? And what do anthropologists do?”

“Well, we recover the history of the indigenous people in this region, the history of the Mixteco people.”

“So you study the Indians? So tell me where have the Mixtecos gone? Where are they?” He said with sarcasm and almost aiming his gun at my companion.

“Well, here we are, we are still here, we have never gone anywhere.”

“We are still here,” answered my companion, leaving the soldier speechless. Most probably, the soldier had assumed that Mixtecos were, or should be, an extinct population in Montaña, a common conception reflecting the historic wish of the Mexican ruling elite. Our group’s checkpoint encounter thus exemplifies a dominant ideology where modernization occurs at the expense and through the neglect of a Mexican (indigenous and mestizo people) majority that Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987) famously called “México Profundo” (Deep Mexico).

It is thus not surprising that the question ‘where have the Indians gone?’ is not new in the history of Latin America. The question is uttered by one of the ladino characters in Jorge Icaza’s (1934) *Huasipungo*. Like other Latin American writers, Icaza’s realist prose depicted the social inequalities resulting from the unleashed Faustian forces of modernization in the early twentieth
century. Focusing on the everyday life of indigenous and peasant figures in Ecuador, Icaza’s novel shows both the entrenched forms of pre-capitalist production and life ways among rural populations, as well as the ways that Latin American elites viewed these as ‘backward,’ ‘irrational,’ and detrimental to ‘modernization.’ Last but not least, Icaza’s novel describes how nationalist ideologies of progress and modernity contributed to the plundering, deprivation, and displacement of thousands of indigenous rural peasants through state-driven capitalist projects geared to stimulate commerce and expand the national economy. “Where have the Indians gone?” There was no other option for them but to leave.

Icaza’s fictional and realistic interpretation of the Indian displacement and land dispossession echoes the so-called “indigenous problem” thesis, embraced by a whole generation of Latin American intellectuals. In 1928, Peruvian intellectual Juan Carlos Mariátegui wrote: “All the theses on the indigenous problem that ignore or bypass this social and economic problem [unequal land and wealth distribution] are all but sterile, or mere verbal exercises condemned to an absolute disgrace. The socialist critique seeks the causes in the country’s economy and not its administrative mechanisms, not on a duality or plurality of races, and not on the indigenous cultural and moral conditions. The indigenous question stems from our economy.”

And yet the question of “where have the Indians gone?” continues to be uttered in ignorance or cynicism. This dissertation offers a partial response as gathered through the voices of people displaced from Montaña.

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7 Mariátegui 1928:35. For the Mexican case, anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987) called this politically and economically excluded segment of the Mexican population the México Profundo.
Integrations and Mexican migration

“Oh what a terrible problem, Mexico is being emptied,”⁸ Alfonso Fabila wrote in despair in the 1920s as he witnessed the mass labor migration from Mexico to the United States in the early twentieth century. At that time, it may have been impossible to imagine that this was but the beginning of human displacement throughout Mexico, including the Montaña region. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexican anthropologist Alfonso Fabila foresaw Mexico’s role as a labor supplier for the U.S. economy as one of the fundamental challenges for the formation of a modern Mexican nation-state. However, in the first half of the twentieth century, Fabila’s concern over Mexico’s subordinated, labor-supply role was not taken up as the key social and political dilemma confronting the nation’s future. Fabila’s concern may have been victim of the confidence held by the generation of Mexican anthropologists writing soon after the Mexican Revolution that indigenismo would decisively integrate indigenous communities and peasants into a modern nation.

In the present context, indigenismo should be understood as a broad intellectual and political endeavor by Mexican anthropology to advise the state in granting social justice to a long-term impoverished and politically oppressed segment of the Mexican population. Since its modern foundation, indigenismo was an intellectual and political endeavor that saliently crystalized with the research of U.S. trained anthropologist Manuel Gamio and his widely read book, Forjando Patria (To Forge a Homeland 1916) where he diagnosed Mexico’s central problems and foretold of the national need for indigenous integration within a modernizing Mexican society. Mexican anthropology was thus deeply invested in finding solutions to the so-called national “indigenous problem.”

Nevertheless, as I will discuss in depth in this dissertation, a state-supported indigenist

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project geared at incorporating and improving the social and economic conditions of indigenous populations, thereby achieving the ideals of the Mexican revolution, most fully crystalized around the work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1958) and integrationist theory. For Aguirre Beltrán national integration called for the acculturation of indigenous populations to western practices and values as well as the destruction of regional (so-called “caste”) social relations. The pre-capitalist forms of social organization inherited from colonial times were held by Aguirre Beltrán as being the very cause of these communities’ ongoing oppression and exploitation. Aguirre Beltrán’s integrationist approach for solving the “Indian problem” prevailed during the mid-twentieth century, providing the instrument of a “política indigenista” to the Mexican state and shaping the ways that anthropology would be carried out in Mexico.

The debate about the ways in which the integrationist project should be carried stayed open during the twentieth century and gave way to different “imaginaries” concerning the necessary social and political trajectory for a “Mexican nation.” In some cases, the social imaginaries of indigenismo have aligned with notions of social justice and global development for third-world nations. In the case of Mexico, a nascent institution, Mexican Anthropology, in a Latin American nation at the margins of modernity, provided a trajectory to test such questions and ideals through concrete projects designed for an ever-deferred future. As Aguirre Beltrán asserted:

*Indigenismo* is not intended to seek care and improve the existence of the indigenous population as its ultimate goal, but as a means to achieve a much more worthy goal: to achieve national development and integration based on social justice. It seeks to make free and equal citizens of the Indian and the non-Indian.\(^9\)

In lieu of the rise of institutionalized anthropology in Mexico and its charge over the so-called “Indian problem,” the twentieth century might then be viewed as Mexico’s century of

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\(^9\) Aguirre Beltrán quoted by Montemayor 2001:89.
anthropology. Anthropologists were key in establishing a social and political architecture for a multiethnic post-revolutionary Mexico and also contributed to dominant discourses arguing the idea that a modern nation, with equal citizens, would come to pass. The production of this positive “imagined future” for Mexico was one of the most salient achievements of Mexican anthropologists in this period as it provided an intellectual drive with which to practically confront the tremendous social inequality inherited from the Mexican Revolution. By far, this was the generation of anthropologists that actually recognized the dire living and working conditions of the indigenous communities in the country. As Moisés Sáenz, a progressive educational reformer, noted in the first decades of the early twentieth century, indigenous populations, “were living in criminal abandonment by the ruling class [and] subjected to unjust exploitation.” Writing on the explanation of this “abandonment,” he continues:

We ended up eliminating the Indian from the national horizon because we were overconfident with the urban splendor of the Porfirian era, and proud of our legislation. We retained, indeed, a romantic sentimentality towards the indigenous past. The ruler oppressed them at ease, and there was no justice for the Indian. [Since then], the Indian problem did not exist, because under the Díaz regime, the republic was apparently without problems.\textsuperscript{10}

Here, Sáenz positions himself in the post-revolutionary moment to offer a critique of Mexico under Díaz yet only to usher in another top-down strategy that he believed would lead to a republic without problems. The “Mexican century” which Sáenz sought to affirm begins with the intent of forging a “national culture” to transcend regional and local cultures through the privileging of the shared “national language” of Spanish, the homogenization of cultural (indigenous) difference, the annihilation of traditional social systems and structures, as well as the formation of a national markets that minimized the power of local and regional caciques (Aguirre Beltrán 1958). State-supported projects would integrate post-revolutionary Mexican

\textsuperscript{10} Sáenz 2007:139-140.
society, as Mexican anthropologist Alfonso Caso made clear in 1956 statement to a conference audience in Paris: “We hope that the indigenous people problem will disappear in the next twenty years.”

But while a generation of anthropologists felt their country to be moving towards overcoming social inequality, the migratory flows out of the country had already begun, spurred on by the United States’ increased industrialization and capitalist demand for labor power after the First World War (Cardoso 1980; Durand, Massey and Zenteno 2001). And so, in spite of the confidence and optimism, emigration to the United States has persisted and expanded, reaching the state of Guerrero and the Montaña regions by the 1980s.

I return to the essay on labor, emigration, and the Montaña by Mexican anthropologist Alfonso Fabila, a key figure of indigenismo that has not been properly acknowledged in Mexico. By 1929, Fabila was writing that Mexican emigration to the U.S., by valorizing Mexican labor outside of the Mexican territory was a central threat to the economic development of post-revolutionary Mexico. Nevertheless, Fabila shared the confidence that Mexico would raise the standard of living for all its citizens, effectively eliminating the flow of migrant labor to the United States. This moment of happiness was imminent, as Fabila wrote, “the desire for a higher life is latent [in the Mexican population].” In the 1950s, Fabila, along with anthropologist Cesár Tejeda, surveyed the Montaña and recognized the desperate social and economic conditions of the region. Despite witnessing these tremendous problems, they

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11 Caso quoted by Montemayor 2001:92.
12 René Avilés, has noted commented on the historical disdain towards Alfonso Fabila by Mexican anthropology and Mexican scholars. Avilés writes, “Mexico is not a country characterized by venerating or keeping its rich historical heritage. Its central intellectuals are easily lost and each ruling generation tries to impose its own values, ideas of history and culture. Each generation imposes which heritage should survive and which should die or be ignored” (Avilés 2002:11). Surprisingly, one of the most important contributions to anthropological literature on the state of Guerrero, Problemas de los indios Nahua, Mixtecos y Tlapaneos, written by Alfonso Fabila (1955) with the collaboration of César Tejeda, remains unpublished. The fact that it remains unpublished is unconscivable in the context of the tremendous lack of anthropological literature on the state of Guerrero. At least an abridged version of the manuscript with a selection of the photographs that accompanies the document should be published to be available for scholars and people interested in the history of the state of Guerrero and the Montaña region.
13 Fabila 1929:36.
maintained their confidence in the role of the state to alleviate social inequality.\footnote{As noted by Raymundo Mier (1996), anthropology projects in Mexico have been supported by the Mexican state and in consequence they have been shaped by an “urgent political logic” which involves the state necessity to control or dominate, but also to alleviate the social needs after the Mexican revolution. Such social and political urgency, points out Mier, shaped the character of Mexican anthropology as a “civilizatory project” to provide health or education to the impoverished indigenous population. This idea of Mexican anthropology as a civilizatory project, shared even by Marxist anthropology in the 1970s, was according to Mier a “despotic civilizatory project” by an authoritarian regime. As a response to this connection between the state and anthropology, Javier Guerrero (1996) pointed out that in the 1960s Mexican students in anthropology challenged the dominant notion of anthropology as an instrument of the Mexican state; a notion defended by Aguirre Beltrán. Guerrero notes: “The most important Mexican anthropologists such as Manuel Gamio or Alfonso Caso, were seen by the new generations [of Marxists anthropologists] as organic intellectuals at the service of the state” (Guerrero 1996:122).}

That was fifty years ago, but the social and economic conditions that Fabila was concerned about have only deteriorated, and in regions with dense indigenous populations, have continued to worsen (Canabal 2008; Martínez 2006). In respect to the Montaña, the region has exhibited the highest rates of illiteracy in Mexico since the 1940s, (Espinosa and Mesa 2000) and state forms of violence continue to be features of everyday life (Bartra 1996, 2000; Canabal 2001). Today, the municipalities of the Montaña have the highest rates of poverty in the nation as social inequality goes unabated.

That the standard of living of Mexico’s indigenous and mestizo people did not increase as foretold in previous generations should not come as a surprise. In the post-revolutionary period, peasants and members of indigenous communities were not integrated, despite the hopeful advocacy of anthropologists like Aguirre Beltrán, as “free and equal citizens,” but were instead integrated through living and working together outside of the territory of the Mexican nation-state as disenfranchised and undocumented workers of a North American transnational proletariat. The indigenous populations of Mexico are now scattered all over the United States as part of a massive, exploitable labor force, much as Alfonso Fabila foresaw decades ago. Mixtecos from Oaxaca and Guerrero moved to Oregon, California, Illinois, New Jersey, New York; indigenous Maya to Texas; and Nahua peasants from Puebla to New York. Formerly
subjects of Mexican anthropology’s integrationist imaginaries, they were now rambling in flesh and blood across North America in search of work.

While the projects to resolve the so-called “Indian problem” did not raise the standard of living for indigenous and peasant groups, much has changed since the rise of Mexican anthropology in terms of global capitalism and state structure. Four decades after Caso’s speech in Paris, in the early 1990s, the Mexican government passed economic neoliberal reforms that curtailed the responsibilities of the Mexican state towards peasants and members of indigenous communities (Gilly 1997). Under the new economic and political conditions of high finance, porous state-boundaries, and free-trade, the long-standing integrationist, nationalist project set in motion by Gamio, Aguirre Beltrán, and other anthropologists of the post-revolution generation had also reached its limit.

Interestingly, it was another Mexican anthropologist, Arturo Warman (a keen critic of Aguirre Beltrán) who identified the limitations of Mexico’s first wave of integrationist anthropology and who symbolically put an end to that period of Mexican anthropology. Warman also worked inside the institutional field of anthropology in the 1990s as the Procurador Agrario (akin to Agrarian Attorney) of president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. As the state procurador, Warman was in charge of enacting newly passed neoliberal reforms that required ending a system of agrarian distribution established under the Mexican Constitution. The reforms transformed the agrarian structure understood as a “set of institutions, norms […] and social political and economic relationships governing the access to and use of land as a productive resource.” The commodification of the ejido lands and the end of land distribution, as Gilly (1997) notes contributes to the destruction of indigenous and rural life ways in Mexico.

\[15\] Stavenhagen 1970:3.
These radical transformations are crucial because as Stavenhagen pointed out in the 1970s, the agrarian structure shapes the life and work conditions of people and “determines their life chances and those of their children for generations to come.”¹⁶ But it also determines, he adds, “the hope or desperation of entire peoples.”¹⁷

Following Gilly’s observations concerning the destructive consequences of free-market reforms within rural Mexico, it is remarkable that, in one century, Mexican anthropologists passed from taking a concerned intellectual stance toward national integration with social justice to opening the gates for global markets and free-trade policies to enter Mexico. With these doors open, new social and economic forces have affected Mexico as a whole and unmercifully and brutally swept Mexican indigenous communities away. These people, former inhabitants of Mexico, can now be found working in pizzerias, delis, restaurants, and construction sites all over the United States. With this surprising turn, anthropologists passed from being those who would provide a sense of hope and national unity to those who helped displace a national population into a distant land and a future unknown. In this dissertation I will delve into this historic shift and expand a debate in the 1960s by Mexican anthropologists concerning the fate and passing of integrationism. As I will demonstrate, the integrationist project endorsed from within anthropology and the government increasingly began to lose political significance as the Mexican ruling class was induced to dream about commercial integration with North America, particularly as embodied by the North America Free Trade Agreement of 1994.¹⁸

¹⁶ Stavenhagen 1970:3.
¹⁷ Stavenhagen 1970:3.
¹⁸ In the late 1970s and informed by Marxism, the National-Ethnic Question School in Mexico elaborated a criticism of the integrationist approach of Mexican indigenismo. Based on a class analysis of the relationship between the state and the indigenous population, this group of scholars challenged the notions of integrationism advocated by Aguirre Beltrán. For anthropologists of the National-Ethnic Question School the political project of indigenous integration to the nation was impossible to achieve within capitalist relations and a Mexican authoritarian state formation. The so-called indigenous problem or the social historical inequality among indigenous population was impossible to solve isolated from the fundamental tensions of a capitalist formation. (Díaz-Polanco 1985, 1986).
As Sandoval (2005, 2006) has noted, when the history of Mexican migration to the U.S. is discussed there is often a general unawareness that labor migration is the result of large class-driven political projects. Discourse concerning the “abandonment,” is also produced by Mixtecos from the Montaña in a very different way. In their discussions, abandonment it is treated not as a gradual, natural process but as a social and political event or product, the act of a ruling class: in the state of Guerrero, for example, the entire bureaucratic state structure for allocating subsidies and credit to agriculture producers was completely eliminated between 1987 and 1993 under the government of Francisco Ruiz Massieu, a process well documented by Bartra (2000). The dismantling of the rural banking system, as Binford notes:

represented a huge reduction in government assistance to small farmers and contributed to sharp declines in many producer prices. Most significantly, NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994] has been accompanied by a multinational takeover of Mexican grain commercialization and massive imports from the United States, leading to further real price declines.19

Instead, there is a political angle in the Mexican indigenous migrant labor, which is the abandonment (by the state), or as Moisés Sáenz noted in the early twentieth century, “living in criminal abandonment by the ruling class.” Since the 1960s the Mexican agriculture was in a profound crisis that ended with the dismantling of the state infrastructure to allocate technical resources to agriculture producers. Here we return to the figure of Arturo Warman (2001), who identified the causes of the crisis as lack of investment, agricultural dependency on state

From this point of view, indigenous dispossession was a tension embedded within the large political and economic capitalist structure of the modern Mexican nation-state. Guerrero (1983) and López y Rivas asserted that the integration of indigenous population into the Mexican nation in the 1980s meant in fact an integration as disposable migrant proletarians in the Mexican cities or agricultural export-oriented enclaves as in northern Mexico. Burguete (1984) argued that cultural integration of indigenous via proletarianization and migration to Mexican cities did not mean an improvement of their social situation. In sum, a radical transformation of the economic and political relations in the nation was needed to put an end to the historical, social and economic distress of thousands of indigenous people in contemporary Mexico.18

19 Binford 2013:47.
resources, as well as a growing dependency on imports. Warman advocated removing legal barriers that hindered agricultural growth.

This view has been countered by Binford who argues that the implementation of free-market policies in rural Mexico presumed peasants to be a nonfunctional segment of Mexico’s rural population. Nevertheless, Warman’s conception of a non-productive peasantry was mirrored by NAFTA negotiators who could only envision broad agricultural modernization geared towards global markets or the abandonment of farming as an element of Mexico’s national economy altogether. As Binford notes, “NAFTA negotiators presumed that Mexican farmers either would have modernized in order to compete in global markets or would have abandoned farming in order to dedicate themselves to some other activity.”

Interestingly the young Arturo Warman (1970) wrote in his brilliant critique of post-revolutionary indigenismo, *Todos santos y todos difuntos*, that the ideology of the Mexican Revolution emphasized the backwardness, isolation and marginalization of indigenous peasants, who “were considered [by the state] a nonfunctional sector for the progress of the country.”

And yet, the passage of NAFTA did not bring with it any possibilities to make indigenous and peasant communities productive or economically integrated at home. In fact, by the end of the twentieth century, Mexico had become the main supplier of foreign labor in the United States. NAFTA, an international agreement was advanced to spur more new jobs in Mexico and reduce the incentives of migration, had actually expanded these incentives and increased the migratory exodus to the United States (Gonzalez 2011). As Stephen has commented,

A key contradiction of the past five decades of U.S.-driven trade and immigration policy toward Mexico is that trade agreements that were supposed

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21 Warman N.d:33.
to limit and slow down Mexican immigration to the United States have had the opposite effect. They have worked together to encourage and indirectly facilitate Mexican migration to the United States—particularly undocumented immigration.  

Gledhill (1998) and Sandoval (2007) have suggested that Mexican technocrats ushered in the legislation with the intent to “capitalize” on the existence of the “massive reserves of cheap labor” in those regions of the country. As for the actual agriculture of these areas, Bacon (2008) and Gonzalez (2011) have noted that NAFTA brought an end to subsistence agriculture, and ruined it in south Mexico (Perales and Reyes 2009), thereby fomenting the need for further massive migrations. And yet as Mexican emigration expanded, Mexico’s neoliberal governments portrayed the output flow of humans from the country as a comparative advantage for the national economy: as a factor of production (to use the vocabulary of the neoclassical policy makers) and, in the case of the government of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), even as a resource with which to negotiate the terms of NAFTA with the U.S. 

Moreover, as Sandoval points out, the massive populations treated as labor reserves by the Mexican government to buttress Mexico’s economy and provide workers for the U.S. labor market are cast into the realm of legal ambiguity as disposable workers. They are denied the rights and of being a Mexican citizen in Mexico at the same time that they will be denied basic labor rights and state supports as “foreigners” in the U.S. (Sandoval 2007)

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22 Stephen 2007:313.
23 Gonzalez (2011) notes that subsistence-oriented peasants were “lured by violent drug cartels to switch to marijuana and opium crops” (Gonzalez 2011:XXI). Interestingly, Gledhill (1995) observes that in some contexts, neoliberalism has been accompanied with the growth of violence with mafias and paramilitary forces.
24 One example of this perception by the neoliberal Mexican governments is the statement of former Mexico’s President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) who in the context of a bilateral meeting with U.S., President George Bush in 2001, declared: “[Migration] is no longer a problem for us, but an opportunity. Because it is an opportunity for Americans to be supplied with this productive and efficient Mexican labor force” (Fox 2001). In the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2000-2006, the Mexican government clearly stated that one of the objectives of the Mexican state was to create: “strategies to influence the direction of domestic and international migration; to strength Mexico’s regional competitive advantages” (Presidencia de la República 2000:143).
Ultimately, the state-sponsored integrationism brilliantly scrutinized by Warman and other anthropologists of his generation was overturned and exists now as an archaic relic of the nation’s history. The irony is that the dismantling of Mexico’s twentieth-century integrationist project (that eased the social tensions in rural Mexico) did not come by way of a national-political reckoning but by way of global, free-market policy. In the process, small peasants in Mexico with indigenous backgrounds, like some characters of this ethnography, were left on their own to face the economic and social dilemmas brought upon them by the needs of a capitalist market. As I will demonstrate through the figures in the following chapters, the former subjects of Mexico’s integrationist polices are now wandering in the North American Free market.

In this dissertation I will also explore the different meanings of “integration” as Mexican workers in New York become typified members of a immigrant labor reserve. Finally, I will show that if the post-revolutionary imaginaries of Mexican anthropology could not be achieved by “forging a nation,” by integrating Mexican indigenous people into the nation, a kitchen in downtown Manhattan can at least melt previous former ethnic differences among Mexicans and turn them into an homogenous labor force in the workplace, a source of value in the eyes of their employers that treat Mexican undocumented migrants as exploitable resources. Indeed, as small-peasants from throughout Mexico migrate to the U.S., they are often categorized by politicians, the press, local populations, and the state under the single term “Mexican,” thereby stripping these groups of local and ethnic identifications, class differences, as well as the particularities that shaped their collective motivations to emigrate. This is not a new reduction nor an altogether “North American” one. As Aldama (2001) has noted Gamio’s (1930, 1931) writings on Mexican emigration also reduced the “heterogeneity of human
subjectivity” into a universalized and “racialized male essence.”

It is not surprising then that the glossing over of intra-Mexican cultural particularity also occurs within anthropological and sociological literature in the United States, where Mexican immigrants have been historically categorized simply as “ethnics” as opposed to migrant-national groups internally differentiated by class and ethnicity. As a result the topic of indigenous migrants from Mexico has been largely absent from scholarly discussion on Mexican migration into the United States even though indigenous migrants have composed a significant segment of Mexican immigrants into the U.S. for over a century (Weber 1998). There is thus a tendency, as Weber (1998) points out, to write the “Mexican immigrant” into the scholarly literature as a culturally homogenous group and, as a result, a failure to grasp the history of Mexican indigenous peoples in the U.S.

Nevertheless, Mexican scholars have recently begun to examine internal differences among Mexican migrants living in the United States. For example, Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004) identify Mexican migrants as a multi-ethnic group within the United States and to further examine the ways that ethnicity shapes particular strategies of organization, identity discourses, and the formation of hometown associations. In the case of Mixtecos in California, the authors also observe the extent to which ethnicity contributes to bi-national political participation as well as to the creation of new collective identities and actions such as the traditional tequío and cargo systems in the United States. This approach was nurtured by the pioneering research of the late Michael Kearney (2000) on the transnational Mexican migration of Mixtecos and Zapotecs from Oaxaca to the West Coast of the United States and the formation of so-called pan-ethnic

\[25\] Aldama 2001:44
identities upon crossing the border into the United States. Kearney pointed out the extent to which transnationalism transformed the ethnic identities of Mixteco and Zapoteco indigenous migrants. According to Kearney, their identity as members of a particular community was replaced by a pan-ethnic identity or self-ascription as members of an ethnic group, as Mixtecos or Zapatecos, in which pan-ethnic identity emerges as a form of political consciousness in place of communal forms of identity.

More recently, Stephen (2007) has asserted that Mixteco migrants from the state of Oaxaca are transborder migrants crossing back and forth the U.S.-Mexico border and being “inserted” into two different ethnic, class, and racial hierarchies. There are several implications that need commentary. Firstly, certainly the multi-ethnic character of Mexican migration to the United States is a feature that has been acknowledged and properly examined. However, it is interesting to note the extent to which within the literature on Mexican indigenous migration this crucial recognition has led to the examination of indigenous people as self-contained ethnic

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26 Kearney was one of the first anthropologists to study Mexican indigenous migrant communities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. His approach was a significant shift in the way U.S. anthropology examined Mexican migration. During the 1940s and 1950s American anthropologists were concerned in explaining social change as a result of rural to urban migration in Mexico, as for example, the research of Robert Redfield (1941, 1950) in Yucatán. For the first time, this research showed that migrants could have a positive impact on the development of their home communities and to be carriers of knowledge and innovative elements to promote social change in their communities of origin. In the 1950s, Oscar Lewis (1951, 1959) conducted an intensive study of the behavior and the formation of subcultures (culture of poverty) among peasant families of Tepoztlán, one of Redfield’s field sites. Lewis was interested in explaining the changes in behavior and the way of life of migrants. As noted by Roseberry (1995), such approaches focused on the internal social relationships of communities without examining their relationships with larger society and contributed to depict rural communities in some “unproblematic” and “romantic fashion.” According to Roseberry, Wolf contributed changing this approach by examining rural communities within a “web of power.” Wolf (1955, 1956) contributed to rethink rural communities as the product of political institutions. He asserted that “closed communities” were colonial institutions, shaped by political relations rather than cultural intrinsic characteristics. Then rural communities where shaped by larger societies with political institutions as the state or the market. A decade later, Wolf (1966) examined the effects of the market economy in the dissolution of local power relations in rural communities. The work of Michael Kearney became part of this long tradition of U.S. anthropology for the study of migration, the peasantry and social change in Mexico. However, Kearney’s research also had important implications for the study of migration from the point of view of theories of assimilation, acculturation, and segmented assimilation. By studying the relationships between communities of origin and destination, Kearney move beyond dichotomous schemes that divided the traditional and the modern, national and ethnic origin and showed that social structures and practices, do not disappear with migration, but instead allow indigenous communities to transnationally organize.
groups within the Mexican migrant stream. Then, for instance, we have studies of Mixteco or Zapoteco migrants in California or Oregon, or Mayas in the south of the U.S as self-contained groups separated from the rest of the Mexican migrants.

This approach resembles the self-contained approaches to Mexican rural peasant communities criticized by Eric Wolf decades ago. For sure, ethnicity, kinship, and community origin are relevant in shaping migrant’s everyday life: in getting access to jobs or housing, or for their participation in civic institutions. However, in the everyday life of U.S. cities such as New York City, mestizos and indigenous are not self-contained groups, they do not live in self-contained Mixteco or Nahua neighborhoods or perform in self-contained labor markets. Instead, they share jobs, housing, leisure time, and they face similar challenges with employers, landlords, or state officials. Consequently, an attempt to historicize the Mixtecos of the Montaña as separated from the mestizo people of Tlapa and even from the rest of the Mexican migrant working class in the city would result in a false abstraction.

In the same way, it is important to keep in mind that the historical trajectories of migration and proletarianization of Mexican indigenous people should not be isolated from the rest of the Mexican migrant stream. Contemporary mestizos and Mixtecos from the Montaña have been incorporated into the Mexican labor as a result of an act of power that has rearranged the entire social, political and economic structure in Mexico, and displaced both mestizos and indigenous from their communities. However, for the first two chapters of this dissertation I have contained Mixtecos and the mestizos as separated solely for analytical purposes as I explain below.

As previously noted by Mexican anthropologists, since the early twentieth-century indigenous people have been subjected and culturally discriminated based on their ethnicity,

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27 See footnote 25.
class, and labor position. Therefore, the acknowledging of ethnic differences or ethnic diversity within the broad scope of the Mexican stream is still a partial consideration. It is necessary to note that the Mexican indigenous people are also differentiated from the rest of the Mexican stream by previous class and labor experiences, and hence have been subjected to particular forms of exploitation. For example, the Mixtecos from the Montaña have gone through and endured rounds of proletarianization and conditions of social exclusion that are singular and thus different from those of the mestizo proletarian migrants from Tlapa. The Mixteco proletarianization via migration has been shaped by previous class and ethnic origins that need to be properly acknowledged rather than subsumed as part of a homogenous pattern in the Mexican stream. In sum, to recognize the multi-ethnic nature of Mexican migration is not sufficient for elaborating an accurate picture of Mexican indigenous migration.

Secondly, Bartolomé (1997) pointed out the extent to which Mexico’s twentieth century history was shaped by the state project to desindianizar; that is to eliminate Mexico’s ethnic diversity. The categories of indigenous and mestizo people were tailored as part of a state ideology to justify the economic exploitation and cultural discrimination based on an ethnic hierarchy.

On Oral history

Oral narratives have been key for anthropologists and scholars in examining the transformation of social life produced by migration and displacement. In their study on Polish migration to the United States, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918), demonstrated the extent to which life stories and migrants’ narratives can be a powerful source for exploring social change, social organization, and peasant migration. Life stories and autobiographies have been used by anthropologists as a
window into the collective social past of indigenous peasants since the early twentieth century, as in the case of Ricardo Pozas’s classic book *Juan Pérez Jolote* (1952), the biography of an indigenous Tzotzil from the southern state of Chiapas.

It is important to note, as does Acuña (1989), that oral history “reflects on the relationship between human action and structural constraints, between freedom and necessity in history.” These constraints have been examined by anthropologists through the use of oral narratives. For example, Warman’s (1980) essay on peasantry and capitalism in central Mexico examines the tension between the state and the peasants, and the way this tension shapes and endangers peasants’ social existence. Through the use of oral narratives, Warman shows us people’s persistence “to survive, to go on being peasants, to continue here obstinately, permanently.”

Warman demonstrates how oral narratives can be a powerful means for anthropologists to examine peoples’ pasts and to reconstruct the history of people within large systems of power. He also points out the extent to which oral narratives must be located within a broader historical context to study the tensions between structure and human action, much like Acuña (1989). The tensions, produced as a result of a families’ migrant experiences and the way people live and organize life in transnational migrants circuits have been examined by Rouse (1989) who collected family oral histories of Mexican migrants from West-Central Mexico in California to explore how migrant families maintain and transform their social relations as they migrate and live in transnational spaces.

Oral history has allowed examining the connections between proletarianization, migration, and contemporary dispossession in Mexico to understand the formation of large

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29 Warman 1980:3.
structures of transnational migrant labor supply. Anthropologist Federico Besserer (1988) in collaboration with Moisés Cruz, a Mixteco migrant worker from Oaxaca, wrote a narrative of the proletarianization and the formation of class-consciousness among Mixteco migrant workers in the United States. More recently, Hellman (2008) has collected the histories of Mexicans regarding their crossing and settlement in the U.S. By elaborating microhistories of Mexican migrants, Hellman has provided a picture of the large-scale transformations in the U.S. and Mexican societies as result of migration. Hellman’s research is among the few studies in recent anthropological literature that emphasize the voices and the point of view of contemporary Mexican migrants in the U.S.

Through her account she demonstrates that narratives allow us not only to recreate the past by recollecting people’s memory, but also to interrogate the tensions in people’s lives produced by the transformation of large social, political, and economic structures such as the state or the labor market. Therefore, oral history may help anthropology to examine and understand those tensions and the way they shape people’s lives in different ways.

Acuña (1989) has noted that oral narratives offer critical insight into class formation, and anthropologists have demonstrated that they can be useful in reconstructing the formation of ideas and beliefs among proletarians. June Nash in her life story of Bolivian miner Juan Rojas demonstrated that oral history facilitates class-consciousness analysis by examining people’s life stories. Oral historian Ronald Grele (2007) has noted the extent that the past “lives on and informs the present.” Oral history may prove to be extremely useful in grounding our ethnographic observations in people’s pasts. Therefore, the ethnographic observation and interpretation of social life may be grounded in the past, and oral history may assist anthropology to unveil the past “behind” people’s daily interaction.
This dissertation asserts that peoples’ pasts matter. I assert that the Mexican working class in New York City was born outside the borders of the U.S. and, therefore, a proper transnational historical approach should examine their history on both sides of the border, even before they become members of the U.S. working class.

In his keen interrogations of Gamio’s descriptions of labor exploitation and the racial victimization of Mexicans in the U.S., Aldama (2001) states that “the border travels with Mexicans wherever they go in the United States, making them invisible noncitizens prey to hyper exploitation and violence with impunity.” However, this exploitation and violence are also shared collectively by Mexicans before they cross the border. The history of former dispossession also travels with Mexicans across the continent, and those previous collective experiences of deprivation may help us to understand the people’s motivations to migrate.

Lucien Febvre (1953) asserted that the purpose of history is to provide a rational organization of the past. However, he added that in a divided society with contradictory interests, there are different ways to organize the past. Chesneaux (1976) argued that history penetrates the existing class tensions within society and so it cannot remain in the margins. When discussing how the history of the Mexican indigenous peoples has been written, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1980) pointed out that their history is an unwritten history, or in any case a set of histories that remain to be written, since they have been organized and written from the perspective of state power. Thus, the social and political history of the Mexican indigenous population (and proletarian mestizos, too) is integrated into histories written to justify and rationalize their oppression. These histories are written in opposition to a “history from below” (Burke 1992), which is concerned with recovering the voices of the anonymous mass of people.

Aldama 2001:52.
as conscious agents of life, like those detailed below, Othón and “the man who has no name.”

As I will show in this dissertation, in the last three decades, the Mexican ruling class has rationalized in different ways the massive flow of dispossessed people from Mexico’s impoverished regions such as the Montaña.

Therefore, oral history offers possibilities of recording those unwritten histories noted by Bonfil Batalla (1980). Oral history allows us not only to explore people’s pasts, but to collaborate with all those members of the subaltern classes whose oral culture has not been written (Ginzburg 1995). The members of the non-hegemonic classes who have not only been materially deprived, but as Portelli (1991) noted, have been also deprived of the means to properly tell their history. This description of the Montaña people is relevant since, as noted by Mario García (1994) in his oral history of Chicano leader Berth Corona, “oral history has been particularly important because Mexican-Americans and other racial minorities in the United States have generally been poor, working people who historically have not produced a vast array of documents or other written matter.”

The tensions between those who write history and those who are dispossessed from writing their own history affects the ways in which we imagine history as an instrument for recovering the voice of that people whose names remain “unknown and unknowable.” But it also affects how we understand oral history as a theory of history. Okihiro has noted that oral history is a “theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written.” Or as Leigh Binford has written, “every member of an oppressed group has a story to tell.”

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34 Binford 1996:10.
Therefore I state that Othón and “the man who has no name” have a history to tell: the history of the abandoned and the history of how a people were forced to its knees by the Mexican ruling class. Using their oral narratives I intend to search through the past of a people that, as described by one of them, has been turned into a “commodity” for sale in the North American migrant labor market. Through their life stories I explore and interrogate issues such as social inequality and the growing distress among the population of the Montaña and its indigenous population. They open a window to see social inequality and the role of the Montaña region as an international migrant labor supplier. I will show how the history of the abandoned and the inhabitants of the chemo days became part of the history of the United States and the city of New York. In the abandonment and the chemo days are located the origin of New York City’s newest proletarians.

Both of Othón and the “man who has no name” have lived in the social, economic, political, racial, and legal margins of the U.S and Mexican society. One lived in a rural town in the Montaña and the other in the city of Tlapa. Othón is a Mixteco migrant born in a rural town, a songwriter, musician and former day laborer in Sinaloa, in northwest Mexico. The “man who has no name” is a mestizo born in Tlapa. He is a punk and he is also a songwriter and musician who uses music to elaborate claims that contest the large structures that shape people’s lives as well as the political and economic actors whose decisions ultimately make of him, Othón, and the Montaña people “commodities” that are sold and bought in the streets of New York City. Contrary to the victimization of Mexican migrants in the United States (García 1994), neither of them are voiceless subjects, and their life stories help us to overcome the victimization of Mexicans in the U.S and in Mexico. As songwriters, Othón and the “man who has no name” have written fragments of the history of the Montaña people and its migration.
I think that a legitimate reservation may now come up: whether I am editing the voice of my collaborators to comply with the purposes of providing a rational organization of the past, or whether I am editing their voice as an oppositional voice, a voice that emerges from below to interrogate the labor migration from the Montaña to New York City. As Crapanzano (1980) points out, “anthropologists have been inclined to proclaim neutrality and even invisibility in their field work.” As the reader will note in the following pages there is no intention on my part to eliminate myself from what Crapanzano refers to as “the ethnographic encounter” between individuals in that abstraction that anthropologists call “the field.” In my case I encountered the past of my collaborators through their recollections of their own pasts: their experiences of poverty as day laborers or being humiliated for being indigenous or undocumented workers in New York. I think that the nature of this encounter shapes or informs the writing of their life as an oppositional history. And also, since punk is an oppositional genre, I cannot imagine another way to write the life-story of a young migrant punk from Tlapa in New York City except as an oppositional history.

For the purpose of interrogating their pasts, I decided to move their voices to the front pages of this dissertation, and to address such questions as they weave their stories by themselves. This is a decision fundamentally informed by a theory of history and its relationship with anthropology also as oppositional anthropology. Oppositional history emerges here to echo my collaborators’ voices, and how they have used them to challenge and contest the causes of their individual and collective displacement.

The struggle of migrant people is not only the struggle for their material preservation and reproduction, but also to keep their identity as a collective through history. A way to preserve

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35 Crapanzano 1980:ix
this collective experience is through the recollection of the past, the recollection of memories, particularly among the first generation of migrants from the Montaña. The large structural forces that in the past swept the region and its inhabitants jeopardized not only the possibility to sustain the material basis for life reproduction, but also their sense of collectivity. An oppositional anthropology of the Mexican migrant working class must contribute to constructing and preserving the historical consciousness of a people in hard times. And it also may contribute to elaborating a critique of the barbaric existing modes of producing and distributing wealth that threaten the desired need for a decent human life for everyone.

Purpose of the work

This dissertation is fundamentally an historical account of how indigenous Mexicans and mestizos from the Montaña region, people from opposite sides of the ethnic and class divide in the region, became disposable workers in their own country and became proletarianized via migration to the United States. By the end of the twentieth century, as they entered into the New York City economy as wage workers, both groups became integrated into the global labor market.

By exploring the history of the Montaña people as migrant workers in New York City, we interrogate not only how geographical and labor connections are being produced between a North American city and a region in south Mexico, but how a densely indigenous populated region is integrated into the Mexican nation-state. What does the labor integration of the Montaña people in the U.S. tell us about the terms of their integration (a former key issue for Mexican anthropology in the twentieth century) into the Mexican nation state? What does it mean if we look at it from the point of view of Montaña labor migration? What does integration
look like from the perspective of Mexican migrant workers? What does it tell us about the location of the Mixteco and the indigenous population in contemporary Mexico?

This dissertation will show the extent to which Montaña migration to New York City is, on the one hand, the consequence of breaking the fragile but functional relationship between the semi-proletarianization of the Mixtecos in Mexico’s commercial agricultural enclaves and, on the other hand, the consequence of the recent destruction of peasant subsistence economy. The breakdown of the peasant subsistence economy is connected to the growing economic dispossession of the region’s indigenous population. When Mixtecos in New York City talk about social inequality in the region as the main cause of out migration, they refer to it as the *abandonment*. They believe that the Mexican state has abandoned them by excluding them from participation in a sustainable local economy based upon their formerly constitutionally guaranteed right to farm communal lands. Moreover, they believe the state failed to protect them from attacks on their livelihood emanating from U.S. corporate agricultural producers. Abandonment, for them, describes how they as an indigenous people have been denied the Constitutional protections of Mexican citizenry and continue to be treated as outsiders in their own nation.

But this dissertation will also examine mestizo migration from Tlapa and the sense of having no future among Tlapa’s teenagers, a sense of no future embodied in what I call the *chemo days*: the days of solitude and family disruption caused by migration to the United States. Thus I will provide a picture of people migrating both from rural and urban areas of the region.

Through oral history this dissertation reveals that proletarianization via migration consists of specific historical forms of dispossession of the Montaña people such as the *abandonment* and the *chemo days*. The people’s oral narratives presented in this dissertation belong to the first
generation of migrant workers from the Montaña region in New York. The voices belong to the members of the first families and communities arriving in New York City and give an account of the early days of this new Mexican migration to the United States.

It is within this historical frame that questions such as “where have the Montaña people gone?” can be answered. Binford (2013) has pointed out that in contemporary Mexico, historical context is necessary in order to understand people’s motivations to migrate. Therefore I propose to examine their proletarianization via migration within the large historical framework of dispossession in the region and the unprecedented wealth concentration and unequal distribution aggravated by contemporary free-market policies in Mexico. In this way we will properly understand the relationship between individual narratives of labor migration and large social, political and economic transformations in Mexico and the region. As labor historian Leon Fink (2003) has pointed out “to understand the motives and behaviors of Third World workers—either on their home turf or as immigrant recruits to more developed metropoles—we need to fit them into a global political economy of competitive markets, changing technology, and a managerial logic of labor control.” I would add that we must fit them into a history located on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. As I will show, claims elaborated by Guerrerense migrants in the city are the product of the accumulation of collective and individual historical experience on both sides of the U.S-Mexico border, and are rooted in different forms of dispossession.

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36 Fink 2003:5
Methods

The fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted between November 2010 and November 2011. Prior to that time, I informally collected data and gathered interviews during my years as a doctoral student and an independent journalist for printed and online media in Mexico City, New York, and Chicago.

This research involved collecting migrants’ narratives and oral histories of people from the Montaña region. One hundred sixty seven, one-to-two-hour interviews were digitally recorded with the intent to obtain insight into: 1) divergent urban and migratory experiences among population in the Montaña; 2) the disruption of rural and urban communities; 3) migrants’ previous life and working experiences; 4) their role in production and access to property; 5) labor experience as peasants, urban workers, small entrepreneurs, or as temporal migrants in Mexico or in the U.S; 6) their roles in the labor process, as mestizos, Indians, workers, and bosses. The interviews also aimed to elicit their experiences as migrant workers and residents in the United States. The areas of inquiry included: 1) their role in the formation of new migrant communities upon their arrival to New York City, and the making of migrant working-class neighborhoods; 2) their migratory histories up to and including their arrival in New York City; 3) their access to jobs and housing; 4) wages, working conditions, and job networks; and 5) their relations with the local Mexican power structure on the job and in the neighborhood of residence.

All interviews were recorded with the consent of my collaborators. Since the majority of the individuals interviewed for this research are undocumented migrant workers, I use pseudonyms to protect their identity. Usually these interviews were conducted at night, after my collaborators’ working day. I scheduled a weekly interview session with Othón, and “the man who has no name.” These meetings were conducted at their apartments or my own. The
interviews conducted with “the man who has no name” were often preceded by a dinner cooked by him. As he had worked as a cook in several delis and restaurants, he had plenty of experience in the kitchen and each interview was an occasion for him to prepare a special dish, including his famous pizzas and truly special pasta. We were friends before I started my fieldwork, and we did things that friends do: we used to talk about our lives and sorrows, laugh and make fun of each other, and hang around in the city eating cheap pizza and drinking beer. When we started working on this research I think I was not prepared, or I did not imagine how difficult it would be to work with someone close, or to draw an imaginary line between the moments and spaces of friendship and those of research collaboration. At the end, it was hard and painful for both of us, and sometimes the tensions in our collaboration emerged as jokes. So, usually when I asked “the man who has no name” to schedule our next interview he used to say: “Oh, no, not again! Stop fucking with me Rodolfo, I already told you what you wanted to know.”

With Othón it was quite different. I met him and the band he plays with through a magazine advertisement that I found one Saturday night in a Roosevelt Avenue record store in Queens and after attending a gig where “the man who has no name” played. I called the owner of the group and two weeks later I was in his apartment for the band’s rehearsal and was immediately invited to drink beer with them. That same night we recorded a brief interview about their lives and then I decided to follow in depth the story of two band members, including Othón. In addition to my weekly interviews with Othón, we also met at the rehearsals and gigs where the band played, and I traveled with them as part of their crew.

So, besides sharing his story as migrant worker, Othón shared with me the discomfort of traveling together across the city in the back of a van packed with band instruments. Every time they endlessly played the band’s demo in the stereo, and Othón and I were always trying to get
comfortable ourselves in the back, next to an amplifier or a bass.

Othón and “the man who has no name” may help us to elaborate an account on the history of the Montaña people in New York City. If the feelings and grievances, the daily frustrations and hopes of thousands of Mexican migrants cannot be manifested or be expressed in the everyday life of the city, that does not mean they do not exist as a product of the class experience of Mexican migrant proletarians. In fact, among Mexican migrants, there is a silent set of feelings that often do not become visible or manifested.

Through their songs, Othón and “the man who has no name,” express the people’s feelings, the accumulated grievances of the Mexican working class from the Montaña. They are uncommon people like those described by Eric Hobsbawn: “the sort of people whose names are usually unknown to anyone [people who] played a role on small or local public scene”\textsuperscript{37} and make a difference or intend to make a difference to transform their fate or the fate of their people. The two central characters of this dissertation are two uncommon people who contest the abandonment and the \textit{chemo days} through their songs. For this reason I decided to ask them to collaborate with me to write their history and the history of their people.

Some other life stories I gathered during my fieldwork were not included due to lack of space. Sadly the life story of another member of the “Mighty Group la Montaña” is not included here. It is the story of a Mixteco migrant and former day laborer in Sinaloa. He was a monolingual Mixteco speaker before arriving in New York where he became fluent in Spanish and in English, which later on allowed him to become a community activist and organizer in the Lower East Side. His narrative showed the extent to which the history of language acquisition, whether Spanish or English, by Mexican indigenous people, has been the history of the need to

\textsuperscript{37} Hobsbawn 1999:vii.
work and to self-defense against labor abuse. Also, the life story of Minacho, a Mixteco cook in Upper Manhattan whose account shows the history of the teachers’ movement in Guerrero during the 1980s. Also, the life story of Minacho, illuminates the urban experience of Mixtecos from the point of view of their displacement by gentrification and landlord abuse in the city. The bond of affections with our collaborators is almost inevitable. Being in the field entails the same risks and joys of life, and spending more than eight months with Minacho was one of the greatest pleasures I had during my fieldwork.

I am not including the life story of a Mixteco woman who has worked as a Mixteco-to-Spanish interpreter in the New York City courts, nor the life story of Lino, a migrant from Tlapa who has been heavily involved in transnational participation and who generously introduced me to the Tlapa’s community in New York.

I deeply regret not having the space and the craft as a writer to include all their life stories. Particularly I regret not having the space to include the history of the Guerrerense working class from the point of view of women. Guerrerense, Mexican and Latina women were an important segment of the sweatshops in New York City in the 1980s and constitute an important segment of the informal sector of the city economy as street vendors. In fact Mexican and Guerrerense women were able to build up one of the most successful street vendors’ and class-based organizations in the city to confront police abuse. If I mention such missing material here, it is just to alert the reader to complex aspects of the Montaña migration and life in New York City not included in this work. To all of them I ask for forgiveness for not including their histories, which deserved to be written and included in this dissertation.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish. In the case of Mixteco migrants, those interviewed were bilingual speakers (in Mixteco and Spanish), and in all cases Mixteco was their
mother tongue. All Mixteco interviewees were fluent Spanish speakers, the majority of them were already bilingual by the time of their arrival in New York City, and just a few spoke only in Mixteco when they arrived. On the one hand, being a Spanish native speaker from Mexico was an asset that facilitated access to the field, and put me in an advantageous position to capture the subtle linguistic meanings in the Mexican migrants’ daily Spanish language use. Not being a Mixteco speaker, on the other hand, resulted in the disadvantage of being unable to capture the richness provided by using your mother language in portraying our world. As I said, my interviewees were fluent in Spanish, but I lost insight during those casual conversations in Mixteco, particularly those at their homes with their wives and children. Also I must say that I lost comprehension when jokes were told in Mixteco, particularly when those were about me.

As said, the interviews were in Spanish as well as the transcripts and these were translated from Spanish to English. Here I would like to note the difficulties of translation. One of the most interesting aspects of the interviews, from the point of view of language, is how people, particularly Mixtecos, intermingle the past and present as well as being in Mexico and in the United States as a continuum in their narrative. For example, people may narrate about social life, as if they were located in Guerrero not in New York. Sadly, these subtle aspects of the use of language are not very well reflected in my English translations.

Since Mexican migrants are becoming less self-contained and connected across the different neighborhoods of New York City, this research is not based in a specific Mexican migrant neighborhood in New York City. Dávila (2004) and Sharman (2006) have contributed to our understanding of the Mexicans’ migrant life in New York City, and the ethnic succession in migrant neighborhoods such as East Harlem, which is one of the major Mexican enclaves in the city along with Sunset Park, in Brooklyn, and Jackson Heights in Queens. An important
aspect to note is that there is no urban enclave in the city where community formation is based on being from the Montaña region. The same goes for migrant populations from other states of Mexico. There are of course important demographic concentrations of Mexicans from the states of Guerrero, Puebla, and Oaxaca, but they coexist not only with other Mexican migrants but also with Latino migrants, as in Queens, or with African-American populations, as in Manhattan, the Bronx, or Staten Island.

However this does not mean that neighborhood life was not important for conducting fieldwork. Regular observations and interactions with Mexicans and people from the Montaña were conducted outside of their workplaces, particularly in the places of regular socialization located in the neighborhoods where they live, and in their homes. As labor historian Joshua Freeman (2000) has noted, the geography of New York City shapes working-class culture, and Mexicans are no an exception. Parks, churches, and dance halls are not only the spaces where workers socialize and get organized, but also the places in which they develop ideas about social and political life. Those places, in the case of Mexicans, are locales where they reflect about their previous life in Mexico, about the social meanings of working and living in the city, their daily tensions with bosses or coworkers. For this reason, I lived for one year in one of the boroughs with the highest density of migrant population from the Montaña region.

During my fieldwork I became known and addressed by my collaborators in different ways: “Profe” for “profesor” or teacher; Licenciado; “the journalist,” “the Chilango” (a derogatory name for people from Mexico City), or simply “Rodo,” “carnal,” “hermano” or brother. Each of them had different implications as well as expectations. For example as “Licenciado” I was asked to provide legal advice to a band from the region that apparently was involved in a law suit dispute over name plagiarism, or even to give advice about how to find a
detective to resolve a robbery in an apartment in the Bronx. But also, “since I was educated,” I was asked to help write love letters by a young man from the Guerrerense municipality of Alpoyeca who hoped to reconcile with his wife.

Also, at the beginning of the fieldwork, a group of Mixtecos spread the word that there was a “loco suelto por ahí,” or there is a crazy man hanging around and asking questions about the history of the region and its people out there. “He is not crazy,” one of my collaborators explained to them. And then he added that I was just “a student in anthropology” who was hanging around asking questions of Mixtecos when everyone was so busy during the winter trying to make a living. “He is a journalist and he is writing a book about us,” he responded to those who warned about the existence of such a lunatic.

Chapter organization

Chapter 1 examines Mixteco semi-proletarianization via labor migration to northwest Mexico. I trace the history of Othón to examine his individual and collective past and to understand how Mixtecos peasants became proletarians. I show the extent to which the formation of a proletarian Mixteco segment in the city is quite different to the mestizo proletarians from the city of Tlapa. I examine the formation of a Guerrerense working class in New York City as the product of different rhythms, temporalities, and intertwined paths of proletarianization. I argue that Mixteco indigenous labor migration to New York City must be located within the large historical framework of unequal social, economic, and political relationships between the Mexican state and the indigenous population in Mexico. I assert in this chapter that Mixteco migration to New York can help us explore the Mixtecos’ former historical and social location in the Montaña.

Chapter 2 looks at the social history of migration from the Montaña, situating the
perspective from the city of Tlapa and its mestizo inhabitants. This chapter locates the individual and collective experience of solitude, restlessness, despair, sense of no future, and drug consumption among Tlapa’s teenagers embodied in what I called the chemo days, an experience preceding their migration to New York. In Chapter 3, I explore the political economy and the language of the abandonment and the necessity, the cultural forms through which the Mixtecos from the Montaña express social inequality and the historical dissatisfaction of the basic social needs in the region. Material abandonment and necessity comprise the historical ground in which a Mixteco indigenous working class in New York was born. These conditions express the set of relations into which they “enter involuntarily” (Thompson 1966) by generations as migrant workers. I assert that contemporary massive migration from densely populated Mexican indigenous regions to the U.S. in the aftermath of Mexico’s economic crisis may help us interrogate a category such as integration that was central for Mexican anthropology in the twentieth century after the Mexican Revolution.

This dissertation is divided and connected through a photographic essay on the social, economic, and political life of Guerrerenses and Mexicans in both sides of the U.S-Mexico border. The photographs complement the narrative of a people that left the Montaña to find a new life in a faraway land. The essay can also be read as a narrative in itself, involving the history of two cities: the city of Tlapa and New York City, two cities transformed by Mexican migration. This essay was collaboratively produced with Claudia Villegas.

In Chapter 4, I explore the settlement and incorporation process into the job market in New York City of a previously class and ethnically differentiated migrant population. This chapter discusses the racialization and stratification of Mexican labor migration from the Montaña. Is there such a “Mexican indigenous labor” among Mexicans, or is there instead a
homogenization of the meanings of labor in spite of previous ethnic differences within the Mexican stream? This chapter examines the tensions and racism of non-indigenous Mexicans toward indigenous Mexicans emerging in the workplaces that may deter the working-class people from Montaña to “come to feel an identity of interests between themselves, and as against their rules and employers.”

In Chapter 5 I follow Thompson’s approach to understanding class as a social and cultural formation. For that purpose, I literally trace back the adolescence of young migrants in Tlapa to depict their ideas embedded in punk music. I trace the formation of punk and rock in the city of Tlapa in the 1980s to examine the extent to which punk and rock shaped the visions of social life for a generation of Tlapa teenagers that later on became proletarians in New York. This chapter analyzes how punk and rock helped a whole generation of young Tlapanecos to convey and shape their visions and interpretations of social and political life in the Montaña. This chapter is also about how a group of Tlapa teenagers found in punk and rock an instrument to collectively elaborate in their own terms social claims about social inequality and politics in the region. Through punk, Tlapa’s teenagers depicted the same “ruinous exploitation” of the indigenous population in the Montaña described by anthropologist Alfonso Fabila in the mid-twenty century. They used punk as a means of becoming conscious of themselves and build up their own identity. As I show in this chapter, rock and punk formation in Tlapa is strongly connected both with labor migration to the United States, as well as to the distress and sense of no future embedded in the chemo days for Tlapa’s teenagers.

Chapter 6 is the “B side” of the record of Tlapa’s young generation. If the previous chapter (the “A side”) looks or listens to the claims made by Tlapa teenagers south of the U.S-

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38 Thompson 1966:11.
Mexico border, in this final chapter I listen to the claims produced and recorded after they crossed the border and became proletarians in New York City. This chapter explores the extent to which punk and rock music may be considered as a cultural expression of a Guerrerense and Mexican working-class formation in New York City. For that purpose, I analyze different forms the Guerrerense punks utilized to contest their location as workers, migrants and inhabitants of the Montaña: 1) the elaboration of individual claims against the intention of Tlapa’s local government to get the economic support of the Guerrerense migrant community in New York to build infrastructure back in Tlapa; 2) the formation of a transnational rock market between Mexico and the U.S., and 3) the commodification of previous forms of community formation based on rock affinity as well as the destruction of working-class migrant solidarity.
CHAPTER 1
THE ABANDONED

That summer afternoon on a Saturday as we crossed the Hudson River Othón took me on a trip into his deepest memories. As we were driving from New York to Philadelphia, he suddenly found an exit to his childhood on the New Jersey Turnpike. He then took me to the place where he hunted deer and raccoons with his grandfather. We were driving past Elizabeth, New Jersey, but in his memory he was picturing the same road that Julio, his grandfather, used to take with his parents when they were jornaleros, or day laborers; this is the same road all of them had transited to survive. Probably no one else in the car was listening or paying any attention to his recounting of those old memories on that warm and humid afternoon; and even less when the music was turned louder and louder and our companions were more amused by the passing sights they were staring at out of the car windows consisting of a steady flow of cars and trucks rolling along the endless highway, running along the swamps of New Jersey.

Othón plays in a music band. That morning, we had waited for more than an hour before a van arrived to pick up us. We were standing outside a basement in Washington Heights, a Dominican enclave in Upper Manhattan, where his band practices every week. The basement belongs to a Dominican, who is also the owner of a Mexican grocery store called “El Huarache,” one of many Mexican businesses in the area owned by Ecuadorians and Dominicans. The poorly illuminated basement where Othón and his band rehearse used to be a Mexican billiard parlor. The traces of its old function remain fixed on the walls: three paintings depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe still hang on the walls alongside an image of a half-naked

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39 Huaraches are leather sandals used by peasants in Mexico.
female. “I am going to place the keyboard next to the girl,” said Abel, who leads the band and also is the owner. Their band is called the *El Poderoso Grupo la Montaña*, or the “Mighty Group La Montaña;” all band members are natives from the Montaña region in the state of Guerrero in southeastern Mexico.

Time passes by as we are leaving the city behind. Our companions keep silent, appearing as though they are trying to recognize someone or something inside the fleeting vehicles. Or perhaps they are simply relaxing without paying any attention to their surroundings. After a long day, they seem to just want to spend their time listening to the music Abel is endlessly switching to on the radio and drinking beer until getting to South Philadelphia, where the band has been hired to play at a private party of a Guerrerense family. The excitement of hitting the road has waned by now and nobody seems to have much desire to talk, except for Othón, whose voice is heard from the back of the car. He is comfortably seated behind me and is having a good time, laughing and making funny remarks. “Oh, shut up fatso!” jokingly says one of the guys, who immediately is followed from the front of the van by Abel, also demanding that Othón shut up, “Somebody shut up that fucking fatso!” But nobody stops him, not even Mariano, who is seated next to him with a hangover and is just trying to sleep. “Why is everybody so sad and bored? I cannot let you guys to get bored, because I am the *animador* [the persons who livens up a party], he says while he grabs another can of Mexican beer. “*Profe,*” (diminutive for teacher in Spanish), he asks me, “Do you want a beer?” “I prefer a bottle of water don Othón,” I reply. “Hey Rosalío,” says Othón, “give the *Profe* a bottle of water.” Rosalío hands me one while talking on the cell phone with his wife who stayed behind in New York City with their two kids. They speak to each other in Mixteco.

The distracted passengers keep looking through the van windows, even though the
soundproofing walls along the New Jersey Turnpike sometimes block the view of the surroundings. Othón continues staring in silence, drinking his cold beer slowly, while Mariano is still trying to sleep and rests his head on the window. Suddenly, Othón shouts with great joy, “Hey Profe, look! You see that vegetation on the road? It looks like the vegetation in my hometown.”

He continues, “When I was a child, I used to go to the wilderness with my grandfather to hunt raccoons, deer and all sorts of animals. My grandfather taught me to hunt at night and to distinguish the animals by the colors of their eyes. At night the eyes of animals reflect light differently and with different colors. In fact, this highway is similar to the Espinazo del Diablo, the road connecting the cities of Durango and Mazatlán; but that road was really dangerous and very often you could see buses and cars falling into the abyss.” And then, as we kept riding over the New Jersey Turnpike, leaving behind New York City and the swamps of New Jersey, Othón begins to evoke his past. And instead of heading to South Philadelphia we were somewhere else, so far away from there, traveling into his childhood, in a time when New York and Philadelphia were not yet familiar names to him. Neither was Harlem, where he lives now. Then Othón was not even his real name.

A history of day laborers

As the New Jersey Turnpike unfolds as a seemingly endless path, Othón’s talk follows the road as if sooner or later he would find the right exit and go any place you ever wanted, even your own past. But this was only an illusion that disappeared as we were leaving behind the exits to Metro Park, Metuchen, Edison and New Brunswick. The exit to Othón’s past did not exist. It was only his memory, turned into a momentary exit he used to escape from here. Was he
looking for it? I never asked, but maybe he was staring out, searching for an exit that does not appear on actual New Jersey maps but could lead him into his people’s past, the place where everything began. As we pass the exit to Edison, Othón’s thoughts return him to his childhood in Guerrero, the place he dreams of finally taking his wife and two sons, and where he will finally reunite with his eldest son, the one he left behind with his parents. By evoking his childhood, Othón built an exit connecting New Jersey to the Montaña region, the place he is from, and where he dreams of returning to end the sorrow and grief of having lived separated from his son and away from his parents.

His memory also evokes another road the Mixtecos from the Montaña have traveled for generations to sell their labor power in the fields of Sinaloa. Each year thousands of Mixteco indigenous peasants, men, women, and their sons migrate to work in the fields in the northwest Mexican state of Sinaloa. Free men and women migrating to sell their labor force only to find out that once they return to Guerrero, they will be pushed out of their hometowns again and again, year after year, generation after generation, in a cycle that will only be broken when someone in the family eventually migrates to work in the United States and then the family, or at least some of its members, may reunite north of the U.S.-Mexico border, as was the case for Othón. He and the other band members may be norteño musicians in New York, but first and foremost they are migrant workers, laboring in Arab delis in Harlem, in a Korean bodega, in a sushi kitchen in a Midtown restaurant, or on a construction site anywhere in the city. Othón and his pals were once peasants, inhabitants of rural towns, and the sons and grandsons of small landowners, ejidatarios, and semi-proletarian indigenous Mixteco families in the Montaña region. How could all this have happened? The destruction of an entire people’s preexisting mode of life based on subsistence agriculture in the 1990s is what precedes their existence as

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40 Norteño music is a music genre from the Northern states of Mexico.
workers in New York City.

As will be examined more closely in Chapter 3, state retreat in the form of financially scaling back support for small agricultural producers is behind this destruction of subsistence farming and its impacts on migration. This destruction was necessary first to supply the agribusiness export-oriented economy of northwest Mexico with the workers required. Later, they became the workers in restaurants and construction sites of New York City as well as dishwashers, bus boys, cooks, and other sorts of cheap laborers.

In the process, thousands of families are dragged out of the region, thousands of families are temporarily or permanently divided, and thousands of children are separated from their parents. This is what happened with Othón’s family. He was raised by his grandparents and he grew up grieving for his father who left him behind while he left to work as a day laborer in Sinaloa. While his father was picking tomatoes far away, Othón was in the wilderness hunting raccoons and deer with his grandfather. But time inevitably passes. Othón grew up, as his father had before him and he became a day laborer too. But also, when he was a child in Guerrero, his father migrated to work in the California farm fields, and shortly thereafter he migrated to New York to work in a retail clothing store on 34th Street in Manhattan. Years later, father and son met again as migrant workers, this time as Mixteco undocumented migrants in New York City.

Othón followed his father’s footsteps and those of the previous generation, as he became a day laborer as a boy. By saying that, I am not trying to imply Othón was following a designated social path; in fact Othón was angry with his father because he migrated to California and New York and left him behind in the Montaña. When recollecting his own life story, Othón asserts he was abandoned twice, first by his father and next by the government. He puts it this way, “When I was a child I left school and worked as a day laborer for a while. We come from
towns where resources are scarce and where you do not have a great chance of moving forward in life even if you go to school. In Guerrero the government has abandoned us, so by coming to New York we are only trying to make our own path. Each member of the band has his own history, but the main cause why we all abandoned our town is because of poverty, because we are trying to move forward and help our families.” Othón and the Mixteco people are following a pathway of survival, a path they must travel to keep themselves alive. However, that summer night, while traveling to Philadelphia for a few hours, they are not dishwashers, sandwich makers, or construction workers. Instead they are musicians, “the Mighty Group La Montaña.” And that night, it does not matter that Abel is the boss and that they are playing for a wage. These men have chosen neither to be day laborers in Sinaloa nor to work in a kitchen in Manhattan; all they wanted was to be musicians and to do what musicians do.

The story of Othón’s life is in many ways not just his own biography but the life history of Mixteco migrants from the Montaña region in Guerrero, the history of how the sons and grandsons of peasants and day laborers have become members of the Mexican migrant working class in New York City. But how exactly did Othón and his people become proletarians in the city? Their proletarianization may also tell us something about the particular position of the indigenous population within the political economy of the Mexican nation state, and the role it plays within the larger social, economic, and political structure of value exchange we know as the labor market. We may explain the “liberalization” of millions of “agricultural workers” from rural Mexico as a result of new rounds of dispossession related to “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005) as part of massive market-oriented policies in the country as well as the implementation of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. Dispossession here functions as a means of freeing workers from their lands and transforming
entire regions as the Montaña in reservoirs of cheap labor.

Even when there is consensus about accumulation by dispossession being a helpful tool for explaining a state-driven project of commodification and privatization of various forms of commons and state owned assets, including communal and ejido lands, accumulation by dispossession is of limited help in illuminating the entirety of the trajectories behind the formation of a mass of landless migrant proletarians. As I will discuss below, the ways in which Othón, his father, mother, and his grandfather became day laborers, or semi-proletarians, subjected to pre-capitalist forms of labor supply to agricultural market-oriented enclaves in Mexico is a process that has existed since the 1970s.

Moreover, the region did not have to wait for the arrival of state power of a Mexican elite willing to massively privatize communal and ejido lands or to transform the Montaña into a “reservoir of cheap labor force.” Instead, as scholars have pointed out, ever since the second half of the twentieth century the Montaña has been a labor supplier of indigenous semi-proletarians for Mexican agribusiness enclaves in central and northeast Mexico as well as for urban economies (Canabal 2008; Fabila 1955; Ortiz 2010). In this context, if proletarianization is understood as the separation of producers from their means of production, and their subjection to a wage for their labor, this process is deeply rooted in the economic history of the region and is something that has been accomplished through periods of growth and decline. As I will show throughout this study, one of the paradoxes of this economic history is the extent to which the opening-up of the gates to free market exchange policies, advocated by the Mexican ruling class, was the deterioration of the working conditions of indigenous day laborers from the Montaña that led them to seek alternatives to proletarianization via migration to Sinaloa. The penetration of drug production in the region offered Mixtecos an alternative to migration and wage labor. In
an impoverished region, an illegal commodity became the means to alleviate historic economic distress and to slow the speed of proletarianization process.

Proletarianization via migration in the Montaña has progressed differently, in other words, at diverging rates and with varying effects. Among the Mixtecos the separation of peasants from their land has involved different phases, and their turning into migrant wage workers in New York is pushing the household economy in the Montaña to a rising dependency on wages coming from outside Mexico. So, what labor and life routes have the indigenous people of the Montaña walked before riding on the New Jersey Turnpike? Which of those roads has led them to sell their labor in a deli or a restaurant so far away from Guerrero? In the following pages, and through the use of oral history, I will provide answers to these questions by going back to the places and moments where this story began. In the discussion that follows, I will trace the historical experience that Mixtecos refer to as the “abandonment,” an experience of the past and present familiar not just to Mixtecos but to many indigenous Mexican people.

Abandonment and necessity

Besides playing the guitar and keyboard in “the Mighty Group la Montaña,” Othón is the band’s animador, the one who salutes the audience and excites the crowds during live performances. As a good animador he has to put away his worries, “You have to leave your worries at home, leave them outside. Once you are off the stage it is different; you feel alive, you shouldn’t show you are worried or sad. There is simply no place for that because you are playing and singing and all your worries must be off the stage. You cannot show the public you are worried, sad or angry. The animador is constantly talking to the audience. And it is very important to say hello to the audience with love and respect.”
Othón welcomes and greets the audience very similarly at different performances:

“Greetings to the people from Atlajamalcingo, Guerrero; greetings to the people from Oaxaca and Veracruz, and of course to all the people from Tlapa, Guerrero. Where are the people from Guerrero? Where are the people of Puebla, where are the poblanos? Where are the people from Mexico City, where are the chilangos? We welcome the Profe, Rodolfo, who is coming with us from New York City and is writing a book about ‘the Mighty Group La Montaña.’ This song is dedicated to all of you, enjoy the night.” Othón performs the same act everywhere they play: in the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, or Queens. He is a performer and regardless of his own concerns, he must liven up the crowd, he must keep the spirit up with the band and the audience. When it is time to play, sadness and worries about bosses, salaries, rents, money, remittances fade away. He invites and encourages people to hit the floor and dance, and “as the party, and the beer goes on” he needs to ease the drunkards who constantly approach the group requesting their favorite songs, “Hey! Compa (short for Compañero) can you play [this song or that song]?”

“Sure, paisa” (short for paisano or countryman), says Othón, “but hold on just a little bit.”

Sometimes, when the party and the music end, the drunkards will still want the music to continue. “I am sorry paisa,” Othón insists, “but we have to go.” As the animador he must hide his sadness and at the same time face the danger, particularly in events and parties with high levels of alcohol consumption, “the danger as musicians is that you never know what kind of people will be there, because you’re going to a public place and you never can be sure who you’re going to run into. So, you must be careful and be aware of your vocabulary. There are people who think differently, not all of us are equal and they could feel offended by a song and you can be attacked. Also, they can be offended if a woman tries to take a photograph of us. Women have boyfriends or husbands that may feel jealous and you can be attacked or killed.
Those are very important things, so you should try not to get very close to any unknown person. There are very bold women who want to get on the stage and dance with you, and you don’t know if they are with boyfriends or someone who is sick with jealousy who may attack you.”

Every night they play, says Othón, “we always have a few drinks before playing, but the first thing we always do is to put ourselves in God’s hands, in case something wrong happens, although I do not think that will ever occur, because as the saying goes: “the one who owes nothing, fears nothing’.” So, Othón must keep the ambience festive: it does not matter whether he has lost his job and has not worked in a month, nor that he has not talked on the phone with his son in Guerrero. It does not matter that night that they are scheduled to play at 2 AM and if he is employed, he must be at work at 6 AM. “You know what Profé?” he tells me on such nights, “I think I won’t sleep today.” That night, it cannot matter that he will not be able to pay the monthly rent, and has no money either to pay for the studio where he wants to record his songs. It doesn’t matter if he is angry because that morning he argued in vain with his Arab boss to get a day off at the deli or the chance to leave early so he could be with the band that night. His job as a musician and animador is also a job for which Othón is paid. He is employed by Abel, the band’s leader and owner.

“Okay ladies and gentleman we are going to play this very nice song for all of you who have come here to dance all night long. This is ‘the Mighty Group la Montaña,’” says Othón when the band is ready to play. When Othón and the other band members are together they can simply be musicians and music is all that matters. He is a performer and performing helps him to conceal his own sadness. This sadness stems from past and present experiences and to some extent from grim expectations or predictions about the future. It comes from the memories of his lonely childhood, from the pain of having been abandoned by his father, and the fact that he has
abandoned his son too. From the frustration that he cannot find a real exit to his current life circumstances. But sadness comes from the memory of other places for Othón, Sandro, the bassist, and Raúl, the keyboardist. They have all shared similar experiences from childhood in the fields of Sinaloa. For Othón and the others, it is impossible to remember their homes with nostalgia or happiness. This was a place of hard labor, where they lived as “slaves,” where they were “treated like animals,” as Othón notes, where they worked every year because they could not have a “normal life.” As this place is for Othón and his pals a memory, a common past they share now as Mixteco migrant workers in New York, the labor fields of Sinaloa are at the same time the actual present for thousands of Mixtecos today.

The first time Othón talked with me about his childhood was during a cold winter night in Abel’s apartment in uptown Manhattan, when we met for the very first time for one of the band’s rehearsals. For a couple of weekends every month, one of the three bedrooms of the apartment is transformed at night into a rehearsal room, with the bed leaning on the wall in order to make the necessary space for two keyboards, the drums and the rest of their instruments. The bedroom amazingly gets transformed into a full studio, with amplifiers stacked in a corner next to the plastic boxes used for storing cables, all of the equipment is made to fit inside the four walls of a small room. Mexican beers pile up in the middle of the room and get constantly refilled by one of their friends as rehearsals are underway. The musicians play and drink all night long, and I do so as well as I sit next to Rosalío, the drummer, listening to their music. Rehearsals ended at 1AM, with the stacks of beers gone, though Abel quickly refilled them calling for a delivery from a nearby bodega. Two six packs arrived a few minutes later; and Abel assured me that those beers were for me only and put them next to me.

So, in the following hours, when it is neither night nor day, with plenty of beer and time,
they talked to me about their lives, and the affliction and sadness that haunts them from the past no matter where they are. In that moment, Othón asked me, “Do you know why my songs are sad? Well, because when I was a child I had a painful life in Sinaloa. That’s why I’m so sad inside.” As a child, Othón had worked picking tomatoes and was not able to leave this sorrow in the past.

On one night, it was nearing 4 AM and after the rehearsal everyone had gone except Othón and me. We drank the last cans of beer and walked outside the building. We were alone on the sidewalk and he asked me, “Where are you going?” I responded, “I need to walk to Broadway and catch the 1 train uptown.” “I am going where the blacks live,” he said and then Othón pointed to Harlem. Then he added, “Someday I am going to show you other songs that I have written. Be sure to bring your recorder.” He waved and walked away in the dark. I was alone on the sidewalk, it was cold, and I walked along Broadway to the subway station. A couple of weeks later, I called Othón and met him at his apartment where he lived with his wife, two children, brother, and father. This small apartment located in the heart of Harlem was the place where at night and after his working hours, he carefully weaved his life story together for me, beginning with the story of his father.

It was in that apartment in Harlem where he told me his life story, the history of his people; where we got drunk even in the morning, where he and his wife shared their food with me and where he generously sang his songs depicting the life of the Montaña people. The characters that inhabited Othón’s songs are sons, daughters and wives being left in the Montaña while their fathers and husbands migrate searching for a job. His songs are the “history of the poor,” as he noted when he sang to me El Corrido de Elsa Pineda, a song about a little girl from Guerrero who finds death in north Mexico where she migrated with her parents. Her parents
migrated from Guerrero in search of a new life, but instead her daughter found death in the fields the very same day they arrived. When talking about little Elsa Pineda and how she found death, Othón says with tears in his eyes, “It is the history of the poor or la historia de los pobres, a sad history, very sad. That is why I decided to wrote this song:”

Escuchen este corrido
Que yo les traigo aquí
El caso que ha sucedido
El 14 de marzo 2000

Por culpa de la pobreza
Un hombre perdió a su hija
La niña de nueve años
Su nombre es Elsa Pineda

Salieron desde Guerrero
Queriendo cambiar su suerte
Pero al llegar a Chihuahua
La niña dio con la muerte

Al darse cuenta la madre
Un hombre corriendo llegó
Señora ¿de quién es la niña?
En el canal se ahogó

La madre de esa niñita
Salió corriendo y llorando
A ver si salvaba a la niña
Pero muerta la encontró

La llevaron de emergencia
Al centro de un hospital
El doctor le dijo a la madre
Ya no podían hacer más

Ese día acababan de llegar
No sabía lo que iba a pasar
Pero la muerte andaba cerca
Pero la niña vio su final

Por ser gente tan humilde
No pudieron trasladarla
Volvieron para Guerrero
Y la niña quedó sepultada
En un pueblito muy cerca
Llamado Lázaro Cárdenas
Se encuentra una tumba triste
Y muy sola y abandonada

Adiós, adiós, adiós
Mi niña Elsa Pineda
Te fuiste y nos dejaste
En el alma una gran herida

Listen to this corrido
That I am bringing to you
It tells something that happened
On March 14th of 2000

Because of poverty
A man lost his daughter
A nine-year old girl
Her name is Elsa Pineda

They left from Guerrero
Wanting to change their fate
But when they arrived to Chihuahua
What the girl found was the death

When her mother found out
A man running arrived
Lady whose is the girl?
In the canal she drowned

The mother of that little girl
Ran away crying
To see if she could save her
But she found her dead

She was taken in a rush
To a hospital room
The doctor told to the mother
There was nothing to do

They had just arrived that day
Knowing nothing about what was going to happen
But death was chasing her
And the girl saw her end
They were poor
They couldn’t take her back with them
They returned to Guerrero
And the girl was buried

In a little village
Called Lázaro Cárdenas
She is buried in a sad grave
She is lonely and abandoned

Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye
My dear Elsa Pineda
You left leaving us
With a large wound in our soul.

And it was also in that apartment where he told me the history of “the abandoned.” Like many other Mixtecos, his father worked as a day laborer in the fields of the state of Morelos and then migrated to the United States. At first, he left for short periods, but as he went farther, his absences became longer, until he eventually remained away from his family for years. He later migrated to New York. He became an absent father, and Othón an abandoned child. Who is an abandoned child? During our regular conversations, Othón explained to me that sons, daughters, wives, parents, mothers, grandparents, and grandmothers who have been left behind in the Montaña by the thousands of men and women who leave the region in search of work are referred to as “the abandoned.”

“As long as I can recall my father was never with me, he was away all the time and the rest of the family was always alone. He returned for a year, two years, or just a couple of months before going again. The first time, he worked as a peasant in the nearby state of Morelos, in the vicinity of Guerrero. Supposedly, they had well-paid jobs there. I think he met someone there who invited him to California, ‘to the North,’ as they called it. That time, he even returned to Guerrero but went directly to the border. So, I grew up that way, while my father was away.
Then, I left school and I did not want to study anymore. It is not that I did not like school, but I did not want to suffer. For me it was hard that even though my father lived in Mexico, he had never been with me, and then he began to come here, to the United States. I left school when I was in third grade, I was eight or nine years old, I was growing up and I needed a lot of things. I had no books, no pens to write, and my dad was in California. My father never called, and people could not call because back then the only telephone was out of the town. So, the people had to go there to make a phone call. My grandfather used to send me to school with five pesos, what you could possibly buy with that money? I had nothing. Sometimes I walked barefoot for about a month, I had no *huaraches* or sandals.”

“At school, many children had money and they could buy candy or food. I was ashamed and had to separate myself from them and wait until going back to the classroom. I wanted to be away and not having to stand there looking at them. I did not have a notebook, and the other children felt sorry for me. Some of them were kind enough and offered me pages from their notebooks, or a small pencil. I was the eldest son in the family, so my mother and my grandfather sent me to a public boarding school. I returned to my grandfather’s house for the weekends. My grandfather had rifles and went out to hunt rabbits at night. Rabbits were like a plague; they were eating the plants. He cultivated his land, and I helped him. He went hunting most every night and I used to go with him every weekend. That’s how I grew up.”

Othón’s mother and his grandfather, Julio, raised him. Julio had worked in Sinaloa, as Othón’s father had. He was a Mixteco peasant, and he did not speak Spanish. He was a small landowner, who had a small irrigated parcel where he cultivated maize, beans, and tomatoes for family consumption: “My grandfather taught me to work with the plow, and so working the land is how I learned to be a peasant.” Additionally, his grandfather “made his own business,” says
Othón. “He also had a small distillery, and made some money selling aguardiente (a strong alcoholic beverage). That money was what allowed him to stay and not abandon the Montaña. He began to buy cows and horses. So, he did not need any more to go to Sinaloa. My grandfather never told me when he went to Sinaloa, but it was a long time ago. They went to Sinaloa to get the money for my father’s wedding. All of the family, brothers and sisters included, went there to get the money so my father could be married.”

After their wedding, Othón’s parents migrated to work as day laborers in Sinaloa, following the same path that generations of Mexican Indians of Guerrero and Oaxaca had walked before them. Othón’s first memories of that place come from his mother. In one of our night talks he recalled that before his father went to California and New York, the entire family, his grandfather and he included, migrated to Sinaloa: “My mother says I went to Sinaloa the first time when I was a baby. My father and my mother kept going there together until my third brother was born. So my family began to go to Sinaloa when I was a child. I think I was five years old when they went for the last time. That was the last time because they found no life in working as slaves. They went all together at the beginning, but later when my other brothers were born, they could not live together so my father traveled alone.”

As a child, Othón worked in the tomato fields in Sinaloa, and when he became a young adult, he crossed the border, as his father had before him, leaving his own son abandoned in Guerrero. He was repeating his father’s history. Yet, there is much more behind these accounts of lonesome children forced to grow up by themselves. “We [Mixtecos] come from different parts of the state, from little towns that don’t even exist on maps. Towns where the abandoned live, people who have been abandoned by the government, towns where people can even die of hunger,” recalls Othón. Here, individual stories are also moments of collective experience of la
necesidad or “the necessity” that for generations has unfolded in the time and geography of the Montaña region. La necesidad, or a general state of consistently being in need that translates in some ways as “the necessity” in English, is the word Mixtecos and Mexican migrants use to refer to another condition of their social existence that is just as significant as the idea of abandonment.

This idea pops up in casual conversation as the cause that explains people’s motivations for migrating from the Montaña. The phrases: “por la necesidad” (“because of the necessity”) or la pinche necesidad (“the fucking necessity”) are used to explain why someone migrated to New York. In the end they are searching for a job or to reunite with relatives. This abstract sense of necessity seems like something haunting and threatening people’s life in a region. Human needs can be satisfied (through labor, for example) but in this case la necesidad emerges as an explanatory tool for discussing why an individual or a family seek to find or build a life somewhere else. In this context, “necessity” haunts and hinders possibilities for building a better life. It seems as though in the Montaña there is a sense of need that goes endlessly unsatisfied. This is because of the lack of the material conditions considered necessary to satisfy basic human needs. As I show in Chapter 3, popular notions of abandonment and necessity run deep in the history of the Mexican state linked to political oppression and economic exploitation of the Mexican indigenous population. Abandonment and la necesidad work in tandem as a set of permanent expressions of social, economic and individual needs that constantly go unmet. This is what Othon expresed in his notion of la necesidad, or that sense of deep “necessity” as something rooted in the political actions of the Mexican state.
Mixteco day laborers in Barbarous Mexico

“If we begin to tell the story of each and every one of my people, it would take a long time,” Othón tells me one day at dawn when another day has gone and he has only recollected a fragment of his life as a day laborer in Sinaloa. His narrative is grounded in experiences that surpass his own individual temporality. His past as a day laborer in Sinaloa is today the collective experience of thousands of Mixtecos being swept away from rural and semi-rural towns of the Montaña. These towns are left abandoned in a geography of uneven and combined development where subsistence agriculture has to be destroyed to favor the formation of export-oriented commercial agribusinesses in northwest Mexico. As noted by Sandoval, in the 1970s the Mexican state played an important role in promoting the increase in production and the capitalist development in Mexican agriculture. An outcome of this policy was the formation of districts of seasonal agriculture in irrigated lands (as in Sinaloa) that opened the path for the formation of new latifundios. The consequences for ejidos and small land tenure were as follows:

Capitalism will expand itself very quickly in agriculture with the elimination of the obstacles represented by “the ejido” and the small holdings. These land tenures will not disappear in legal terms but in real terms. This rapid development opens the door to the hegemony of national and international agribusiness, which looks for the insertion of Mexican agriculture into the new international division of labor.41

It is in these fields, the agricultural fields of capitalist expansion nurtured by the Mexican state, where the origins of Mixteco proletarians in New York City can be found, south of the U.S.-Mexico border, where thousands of laborers are, in Othón’s words, dragged into a labor system he compares to slavery because of the hard working conditions, “Life there was not life,

41 Sandoval 1982:7-8. As noted by Bonilla (1968) One of the main problems in the late 1960s is the underemployment of Mexico’s rural population. According to the author, the agricultural underemployed “is the one who is willing to work on anything, and with any salary condition. His situation is so critical that he cannot bargain conditions of contract (Bonilla 1968:126).
we lived as slaves.” His assessment opens a window to reflect here on the extent to which a former Mixteco day laborer is representing the conditions of Mixteco workers similar to those severe conditions of indigenous peons in early twenty century agricultural enclaves, described by Turner for Mexico’s haciendas.

It also questions the extent to which export-oriented commercial agribusinesses connected to the global market, enthroned by the Mexican ruling class as examples of the modernization of the country’s economy, have heavily relied on the super exploitation of workers, endangering their individual and collective possibilities of survival and reproduction. For sure, today’s day laborer worker has little in common with day laborers in the early twentieth century. As noted by Stavenhagen (1970) the old hacienda peon was subjected to a system of economic exploitation based on an oppressive and paternalistic relationship with the hacienda owner. Now the day laborer is subjected by a “cold impersonal monetary” relationship.42

Anthropology and oral history can assist us in examining the differences that Mixtocos workers experience nowadays, as well as the continuities of labor relations and ethnic discrimination endured by thousands of indigenous day laborers. As Stavenhagen noted almost 40 years ago, they:

Occupy the lowest strata of Mexico’s population. They receive the lowest incomes, which are generally below the minimum official wage. Their living conditions are also of the worst kind… They do not benefit from protection of the law, or social security, or medical assistance or adequate housing or educational facilities for their children.43

Then, in this way we will have a more informed position to understand Othón’s recollections of his life in Sinaloa where he had a painful childhood, and have a better

42 Stavenhagen 1970:246.
understanding of why a Mixteco migrant in the early twenty-first century depicts his life in Mexico as the life of a slave.

Othon’s past experience as a laborer helps to connect the origins of Mixteco migration and proletarianization in New York City within a larger historical scope, or that of the integration of Mexican indigenous into the national capitalist formation as subordinate labor minorities (López and Rivas 1988). As Javier Guerrero (1979) demonstrates, Mexican indigenous workers have been the “subjects of history,” a predatory history in which they have provided the energy and sweat that has fed the development of capitalism in Mexico. From this point of view, the political and economic subordination of Mexican indigenous peoples and their migration to the U.S. constitutes both a political and moral dilemma. In fact, for an ample segment of the Mexican population their only freedom is to choose year after year whether to migrate as day laborers to Sinaloa, or to stay in the Montaña and endure dire economic conditions. How did it become morally acceptable for a society that thousands of its members find a means to survive and for satisfying their most basic needs in a system of labor that they compared to slavery?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, John Kenneth Turner, a journalist from Oregon, crossed the Mexico-U.S. border undercover as a U.S. investor to write his famous *Barbarous Mexico* (1910) book. In the first chapter of his book, Turner described Mexico as

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44 During the Conquest of America one powerful representation of the Colonial subject emerged. The existence of a bestialized being: a degraded and colonized individual. Given this bestiality, the colonizer justifies the extermination as an inevitable outcome of the colonial encounter (For a discussion of this representation in Latin America history, see: Retamar 1972).

45 As noted by Florescano during the nineteenth century indigenous people rebelling in South Mexico were stigmatized as barbarians by the Mexican press and national political elites. The indigenous rebellion was framed as a clash between the barbarians and civilization, “it was a sort of ethnic reductionism, useful to disqualify those who refused to lose their traditional rights and their land” (Florescano 1996:477). Especially noteworthy is Turner’s use of the phrase titling his book, especially the use of the term “barbarous.” This word is part of a long-term ideological dispute in Mexico dating back to the Colonial period. During the eighteenth century the term barbarian was only used to refer to the indigenous population from northern New Spain, the so-called Chichimecas and Apaches. Turner portrays the nation and the modernization project of the “ civilized” elite (or the Imaginary Mexico, a term coined by Bonfil Batalla) as the real and mighty source of destruction and irrationality in Mexico.
“a country without political freedom… without any of our cherished guarantees of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Contrary to the modernizing ideas of the Mexican elite at the time who advocated the development and progress of the country by means of U.S. and British capital investment in Mexico, Turner shows that capitalist penetration during the Porfirio Díaz regime (1876-1911) was anything but beneficial. He describes the working and living conditions he witnessed in Southern Mexico as “pitiful misery.” Men and women “are held as chattels, they are bought and sold, they receive no wages. They are beaten, sometimes beaten to death. They are worked from dawn until night in the hot sun.” Indigenous families disintegrated as a result of forced migration, and plantations were supplied with child labor, “at least half [of children] were under twenty and at least one-fourth under fourteen” years old. In fact, Turner went to Mexico with the purpose of investigating the accuracy of his informants’ accounts regarding the existence of slavery in Mexico in the early twentieth century: “Human beings bought and sold like mules in America! And in the twentieth century. Well, I told myself, if it’s true, I’m going to see it.”

Turner’s account serves as an indictment of the use of an indigenous labor force in rural Mexico, one that has been polemically contested by Mexican scholars and writers. For example, Fernando Benítez writes: “an incredulous North American [writer] wandered in the country and wrote his impressions—all first hand—a book honest and objective.” Enrique Florescano says, “The formidable claims in the famous book by John Kenneth Turner, Barbarous Mexico and his

47 After having interviewed four Mexican anarchists (including Ricardo Flores Magón) jailed in the United States and accused of organizing an armed rebellion in the U.S. territory against the Diaz regime in 1908, Kenneth Turner traveled to Mexico.
48 Turner 1910:22.
49 Turner 1910:55.
50 Turner 1910:97.
51 Turner 1910:11.
52 Benítez 1956:86.
impressive collection of photographs revealed to the world and the Mexicans the vision of the Porfiriista elite for dealing with the nation’s crucial social problems.”

But also, while Benítez and Florescano praised Turner’s book, other scholars, such as Jean Meyer, have pointed out Turner’s dichotomous depiction of Mexican rural class structure:

It is not true that there existed in rural Mexico nothing but this tremendous dichotomy… It is false, but it is up to the vision of Mexico in 1910 that recorded in the collective unconscious of the “Social Scientists” the pamphlet Barbarous Mexico by John Kenneth Turner. It obscures the fact that there were indigenous people who have retained their land and do not appear in the census, nor are the sharecroppers or the smallholders.

Among Turner’s critics was historian Daniel Cosío Villegas, who wrote the preface of Turner’s first Spanish edition in 1955 remarking that Barbarous Mexico was a “political pamphlet” the work of an “elemental mind.” As noted by Armando Bartra, Cosío Villegas challenged the very existence of Turner’s travel to Mexico and even his existence: “I have come to doubt whether Mr. Turner really existed.”

But, who were those men, women, and children living under such a labor regime and deprived of the liberty to pursue their happiness according to Turner? They were the Mexican indigenous population of the first decade of the twentieth century, peons living and working in the henequen haciendas in Yucatán, South Mexico, or in the tobacco plantations of the Valle Nacional, Oaxaca. They were indigenous Yaquis from the northern state of Sonora, and Mayas.

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53 Florescano 1997:511.
54 Meyer 1986:488. Quite contrary to Meyer’s criticism of Turner’s dichotomy; Stavenhagen pointed out about the tremendous land concentration during Diaz government: “In 1910, the last year of the Diaz dictatorship, 1 percent of the population owned 97 per cent of the total land, while 96 per cent of the population owned 1 per cent of the land” (Stavenhagen 1970:227). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss in depth the nature of Mexico’s agrarian structure and land tenure in the early twentieth century. If there is such a huge controversy among Mexican scholars on Turner’s depiction of Mexican land tenure is because it informs the terms in which the Mexican Revolution should be explained: a social revolution grounded in the unequal distribution of wealth. Stavenhagen explained in this way: “The lack of land of the greater part of the rural population cannot be separated from the oppressive living conditions to which peasants were bound. These conditions sparked the armed, unstable mass risings in which so many rural communities became involved during more than a decade” (Stavenhagen 1970:227). The controversy around Turner’s perception on land tenure, probably reflects more about who we are as a nation to properly acknowledge the tremendous social inequalities existing in Mexico that shaped not only the Mexican Revolution, but contemporary day laborer migration to northwest Mexico or the U.S.
55 Cosío Villegas, quoted by Bartra 2005.
from Yucatan, “exiled” and “deported” populations within Mexican territory. They were workers whose very existence was denied by the hacienda owners, as noted by Benítez, because the very word provoked in them an “invincible repugnance.” Hacienda owners did not consider their workers as a property. Instead, hacienda owners believed that they were making use of their right to force workers to pay their debts, “We do not own our laborers; we consider they are in debt to us.”

Turner fiercely condemned the existence of such labor systems since he found no signs of progress in the living and working conditions of the Mexican indigenous workers. What he found instead was “a land where people are poor as a result of lack of rights, where peonage is common for the masses and where effective slavery exists for hundreds of men.” He described how the state legally used coercion and the military apparatus against the Mexican indigenous people to guarantee and regulate a steady flow of indigenous laborers from the most densely populated indigenous regions to the sectors of the Mexican economy articulated to global capitalism. If we could keep following Turner’s narrative of the state of affairs of early twentieth-century Mexico, there would be no difficulty in anticipating the following conclusion:

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56 According to Turner, the slave labor force in Yucatan included 8,000 “imported” indigenous Yaquis from the northern state of Sonora, 3,000 Chinese and 100,000 to 125,000 indigenous Mayas. Yaquis were deported from Sonora at the rate of 500 per month (Turner 1910).

57 Benítez 1956:87.

58 The planters defended the slavery system as a labor system based on a contract, arguing that it was “Human, legal and especially efficient” (De Vos 1997:175).

59 Turner 1910:14. In the book Turner describes how in the agricultural export oriented enclaves of the time, Yaquis and Mayas, were sold for $65 Mexican pesos by the Mexican government. Very probably Turner used “slave” to refer to peons as a rhetorical device. There is a lot of contention in this topic in Mexican historiography. For example, Alan Knight (1986) points out that the list of indebted peons can be derived from libros de cuenta and is impossible to establish if those debt-peons were “de facto slaves.”

60 In other Mexican regions with debt-peonage system, the fate of the indigenous population in Mexico during the Porfiriato was similar. In the southern state of Chiapas for example, “Nearly two thirds of the active male population in the late nineteenth century, were reduced to servitude on the Ladino fincas (White owned haciendas): a situation of human exploitation that Indians had never met over the three former centuries of Colonial domination. Another indication that the fate of the Indians had deteriorated was the persistence of the habit of using them as beasts of burden [tamemes] to transport goods and people. The fact is that, in the late nineteenth century, the tamemes were a sad reality in Chiapas roads” (De Vos 1997:177).
that the flow of indigenous workers to the agriculture enclaves of tobacco and henequen in southern Mexico was far from being the result of an agreement of free individuals. Quite the contrary, workers were literally hooked, *enganchados*, through the so-called *enganche* system that worked on different regions of Mexico. As also noted by Stavenhagen, peonage as a system of labor was an “inhuman system of exploitation of man.” The system, operating with the mutual cooperation of brokers, the state, and local officials, worked to uproot the indigenous population by depriving them from their lands effectively, turning them into global workers.

In the late nineteenth century, for example, the Yaqui people in the northern state of Sonora were enslaved in a similar way by U.S. investors and the *Sonorense* oligarchy, both favored by state concessions. The Sonora and Sinaloa Irrigation Company took control over two thirds of the Yaqui River, and the Richardson Construction Company obtained the railroad concession in 1904 while the Mexican government, as noted by Bartra, used all sorts of legal

61 The peonage system described by Turner did not operated uniformly in the entire country. Instead, as Katz (1974) noted, there were important regional differences in Mexico’s agrarian structure in the early twenty-century. Nickel (1988) notes the extent to which the regional differences in Mexico’s agrarian structure and peasant population shaped differentially collective action. Knight (1986) notes about the profound differences existing between north and central Mexico. In north Guerrero for example, Ian Jacobs (1982) notes the formation of a Porfirista middle class connected to haciendas as well as haciendas owned by U.S. investors as the case of the Hacienda Anáhuac owned by the Guerrero Land and Timber Company. In some of these haciendas, Jacobs reports the existence of debt-peonage (For a regional account of the haciendas in Guerrero during the Mexican Revolution, see Jacobs 1982). However as Bauer notes, “about Yucatan and the southeast Mexican lowlands there is no disagreement: labor conditions were harsh; workers were imported by force; debt was systematically used to provide a legal basis for coercion; and plantation owners, aided by the local police or army were able to restrict workers’ movement and tie them to estates” (Bauer quoted by Knight 1986:42).


62 The formation of the *enganche* system in the southern state of Chiapas in 1880 was explained by Jan de Vos who describes it as the product of a class alliance between the bureaucrats and merchants of San Cristóbal de las Casas with the planters or *finqueros* to supply indigenous labor force every year. “Thus was born … a new trade, that of the *enganchador,*” a specialist in recruiting Indians to work on plantations. The recruitment was usually based on deception and was often accompanied by physical violence. It was not executed by the notables who ran the company. Instead, it was done by intermediaries who maintained regular contact with the Indian population and therefore knew very well where to get day laborers. Those recruited were mostly itinerant traders or shopkeepers in collusion with local mayors and school teachers” (De Vos 1997:173). On the role of Mexican government in maintaining the labor mobility of indigenous workers, Turner says: “In some quarters this slavery has been admitted, but the guilt of the government has been denied. But it is absurd to suppose that the government could be kept in ignorance of a situation in which one-third of the entire population of a great state are held as chattels. Moreover, it is well known that hundreds of state and national officials are constantly engaged in rounding up, transporting, selling, guarding and hunting slaves” (Turner 1910: 109).

64 See Hernández 1996.
means, the police, the local governments, and even the railway network, to “annihilate or exile the *bronco* Yaqui and Mayo Indians.” This was a “bloody war” against the Yaqui population seeking their extermination and the dispossession of their lands, forests, and waters.

Indigenous land dispossession and forced labor mobility were a central part of the Mexican state policy in late nineteenth century. As noted by De la Peña, “this period was definitely one of the last stages of primitive accumulation.” Massive land transference to the market was made, for instance, through a public land demarcation policy implemented in the Act of 1883. According also to De la Peña, as part of this Act, private survey companies were granted a third of the total wasteland they could locate. Between 1881 and 1906, companies surveyed 49 million hectares, a quarter of the country’s total area, and got about 20 million hectares (10 percent of the territory) for themselves this way. The conversion of land to private property was in fact a continuation of the liberal agrarian policies of mid-nineteenth century. As Katz points out;

[A]fter Mexican Independence 40 percent of agricultural land in south and central Mexico belonged to communal villages. When Diaz fell in 1911, only 5 percent remained in their hands. Over 90 percent of Mexico's peasants became landless. In the late nineteenth century the Mexican indigenous population was displaced by force and introduced to the global market by means of violent systems of labor supply such as the *enganche* system. In early twentieth century internal indigenous migration was also a

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65 Bartra 2000:77.
66 (Hernández 1996:133). Other Mexican indigenous groups, as the Mayas in Yucatan, also suffered similar instances of land dispossession during the same period: “The small property in indigenous hands lasted a short time since by borrowing or buying at low prices and other extralegal mechanisms, landowners appropriated private plots” (Soler quoted by Bracamonte 1994:148).
67 De la Peña 1989:188.
68 Katz 1986:48. Katz points out: “There are no exact statistics to establish with any degree of certainty when the process of land expropriation took place and when it reached a high point. Nor is there sufficient explanation for the frequent and at times great disparity in regional developments” (Katz 1986: 49). Katz notes that regionally, the southern state of Yucatan had the highest number of Indian villages expropriated while Indians in the state of Oaxaca managed to keep their lands. Greater community cohesion, the importance of the export oriented enclaves in Yucatan, and the existence of an indigenous middle class in Oaxaca, are some of the factors that could have played a role in determining the different rates of land expropriation.
premeditated state policy to supply the capitalist agricultural enclaves. A century later, the Mexican indigenous workers, small peasant Mixtecos included, were introduced in a very similar way to the fields of Sinaloa, or north of the U.S.-Mexican border as disposable migrant workers. For the future implications of this history, it is worth stating that such continuity has been achieved through the effective role played by the Mexican state in producing a huge labor army of dispossessed indigenous peoples whose spatial mobility has also been regulated by the state.

What has changed then in more than a century? It is true that Mexican indigenous workers are not sold by force as raw labor anymore as in the capitalist Mexico observed by Turner one century ago, but the agricultural fields of capitalism are still planted with indigenous labor as they were a hundred of years ago. Today, Mexican indigenous workers continue to be temporarily or permanently uprooted from their towns but without directly coercive methods; their displacement comes from the profound social inequality produced by the transfer and concentration of the socially produced wealth. As stated previously, the Mexican state has made effective use of its coercive methods in planting and nurturing the seeds of capital, or said differently, integrating the Mexican indigenous peoples to international capitalism via commercial export agriculture.

From this perspective, evidence that the labor of the Mexican indigenous population still resembles that of peons at the beginning of the twentieth-first century in some Mexican regions is bringing to the fore certain continuities in the labor relations described by Turner at that time and endured by Mexican indigenous. In reflecting on the impressions Turner elaborated earlier in the twentieth century, historian Cosío Villegas writes:

Horror, fear, shock, outrage [...] all these feelings can incite the reading of Barbarous Mexico [...] But today’s reader must remember that Turner’s book is about Mexico in 1910. God bless such horror does not exist today. I hope the contemporary reader would ask with wonder: Are we now far enough from that
unfortunate situation? Are we far enough away from it that we can sleep peacefully? Is today’s Mayan Indian the owner of his destinies? 69

Now, we can return again to Othón’s past and the recollections of his labor experiences. In the following pages I will try to use his memories as a means to rethink the proletarianization of Mixteco people from the Montaña and question the extent to which the social and labor conditions described by Turner resonate in the present of Mixteco families from the Montaña. Since social and economic deprivation are still experienced by individuals as Othón and his family; then for the Mixtecos, their people’s past is in part also their people’s present. The conditions of social and economic deprivation that pushed many of peasants into abandoning their towns in the Montaña in the past are deeply rooted in the present everyday working and living conditions. In light of these relative temporalities, Othón’s past in the fields of Sinaloa is the present of thousands of indigenous in the Montaña region.

Leaving the Montaña

Year after year in September, like dust being swept by the wind, the people from the Montaña are pulled out of the region. In some towns, the labor recruitment season begins after the 29th of that month, following the celebration of the festivities of San Miguel Arcángel. 70 In Othón’s hometown, people begin to migrate early in November. The enganchadores, or labor brokers, recruit men, women, and children from every town in the Montaña. The enganchadores are usually people from the same region, who previously have worked as jornaleros and they have learned, as Othón recalls, “the workings of the seasonal system of indigenous labor supply.” They travel from town to town, recruiting Mixteco day laborers to work in Sinaloa. There are

69 Cosío Villegas, quoted by Bartra 2005.
70 Ortiz 2010.
different enlisting methods. The *enganchadores* travel from town to town, offering jobs as if they were the “forerunners” of the abandonment. In some cases a loud speaker is used to inform the population that it is time to leave: “All the ladies and gentlemen who want to work in Sinaloa, please go to the police station to sign up and get your bus ticket.” The *enganchadores* are intermediaries between the workers and the employers, and are seasonally subcontracted as labor suppliers. They are paid about $800 to $1,500 pesos ($64 to $121 US dollars) for every 40 to 45 people they recruit individually ($20 to $40 pesos $1.5 US dollars to $3.20 US dollars per person), or per every two bunches, or *cuadrillas*. Each bunch comprises about 20 people, including women and children. In many cases the recruitment system is bilingual, meaning that the *enganchadores* employ Mixtecos from the same community to facilitate the communication and the organization of the *cuadrillas*. People’s names are important for both the families and the *enganchadores* for very practical reasons. For the families, because every year parents must be prepared to give their names and the names of their children so “they can be written down by the *enganchadores,*” and families can go all together to the fields, says Othón. For the *enganchadores*, names are relevant, he continues, to maintain control over the number of workers they can bring to the fields, “they calculate how many people will fit in each truck.” In late October, between the 20th and the 25th, he goes on, “the trucks arrive from Sinaloa, pick up the people in their towns and then take them back to Tlapa by early November” in a trip of three or four days.

Inhabitants of the Montaña begin to leave their towns in the Fall. “Everybody is going to Sinaloa, almost everyone is going,” Othón remembers, “Men and women, the whole family goes away. Although they have been waiting to harvest the maize and the beans before leaving for

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71 Ortiz 2010:147.  
72 The exchange rate between the Mexican Peso and the U.S. Dollar in 2010 was $12.36 pesos per one dollar.  
73 Ortiz 2010:148.
Sinaloa the first day of November; families eventually end up storing the harvest because they are going to work for six months.” Only a few stay in the Montaña, “they are not many, the majority have gone to Sinaloa. Only about 25 percent of the people stayed,” including the mayordomos (a religious stewardship within the cargo system) who must stay to organize the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12th. But not even the Virgin can keep them from leaving their towns; by mid-December they have joined the migrant flow, and by the 20th of December there is almost no one left. The ones who stay, says Othón, are Mixtecos, many of them former day laborers who now possess cattle or are the owners of small businesses they have inherited: “These people do not have the necessity to travel or to leave the region, because they have the means to maintain themselves, and they do not want to go back to Sinaloa.”

Once people are hired by the enganchadores, they are transported in cattle trucks to the city of Tlapa. Once there, they must wait near the Xale River, or by the city’s bus station to be organized and transported based on kinship or municipality of origin. While they are waiting for the buses to Sinaloa, they eat, and sleep on the sidewalks. Once the buses arrive, they are called by name and they jump into the buses, one by one, recalls Othón. Many of them, as was the case with Othón, first traveled to Sinaloa in their childhood, or were born in the fields.

In 1994, then eleven years old, Othón left to Sinaloa along with five friends. This was his first trip without his family. The journey was, in his words, a kind of adventure after a period of “suffering” by being separated from his father, who was by then working in the United States. So, the young Othón said that after dropping out of school and “after having suffered too much, I decided to search for adventure because I could not keep studying, and I wasn’t good at anything.” He was hitting the road to Sinaloa not with the intention of looking for a job as
thousands of families do, but just to be away on the road without a specific purpose but seeking “adventure” otherwise uncommon for teenagers from that region. “Curiosity” and an opening for teenage misconduct are at the root of this trip to such a place where every year Mixtecos find at least a partial relief for their needs. The group of young kids was guided by Salvador, a 17 year-old teenager who was older than them. Besides being friends, Salvador and Othón also share the experience of becoming proletarians: Salvador had worked and lived in Sinaloa with his family and he knew how to get a job outside of the Montaña. He knew how to get from Tlapa to Sinaloa, as well as how to reach the enganchadores, and how to work as a day laborer.

Othón and his friends had to get money for their trip. “Salvador told us how to get the money for the bus to Sinaloa. My cousin, who did not have the need to go but was curious about going, went to his house and stole the money from his mother. I think he took 100 pesos for both of us.” Then, Salvador guided them to Tlapa and from there to Puente Grande, the place where every year the buses depart with hundreds of indigenous workers recruited by the enganchadores. “When we arrived in Puente Grande, we saw a lot of buses parked. There was a man and Salvador talked with him. We were a little scared and did do not know what to do. After the deal was done Salvador came back and told us to give him our names. The enganchadores did not care who you are or who you are coming with, they only want to fill the buses with people because that’s their business.”

The group traveled for two days and three nights across five states until getting to Los Mochis, Sinaloa. Once there, people are assigned to a group headed by a mayordomo. There is also an apuntador, a person who writes down the names and the duties assigned to everyone in the group: planting, clearing the land, etc.74 “We arrive at that place, Santa María de Los

74 In Los Mochis, Othón met Raúl, with whom he had more in common, they were Mixtecos from the Montaña –Raúl came from a town nearby to Othón’s. Years later, although they migrated to the U.S. separately they would
Mochis, where there were people from other towns of the region. We were better dressed than them, so we did not fit in there very well because the customs were different. Everything was different, we were strangers to them and we could not get used to the place. We lived there for two weeks. So, the guy who was serving as guide said to us, ‘No, we cannot stay here because it’s such an ugly place, let’s go to another camp where we can find people from our own town.’

So, one Sunday we left for another camp, we did not know anyone there either but the place was bigger and closer to the city, that way we could hang around and go shopping on weekends. We were there for two weeks. One Sunday we went to hang out in a town named Costa Rica, very close to the beach and we took the bus. Salvador guided us saying ‘let’s go this way or that way.’

And when we got on the bus, Salvador surprisingly found some people from his hometown. That day, my cousin and the other two guys who were traveling with us had stayed in the camp.”

“So, when we met these people on the bus, they asked Salvador: ‘What are you doing here, where are you going? Your father is crying for you because he thought you were missing.’

Salvador told them we were just hanging out, so they tried to fool him saying his father was jailed, that he had had an accident. That he was taking a bath when someone tried to rob him; so he tried to defend himself and stabbed the thief and so, he had been jailed in Culiacán. ‘So, let’s go there to see what is happening,’ they told him. Salvador got scared and said, ‘Ok, let’s go to see my dad.’ I did not know what to do or where to go, so I followed him. And right before arriving in Culiacán, the man began to laugh, but Salvador was still scared. So, the man laughs again and says, ‘Don’t believe what I say man, I’m just teasing you. Your father is not in jail but he is waiting for you in Costa Rica; he arrived in the morning. They are waiting for us in another place.”

Meet again in New York City and would play together in “the Mighty Group La Montaña.”

75 Important to note is Othón’s observation, “we were better dressed than them,” which reveals the social and economic differences within the indigenous day laborers in Sinaloa. Such social inequalities within the indigenous population in the Montaña will be examined in Chapter 3.
place with our people.’ When we finally got there Salvador told me: ‘I’m going to stay here with my dad.’ ‘And what about me?’ I said, ‘what am I going to do? How am I going to return with the other guys? I do not know how to go back [to the fields for work].’ I had not much money, about $50 pesos. ‘Leave them’ [their friends], he said, ‘They know how to return to Guerrero.’”

“So I stayed, and then people began to ask me where I was from, who my parents were, and so on and so forth. Someone said he knew my father; another woman said she knew my mother and that we were relatives. I did not know them, but I went with them anyway. We took a bus at three o’clock and we arrived in a town by 6 PM. I do not even remember the name of the place, or even know how to spell it. Once you get to that point you must switch to another transport, to vans that are called “spiders.” Since I did not have any money, the man I had met paid my fare. I did not know these people but they insisted they knew my family. When we arrived, there were a lot of people from Salvador’s town. The majority was from a Mixteco town close to my hometown and all of us spoke the same dialect of Mixteco. We arrived in the fields the next day and everyone went out to work immediately, so I joined them. However, since everybody was there with his family, my friend Salvador joined his and I stayed alone. I felt very lonely. He was all right because he was with his family, but not me.”

“Then, I found a group of single men that had traveled with us, and one of them was traveling with his daughter. So, the next morning I went out to work with them. Once you’re in the fields they write down your name and you go out to work. You work from 7 to 8 AM, you just warm up and then you have a break for breakfast, next to the crops. So, we sat there and I asked myself, “What am I going to do?” I did not have a penny to eat. The man began to eat with his family and he invited me, but I felt really bad. I took a taco and I wanted to cry, I wanted to cry.” In spite of the generosity and solidarity found by Othón far away from home, his
desire to cry was the result of loneliness. A trip that began as a teenage adventure with a group of friends was ending in the loneliness of the Mexican day labor camps. There was no “adventure” in laboring hard and experiencing loneliness in Sinaloa. He continues, “I did not know them. Then, they started to ask me, ‘Who is your father, where are you from?’ A woman told me she was my mother’s relative. ‘Yes of course, but I do not know you,’ I replied. She invited me to eat so I ate a taco here, another there and I got breakfast that way.”

“We returned to work and then at 12:30 PM, at lunch, the same thing happened. ‘And now what am I going to do?’ I asked myself again. I really wanted to cry but I didn’t because I felt ashamed. Again, everyone offered me a taco and so I survived the day. We finished working at 4 PM and then we returned to the camp. Then, for dinner a man tells me his daughter can prepare my meals because she was cooking only for three people, him, his father, and her. All you need to do, he says, is buy the food and bring it to her. Afterwards he invites me to have dinner, so I sit down with a lot of embarrassment, because I did not know them. They were talking and laughing and I sat quietly like a puppy. Then he asks his daughter if she could do my meals and she agrees. The only problem was I had no money to buy the food. So, the man took me to the camp’s store to buy the food. The owners pay a tax to the landlords for having their business there. Since I had no money, the man asked the owner if I could pay him for the food after my first week of work. He agreed, wrote down my name and asked me what I wanted. I bought flour for the tortillas and gave it to the girl who was going to prepare my meals. The girl was single; I think she was 18 or 19 years old. She said ‘It’s okay. Come by tomorrow for your lunch.’ The next day I felt confident, I felt alive. She had my meals ready.”
**In the labor fields**

For Othón, life in the Sinaloa fields “is not life,” not for a day labor migrant: “The weather is really bad in Sinaloa; days are humid and so hot you get burned, but mornings are freezing cold. We worked from 8 AM to 4 PM, but had to leave our house at 6 AM in the morning because we stayed far away from the fields. Every morning the buses arrived to the camp to pick up everybody. After the working day we returned to the camp all covered with dust. We cleaned ourselves up and rested while the women prepared dinner. Then we had dinner and went to sleep … and did the same thing all over again the next day. Sunday was our day off; nobody worked on Sundays. Sundays were really nice because people had barbecues. But I began to drink since then, I began to drink because I felt lonely and I was living with older people. I was an eleven-year-old kid and everybody was older than me, and besides, everyone drank. I drank a beer and threw up. I even began to smoke marijuana. I was getting lost. Who was to tell me anything? As a matter of fact, I was lost already.”

The Guerrerenses use phrases such as ‘los perdidos’ (the lost ones) or ‘los que se perdieron’ (the lost ones), when referring to the fate of youngsters who ended up ‘wasting’ their lives in the labor fields of Sinaloa or thousands of miles away in New York City. Some of them become drunks or drug addicts; some never send remittances or write a word to their families in

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76 Othón’s statement reflects the hardships of living and working as a day laborer and indigenous migrant in Mexico, which has been studied in different ways by scholars since the 1990s. There is a rich body of literature on the migrant experience and the following is only a sample of the various themes explored. Anguiano (1991) has examined the differences and connections between indigenous day laborer migration to northern Mexico and the United States to point out the existence of an indigenous migrant labor force moving from legality to illegality within the same labor market. In the 1990s, scholars such as Lara (1991) began to discuss the growing feminization of day labor migration in north Mexico and introduced the relevance of “agency” in studying female day laborer migration. Canabal (2008) has provided a detailed overview of the migration from the Montaña and examined the unhealthy and unsafe working and living conditions common in agricultural settings, especially those resulting from the use of pesticides, and the use of child labor in Sinaloa and Morelos. Velasco (1995, 2000, 2002) has extensively studied Mixteco migrant collective action in northern Mexico, and examined the territorial and cultural mobility of this group connected to the “logic” of the day laborer market and the “cultural logic” of the ethnic bounds.
Mexico. They get engaged in gang activity and ultimately they are killed, jailed, or if deported, they come back to the Montaña only to be hired as assassins in the Mexican cartels. As I will show later, the teenagers that are left behind by their parents in Tlapa also experience the same feeling of despair experienced by Othón when he realized that he was becoming one of the “wasted ones” in Sinaloa.

“Though at the same time, I was trying to react because I knew I was acting wrong, so I stopped doing that. Then I began to work harder, back then, in 1994, I earned $375 pesos ($30.5 US dollars). My salary was really low. I could not save any money. All my money went to pay my debts at the camp store. I bought a lot of stuff. I usually bought soda for everyone after working. And sometimes, when I got paid, it was not enough to pay my debts. I had to get another loan to buy the food for the following week. I could not save a penny, nothing. I returned to Guerrero penniless. Usually, in a family of five members, the two salaries earned by its members are enough to buy the food and the other three salaries are saved. That way, families were able to save money, but not me because I was there alone. I realized that “allá no es vida” (your life there is no life at all). The whole family has to work. Men, women, and children are put to work because there are no laws protecting pregnant women or children from work. If you have the necessity and can work… you have more chances to save some money if more members of your family are able to work, but if only two or three work, you barely get enough to buy food and then you have to go home with nothing. Maybe you can save some money, but that will vanish in a few months.”

“In Sinaloa we worked from dawn to dusk, we had the lowest wages, and had just one day off. There were no bathrooms, no drinking water, no drainage, and no access to health care. Without sanitary facilities, people had to urinate everywhere, and had to drink water from the
same pipe they used for irrigation. The employers told us that the pipe had a filter, but I did not believe them. The water was undrinkable. Slavery was right there. Furthermore, parents are forced to put their children to work because of the low salaries. In Mexico there are no laws against child labor. Ten-year-old boys and girls work picking tomatoes, jalapeño peppers, or spinach. They work from April to May. Children must lift their trays full of tomatoes, about 15 or 20 pounds, and carry them about 200 meters to one of the edges where the tomatoes are selected and packed. They must hurry because the foreman is recording the number of trays they are carrying, and if someone falls behind, the foreman immediately yells at him, because if they do not collect enough tomatoes they will not get enough money. Parents help their children, so that the foreman does not yell at the children for not doing their job properly or for leaving tomatoes thrown on the fields. You live a life of slavery there.”

Drug production in the Montaña

Last but not least, another significant aspect shedding light on one of the dramatic transformations in the Montaña region in the mid-1990s is drug production. This sector connects the region and its indigenous communities to the capitalist agricultural enclaves in a different way. As Othón’s recollection indicates, the mid-1990s was a time when subsistence peasants in the region became drug producers, and the lands they had used to cultivate the maize and beans to feed their families were switched over to producing poppy for the drug market. For many, cultivating drugs became not only a means to fulfill their needs but the ultimate escape from work as day laborers in Sinaloa. As maize prices dropped the region was penetrated by poppy as

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77 According to the UNICEF, for 2009 in Mexico the number of working children between 5 and 17 years old was 3,647,067 (12.5% of the children population). Of this total, 70% of them lived in rural areas. For the same year in Guerrero, the number of working children between 5 and 17 years old was 202,477 (20%) out of 1,014,102 (UNICEF 2009).
a highly profitable agricultural product. According to Ronquillo (2011) one kilo of maize cost 3 to 5 pesos (US$0.50) while one kilo of poppy can be sold for 10,000 pesos (about US$1,000). Mixteco peasants followed the path of economic profitability to escape those paths that led them to Sinaloa. Yet in the end, as happened with Othón’s family, this attempt to run away from peonage in northwest Mexico was futile. Despite the fact that Othón and his family cultivated drugs for three years, they ended going back to Sinaloa, and later on Othón finally migrated to the U.S.

As Othón recalls, “my family knew about that kind of business [poppy cultivation] because at that time there were not many opportunities. When they came back to Guerrero from Sinaloa in the early 1990s after having worked for one season (six months) they knew about the poppy business. I do not know how, but they knew it. So, they began to cultivate it, they made money so they did not have to go to Sinaloa again.” Eventually the military arrived with helicopters “and burned down and destroyed everything,” he tells me. Without money the family had no other choice but to return to Sinaloa. The escape Othón’s family and other families found in cultivating poppy is actually a story of the past for his family, but it remains the last chance for many others living in the region today and looking to avoid peonage in Sinaloa.

The drug business originally came from Tlapa: the first men who “spread the word” about it and brought the seeds to the region came from there, and sometimes from Huajuápan de León, in the state of Oaxaca. Poppy and maize were frequently planted on the same lands.

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78 Paradoxically, those individuals and families that have followed the trends of drug production in the region have just been behaving according to the very same fundamentals of capitalist accumulation as other traditional agricultural sectors. Their aims are to concentrate assets and capital in those sectors of the economy with the highest rates of profitability, in this case drug production.

79 Tlapa is the municipality head and the main geographical and commercial entrance to the Montaña region. On the expansion of drug production in Mexican agriculture and in the Montaña in the 1990s, Ronquillo (2011) pointed out that the seeds of poppy were sold secretly in the north of the region in the mid-1990s. According to the author in the mid-1990s the poppy production was spread in the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, Michoacán, Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Morelos. Although there are not precise statistics about the infiltration of drug
Poppy was planted in late November, when the maize was still growing and the plants were high enough to cover the poppy plants. Poppy fields were located on cliffs or in areas densely covered by trees to hide the poppies from soldiers on foot, and prevent the helicopters from landing. Othon’s father told him this story, and Othón remembers very well how the army presence became more and more visible as production increased in the region: “Suddenly the soldiers began to come out from everywhere; you never knew exactly from where. They were more and more aware of the poppy and so the helicopters began to fly over more often. At first, people cultivated the poppy right there in their backyards, but this changed with the helicopters. They always flew in pairs, one to find the poppy and the other to burn it from the air. They flew very close to the ground to burn it. The next day the poppy was dry and yellow. My grandfather was arrested twice. The federal police caught him the first time but could not take him away because the people stopped them. It is a small town and the people are very united, so the people did not allow the police to take him away. Everybody was armed with machetes and sticks, but eventually the police put him in a van and took him away. He was rescued right when the van was heading out of the town. The van had to turn very slowly so as to not fall down into the ravine. So, people began to gather, and the town’s Commissioner used a speaker: ‘Go outside and get armed. Julio has been taken away. Cover the road and do not let the van get away.’ Women were sent to the front, so the federal police would not harm anybody; and behind the women came the armed men. And so the federal police could not take my grandfather away.”

The second time, Othón continues, the soldiers caught his grandfather by surprise while he was cleaning and preparing the land. “He was arrested and nobody could do anything

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cartels in the Mexican agriculture, he estimates that in the first decade of the twentieth first century about 60% of agricultural production in the country has been penetrated by drug cartels. “How many Mexican laborers occupy the last link in the chain of production of transnational drug cartels? How many of them have not found other alternative to poverty and to the deplorable conditions of the Mexican countryside in drug production but to be hired as cheap labor for drug producers?” (Ronquillo 2011).
because the soldiers were well armed. They were like 30 men! They were about 20 or 30 soldiers. The soldiers tore the poppy off the land, packed it in small bags, and forced him to carry everything all the way from where they caught him. It was not very far, about half a mile. They locked him in the police station, and later took him to Tlapa. But near Tlapa there is a town where my grandfather had a very good friend; they were like brothers. This man knew the municipal president in Tlapa, and knew he was a corrupt man. So, this man and I do not know how many others went there and threatened him saying that if he did not let my grandpa go, he would pay the consequences. So, the president, who was a criminal, had to negotiate. Back then not many people were arrested. I think the only detainees were my grandfather and another person, Mr. Valentín. I think back then, the Commissioner knew some Spanish and defended him. Mr. Valentín said the poppy was not his, that he was just passing by and he did not know anything.”

“The land was communal so nobody could know for sure who the owner was. So, no one said anything and the soldiers released him. And so that’s how the whole thing began. At the beginning it was okay, because the soldiers did not know much about it. But then the helicopters arrived, and later soldiers on foot and in vehicles. They often camped near the town. People said that in other towns women were abused.80 I think two women were raped. So, people were

80 Instances of the military’s sexual abuse of women abound. The following are a few of the reports dating back to the late 1990s. In 1997, the Me’phaa or Tlapaneco indigenous women Delfina Flores Aguilar and Aurelia Méndez Ramírez denounced sexual abuse by the Army. In 1999, the Amuzgo indigenous women Victoriana Vázquez Sánchez and Francisca Santos Pablo were also sexually abused in the municipality of Xochistlahuaca. In 2002, Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú were sexually abused separately in February and March of 2002 by members of the Mexican Army with the purpose of terrorizing social movements in peasant communities in Guerrero. Valentina Rosendo, 17 years old, was sexually abused in the municipality of Acatepec. The soldiers in Ayutla de los Libres sexually abused Inés Fernández an indigenous Me’phaa woman in his own home. As noted by the Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña, sexual abuses against indigenous women are part of the militarization of the Montaña and the Costa Region and the institutionalization of impunity, particularly against indigenous women to repress social activism (Tlachinollan 2010). According to the same organization, during the three first years (2006 to 2009) of the government of Felipe Calderón, the complaints against the Mexican Army received by the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) increased from 182 to 1,791 (Tlachinollan 2010).
scared when the soldiers arrived. People did not go out. Well, they came out but in groups or in pairs to avoid the danger. In my town the soldiers are known as Na lapa, meaning *los de cuero prieto* in Spanish (referring to dark-skin), because the motherfuckers wear a dark green uniform that looks like brown skin, like it was made of rubber. Fucking *cueros prietos*, like they were repulsive things. People also say ‘the *guachos* have come.’ But in Mixteco everybody calls them Na lapa because if you look at them from afar, they look dark. Once they are closer, you can distinguish the green color of the uniforms, but when they are far away walking down the hills, they all look like *prietos*.”

That second time the soldiers came to arrest Othón’s grandfather, they also took his father and uncle away. “The helicopters landed on a great plain near the town. Two helicopters landed next to my grandfather’s land where he was ready to harvest the poppy. My grandfather said someone from the nearby town, because of envy, denounced him. They were to arrest all of us. The informer said my family was the major poppy producer, and that we were leading the whole thing, that we were the bosses. People could be ignorant but they know how to defend and protect their own. In other words, they knew something bad would happen and they spread the news. So, they were ready. The soldiers entered into my grandfather’s house. At that time we lived all together: my father, my uncle—my dad was still living with my grandfather—and my aunts. It was like a movie. Well-armed soldiers came out from the helicopters, and when they reached the house, my grandfather and my father were already gone. Only the women were there. They entered the house and began to search around. They were armed.”

“My uncle’s house was next to my grandfather’s; there he stored the hoses to water the poppy. Sometimes they had to bring the water from 300 or 500 meters away. Poppy needs to be watered every third day because of the dry weather and the sun; the sun burns everything and
dries the soil quickly, so you have to water it repeatedly. So, when the soldiers found the hoses, they destroyed them with the *machetes*. I remember my great-grandfather used to sleep in a little bed, that’s where the soldiers found the poppy, about six pounds right under, buried underground—the house had no floor only the bare soil. I do not know how they found it. They took the poppy away and then interrogated the women. They could not get anything so they took them away. They also took my uncle’s sneakers. Fucking soldiers [*los pinches soldados*], they took all the good things in the house! The damned soldiers robbed us! But nobody could say anything; soldiers went into the houses and did whatever they pleased. They found nothing in our town, but in a town nearby they caught some men to interrogate them. But these men knew nothing.”

“Porfirio Palomas, the only teacher in the town, arrived to the place and tried to defend them. The soldiers grabbed him and tied him hand and foot to the helicopter. His wife and mother arrived, and his wife told the soldiers they could not arrest him because he was a good teacher. They begged the motherfucker soldiers [*los soldados hijos de la chingada*]. She showed them his teacher’s diploma and she begged a lot until they released him. Supposedly, they had to confess where our family was or be shot right there. They were lined up. I do not think the soldiers would do it, or maybe they would, or maybe they just wanted to scare them to make them confess. In the end, the soldiers left and did not take the teacher away and my uncle and grandfather returned three days after. They were gone while things cooled down. And then, they did not want to plant poppy anymore.”

When talking about the economic advantages of planting poppy, Othón recalls, “I think at first cultivating poppy allowed people to change their lives, because before that most people lived in small wooden huts, and only a few in adobe houses. Living in an adobe house meant
you were upper class or had money. In other words, you could have another status: you had your little adobe house while the poor lived in their small huts covered with palm leaves. Sometimes when people cooked, the sparks burned the palm houses. Many were burned and they had to build them again. So, the people began to cultivate poppy, so that many were able to build their little adobe houses. I think that has been a pretty good change because people were able to live better … Yes, it was a good time back then, because with that money my dad bought his cows and rifles. At that time, one kilogram of poppy was paid near 20,000 pesos, and you need to plant one or two hectares to get that amount of money. Each plant produces five to six fruits and each fruit produces a few milligrams. All depends on how well you take care of the plants, because they need to be irrigated and fertilized. Maize is different. My grandfather tells me that until recently maize could be sold at a good price. Maize is scarce because now the majority of the people are going to the United States and they do not cultivate it any more. Only the old men still do so, and they are doing well. Now many families that used to cultivate maize buy it instead.”

“Things are different now, things have changed. People get to realize that if they do not cultivate poppy they must return to Sinaloa and start all over again, or as they say, ‘you must go back to where you were before.’” Going back to Sinaloa is, like they say in Mixteco, Nandi coyo tach a, like repeating the same story. Yes, you could find jobs and opportunities for the family, but merely to stay alive, not to make money and change your life. So, definitely nobody likes to be there; they go to work for six months and then return to Guerrero. It is not such a big deal. They must work just for keeping themselves alive. But once the money runs out, they must go again, and every year it is the same. Many people returned to Sinaloa because they had no other choice. The military began to watch the town more frequently. They knew when people were
ready to harvest the poppy, and so they arrived and destroyed everything. And so many people cried because they lost their harvest. Can you imagine all the work they had put in there? To fertilize, to irrigate every day, to care about the plants like a treasure: people cried over all the wasted work and the lost hopes. Because they thought, ‘once I sell the poppy, I will buy this little thing, or I will build my house.’ They were imagining their dreams, they thought what they would do with the money; and then the helicopters arrive, the soldiers arrive, and everything goes to hell.’

The path of the Mixteco proletarianization

Since the 1980s, capitalist agribusinesses located in the Culiacán, Fuerte, and Guasave Valleys in Sinaloa have employed tens of thousands of migrant workers in the cotton, sugarcane, wheat, sorghum, pepper, and tomato fields. According to Canabal (2008), the number of day laborers in these enclaves was near 200,000 in 2003. Besides, their total production amounted to 50.5% of Mexico’s agriculture exports. Such a tremendous increase, as we have seen, is in part related to the ways in which labor was made more flexible following neoliberal reforms. Labor flexibility has been ensured by encouraging a seasonal labor pool consisting of individuals and households destabilized by the dropping price of maize, and the overall retreat of the Mexican state from aid to subsistence producers.

Since the late 1970s and the 1980s, the northwestern states of Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California have become a labor market for an increasingly indigenous migrant population from southeastern states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas.\(^{81}\) However, evidence indicates a

\(^{81}\) As noted by Ortiz (2010) this flow to the capitalist agricultural enclave in northwest Mexico, substituted the former seasonal or permanent indigenous migrations in the 1950s to Mexico City and the 1960s migration to Mexico City, Puebla, Estado de México and Vera cruz where indigenous migrants were mainly incorporated in the construction industry.
much earlier formation of a regional market of indigenous labor in Guerrero, with a major role of
the Montaña region since the 1950’s. For instance, there is evidence of significant internal
migrations from Atlixtac and Tlapa to Copanatoyac in Guerrero related to the scarcity of
agricultural land, and of peasants moving from Puebla and Oaxaca to the municipality of
Huamuxtitlán in the Montaña, where agriculture was on the rise. In Alcozauca, a municipality in
the Montaña that a couple of decades later would become a major supplier of Mixteco labor for
agribusinesses, internal migration was registered to the municipalities of Chilapa and Tlapa.
By the 1970s, as pointed out by Dehouve (1975), indigenous seasonal labor markets began to
grow. For instance, the commercial plantations in Guerrero and Morelos employed 20% of the
total indigenous male population of the Nahua community of Xalpatláhuac (south of the city of
Tlapa). Mixtecos of the Montaña worked in October and November in the sugar and rice fields
in Tlaquiltepec, Tlapa, La Providencia, Igualita, and Tlajesala, or migrated to the city of Cuautla
in the state of Morelos to work in the tomato fields. Another segment traveled to the tourist
enclave of Acapulco, south of Guerrero, and to the sugar cane and coffee plantations in the Costa
Grande region (in the municipalities of Atoyac, Coyuca, and Tecpan, next to Pacific Ocean).

82 In the decade of the 1950s, the Montaña had 160,907 inhabitants, with 88% rural population, and a majority of
speakers of indigenous languages, such as Náhuatl, Mixteco, and Tlapaneco. Fabila and Tejeda 1955.
83 Emigration to Mexico City and Acapulco was registered in Chilapa, as a result of the decay of the rebozo industry
(a woman’s garment usually made of cotton or silk) in the 1940s. Tensions and conflicts over agricultural land led
people to emigrate from the municipalities of Atlamajalcingo and Olinalá. From 1940 to 1950, Fabila and Tejeda
(1955) acknowledged a demographic decrease in the municipalities of Alcozauca and Atlamajalcingo. Several factors
played in this fall, including conflicts over the land, an elevated mortality, and migration associated with political
tensions. According to the authors, for that period existed already an indigenous labor market in the region, as well
as a female migration of indigenous domestic workers laboring for mestizo families in Tlapa. From 1940 to 1950
the population in Alcozauca and Atlamajalcingo declined from 7,102 to 5,935; and 3,188 to 3,074 respectively. For
the same period, Tlapa’s population growth from 10,673 to 14,513 (Fabila and Tejeda 1955:325).
84 According to Canabal (2008), the plantations in Guerrero were still a destination for only 4% Guerrerense in
2006. For the same year the main states of destination were Sinaloa (65%), Sonora (11%) and Michoacán (5%).
According also to the same author, for 2005-2006, three localities in the municipality of Xalpatláhuac were among
the main localities of origin of day laborers. For an examination of Xalpatláhuac’s migration to the United States
see the work of Villela (2011).
85 Canabal (2008) has pointed out that Sinaloa became the main state of destination of day laborers as a result of its
tremendous economic growth and the resulting growth of labor supply. The escalation of day laborer migration may
Two decades later, the municipalities of origin of the indigenous labor force in the Montaña region began to diversify as Mexican capitalist agriculture, particularly in the North, began to grow. In 1993, PAJA (Programa de Apoyo a Jornaleros Agrícolas- Program to Support Agricultural Day laborers) registered 30,000 agriculture day laborers from Guerrero, 10,000 of them from the Montaña. In 1996, out of 80,000 day laborers working in Culiacán (Sinaloa), 30,000 were from Guerrero. And from this figure, 70% came from the Montaña region: Chilapa (17%), Tlapa de Comonfort (14.8%), Alcozauca (13.4%), Metlatonoc (10.5%), and Ahuacuotzingo (13.55%). Similarly, Ortíz (2010) pointed out that the number of migrant workers from the Montaña more than doubled between 1994 and 2004, going from 13,358 workers to 32,581 (see table 17). According to the same author, in 2005, 37,144 day laborers migrated from Guerrero. In 2006, the number grew to 40,207, then slightly decreased to 39,948 in 2007. Canabal (2008) reports 32,581 and 34,602 day laborers migrants from the Montaña Alta and Montaña Baja regions for 2005 and 2006 respectively.

However, as Canabal points out, the northwest region has not been the only migratory destination for the Guerrerense population. Between 1987 and 1992, they migrated to the states

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87 Quoted by Ortíz 2010. Based on data collected by Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI), Canabal registered 30,000 Guerrerenses migrating temporarly to Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Michoacán, Jalisco, and Nayarit in 2000. From the total day laborers in those states, the Guerrerenses were 83.7% in Morelos, 71.9% in Nayarit, 42% in Baja California, 37% in Baja California Sur, 46.9% in Sinaloa, and 23.83%.
88 Ortíz includes 17 municipalities as part of the Montaña Alta (Atlamajalcingo del Monte, Metlatónoc, Acatepec, Malinaltepec, Zapotitlán Tablas, Xalpatlahuac, Copanatoyac, Alcozauca de Guerrero, Tlacoapa, Atlíxtac, Tlapa de Comonfort, Oinalá, Cualálc, Tlalixtaquilla, Haumuxitlán, Alpoyeca and Xochihuiehueteñan) and three municipalities as part of the Montana Baja (Zitlala, Chilapa de Álvarez and Ahuacuotzingo). Following the same significant increase in the population migrating from Guerrero since the 1940s, she points out that by 1990, the migrating population accounted for nearly 20 percent of the state’s total population, particularly from the Mixteco municipalities of Metlatónoc and Alcozauca (Canabal 2001).
of Morelos (18.3%), Mexico City (16.2%), Baja California (12.9%), Estado de México (18.3%), Michoacán (9.2%), and Oaxaca (7.5%).\textsuperscript{89} Between 1995 and 2000, they migrated to Morelos (22.2%), Estado de Mexico (19.2%), Mexico City (15.6%), Michoacán (8%), and Sinaloa (6.1%). By 2000, the Guerrerense migrants were already an important segment of the day labor force in the export-oriented agriculture in Morelos, Nayarit, Baja California, Sinaloa, and Sonora. In Sinaloa and Sonora, Guerrerense day laborers grew from 25,303 to 26,939 from 2005 to 2007 respectively; and nationally, the number increased from 37,144 day laborers to 39,948 (See Table 18).\textsuperscript{90} While Canabal is correct in her assessment that migration in the Montaña “has been directly related to the economic decline of the conditions of reproduction in the region,”\textsuperscript{91} the proletarianization of the Mixteco population has not followed the classic trend of proletarianization involving the often violent alienation and displacement of peasants from their land, leading to their transformation into wage workers surviving by exchanging their labor in a non-agricultural sector of the economy.

Instead, in contrast to the changes that began in the 1970s and continued until 1992 when neoliberal reforms paved the way for the privatization of the ejido system and communal ownership, Mixteco families in the Montaña were able to subsist as semi-proletarians. They were able to be self-sufficient by combining subsistence agriculture and producing enough maize for local markets, with an annual migration to northwest Mexico for wage work as day laborers in the more highly developed capitalist agricultural enclaves. Furthermore, and as I have shown, agricultural enclaves and subsistence agriculture regions are connected through forms of wage labor supply such as the enganche system, a labor system that entails the use of customs and

\textsuperscript{89} Canabal 2008.
\textsuperscript{90} Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas, Delegación Guerrero 2007 (quoted by Ortiz 2010:141).
\textsuperscript{91} Canabal 2001:42.
traditions, and the appropriation of kinship and community relations to secure its stability.\footnote{92}

According to Dehouve (1976), the use of seasonal wage labor entailed a reliance on communitarian and religious institutions for recruiting labor that included *cofradias* or *hermandades*, institutions that annually organize the festivities of the community’s Patron Saint. These social institutions were also used in the recruitment of workers and the structuring of labor hierarchies in the plantations, as the case of Othón’s father illustrates. Othon’s father was a *Mayordomo* in a *Cofradía*, putting him in charge of the recruitment of day laborers to Sinaloa.

“Traditional” social institutions in the region, Dehouve notes, have long facilitated the process of proletarianization in the region through local and regional labor markets.

The balance between a wage regimen in the agribusiness sector and subsistence agriculture that allowed the existence of a semi-proletarian pool of indigenous Mixtecos began to present tensions first in the 1990s when agribusiness wages began to drop and the labor and human degradation in the fields got worse,\footnote{93} approximately the same time that the Mexican state stopped regulating maize prices and withdrew all its technical support from the peasantry. Eventually, NAFTA brought a major penetration of U.S.-subsidized maize imports leaving no opportunity for Mixteco growers to keep producing for the local market in the Montaña.\footnote{94} As I will discuss in the following chapters, the destruction or dismantling of the institutional framework that protected Mexican peasants by regulating agriculture prices, by granting access to land, land tenure security, and access to technical assistance and credit, was part of a full class reconfiguration in Mexico that critically contributed to the growth of the Montaña’s migration to

\footnote{92}{Day labor migration to Mexico’s northwest was not the only path of Mixteco proletarianization. In Mixteco municipalities such as Xalpatláhuac, Dehouve (1976) documented the temporal wage labor among men, women and children (For an account of contemporary migration from Xalpatláhuac to Sinaloa’s plantations, see Obregón 2008).}

\footnote{93}{According to Canabal (2008) day laborers wages in 2000 were between 60 to $100 pesos (about $4.60 to $7.70 U.S. dollars) for an 8 to 10 hour working day.}

\footnote{94}{As mentioned earlier, the global profitability of agribusiness relies on the use of an extensive labor force and low wages to a large extent. However, as noted by Arrighi (2009: 63), these elements have prevented a full proletarianization of day laborers in the sector, albeit in the Rhodesian case his analysis is based on.}
the United States. The dismantling of the local peasant economy of the region in effect devalued the cost of labor in Sinaloa, pushing further proletarianization of Mixtecos in several phases via migration to the United States. The repression and targeting of peasants engaged in poppy production also contributed to the flow of workers into the circuits of indigenous labor supply by perpetuating the mobility of Mixteco workers to the Mexican northwest or to the United States.  

In this chapter I have shown who the abandoned are and how as day laborers they became proletarians in New York City. “This social class is a forgotten group in Mexico’s social political picture. In official declarations the topic is evaded,” wrote Stavenhagen. Today those forgotten workers may be found behind the counter of a deli in midtown Manhattan. It is the abandonment. The abandoned, as John Berger notes, “are those born into zones where is no longer possible to earn a living, and where the idea of any future has been ruptured.” I have shown some of the different and intertwined mechanisms that shape the proletarianization of the Montaña population. In particular, the Mixteco case shows that the contemporary proletarianization of the Mexican indigenous is deeply rooted in social conditions of deprivation expressed in the cultural notions of abandonment and necessity on the one hand, and on the other, in land commodification, the annihilation of the state’s technical and financial assistance to peasants, along with the active use of Mexican state violence.

The aim of pointing out the similarities between the hacienda’s peonage system in early twentieth century (notwithstanding the regional differences that Mexican historiography has pointed out) and today’s labor conditions in Sinaloa has been to highlight a continuum in the

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95 While Mixteco day laborers migrated first to California and then to New York City, Mestizos from Tlapa and Alpoyeca have primarily migrated directly to New York City.
98 Such structural conditions, with their historical and regional differences, are common to the entire Mexican indigenous population, and according to Montemayor (2010) constitute a form of institutionalized social injustice hidden behind official discourses of “social peace” and “stability.”
structure of the ethnic-labor relations in two different moments of Mexico’s history. At both moments Mexican indigenous peoples are located at the lower ranks of social and labor structure. And in spite of the historical accuracy that Othon’s representation of his life as peon with the life of a slave could have or not, what is a stake here is on the one hand, the extent to which this picture of a day laborer, of a man from below, is telling something about the current labor and living conditions of the indigenous people in Sinaloa. And on the other hand, the it tells us the extent to which in two different periods two sectors of the Mexican economy connected to the world market has relied on the super-exploitation of Mexican indigenous labor.

As I will explore in the next chapter, there are different rhythms, temporalities and paths to proletarianization in the history of the Montaña migration to New York City. These trajectories are part of the biography of the people of the Montaña and are what define the Mixteco people as a specific segment of the Mexican working class in New York City. In the next chapter I will show a different path of proletarianization through migration from the city of Tlapa and the extent to which proletarianization is shaped by a geographical, ethnic, economic and political location in the region. I will narrate the extent to which the sense of no future that shaped the life and death of day laborer Mixtecos in the Montaña was also extended to the city of Tlapa. I will recount how people became proletarians in New York City in the middle of the loneliness of the chemo days and the history of the man who has no name.
It is Tuesday afternoon, and it is raining again inside his memory. Every time he, “the man who has no name,” remembers Tlapa, the city of his childhood, it rains in his mind. “The man who has no name” does not know why, but in his recollections of the past, his own past, it is always raining. In the 1990s the family house was located on Morelos street, next to the Tlapa bus station, north of the city in San Pancho, the San Francisco neighborhood. Then the family moved to Hidalgo Street, on the edge of town but still in San Pancho. The memories of his childhood come back to him with his memories of the family house on Morelos Street, nostalgic recollections of people and places “the man who has no name” will see no more. His are not the memories of the men and women from the indigenous towns in the Montaña where nostalgia for living and working in agricultural fields far away from home has no place; nor are they recollections of children born in Sinaloa dragged to pick up tomatoes 10 hours a day to contribute to the family income. Rather, his memories come from a different social and geographical location, from the urban setting of Tlapa. His recollections consist instead of walking with his sisters, walking down the road alongside the river, and picking fruit, tomatoes, and mangoes just for fun from the nearby orchards. Of old characters such as Don Daniel, his neighbor, with his cows and his orchard, of adobe houses and tiled roofs. And of the few houses with a gas installation in a town where most people still used firewood they bought from street

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99 The City of Tlapa de Comonfort also known as the “Hearth of the Mountain” is the main urban, commercial and political center in the region, and located in the municipality of Tlapa. Of the 19 municipalities in the Montaña, Tlapa’s municipality is the only one with an urban population majority (See Chapter 3).
vendors. Or the poorest who used the wood that their children gathered on the riverbanks. “The man who has no name” left Tlapa more than 20 years ago.

It is a cold and dark autumn afternoon in mid-September New York when we talk about the day he left. Inside his mind the rain is falling again, as it has been doing so for about twenty years now: “Every time I think of Tlapa, in my childhood, the first thing that comes to my mind are the rainy days in the street. We lived on Morelos Street near the bus station; I remember the wet street and the buses arriving at the station.” One day one of those buses would drive him and his family away from Tlapa, away from his hometown, away from the family home where he lived and saw his grandparents alive for the last time. “The man who has no name” has never returned to Tlapa. But for now, in our conversation the rain keeps inhabiting his memory as kids are playing outside on Morelos Street; they are playing soccer and none of them would imagine that one day many of them could leave the town. One of those kids will die on the U.S.-Mexico border, another in a street fight in New York, another in a work accident, and another killed by robbers when he returned from work to a crowded apartment in East Harlem. But many others will raise a family, and one day will be playing football next to the Hudson River in the summer.

But not now, for now all they are just kids in his thoughts, running and playing on the streets in the San Francisco neighborhood. “Those are my first memories,” he continues, “memories of the rainy days and the fog over the Cerro de la Cruz. I do not know if they are nostalgic, but those are my first memories,” he says. “The man who has no name” was about six or seven years old back then. After these first memories, come his recollections of the fireworks and the fiestas patronales, the festivities of the Señor del Nicho, the Patron Saint of Tlapa, with the music bands, the street bullfights and the mojigangas (men dressed as bullfighters, dancing
and infuriating the animals while others pull them back), and the memories of the horse races in the afternoon.

The first house the family had was in the same street where his mother’s father lived. Remembering him brings from the past the smell of the fruit trees—the guayabas, tamarindos, and guamuchiles of his grandfather who worked as a rural schoolteacher until the last years of his life. He taught at Tlapa primary school. As a child, “the man who has no name” used to play in the school’s playground; and later when he entered school had his grandfather as his first-year teacher. He remembers how strict he was. He was a Mixteco perfectly fluent in Mixteco and Spanish, and although he firmly believed that children had to master the two languages, he never spoke Mixteco to his grandchildren at home. Indigenous languages such as Mixteco, Nahuatl and Tlapaneco still are nonexistent in the public schools in Tlapa where classes are taught only in Spanish. The children of the migrant indigenous people working in the city -Tlapanecos, Mixtecos, and Nahuas, who come from the Montaña- do not speak Spanish so it is hard for them to understand and speak a language that is neither theirs nor their parents. Outside of school, their peers bully them because of how they speak, for being the sons and daughters of indigenous peasants, shepherds, artisans, or migrant workers from the rural towns of the Montaña living in the city.100

100 In the early twentieth century, the project of making Spanish Mexico’s national language was part of the modern state-nation formation and the integration of indigenous population. The castellanización of Mexico began in 1911 with the Ley de Instucción Rudimentaria or Act of Rudimentary Instruction that mandated the state to teach Spanish to the indigenous population. In 1922 the rural school and the rural teacher were key in the castellanización. Interestingly as noted by Carlos Montemayor, it was Moisés Sáenz, then in the Ministry of Education in 1927, who advocated the idea of teaching Spanish as foreign language to indigenous communities. The formation of a national language was advocated by Mexican politicians, as Luis Cabrera who supported the elimination of indigenous languages from the country: “Here the problem is to make the Indian languages and dialects disappear, and only spread the Spanish language. The only way to achieve this goal is to teach Spanish to Indians and ban the use of indigenous languages” (Luis Cabrera quoted by Carlos Montemayor 1997:110). As noted by Montemayor (2001) Spanish language has been historically imposed on the Mexican indigenous population. For Indians, Spanish has been the language of laboring or the instrument for legal self-defense or contest land dispossession. Within the period of modern national formation indigenous languages have been under siege. Montemayor notes, “we have imposed Spanish language to dominate them. Spanish language should forge a
Like the families of these indigenous kids, his family migrated from the Montaña to Tlapa. His family story reflects the history of thousands of families who have migrated from the indigenous towns of the region to the city. His grandfather came from a nearby municipality to Tlapa, as did his grandmother, an indigenous Nahua who migrated from the Costa region, south of the state. He tells me his grandmother came from a family of shepherds and grew up in the country raising goats, cows, and horses. “She always lived like a nomad, so to speak, and it was late in her life that she settled down in Tlapa. One of my uncles was born in a narrow valley near Xalpatláhuac, my other uncle on a hill called Cerro de la Rosa; my mother and most of my uncles are from a small town in the Montaña.”

Most of the people who migrated from the Montaña region did not settle in the oldest neighborhoods of the city (La Aviación, Santa Anita, Cuba, San Diego, San Francisco, Centro), but in San Antonio –*el barrio de guancos*, the neighborhood of the *guancos*. “*Guano*” is the derogative name the Mestizos from Tlapa use to refer to the indigenous people from the Montaña (Mixtecos, Nahuas, or Tlapanecos). “The people from San Antonio came from different places in the Montaña. There were Mixtecos and Nahuas. People cannot distinguish between Mixtecos and Nahuas. Even myself, when I was a kid, I could not tell the Mixteco from the Nahuatl language. I used to laugh about it, but not anymore. I am not going to deny it, but I do that no more. I think I behaved that way because where I lived everybody behaved like that. We were kids. But then, my family reproached me, ‘You should not say that because we all have the same origins. Even though we do not speak the Indigenous language, we are all the same.’ In fact, my

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101 Based on natural, economic, social and cultural characteristics, the state of Guerrero has been divided in six regions: Norte, Tierra Caliente, Centro, Montaña, Costa Grande and Costa Chica. As noted in the previous chapter, the Montaña region has the highest demographic concentration of Indigenous population and agriculture for subsistence agriculture with production of maize and beans (Espinosa and Mesa 2000).
mother knew the language but stopped using it because she did not need it anymore.” His childhood memories reflect the profound ethnic and class division existing in the region, an element that, as will be shown later, has implications in how the people from the Montaña build community and get access to jobs in New York City. The Montaña is the geographical and social location of the marginal population, Indians and poor peasants.

As noted by Canabal (2001), the people in the Montaña use a variety of phrases and words, with specific meanings, to mark people’s social and ethnic origins. For example, as noted by Canabal (2001) the Montaña is the location of the “impoverished population”, the place where “the marginalized subjects from the government” live, or “the place inhabited by Indians.” Montañero is a derogatory name used to refer to the indigenous inhabitants of the Montaña. It is used also as class and ethnic marker. The term connotes “poverty” and a “marginal” identity that also refers to people’s skin color, as in “brown skinned people.” This identity marker situates people regionally since the term literally refers to “those from the hill,” combining geographic location with a particular style of dress as well, or “those who use hats,” which is another aspect of ethnic identity implied by the phrase (Canabal 2001). In contrast, the Mestizos living in Tlapa do not tend to identify themselves as Montañeros but as Tlapanecos.

Hate and discrimination also dwell in the memories of “the man who has no name.” It was not necessary for him to cross the border or to become an undocumented immigrant to realize what discrimination, humiliation, and human degradation really meant. He knew the discrimination embedded in the word Montañero very well. He was familiar with it and had experienced it outside of his and his grandfather’s house. It was evident in the stories the old man used to tell, like the one he remembers about a mistreated wife. There was an indigenous

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102 According to Canabal (2001), at the end of the twentieth century 85% of the total indigenous population in the state of Guerrero lived in the Montaña region. 37% were Tlapanecos, 36% Mixtecos and 25% Nahuas.
woman who was constantly called a “bitch” by her husband and by repeating the word again and again she was really transformed into a dog by her own husband, an animal fed on the tortillas he threw on the floor for her. By telling stories like this, the grandfather intended to educate his grandchildren to never use offensive words to mistreat people. But outside the house “the man who has no name” had to listen to such offensive words applied to others. He listened to those insults with the recurrent voices of the enganchadores announcing the time to leave the region to work for the Northwest Mexican agribusiness. “¿Quieren chambear cabrones?” or “Do you want to work motherfuckers?” It was an old and familiar voice of command, the voice of the recruiters.

It was the voice Othón and his family heard every year too. It was the voice of the enganchadores searching for indigenous labor from the Montaña. “There were five to ten buses coming to take the people away; there were all these motherfuckers screaming at people, treating them as cattle. It was outrageous to see all these people sleeping on the floor at night. Lines and lines of entire families, children, and women sleeping next to the highway; even old men sleeping on the floor waiting to leave to Culiacán, Sinaloa. And when they returned everything was the same. I remember them coming back from Culiacán, returning with new clothes, radios and tape recorders, and listening to Chalino Sánchez. That is how I knew his music because that’s what people listened to when they came back from Sinaloa. The people from my neighborhood hated whenever they were back: ‘Look, all those fucking Indians, they have come

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103 Chalino Sánchez, a.k.a El Compa Chalino (Buddy Chalino) and whose real name was Rosalino, is considered a folk-legend among the Mexican-American working class in Los Angeles. Sam Quiñones (2001) describes him as “a barely lettered young man, once an anonymous campesino (peasant) in the massive flow of immigrants North” (Quiñones 2001: 29). He migrated as undocumented worker before settling down in Los Angeles and becoming a corrido singer. He worked in California’s and Oregon’s farms and ultimately he was assassinated on May 16, 1992 in Culiacán, Sinaloa. According to Quiñones, his songs represent a “kind of oral history” about the life and towns from which the Mexican migrants in California were coming. His corridos or folk songs convey the histories of people living in “lawless places, desolate villages… betrayals and ambush, paid killings, easy killings, easy gunplay, and corrupted justice” (Quiñones 2001: 15). Songs that were inspired in the rough life of Northwestern Mexico and Sinaloa, whose everyday life dominated by drug traffic resembled in some way the everyday life of the Montaña.
again, they have slept in the street again, and they have left all this garbage again.’” As in the story of his grandfather, the indigenous people were insulted and treated like animals; entire communities and individuals under the same chain of command and obedience, learning from the beginning that their social and economic location was to be an army of workers. “Pitiful misery,” the words Turner used to depict the fate of indigenous population (see Chapter 1) caught by the enganche system in early twentieth century, was once again recreated in the twenty-first century streets of Tlapa.104

“The man who has no name” could see and hear this ancient play; he could witness a tiny fragment of this deep time-and-space chain of command right outside his house, and then seek refuge inside the family house, hoping his grandfather’s tales could silence, at least momentarily, the voice of the enganchadores. And years later, he would see similar scenes, as though from the same story again, but this time away from home and away from the family house, where his grandfather’s stories would no longer be there to provide him refuge. This time, the timeless voice of the enganchador would be replaced by a faceless employer, a landlord, or a police officer; and this time “the man who has no name” and his family will be a piece of the same chain of command he once saw in front of his house.

He will join the mass of indigenous from the Montaña supplying the labor for Mexico’s Northwest agribusiness. He will join the mass of people who have faced the destruction of agriculture and economy of their region, as well as the destruction of ancestral peasant and artisanal activities now deemed unproductive. “People used to cultivate or make their living as artisans selling their products in Tlapa, making straw hats, clay pots, petates (handmade rugs). There were entire towns devoted to making pottery (one of the main artisanal activities in the region). I think they still do so but not at the same scale. Then the indigenous began to migrate

104 Turner 1910:22.
from Tlapa to Culiacán and Cuautla, Morelos (in central Mexico). In Cuautla, there are a lot of indigenous people from Guerrero. They left because they couldn’t make a living in the Montaña anymore.” When early in the 1990s, the Montaña region began to be transformed and shaped by the predominance of two commodities--drugs and a wage labor pool\textsuperscript{105}--indigenous Montañeros were not the only ones leaving. The people from Tlapa, employed in services as state bureaucrats, petty merchants, taxi and truck drivers, etc., also found themselves abandoned and recognized the need to move North as well. This time, “the man who has no name” will never again hear the voice of the enganchadores yelling to the peasants standing in front of his house. Instead, he and his family will be dragged away by the voiceless demand of labor supply to “the North.”

\textit{Greetings from New York, or the Chemo days}

Back in the 1980’s, “New York” was not much more than the name of a place or a mere black and white picture for “the man who has no name.” Over the years, it would become a real set of social relations little by little as Tlapa would gradually fade into a blury rainy city, a faded memory. Years later, when he tells me his story in New York City, the image of the city came into existence in a different way. “It was then that I began to hear the word New York inside my head. When I was a kid I went to the Casa de la Cultura, or Center for the Arts, which was part of the Autonomous University of Guerrero. There we learned acting and performed plays, and I also took painting classes. I remember I wanted to take all kinds of classes,--painting, poetry, theater, music--but it was impossible, so I chose painting. Maybe some of my paintings are

\textsuperscript{105} The transformation of the region into a source of labor supply is connected to the enactment of NAFTA that I will discuss in the next chapter.
stored in our abandoned house in Tlapa. So, there was a man named Víctor, who was the theater teacher and I began to study with him, but then he left to the United States. So, Marco, his brother in law, replaced him. I remember we began to rehearse with him. But then, he also left for the U.S. Marco and his brother were from the Cuba neighborhood. They returned to Tlapa and left again. For me it is nostalgic and very hard to remember him. I remember that my sister met the brothers when she finally left for New York, and on one occasion she sent us American clothes to Tlapa, along with four letters from Víctor and Marco. I will never forget that moment. Two letters were for me, and the others were for one of my school friends. The two letters said: ‘Greetings. We are okay. Keep going with the school, keep practicing, and we are sending this money for you.’ I remember they sent me ten dollars. They sent me ten dollars! They sent another ten dollars for my other school friend, who is now dead. It meant a lot to me to hear my sister say that Víctor and Marco said ‘hello’ to me, and that I had to keep going with school. It really meant a lot to me.”

His family’s experience and his own slowly became that of the many families from Tlapa. At first, as he noted, only “the paisas [the indigenous people] left the region” but next mestizos from Alpoyeca and Tlapa followed them migrating to California and New York. His sister Elisa was the first to migrate. “I remember when my sister Elisa left for the United States

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106 In the 1970s, indigenous populations of Mixtecos and Nahuaas migrated from the region to Sinaloa and Morelos. However, these labor migrations as well as the labor markets that were formed outside of the region were ethnically and geographically segregated: indigenous Mixtecos, Nahuaas and Tlapanecos were absorbed into capitalist agricultural enclaves with high demands for intensive labor. As noted by Canabal (2001) in 1970, the census data showed that 39.2% of the migrants in Morelos were from Guerrero working in agriculture, construction, the informal sector and domestic service. Since then, men and women have migrated from Guerrero to Morelos. Sugar plantations in Morelos receive each year indigenous Tlapaneco day laborers while Mixteco migrants work picking up tomatoes.

107 Though the Montaña has functioned as a regional and national labor supplier since the 1970s, in the 1980s it began to escalate its role as more of an international supplier of labor for the North American international labor market. For example, according to Canabal (2001) from 1940 to 1950 the urbanization of the tourist center of Acapulco, Guerrero, next to the Pacific, created a labor market for the people of the Montaña; first in the construction sector and then in the sector service. Later, workers were not only pulled into that tourist market linked to the North, but eventually traveled north for work.
for the first time, my mom and my dad cried. They took her to the station to take the bus to Mexico City. I do not remember if my mom had ever gone to Mexico City with her before. Elisa had studied in Chilpancingo, (Guerrero state’s capital) so she had lived alone before, but never out of the country. My mother worked as a janitor in a public hospital in Tlapa. My father worked in a road construction company that was part of the Ministry of Communication and Transportation. He later quit, I do not know why, and he worked as a vendor in the Montaña. He sold stuff to make a living. We were seven siblings, brothers and sisters, and back then my mother and my father worked. But then things began to get complicated, and my mom had to join Elisa in New York. After that, Karla and Rosa, my other sisters, and eventually my other sister, Daniela, with her two sons, and along with me arrived.”

The family separation came in stages and with the growing alienation from family also came an addiction to chemo. Chemear, or the act of inhaling cement or glue (el chemo), became a trend among many of the teenagers that were left behind when their parents migrated. The chemo days were days of solitude, days filled with unrest and a sense of dislocation and uncertainty about the future. Chemo was the only answer he found to the sudden loneliness and the desperation he felt after his separation from his parents, and the departure of his mom and sisters to New York City. He was angry because they were far away from him. As it happened with him, the chemo days became the lonesome answer for a generation of young people in Tlapa. Nobody knew “the man who has no name” inhaled cement, nobody knew that he, as is said in Spanish, andaba con el chemo, literally, was “hanging around with the chemo” in the streets of Tlapa. No one saw him chemeando on the roof of his house; not even his sister and his father. One sunny day, he remembers, he was on the roof chemeando when his father suddenly arrived and asked him for help to carry the boxes with the stuff he used to sell in the Montaña.
But his father did not even notice it. “The man who has no name” used to spend the days missing school, smoking marijuana, inhaling cement or industrial gum with Vigo, one of his closest friends, and getting drunk alone. His family eventually noticed his addiction, but only after he had an overdose and they had to take him to the city of Puebla to receive medical attention.

The chemo days were part of those collective experiences in which many teenagers “lost” their way in life. Although some of them never left Tlapa, they became the “lost ones,” or los que se perdieron: the ones who got socially “lost” in the solitude of the chemo days. And although they were just kids, a decade later, as they had to follow their parents’ path and migrated. Many of them found jobs in the New York City economy, but many of them also ended up filling the ranks of the Mexican gangs. Some of them were killed in street fights, got incarcerated, deported, or returned to Tlapa only to be engaged in the criminal activity of the Beltrán Leyva drug cartel. Yet, perhaps the chemo, the inhaled cement penetrating the body of lonely teenagers was reflecting something else about the social conditions in Tlapa. The chemo was a proletarian drug, a cheap industrial drug consumed not only by teenagers in Tlapa but in every working-class neighborhood in Mexico. At the same time that the bodies of Tlapa’s teenagers were being invaded by the industrial glue they were inhaling, the Montaña region was being penetrated by the drug production that would ultimately have a destructive impact on everyday life in Tlapa.

108 A pool of reserve labor army, as well as a transnational migrant lumpen proletariat, composed mostly of teenagers from Tlapa. Some became members of the drug cartels such as “Los Alacránes,” a criminal cell associated to the Beltrán Leyva’s. Ricardo Nieto, a.k.a. “El Alacrán Nieto” led the cell in Tlapa.

109 Earlier, in the 1950s, anthropologist Alfonso Fabila (1955) noted that marijuana was the most consumed drug in the region only among the mestizo population: “The vice of smoking marijuana is apparently of recent introduction. In any case, it is affecting only some members of the mestizo population, which is a minority in the region. The indigenous population does not smoke it. Mestizos smoke marijuana in Chilapa, Tlapan, Huamuxtitlán and Olinalá. This vice is the most widespread in Chilapa, where its trade has even special places such as la Calle Nueva and the neighborhood of San Antonio, where many drug addicts come to buy and consume the weed” (Fabila 1955:408).
As discussed in the previous chapter, the growth of a drug market in the Montaña in the 1990’s transformed the local and regional economy of peasant families relying on subsistence agriculture. With the expansion of drug production, militarization came to the region too, particularly in the areas with the highest density of indigenous people who saw in cultivating poppy a means to stay in the region and not continue migrating to Sinaloa. In the memories of the “man who has no name,” in those days, “the guachos (the military) are always there.” Their presence is timeless in his mind; there is neither beginning nor end, no calendar delimits their presence in the city: “Since I remember, the region has always been militarized. The guachos had always been there. I remember there was an area in the city where they were settled. It was grotesque, because the adults were telling you all the time: ‘The guachos are going to take you away!’ Maybe they said so for a reason. But they also said, ‘Do not go outside because the guachos are going to take you away!’ The mothers referred to them as if they were boogiemen: ‘The guachos are coming, and they will take you away!’ These kinds of memories always come to my mind, I do not know why. Tlapa has always been militarized. There was a military base in the old Zócalo, also known as ‘La Plazuela,’ located in the San Diego neighborhood. Twenty years ago there were some old houses and the guachos lived there. And again, the memories that come to my mind are of the soldiers beating the people, the sun is high above and they are marching in the streets, grabbing some men, yelling at them, and beating them with sticks. I remember we were playing in the street and suddenly we heard them, always twenty or thirty of them. But the thing that impressed me the most was that the majority of the guachos wore white shirts with bloodstains. At that time I did not know who the prisoners were. I never knew it. I think they were political dissidents. People were always protesting because of the land conflicts in the Montaña and in Tlapa, and there were land conflicts among the different towns. I think it
was a state strategy to maintain the people divided and then to send the guachos to cool things down. But in the end, I think it was our fault because we weren’t united, we were divided.”

Going deep into his memories, perhaps there were other powerful reasons behind the “grotesque” tales of the guachos who used to scare the children, reasons that arose from people’s experiences of the military and state repression. Maybe the experience of the physical and moral abuse had to be transformed into a children’s tale to bury the individual and family pain produced by it, a pain that makes the recollection of the past difficult. Maybe this explains why “the man who has no name” was persistently reluctant to talk about the repression experienced by his family related to their political activism. They were victims of state violence who ultimately lost family members to state assassinations, including an uncle involved in the teachers’ movement in Guerrero and the democratization of his union in the late 1980s. They were also victims of the violence perpetrated by the drug cartels in Tlapan.110 I respect his decision to leave out details. Yet, many times these sorts of family stories would come up during our informal conversations while we were riding the subway, having lunch, or in a New York City record store.

The decade of the 1990s is remembered by the Tlapanecos not as a time when migration to New York City reached its peak, but as one of the most violent periods in Tlapan’s history. One of the most famous gang leaders in Tlapan’s recent history “El Abismo,” literally “the Abyss,” migrated to New York as a teenager and after several years of gang activity in upper Manhattan was imprisoned for drug trafficking and deported to Mexico. Ultimately, el Abismo was found dead in Tlapan. Popular accounts among migrants from Tlapan speculate that el Abismo

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110 The assassination of the uncle of “the man who has no name’s” was part of a large wave of state-driven violence of teachers in Mexico. As noted by Hernández Navarro (2007), since 1979 at least 152 teachers were killed or kidnapped in Mexico (14 assassinations took place in Guerrero alone) as a result of the repression against the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE), founded in 1979 to democratize the teachers’ union, called the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE).
was captured by his enemies and buried alive, and that his rotten body could only be found by ringing his cell phone. The 1990s is also associated with the figure of Julio Guerrero Zurita (1996-1999), a municipal president from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), charged with being the leader of a kidnapping gang in the region, notorious for the kidnapping and subsequent assassination of a local well-known small businessman (the owner of the first movie theater in the city). For many Guerrerense migrants this killing marks the beginning of a dreadful cycle of violence in Tlapa.

When Tlapanecos in New York recollect those times, the former picture usually contrasts with their memories of how social life in the city and the Montaña was before the 1990s. Many migrants have not returned to Tlapa in years or even decades, but a bit of nostalgia for the past still remains. Tlapa, what has become of you? “Tlapa was rather quiet, nothing to do with what it is now,” says Abraham who worked as a truck driver in the Montaña, transporting people and cattle in the same vehicle. Now he plays football in one of oldest Tlapaneco soccer teams in New York City. He remembers the drug trafficking back then, and the two clandestine landing fields in the region. And he continues, “I frequently saw the poppy and the marijuana around. When I was driving from the Montaña to Tlapa, people used to hide the poppy in the trucks, inside pumpkins.” In other accounts, people tell stories about how the Mexican Army slowly became aware of the poppy production in the Montaña. Accounts about how the indigenous of the Montaña were transported like cattle in trucks, and then would “suddenly” be seen driving expensive cargo trucks they bought in the state of Puebla. In a region haunted by la necesidad (the necessity), the only possible merchandise you could exchange for a cargo truck was drugs. For the Tlapanecos, the arrival of the Mexican Army in the region also explains the emergence of great social unrest in the city: soldiers going to the local bars, harassing men and molesting
women, bars popping-up everywhere, teenagers consuming not only the industrial and proletarian drugs but cocaine as well.

In time, tensions with the military began to escalate and accounts emphasize that the local population began to contest the military’s violence. Some guachos were beaten and even assassinated. Teenagers who had migrated to New York and came back to Tlapa joined drug cartels. After *el Abismo* disappeared, there came another drug dealer, the so-called *el Alacrán* (“the Scorpion”), who by then had already “bribed” all of the authorities in Tlapa. Every day someone was killed. Vicente, another Tlapaneco in New York, remembers *el Alacrán* as a shy teenager who used to visit him at home, and then he became one of the most feared drug criminals in Tlapa. “If someone dares to honk at him on the street,” he continues, “*el Alacrán* could pull the car over and kill the person. He never imagined seeing *el Alacrán* again, but once when he returned to Tlapa, Vicente witnessed the murder of his cousin right in front of him. “It was a drug crime; I did not know my cousin was involved with the drug cartels, and when he was shot, his dead body fell into my arms. My cousin tried to repel the attack with a gun but it was too late, *el Alacrán* killed him. I took him to the hospital, but it was too late. His gang followed us to the hospital; they wanted to be really sure that he was dead. I think he did not kill me then because *el Alacrán* respected me. I knew him when we were kids, and he used to go to my house to drink beer.”

For many teenagers in Tlapa, the *chemo days* came to an end when they followed in their parents’ footsteps and migrated. New York City became for many of them the end of those days. For “the man who has no name” the end of those days came with the death of a childhood friend, Rafael. “When I was in secondary school I failed the second year due to my bad behavior. I was a rebel in those years, and it was in that time that my friend passed away. I saw him die and his
death affected me a lot. It marked me to see him die. He was my best friend. We went together
to Mexico City to the Chopo market. He had a small business in downtown Tlapa and he
regularly went to Mexico City to buy merchandise for his business. Rafael was his name, he was
my best friend at school and I saw him die. He drowned in the river. The day he died, he did not
even want to swim. The last thing that I remember about that day is seeing him sitting on the
river shore, and then seeing him slapping and hitting the water.”

“Our friends had already gone but we stayed longer to talk about rock music. I swam and
tried to rescue him but I could not do it. I almost drowned myself. I went back to my house and
told my sister Nuria about the accident. She went with me to Rafael’s house to inform his
parents, and they went crazy. I returned home later, but since the police could not recover
Rafael’s body, they came to my house and asked me the exact place where my friend had
drowned. They finally recovered the body and put it in an ambulance. I remember the sun
coming down as I was walking home with my sister, the ambulance passed by next to us and I
could see my friend’s body. They buried him in Tlapa.” The loss of his friend was not the only
time he would face death in his childhood. He could see the consequences of state violence
against teacher activists and dissidents of the PRI regime in Guerrero. In the 1980’s some of his
relatives were repressed and ultimately assassinated for participating in the movement to

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111 The Tianguis Cultural del Chopo, a street market in downtown Mexico City specialized in rock and roll
merchandise. It was founded October 4, 1980. Originally the market was organized as a temporary space within
the building of the Chopo Museum of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Angeles Mastreta, then the
museum’s director appointed journalist Jorge Pantoja to organize the event. It was intended to be held for only four
weekends. However, as a result of its success, the tianguis continued the exhibition, selling and exchanging albums,
t-shirts, posters and books related to rock. Eventually, the tianguis was forced to leave the Museum and became
transformed in a street market in 1982. In six years, from February of 1982 to February of 1988, the tianguis was
forced by Mexico City authorities to be an itinerant street market. It was until February of 1988 when the tianguis
finally got its definitive location on Aldama Street in the Guerrero neighborhood, a proletarian neighborhood in
Mexico’s downtown. An important thing to note about this regional history (as some commentators and scholars
have pointed out in the history of the Tianguis Cultural del Chopo, is that the Mexican rock scene has crystallized
around this most important space of confluence for youths from Mexico City and other diverse states of Mexico,
including Guerrero, since the foundation of this market (Agustin 1996).

112 Rafael knew how to swim, so the reasons why he drowned in the river that day are unclear and remained
unexplained by “the man who has no name.”
democratize the corrupt teachers union, the SNTE, Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, or National Teachers Union.

“I knew already what I was coming to”

“The man who has no name” had gained consciousness about how things work out early in life, so when the moment to migrate finally arrived he was very aware of what was ahead of him. He was just a kid, he did not want to leave, but on September 16 of 1990, he left Tlapa with his mother, his sister, and a friend of the family (a successful Tlapaneco and small businessman in New York City) who helped them cross the border. He was 15 years old. “Since I was a kid I had a political consciousness because we had been told how things worked. So even before I came to the United States, and I am not blaming my mother or my father, I knew already what I was coming to. I knew I was coming to be oppressed in this country (the U.S.), so I did not want to come.” Years later, in New York City he would meet again with his former theater teacher, Marco. He had left behind Tlapa and his poetry and theatre classes. Ahead of them was a life of menial jobs, something his former teacher tried to warn him about one afternoon. “I was no longer a child but a teenager. And I think that Marco was trying to tell me, ‘what are you doing here? Get out of here, get back to Mexico.’ Yes, I’m sure he tried to warn me ‘what are you doing here? You better go back to Mexico to study.’ I told him that I was already here in New York with my mom, and that she had brought me here. Marco wanted me to study and get a career, a normal life; he had the idea that kids should not be here. I do not know if this idea was a fraternal sentiment or just ideas adults have. But finding a living was, and still is, difficult in Tlapa, and there is nothing we could do about it. Now, as time has passed by, I feel the same as he did. Kids from Tlapa still come here to be cheap labor, like Marco and me. I think he tried to
warn me, although he could not say it directly, he told me: ‘you had a lot of talent, get out of

here.’” Maybe his former teacher could not warn him since he probably thought he could not interfere in family business. “The man who has no name” was brought to New York City as a consequence of a parent’s decision. Later on, he met in the city with his other former teacher, Víctor, who passed away a few years later.

“The man who has no name” began his journey to leave the country exactly the day Mexico celebrated its independence, with a painful realization of what his place was to be within U.S. society. “Do you remember your trip to New York?” I asked him one day. “I was a kid and I remember that during the whole trip I saw all the independence parades in every town where the bus stopped. We saw the Independence Day Parade in Huamuxtitlán, Alpoyeca, Tulcingo del Valle, and Izúcar de Matamoros. The parades were very different from the ones in Guerrero because they had a lot of music bands. My grandmother accompanied me to the bus station in Tlapa to say goodbye. I will never forget that day; it is seared in my memory. I think something different happened that day, because I had seen a lot of people leaving for the U.S. all the time, but it was different that day because many of our neighbors went with us to the bus station to say goodbye. I remember that our next-door neighbors walked with us to the station, and people came out of their houses to give us a farewell. Back then Tlapa was a friendly place and people used to come out to the street and say ‘hello,’ or share their food with their neighbors. I remember when I was on the bus, my grandmother told me, ‘You are leaving my dear son and I will never see you again.’ Those words are stuck deep in my heart and mind. When my mother left for New York I lived with my grandmother in Tlapa, and she always said she would never let me go to the U.S., but I was not her son. And if I ever return to Tlapa I know I won’t ever see my grandfather, my grandmother, and my neighbors alive. I know Tlapa is very different now
because the passing of time is merciless and it does not forgive. But still, I hope Tlapa could keep traditions, even though all the people I know are no longer there.”

Every time we get together on 16th of September that date “the man who has no name” said to me, “Rodolfo, today it’s been 18 years since I’ve been here ..,” or “19 years,” and onwards. He never miscounts the number of years he has been in the United States. The night of the 16th of September in 2012 was no exception. We had attended the 25th anniversary of La Peña del Bronx, and later we took the 6 train from the South Bronx to the Lower East Side in Manhattan. We were heading to a Mexican restaurant there. On that Saturday afternoon, the 6 train is crowded and he sits in front of me and falls asleep right away. He always falls asleep and always needs a cup of coffee because he works both night and day shifts, from 10 PM to 4 AM, and 10 AM to 2 PM, Monday to Friday, in an Ecuadorian restaurant and a Jewish deli. I had to get accustomed that every time we met we had to go for coffee. “Rodolfo I need coffee, let’s go to have some coffee,” he would say to me, and when we met at my apartment, he always arrived with a bag of Mexican bread saying, “I brought some bread for the coffee.”

That Saturday afternoon, the coffee did not work, and once on the train, he fell sound asleep. His big body moved to the rhythm of the train cars. At the 59th Street station, two young Mexican middle-class white girls wearing expensive clothes got on the train. They were chit-chatting in Mexico City accents as they stood in front of him. Both girls could be Mexican tourists, or students at any university in New York. They stared at him with disdain and began to laugh; they did not stop laughing until we got off at St. Mark’s Place. Was there something unusual about his appearance that made them laugh? I wondered. I do not think so. It was the usual picture of a New Yorker commuting on his or her way back home in the train after a long

113 La Peña is a community-based grassroots organization initiated by Víctor Toro, a founding member of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) in Chile in the 1960s, and member of its Comité Central. He was tortured during Pinochet’s dictatorship, and later on lived in exile in Europe and Latin America.
workday: a man taking a nap and wearing sneakers, jeans and a punk band t-shirt. I was angered by their laughter but he was not. Instead, once we got out of the subway station, he told me that he was aware the girls were laughing at him disrespectfully: “Maybe they think I look funny because they don’t even know what it is to work.”

We finally got to the restaurant where we were going for a rock gig celebrating Mexican independence. The place is not the usual Mexican restaurant frequented by working class Mexican migrants or Mexican families in the city. Located in a gentrified middle class white neighborhood, the usual customers are white youngsters and middle class Mexicans, professionals and students like the girls that made fun of “the man who has no name” in the subway. The pool of Mexican patrons included the Consul and personnel from the Mexican Consulate in New York City. In this place, as in many other New York City restaurants, the Mexican undocumented immigrants, Guerrerenses included, occupy the lower ranks of the labor force. We left the place about 2 AM and headed to eat tacos in another Mexican restaurant, this time in a cheap “ethnic” restaurant in upper Manhattan. We went down to the lower level because the first floor was very crowded, and not because it was Mexico’s Independence Day but because people get together and hang out and get drunk on Saturdays after having worked all week. Men and women here come from the lower ranks of Mexican society. The waitresses, very often Mexicans, dress in tight mini-skirts to attract male customers, and some of these women are or have been “ficheras,” that is, they dance for money. They dance for three dollars a song in a range of places throughout Manhattan, from Washington Heights to East Harlem, as well as in Jackson Heights, Queens. Treating dancers to $10 Mexican beers is customary. And these are not just any bottles of beer, but the type that have been diluted with water by the bartender, so dancers can endure the night shift without getting drunk. In the restaurant business,
dancing can be a crude commercial transaction that may lead to obtaining sexual favors.\(^\text{114}\) For these men and women, waitresses and customers of this and other Mexican restaurants in Uptown Manhattan, there could be no Independence celebration.

They have come from Mexico’s urban outskirts or from rural peasant towns in Puebla, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. They have migrated from stigmatized places in Mexico they are ashamed of identifying upon moving here because of ancient prejudices stemming from urban biases against townships and rural communities. “I am from the state of Puebla, or from Guerrero,” they answer if asked where they are from. To acknowledge a rural origin is to acknowledge being an Indian, people from the tierra de indios, or the land of Indians, and so recognizing a backwardness and inferiority that does not exist in the city, where “the people of reason,” la gente de razón, live.\(^\text{115}\) Even after crossing the Mexican–U.S. border, the former geographical and social origins have a role in defining their status within the Mexican stream in the city.\(^\text{116}\)

Arriving in New York City in many ways represents an opportunity for a new life. For many migrants, this includes the opportunity to leave behind those traces of backwardness associated with rural Mexico and indigenous people that make them the target of disdainful glances on the New York City subway.

But the rejection of rural origins in a North American city tells us something historically

\(^\text{114}\) Young Mexican female workers are often subjected to sexual exploitation. The degradation of Mexican and Latin American women is most hideous within prostitution rings on Roosevelt Avenue, in Queens, where women are offered and depicted as “pollos,” literally chickens, on business cards advertising chicken “deliveries” at a customer’s door.

\(^\text{115}\) As discussed by Bartolomé (1997), gente de costumbre and gente de razón are “barbarous” notions inherited from the Colonial period, and they still shape inter-ethnic relations between Indians, mestizos and whites. As the author points out, after the Mexican Revolution, society was not only structured by ethnicity but also by class division. Such categories were part of an ideology that served to justify economic exploitation, cultural discrimination and a ethnically-based hierarchy in Mexico.

\(^\text{116}\) This attitude among Mexican migrants has received scant attention in analyses of Mexican migration. Many factors may explain this silence. One is the homogenization of Mexicans as ethnics. Another is a general neglect of the profound racism on which Mexican society is founded. It is common to hear popular commentaries about the racial discrimination suffered by Mexican migrants in the United States, but rarely is this problem of discrimination within the Mexican community addressed, never mind with the same vehemence, in Mexico.
deeper that grounds the Mexican modern nation-state formation: the desindianización of Mexico as a state project, as noted by authors such as Bonfil (1987) or Bartolomé (1997). The desindianización of Mexico as Bartolomé points out, is not a biological process but an ideological and political one intended to make indigenous people renounce to their linguistic and cultural heritage. The rejection of their rural origins as migrants in New York City is a way to renounce not only a geographical origin but also a cultural, economic and political one. As noted by Bartolomé (1997), interethnic relationships in contemporary Mexico are based on economic exploitation and indigenous discrimination. The denial of these origins, as peasants or Indians, in a location where these internal differences are hardly noticeable for the rest of New York society, shows us on the one hand, that desindianización is operating also outside of the Mexican territory, and on the other hand, the fact that ethnic hierarchies between mestizo and Indians are still relevant in their everyday life as migrants.

A man in his mid-fifties is moving slowly between the tiny tables decorated with red and white tablecloths. He drunkenly stops in the middle of making his way across the room. He is seemingly lost, unable to find his table. There are two other Mexicans sitting in front of our table and they are also drunk and are not talking to each other. They stare at the mirrors on the wall reflecting their lost and sad facial expressions. Their table is covered with empty bottles of Mexican beer as they ask for another round of six beers. The night is almost over, and the place stinks, particularly around the tables next to the restrooms. My friend goes to the restroom and the man sitting next to our table, a man in his sixties, starts a conversation with me. He is alone in this country, I presume, another lonely and bitter soul, drunk in this smelly restaurant. He grabs his beer and drinks it while he invites me to eat some of the tacos recently delivered by the waitress. “Eat them, they are getting cold, eat them,” he says as he grabs one only to quickly
return it to the plate. “I do not know why I ordered this food, I am not hungry. My life was always exemplary. My life was always exemplary, until I had to come to the United States.”

When I ask him why things changed upon moving here, he stares at me and repeats “my life was always exemplary until I had to come to the United States. I have been living in this city for twenty years never returning to Mexico. I am from Puebla and my life was exemplary until I had to come to the United States. My boss is a Jew, an old bastard that once told me, ‘You Mexicans are only good for hard work.’ He is a bastard. At work he is always shouting at me ‘Fernando what are you doing? Get the fuck out of here!’ I am almost 60 years old, what will become of me the day I can no longer work? What will I do if I cannot work anymore?”

Ashamed I respond that I do not have an answer to such a question. It seems no one needs an anthropologist in these dire situations. And while I am saying this to myself, he answers to himself, “I’ve decided it, the day I can no longer work, I will put a bullet in my head.” Then he waves his hand and leaves the restaurant. Minutes later, “the man who has no name” returns and asks for something to eat. We leave the place at around 4 AM, and I realize he has not yet reminded me about how many years he has been in this city the way he has made a habit of doing. Then, as we are saying goodbye and I am at the street corner and just about to cross the street, he says it, “Rodolfo, today it’s been 22 years since I’ve been here,” and like the solitary and bitter man in the restaurant, “the man who has no name” goes away. He has not gone home in more than two decades.
It is about two o’clock on a Sunday afternoon and we are waiting outside an Irish pub located in downtown Manhattan. There is nothing unusual about the spot except that it is one of the few places in this city where Wall Street white collar and Ground Zero blue-collar workers drink alongside Mexican workers. And as a matter of fact, they all drink alongside a group of Mexican workers identifying themselves as punks and Trotskyites who gather here on a regular basis. But “the man who has no name” is here to meet with a different group of friends who belong to a *colectivo* or political collective he has been participating in for more than three years. The *colectivo* is mostly made up of young Mexican male construction workers coming from Mexico City’s outskirts and the state of Guerrero. This is their first meeting after five months of inactivity. The last time they met was in November 2010 when they presented the latest issue of their *zine* at the Brecht Forum, a special issue dedicated to the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón.

The afternoon is dying, and now he and I begin to talk about our collaboration, his sharing his life-story and the history of his people with me. The first time we talked about this was in 2009-- indeed a few months after we met in Queens for the first time. We were in a Mexican restaurant on 116th Street, in East Harlem, and I told him I wanted to do research on the migration of people from la Montaña to New York. He did not answer right away but instead he told me, “My dad passed away last week.” That afternoon he shared some memories of his father with me for the first time. He was a traveling merchant who worked throughout the Montaña. His father was also an amateur guitar player, and taught “the man who has no name”

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117 The *colectivo* publishes a zine, a sort of underground magazine they distribute freely among young Mexican migrants or at organized special events. The publication, printed in Spanish, is recognized among its readers as a means to share and voice their (political) ideas and everyday issues (see Chapter 5 for more details on this group, its publication and its distribution).
how to sing *corridos* and *boleros*. These memories cast a shadow over our meeting, but despite the pain over his father’s death and not having been able to return to Mexico to see him while he was still alive, “the man who has no name” nevertheless insisted on talking about my research project. I replied that I did not want to do so after knowing about his father. Yet he said to me, “I will be glad to introduce you to some people from Guerrero. There is not much written about my people, so I will be glad to help you.” That day he shared the first stories about the migration of Guerrerenses to California, the first Tlapaneco migrant in New York, the first settlements of Guerrerenses in the city, and the violence and racial tensions against the first Mexicans in the streets of East Harlem.

When discussing our collaboration for compiling his life story and how I would ensure his anonymity through the use of a pseudonym, I ask him to choose a fictitious name, and he simply did not have any interest in choosing anything in particular. A pseudonym was irrelevant to him. “Chose whatever name you want,” he said to me. It was this way that he came to be “the man who has no name.” In this ethnography, in this recollection of his memories, he remains nameless, much like the thousands of Mexican migrant workers and Mixteco men and women who have left their abandoned hometowns for low paying jobs as day laborers in Sinaloa. They, too, have become nameless, instead serving as the raw meat, “the animals” or “the slaves” of the capitalist Mexican agricultural sector.

However, a year and a half later, in 2011, when I formally began my fieldwork, I noticed he was kind of reluctant to introduce me to Tlapanecos. So, that night in 2011 while meeting at the Irish pub, we discussed this matter. As the conversation progressed, I began to understand the real reason behind his reluctance: even though he trusted me, he was “protecting” his people from the Montaña from being robbed and dispossessed of their history by scholars or anyone

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118 Now, those early teachings have helped “the man who has no name” to get jobs in Mexican and Ecuadorian restaurants as a singer.
else. “Why did you trust me then?” I asked him. “How did you know I would not betray you? How could you be sure I was not getting information from you just to get my degree, to find myself a prestigious job, and be recognized as an ‘expert’ on Mexican migration?” I asked him. He responded immediately, “Listen to me Rodolfo, I was taught to oler a la gente since I was a kid, (literally to “sniff people out”), and to be aware of their true intentions and purposes. And I knew who you were since the time we hung out in Brooklyn. Do you remember León Chávez Teixeiro? That’s how I knew who you were.” He was talking about one night we met at my apartment in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Back then in 2009, my place became a handy spot for friends to get together and listen to rock records all night long. In those nights we used to play CDs of the Mexican songwriter León Chávez. His songs narrate the everyday life of the Mexican working-class, songs populated by proletarian men and women struggling to survive and give meaning to their lives. “The man who has no name” could easily have come out of a song by Teixeiro;\(^\text{119}\) he has come “from the past, where everything began, with his tired feet and his back folded and crushed.” He has come from a homeland that has turned into a “grave,” from a country of workers “for sale.” He once lived in a “slaughtered” city, a city “exposed” like a “wound.”

His attitude against scholars and activists, on the other hand, was grounded in his personal experiences in New York. Observing how community activists, union organizers, scholars, and even Guerrerenses have taken advantage of the Mexican community to climb the political ladder, he had grown suspicious of researchers. He expressed his anger against the members of the Mexican community who have “sold the history of our people” to the U.S.

\(^\text{119}\) “I come from the past, where everything began, with my tired feet and my back folded and crushed. Grave homeland, homeland of workers for sale, slaughtered city, exposed as a wound” (De Nuevo Otra Vez. León Chávez Teixeiro).
Perhaps it was because of those experiences that he, despite of our friendship, was acting as “gatekeeper” of his own, his family’s, and his people’s memory. This tension kept emerging from time to time, and usually would come up as a joke. One day, for example, he warned me to never make money from my research: “Listen Rodolfo, if you want to make money with this story, I will screw you.” It was a joke but deep inside it was clear that he would not let anyone trade or sell his people’s history or allow others to profit from the history of struggle experienced by Guerrerenses. Sometimes these concerns, although mitigated by our friendship, could escalate in bitterness and derision, like the time we had a disagreement about punk music. He said to me, “Rodolfo, I am going to fuck you up.” I knew he was not really threatening me, so I replied: “Shut up.” Then he kept on: “Okay, you know what? You are a fucking idiot and I am going to throw you in the river.” So I followed his lead and said, “You would not dare, you fatso.” Then we walked pass a rotten fish on the river shore and he shouted in horror: “Rodolfo what are you doing lying there?!”

Our nonsense talk was in fact fleshing out the profound tension by which “the man who has no name” was contesting the terms under which I as an anthropologist was intending to depict his life in my ethnography. When framed within the larger context of dispossession, including the dispossession of the memory and social knowledge that belongs to an entire population, it seems to me that he understood his own jealousy as necessary to protect its people, the people from Tlapa and the Montaña. On the critical question of the inequality that exists between scientists and informants (and by extension, with historically disenfranchised Indian cultures), Carlos Montemayor points out that in the case of Mexico, research has been an instrument for systematically abusing and dispossessing Indian communities of their collective
knowledge.\textsuperscript{120} It might be suggested then that with the formation of a transnational labor market between the Montaña region and New York City, the emergence of a new and highly specialized literature on the subject of Mexican indigenous migration is to be expected. Nevertheless, it is not that obvious that “the man who has no name” could prevent the misuse of indigenous peoples’ memories and their history. Examining Mexico’s “\textit{Indigenismo}” in the 1980s meant acknowledging the collaboration between anthropology and the Mexican state. López and Rivas (1988) have elaborated a critique of it (see Chapter 3), pointing out that \textit{Indigenismo} has been an “authoritarian” state policy framed to “cover up” the exploitation and oppression of the indigenous Mexican populations.\textsuperscript{121} Throughout the 2010s, Mexican migration grew exponentially in New York City, making indigenous Mexicans a new “subject of study” and a growing topic for “specialty” research among academics.

This growth in numbers also meant that Mexican indigenous migrants would become an area of focus for Mexican state officials. The latest example is the brand new “CUNY Mexican Studies Institute” at Lehman College, which received the endorsement and support of Arturo Sarukhán, Mexico’s former Consul in New York and later on Mexican Ambassador to the United States. Sarukhán, a right-wing politician, is just one example of a state actor responsible for promoting the free market policies of the last decades that have led to the massive displacement and migration of Guerrerenses from the Montaña to the U.S.\textsuperscript{122}

I imagine similar concerns crossed the mind of “the man who has no name” when he

\textsuperscript{120} “Without them [the Indian society] no research would be possible. But instead of recognizing them as guides, as partners, as instructors, they are seen as informants, minor assistants of science, thanks to whom the knowledge that belongs to the communities passes into the domain of a new owner. The scientists (and not to say the local or federal government politicians) rarely question the way they observe, what set of cultural references are the most appropriate to investigate, and let alone how these references affect their observations and the flow of prejudices that inadvertently guide them.” And he goes further as to argue that the cultural appropriation of Indigenous knowledge is contributing to the cultural annihilation of the Mexican indigenous population. Montemayor 1997:112.

\textsuperscript{121} López y Rivas 1988:67.

\textsuperscript{122} For instance, the denationalization and privatization of Mexico’s energy industry as well as Mexico’s military subordination to the United States. Fazio 2011; Garrido 2010.
“warned” me not to use his people’s history for the wrong reasons. From what I know now about his personal and family history and the relationship of the people of the Montaña with state power in Mexico, I have no doubt he was warning me not to collaborate in writing a history that would mask and conceal the abandonment of the Mixteco indigenous people, and once again whitewash their oppression. He was indeed warning me not to use history to silence the voices of the *enganchadores* he and his family once heard outside their home in Tlapa. As Gilly (1980) has pointed out, the power of history hinges on its capacity to socially and politically “exclude.” Through writing, one can make subjects “visible” or “invisible” and the author possesses the authority to sustain the “illusory” notion of the social communality between “those who are in the upper and the lower ranks of society.”123 “The man who has no name” and most of the Tlapanecos in New York City are located in the “lower ranks” of society. They are “the lower community,” the working class, which according to Gilly constitutes the vast segment of society that does not possess history, so long as their voices and feelings have been concealed, denied, and made invisible.

In an attempt to rethink my relationship with “the man who has no name” and the fierce and brave way he disputed the terms of our collaboration, I return to Gilly’s charge that there must be a sense of duty among historians and anthropologists who should convey “the voice and feelings” of those in the “lower community.” And if we ought to convey them so, we are first obliged to understand “their acts.”124 “The man who has no name” was openly speaking to me through his acts. Yet, his worries were also fixed on the expectations he had twenty years ago, before crossing the border. He told me several times that he wanted to be an anthropologist like me. “I always wanted to study anthropology in the same school where you studied, Rodolfo [the

123 Gilly 1980:210-211.
Instead, his mother brought him to New York City as a teenager right after finishing high school. He began working in the kitchens of this city and ultimately had a severe accident that left him injured for life. “I never wanted to come to New York City. I always refused to come here because I knew I would be oppressed in this country, so I never wanted to come here.”

That night at the Irish pub, he stared at me, and told me with tears and rage in his eyes, “Do not fail me Rodolfo, do not dare fail me. You are my last hope. You have the weapons to do it.” And then he asked me to do one more thing. “Once you return to Mexico, go and visit the graves of my grandfather and my father. I am asking you to do that because I won’t be able to go, but you will. My grandfather was jailed, and he was kept in jail. The government repressed my uncles and assassinated my cousin. My people is a people on its knees, down by subjugation, so do not fail me Rodolfo, you are my last hope. Dignity means dignity in any language. Dignity means dignity in any language. Yes or no, Rodolfo? Yes or no, Rodolfo?”

I have already explained that “the man who has no name’s” grandfather was a Mixteco rural teacher. Named Genaro Salazar, this man was born in the Montaña region. He was a schoolteacher, a man I never met. He is buried in Tlapa. What I have not yet recounted about this schoolteacher is the way he is remembered: he is remembered by one of his granddaughters as “a noble man who fought for his people.” In a region where indigenous peasants have been historically dispossessed of their land, resources, and more by the Mexican state and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), to be able to read and write is not only a privilege but a weapon and an instrument for voicing people’s rights and claims. Genaro Salazar was able to read and write and by doing so he fought to preserve the memory of the Mixteco people’s right
I25 Illiterate peasants from the Montaña looked for his help to solve their land tenure conflicts. When trying to know more about this man I had never met but whose grave I promised to visit, I met with his granddaughter and asked her, “How do you remember him?” She was the only one of his grandchildren who saw him in Tlapa before he passed away. We were at her house in Manhattan, where she had the photograph of the old rural teacher hanging on one of her walls. “I always remember my grandfather carrying a carpeta under his arm. He always carried his folder under his arm.” She answered. And “What was inside?” I asked her. “Land tenure titles,” she answered. In other words, what his grandfather carried with him all the time were not only the titles granting people their legitimate right to the land. What Genaro Salazar always carried under his arm was the right of the indigenous communities of the Montaña to exist, the right to keep their ancestral links, the right to live life collectively and to speak up for themselves.126

Genaro Salazar passed away after several years of suffering a painful illness. She tells me that her grandfather “looked like a skeleton” before passing away without even recognizing her next to his bed. None of the grandchildren living then in New York could attend his funeral because none of them could leave the U.S. As time went on, people kept migrating from the Montaña, and in time, even those peasants who in the past looked for an old rural schoolteacher for help to prevent losing their lands, found themselves in New York City, some of them selling ice cream on city streets. Genaro Salazar’s granddaughter is a grandmother now too, and one day, her own grandchildren bought an ice cream from a street vendor on 96th Street in

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125 As noted by Bonfil Batalla (1980), Mexican indigenous populations are usually very meticulous in keeping records of the land titles and maps of their communal lands.
126 As Carlos Montemayor wrote: “The land for indigenous communities is not just a matter of productivity and competitiveness: it is the essential reason of their knowledge of life, the soil that binds them to life, which unites the invisible world and the visible world, the ancestral links with the community of men and gods, which contains the root of their ethical, economic, family, which is the support of their culture. For it they have been able to give life” (Montemayor 1997:62-63).
Manhattan. The vendor was from the Platanar, one of the communities where Genaro Salazar had worked and had helped the peasants as well. “He saw the injustice,” says his granddaughter, “he saw how the poor people had no other way to defend themselves, because unfortunately they did not know how to read or write. He did it for them in the Platanar or in Tecoyame, he did it to help them keep their land.”

Like his grandfather, “the man who has no name,” also saw the social injustice in the region -- First as a child when he heard the shouts of the *enganchadores* outside his Tlapa house and years later as an undocumented migrant worker in New York City. Faraway from the Montaña, he became a songwriter, and as a songwriter he helped his people keep alive their memory and their legitimate right to never renounce from where they came.
Othón’s life story (see Chapter 1) is only an instant in the recent history of the Mixtecos in New York City. His passage through the tomato fields in northern Mexico is a tiny fraction of time in the social history of Mixteco workers. The shouts of the *enganchadores* recruiting day laborers in Tlapa’s downtown are tiny fragments of larger statements on the social, political and labor location of indigenous people in contemporary society. They are indigenous workers that have been treated like “animals” and have been incorporated into Mexico’s capitalist enclaves as day laborers and semi-proletarians. Such treatment is normalized within Mexico’s society under the assumption that they are culturally inclined to accept lower living and working conditions than the rest of the population.

Othón’s life story is narrated from outside of the Mexican nation-state, and it tells us about the contemporary political and labor location of indigenous and migrant undocumented workers within the North American transnational migrant labor market. Othón’s life narrative is a window that enables us to view the nature of a long-term relationship between the Mixteco people and the Mexican nation-state. His life narrative tells us about the Mixteco migration to the United States as a relatively recent feature of Mexican migration as well as one of the oldest historical and political dilemmas of post-revolutionary Mexico: the politics of integration of indigenous population in the nation.

His history, on the one hand, helps us to expose the long-term structure of class and racial inequality in Mexico. On the other hand, it shows the uneven wealth distribution in the rural indigenous communities in Guerrero, a state where social inequality is culturally expressed by
the Mixtecos in the language of “the abandonment.” Since the history of the Mixteco migrant workers in New York City has its roots in this historical abandonment then I propose to examine contemporary Mixteco labor migration and its relationship with debates on integration to the nation as imagined by Mexican anthropology in the early twentieth century.

In this chapter, I explore the political economy of “the abandonment” and the language of abandonment by Mixtecos in New York City in order to examine the claim of their social inequality and the state’s historical refusal to help them meet their social needs (la necesidad or the necessity) in the Montaña. The language of abandonment explains the social inequalities that Mixtecos endure, as well as the roots of labor migration. On the one hand the language of the abandonment depicts the social inequalities in Mexico and on the other hand it explains the collective and individual inability to meet social needs expressed by the necessity. In this chapter I show the extent to which the material abandonment of people from the Montaña may help us interrogate our notions of integration of Mixtecos indigenous people to neoliberal Mexico.

What might the language of abandonment tell us about Mexico in the early twenty-first century? What does the language of abandonment of Mixteco migrant workers tell us about our past and present imaginations of the nation?

I suggest “listening” to the language of abandonment as a political language that reveals the historical dispossession of the Mexican indigenous communities by the Mexican state.127 Paradoxically, as “the necessity” increases as a result of a gradual and steady retreat of the social role of the Mexican state and the implementation of market-oriented policies in the last three

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127 I do not ignore the role of private economic actors in peasant indigenous dispossession in Mexico. However I would like to stress the role of the state in organizing dispossession. As noted by Warman, “the State… establishes the general conditions for the plundering of the peasants. It establishes the prices of the things that circulate, which are set more in terms of power relations than of laws of supply and demand” (Warman 1980:304).
decades, Mixteco workers have to find satisfaction of their social needs in the migrant labor market. Therefore, for Mixtecos, the labor migrant market becomes the channel for alleviating their social needs produced by the abandonment.

The language of the abandonment depicts Mexican indigenous migration as the outcome of a long-term political tension. By the same token the origins of contemporary Mexican indigenous migration and the growing cultural ethnic diversity among Mexican migrant population in the United States can be located in the abandonment. In such conditions of abandonment a pool of dispossessed indigenous workers was born to supply labor in the fields of Sinaloa or in the New York City labor market. The origins of the Mixteco workers as a segment of the Mexican working class in New York City are located in rural towns socially and economically detached from their nation but connected as labor supplier regions to the centers of the global economy.

The Guerrerense migration from the Montaña to New York City, like the former Mixteco migration to Sinaloa, is a subordinated integration into the global capitalist economy, as a result of the labor conditions previously described by Othón in northwest Mexico. The first cycle of Mixteco labor integration into this economy dates to the 1970s, when the region became a supplier of indigenous workers for the export-oriented northwestern Mexico agribusiness enclaves. A second cycle dates back to the mid-1980s when the region became an international labor supplier of Mexican indigenous and mestizo workers for the North American regional labor market, and by the nineties as part of the NAFTA. It is within this cycle that migrant community formation, both from the city of Tlapa and the rural areas of the Montaña, began in New York City in the decade of the 1980s.

Nonetheless, decades before this migration to the east coast of the United States, a young
Mexican anthropologist surveyed the Montaña and wrote an extensive and rich manuscript about the region, probably the most complete until now, that helps us to properly understand contemporary migration from the region within the framework of material dispossession.

*Ruinous exploitation*

Mexican anthropologist and writer Alfonso Fabila, also known as “el apóstol del indio” or the apostle of the Indian, acknowledged the economic deprivation and social inequality in the Montaña region in the mid-1950s. Born on November 1, 1897, in Amanalco de Becerra, Estado de Mexico, Fabila was the son of Andrés Fabila and Luisa Montes de Oca. During his childhood he attended a rural school in the community of San Lucas where he interacted with Mazahua indigenous children. After his father’s assassination in 1915 during the Mexican Revolution, he moved with his family to the city of Toluca, Estado de Mexico in Central Mexico, where he obtained a job as railroad worker and joined the working-class union *Casa del Obrero Mundial* and the *Batallones Rojos*. In Mexico City he was enrolled in the Art Academy of San Carlos (Avilés 2002) and at the age of 21, he studied at the *Escuela Normal* and

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128 Fabila works include: *El Problema de la Emigración de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos* (1929); *La Tribu Kikapoo* de Coahuila (1945); *Los Indios Yaquis de Sonora* (1945) and *Los Huicholes* (1959). His work *Problemas de los Indios Nahua, Mixtecos y Tlapanecos* (1955), co-written with César Tejeda Fonseca remains unpublished. Alfonso Fabila died on June 6 of 1960, at 62 years old. Alfonso Caso wrote about him: “Alfonso Fabila was part of the older generation of the Mexican *Indigenismo* founded by [Manuel] Gamio and [Othón] Mendizabal who studied the indigenous problems and the actions of the *indigenistas*. His studies are of prime importance for the understanding of the life and culture of indigenous people. Even more important is his attitude towards the indigenous problems” (Alfonso Caso, quoted by Casco and Avilés 1963-1964: 92). Besides his prolific work as an anthropologist, Fabila wrote an extensive work as a fictional writer from the 1920s to the 1940s. He is considered among the Mexican precursors writers on fictional literature on Mexican indigenous population. A post-revolutionary genre that intended to integrate realism and fiction to depict the life of Mexican indigenous population from the point of view of Mestizo and white writers. Among his literary work it is included: *El en sí. Confesiones y cuadros emotivos* (1922); *Hoz, 6 cuentos mexicanos de la Revolución Mexicana* (1934); *Aurora Campesina* (1941); *Sangre de mi Sangre* (1941); *Los Brazos en Cruz* (1929); *Entre la Tormenta* (1946).

129 Founded on September 22th of 1912, and with significant anarchist influence, the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* became the most powerful working-class organization in Mexico City in the early twentieth century. *Los Batallones Rojos* were the armed group of the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* (For a history of the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* and the anarcho-syndicalism during the Mexican Revolution, see Ribera 2010).
at the National University. Fabila worked as a packer in *El Pueblo* newspaper and then as a journalist in *El Demócrata*, directed by Vito Alessio Robles. In 1921 Fabila began to work for the Ministry of Education, and in 1927 he moved to the United States to work and study. When he returned to Mexico, he collaborated with Manuel Gamio in the Valle del Mezquital Project, in the state of Hidalgo. Gamio’s research focused on the use of natural resources in the area to implement state conservation policies. At that time Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas created the Institute of Social Research of the Regional Peasant School of El Mexe in the state of Hidalgo. The institute had Gamio and Fabila as directors. During his appointment, Fabila conducted research with indigenous communities in the Valle del Mezquital. Fabila noted that cultural traits were the main cause in explaining the poverty in the indigenous communities, “the poor health conditions, poor feeding, economic problems, poor housing are due to the cultural backwardness of indigenous groups.”

In the late 1920s and early 1930s he was member of *Los Agoristas*, an intellectual group that published the *Vertice* journal. The *Agoristas* were influenced by the revolutionary ideas of the period and promoted the massive socialization of knowledge. Fabila considered himself a Marxist-Leninist and his ideological formation probably influenced *Vertice* to serve the purpose of people’s revolutionary struggle. However as noted by his nephew, René Avilés Fabila in the introductory essay to Alfonso Fabila’s monograph on the Kikapoo tribe from the northern state of Coahuila, Fabila as a member of the Communist Party and as an anthropologist during

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130 Manuel Gamio was a Franz Boas student in anthropology in Columbia from 1909 to 1911. After returning to Mexico in early 1912, Gamio did research in the International School of American Archaeology and Ethnology co-founded by Boas in 1910-1911 in Mexico City and whose first director was Edward Seler. Aguirre Beltrán pointed out about the early years of the School, “the years following the founding of the International School are hard times in which Mexicans desperately seek to define their identity” (Aguirre Beltrán quoted by González 1987:45).

131 Fabila, quoted by España 1987:244.

132 Along with Mexican writers such as Alfonso Reyes and Emilio Abreu, he founded the *Instituto de Amistad e Intercambio Cultural México-URSS* (Ocampo 1992).
the 1940s, fashioned ideas of self-determination of the Mexican indigenous population politically and ideologically ahead of politicians such as Vicente Lombardo Toledano or Narciso Barrera Bassols. For example, during Alfonso Fabila’s intervention on the Primer Congreso Interamericanista in 1940 he pointed out that:

The Mexican Constitution establishes the existence of sovereign states and free municipalities. Territories and municipalities are created and destroyed, and this does not affect the needed unity and the development of the nation. Why then with this same liberal standard, the Indian is not granted something of what historically belongs to him? Is there a fear of enabling people to be happy? To do so is an attack against the homeland? I do not think so.\textsuperscript{133}

In the mid-twentieth century Fabila was commissioned by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista to survey the Montaña region during four months with the assistance of César Tejeda Fonseca. As part of his research, Fabila wrote an extensive yet unpublished manuscript on the so-called “problems” of the Nahua, Mixteco and Tlapaneco indigenous population in the Montaña.\textsuperscript{134} He found that extreme poverty was troubling the region in post-revolutionary Mexico:

The region is one of the most mountainous of the Mexican Republic, located in an extensive area of the Sierra Madre del Sur and the Balsas River depression, where almost no flat land suitable for productive agriculture exists, so the Indians who live there with the other peasants have an existence shackled to poverty and backwardness.\textsuperscript{135}

He acknowledged that the areas populated by the indigenous population were:

\textsuperscript{133} Fabila quoted by Avilés 2002:11. As Avilés points out, Fabila was ahead of the Marxist-Leninist ideas on the ethnic question of his time by advocating the self-determination of the Mexican indigenous population.

\textsuperscript{134} Fabila’s manuscript, which I consulted for this dissertation is located at the Juan Rulfo Library of the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI) in Mexico City. This manuscript is part of a vast work, sadly unpublished. However in the last years some of his manuscripts have been published as it was the case of Mixtecos de la Costa. Estudio Etnográfico de Alfonso Fabila en Jamiltepec, Oaxaca, written in 1956 and published by the CDI in 2010. I am thankful to Jaime García Leyva who kindly informed me about the existence of the manuscript and who also examined it for his Ph.D., dissertation in 2010. Also, according to Villela (2006), between 1937 and 1938 the German geographer and anthropologist, Leonhard Schultze Jena conducted the first ethnographic research in the Montaña region, which examined the folk traditions of the area.

\textsuperscript{135} Fabila and Tejeda 1955:VIII.
subjected to ruinous exploitation because of commercial tax and monopolies. The hygiene and health of the population are so precarious; they registered an intense child mortality; housing, food and clothing conditions are undesirable, particularly the latter, to the extent that many Indian families die of hunger every year…Illiteracy among the Indians is the highest, but in the past years no one has been concerned to change these harsh conditions, and worse, the situation has created an obvious attitude of resentment of the natives against the mestizo and the white population, and the officers, whom they distrust and look suspiciously on. Respectively, the state officials straightforwardly have the concept that natives are lazy, stupid and irredeemable, and therefore, they underestimate, exploit and humiliate them.136

Fabila and Tejeda showed that poverty was more extreme in the communities with the highest proportion of indigenous population in the region (Atzompa, Huexuapan, Xonacatlán de Metlatónoc, and Zapotitlán). In localities such as Zitlála, Acatlán, and Atzacualoya, such conditions led to “almost nightmarish human situations.”137 Fabila explained that the environment was a cause of extreme poverty in the region, but he strongly pointed out that the fundamental cause was the lack of state intervention.

Therefore, the so-called “acción indigenista,” or indigenist action was the path to eradicate poverty and to solve the so-called “indigenous problem.” It was the instrument to build up a modern nation-state as imagined by Mexican Indigenismo and to end “the unpleasant feeling of being in a strange and absurd country, where little is known about our last social revolution, because not only poverty and ignorance exist, but also pre-Hispanic and Colonial aspects that invade people with sorrow.”138 “In which country are we living in Agripina?,” one

136 Fabila and Tejeda 1955:IX.
137 Fabila and Tejeda 1955:329.
138 Fabila and Tejeda 1955:IX. Like Manuel Gamio, the integrationist approach of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1967) pointed out the key role of the state and the Indigenismo in state formation. Aguirre Beltrán pointed out that the territories inhabited by the Mexican indigenous population were “regions of refuge” (regiones de refugio). Regions that were refractory to industrialization and modern civilization due to physical and geographical isolation and the prevalence of the social, political, economic and cultural structure inherited from the Colonial period. Fabila saw this heritage in the Montaña as an obstacle to integrationism. According to integracionismo, the ultimate goal of the state was to improve the economic and cultural conditions of the indigenous communities. In the late 1960s, Aguirre Beltrán explained the power mechanisms used by the Colonial agents towards the indigenous in post-
of the rural characters of Mexican writer Juan Rulfo (1953) asks his wife, when expressing his astonishment about the deep social injustices in rural Mexico in the same period in which Fabila surveyed the Montaña region.

Nonetheless, Fabila foresaw a Montaña region where the living standards would be raised to “take care of the men, the greatest treasure of peoples and nations,” where “modern roads” would be built to connect the region, where “things would change to become a paradise with the resources, climate and vistas of wonder to remain.”\(^{139}\) His vision was informed by the acción indigenista of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) founded the 4\(^{th}\) of December 1948. As noted by Montemayor (2001), since “the problem of integration to the nation was not irreducible to a purely pedagogical scheme,”\(^ {140}\) the INI sought an integral solution to the indigenous problem by implementing economic development projects, supporting agriculture, education, and the construction of infrastructure. Its regional projects were organized through the so-called Centros Coordinadores.\(^ {141}\)

Fabila’s strong advocacy of the role of the state to promote Mexicans’ well-being was probably also informed by his visions of the Mexicans migrant workers across the U.S.-Mexico revolutionary Mexico. He coined the concept dominical (for domination) process as the regional domination of the indigenous population by: local state administrators, missionaries, and officials representing the regional oligarchy, municipal commissioners, and priests. They maintained the political, economic and ideological dominance through racial and spatial segregation, reducing the indigenous population to economic dependence and excluding from education, health, and housing. Aguirre Beltrán strongly pointed out that the dominical process hindered the evolution and cultural progress of Indians. Then, according to integrationism, the obstacles to fulfill their full integration were ‘located’ not at the national but at the regional scale. The indigenous citizenship was inauthentic and incomplete because of their regional segregation. Moreover, the process of domination was based on a caste structure that prevented class stratification “which represents a step forward in the evolution of humanity” (Aguirre Beltrán 1967:20). In sum, ethnic minorities were not in tension with the Mexican state but with regional power. According to anthropologist Javier Guerrero (Personal communication), “dominical” in Aguirre Beltrán’s concept refers to domination or to control.

\(^{139}\) Fabila and Tejeda 1955:XII.

\(^{140}\) Montemayor 2001:90.

\(^{141}\) Actually, Fabila was working in 1954 in the Centro Coordinador Tzeltal Tzotzil in Chiapas when he received a letter from Alfonso Caso, then director of the INI, to travel to Guerrero to conduct the survey to create a new Centro Coordinador in the Montaña region. After traveling to Mexico City, Fabila arrived on September of 1954 to Chilpancingo, Guerrero (the state capital) where he was introduced to César Tejeda Fonseca coauthor of the manuscript. Between 1950 and 1969 the INI created eleven Centros Coordinadores in Mexico.
Before Fabila surveyed the Montaña he had previously traveled to the Mexican communities in the U.S southwest. Many of these communities existed before the U.S imperial invasion of Mexico in the nineteenth century and many others were formed as thousands of Mexicans had run away from the war unleashed by the Mexican Revolution. As no other Mexican anthropologist of his time, Fabila provided an account of the tragic social and economic consequences of a war and people running away from their homeland to find a life that they could not have in their own country. In his travels through the former Mexican territories, Fabila (1929) found a people troubled by madness and despair.

By the time he traveled to the Montaña, he already had a vision of the social life of the Mexican migrants in the South of the United States. Twenty years before arriving to the Montaña, in the late 1920s, Alfonso Fabila had traveled along four states in the U.S. to get insight into “the millions of Mexicans roaming this vast territory, having a nomadic, absurd, heroically and tragic existence.” The “illness of the sin of emigration,” as he depicted the consequences of the life of thousands of Mexican migrants who worked “on lands that were ours.” Men and women picking up lemon and cotton, drifting on the highways, working in the mines, in the factories, on the railroad. His visions were those of someone who had traveled to what he described as the circle of Dante’s Inferno: “unknown even for him.” A circle located neither in heaven nor in hell but on earth, where he saw: “calloused hands that once you see them, you understand they are not the hands of a bandit but the hands of a slave.” His visions are populated by men sweating in cities, shouting to be saved from the tragedy of the so-called bronze race being turned into “vile clay in the hands of the exploiter,” people who sold

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142 Fabila 1929:36.
143 Fabila 1929:39.
themselves for generations to the “exploiters of lives.” He saw Mexican workers walking on the roads as “vagabond and hungry dogs.” Their gaze, he continues, “was an uncertain look, injected and soaked with sweat, and with weary arms and legs.” Men were transformed into machines and “bestially treated” in the labor fields, women degraded to prostitution. And then, after having escaped from the violence of the Mexican Revolution and the collapse of Mexico’s economy, after several years of hard labor and the anxious hope of returning to Mexico, those migrants could be found in hospitals and mental institutions, “crazy and consumed, that is the punishment for abandoning the homeland,” and whose shouts are heard through the walls of the mental institutions -- shouts that tell about “a terrible tragedy behind the walls,” writes Fabila.

As part of the tragic depiction of the life of Mexicans in the United States, Fabila also observed in the migrants’ tragedy the irony of Mexico’s fate after the revolution, “We [Mexicans] have established a remarkable record as [suppliers of] dishwashers.” In fact, he saw the Mexican migration as a “threat” to Mexico’s future. His assessment was based on moral, economic, and political principles. Fabila asserted that Mexican migrants in the United States were subjected to unjust labor conditions, labor exploitation, and human degradation. He considered that the value transfer through Mexican labor migration was an instrument to promote U.S. economic expansion against Mexico’s economic needs in the 1920s, particularly in a moment when Mexico needed to recover from the bloody revolution that killed more than a hundred thousand men. His assessment was also based on the political principle that a

144 Fabila 1929:52.
146 Fabila 1929:44.
147 Fabila 1929:57.
148 Fabila 1929:57.
149 Fabila 1929:56.
government must look out for the well-being of its citizens: “It is the urgent duty of the men governing Mexico today to create agricultural colonies, and organize modern manufacturing centers.” Three decades later, and after documenting the living and labor experiences of the Mexican workers in the United States, Fabila (1955) reinforced his assessment about the social role of government to promote social justice and to alleviate the negative social and economic conditions he found in the Montaña. He did not imagine that he was warning about the social conditions of abandonment that decades later were the ground for social grievances and labor migration in the state of Guerrero and that led to the rise of social movements challenging social inequality in the state. Fabila pointed out:

We believe that in the state of Guerrero the great dissatisfaction among the inhabitants in all orders of social life must be thoroughly investigated. It is necessary that together in a constructive effort, rulers and ruled, may change the negative aspects and raise the living standard for their own benefit, and for the benefit of the State and the Republic. Because, being honest, throughout our study of the state, we found out a harmful resentment among the population, and such sentiment cannot be healthy for social coexistence. This resentment will only be modified with the positive work of all Guerrerenses.

Fabila’s confidence in the future was the conviction of a generation of Mexican anthropologists advocating Indigenismo as part of the ideology of the Mexican Revolution. As noted by Javier Guerrero (1975), the revolutionary Mexican nationalism of the early twentieth century promoted the idea of the Mexican sovereignty over natural resources, such as the land and the oil, as part of an ideology to create a modern Mexican identity. Guerrero points out:

It is known that the 1910 Revolution was a profound nationalist movement. This nationalism came from the need of rescuing the country from foreign influences and interventions of all sorts. It was intended to build a genuine sovereignty and to grant people full possession of the national resources... It was a nationalist revolution, resulting from the growth of industry and commerce, and the increasing interests of a Mexican bourgeoisie that used nationalism as a weapon.

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150 Fabila 1929:38.
to dispute the nation to the large foreign companies that were plundering Mexico.\footnote{Guerrero 1975:31.}

*Indigenismo* and later on *integracionismo* was meant to create a nation of equals, a state instrument to overcome the social conditions of exploitation and lack of hope and sense of no future that prevailed in the early twentieth century, as Guerrero (1975) noted. This social world had to be radically transformed by the *Indigenismo* into a better place. Moisés Sáenz (one of the founders of Mexican *Indigenismo*) described the world that had to be destroyed in the following terms:

The indigenous world is far from being a paradise. It is a fatal and deficient world where people vegetate; where the poor and tired soil does not provide enough to satisfy hunger. It is a world of diseases and pests, a world where people get drunk as a result of hunger or fatigue; a world of bitter passions, puerile intrigues; a world of miserable, terrified and exploited people.\footnote{Sáenz quoted by Guerrero 1975:36.}

To overcome that world of “misery” and “exploitation” described by Sáenz, Mexicans had to build a nation. Since its origins *Indigenismo* was conceived as a means to achieve what Manuel Gamio (1916) called the “coming of a better existence” for the Indians. For Gamio, founder of the integrationist approach, the state intervention to alleviate “the poor physical development of the indigenous population” in which they have “vegetated for a long time” was not only possible but also desirable and necessary (Gamio 1916).\footnote{Gamio 1916:179. In 1940, and after the first Interamerican Indigenist Congress held in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán; the *Instituto Interamericano Indigenista* was directed by Moisés Sáenz and then by Manuel Gamio from 1942 to 1960. The Institute was the main instrument of state intervention, through applied anthropology, to solve the so-called “indigenous problem” or *el problema indígena*. During more than two decades the *Instituto* designed several projects of applied anthropology with the purpose of alleviating socially and economically the indigenous population in Mexico as for example, the project conducted by Gamio in 1950 in the Mezquital Valley in Central Mexico. In discussing the role of the Mexican state in relationship to the indigenous population, Gamio promoted a non-ideological role of the state’s function. In fact and opposed to the positions defended by Mariátegui in Peru in the 1920s, Gamio rejected any solution grounded in Marxism. He wrote that the “red propaganda” has “never acknowledged in its preaching the indigenous factor” (Introducción. The Teotihuacan Valley population I, p. X-XII.)}
Integration was a central concept in Mexican anthropology during the first half of the twentieth century. The ideas of development, modernity and equality were attached to this concept. Mexican anthropologists were key actors in formulating the frame that shaped the relationship between the state and the Mexican indigenous population in the twentieth century. The integrationist project of the post-revolutionary Mexican *Indigenismo* was conceived as a mighty moral dynamo: to redeem, liberate and emancipate the indigenous population. As pointed out by Gamio (1916), the indigenous would be ‘liberated’ from the fear of the humiliation and disdain of the “people of reason.” Gamio (1916) assumed Mexico’s ethnic diversity to be an obstacle for nation formation. Although he acknowledged what he called “economic imbalances” in Mexico’s society, he considered that indigenous culture was anachronistic and deficient. In fact, Gamio believed that Indian people “suffered” due to the fact that they lived isolated from the majority of the Spanish speaking population. Like Fabila’s reflections on Mexican labor migration and poverty in the Montaña, Gamio also perceived social inequality as a threat to state formation. However he was also concerned with the role of cultural and regional diversity in hindering nation-building. For example, Gamio believed Mexico’s cultural diversity was an obstacle that stood in the way of the creation of a national educational project to unify the country.

The only acceptable solution was the integration of the indigenous population into the nation. However on what terms was this integration formulated? Gamio foresaw integration to...
the national culture as a “cultural fusion” in which cultural diversity, as for example linguistic diversity, would disappear for a true and coherent national language and a national culture, as he asserted it on his classic book on the Teotihuacan Valley population (1922). Gamio conceived the implementation of a state-driven comprehensive education project to unify the country by imposing a common language among the nation’s members. And hence, the role of anthropologists was to raise the cultural level of the indigenous peoples by educating, intervening, and correcting what they considered the negative aspects of their impoverished culture. Anthropologists must intervene by replacing its negative cultural traits, activities, habits, and ways of thinking that hindered what he considered an abnormal evolution, with those existing in the metropolitan centers of the world in the early twentieth century. In sum, Gamio’s project embodied the idea of culturally homogenizing the country to provide the social ground for the economic and social development of a modern nation.

Nevertheless, the conceptualization of the “indigenous problem” in the mid-twentieth century was widespread through the integrationist approach, fully developed by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1967), the lead architect of Indigenismo as state policy. Post-revolutionary Indigenismo asserted that a culturally divided country posed a problem for the formation of a modern, cohesive, and uniformly integrated nation. For Indigenismo, the indigenous population was composed of culturally differentiated, cohesive ethnic groups.

Aguirre Beltrán (1967) developed Gamio’s approach more coherently to formulate a project to transform the social and political relations in densely populated indigenous regions in favor of the penetration of capitalist social relations of production to unchain indigenous peoples from pre-capitalist forms of social production. The state had to promote indigenous integration

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155 The idea of a culturally divided country prevailed until the late 1970s even among the critics of Integrationism, such as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987).
through their acculturation to national culture. But also Aguirre Beltrán noted that old regional colonial agents and caciques subjected Indians to economic exploitation and discrimination. They were excluded from education, health and housing in the so-called dominical process, a form of social and political domination in which regional oligarchs for their own purposes stood in the way of the betterment of local indigenous populations.156

The dominical process was located in the so-called regions of refuge as Aguirre Beltrán called those densely indigenous populated regions. The regions of refuge lacked proper agricultural irrigated lands and natural resources for commercial or subsistence use. These settlements were the consequence of colonial military harassment and the plundering of Indians’ former lands.

Aguirre Beltrán’s analysis showed the extent to which Mexican indigenous were not treated as citizens with equality in post-revolutionary Mexico. However, he wrote: “the problem of ethnic minorities is located at the regional level.”157 Therefore, the regional pre-capitalist web of power and the caste system should be dismantled to promote the ideals of Indigenismo. By

156 Like Manuel Gamio, the integrationist approach of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1967) pointed out the key role of the state and the Indigenismo in the national formation. Aguirre Beltrán pointed out that the territories inhabited by the Mexican indigenous population were ‘regions of refuge’ (regiones de refugio). Regions that were refractory to industrialization and modern civilization due to physical and geographical isolation and the prevalence of the social, political, economic and cultural structure inherited from the Colonial period. Fabila saw this heritage in the Montaña as an obstacle to integracionismo. According to integracionismo, the ultimate goal of the state was to improve the economic and cultural conditions of the indigenous communities. In the late 1960s, Aguirre Beltrán explained the power mechanisms used by the Colonial agents towards the indigenous in post-revolutionary Mexico. He coined the concept dominical process as the regional domination of the indigenous population by: local state administrators, missionaries, officials representing the regional oligarchy, municipal commissioners, and priests. They maintained the political, economic and ideological dominance through racial and spatial segregation, reducing the indigenous population to economic dependence and excluded from education, health, and housing. Aguirre Beltrán strongly pointed out that the dominical process hindered the evolution and cultural progress of Indians. Then, according to integrationism, the obstacles to fulfill their full integration were ‘located’ not at the national but at the regional scale. The indigenous citizenship was inauthentic and incomplete because of their regional segregation. Moreover, the process of domination was based on a caste structure that prevented class stratification “which represents a step forward in the evolution of humanity” (Aguirre Beltrán 1967:20). In sum, ethnic minorities were not in tension with the Mexican state but with regional power. According to anthropologist Javier Guerrero (Personal communication), “dominical” in Aguirre Beltrán’s concept refers to domination or to control.
157 Aguirre Beltrán 1967:18. In some way, the regions of refuge were the economic hinterland of the country or in other words regions where non-capitalist relations of production were dominant.
dismantling the colonial-era caste system between indigenous and ladinos, Aguirre Beltrán was instead advocating for a class division as “a step forward in the evolution of humanity.”

In the 1970s, Aguirre Beltrán’s Integrationist approach was scrutinized by a younger generation of Mexican anthropologists. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1970) asserted that integrationism meant the deprivation of the indigenous ethnic identity, their displacement from the regions of refuge and ultimately their incorporation as wage workers into Mexico’s capitalist relations of production. In fact, Bonfil Batalla noted, the discourse of cultural integration of Mexican indigenismo concealed the role of the Mexican state in regulating the appetite for proletarian indigenous communities by foreign and national capitalism. Ultimately in his view, Indigenismo wanted to desindianizar or to destroy indigenous ethnic identity and to integrate Mexican indigenous as proletarians.

However similarly to the dominical domination arguments of Aguirre Beltrán, Bonfil

158 Aguirre Beltrán 1967:20. In the late 1960s and 1970s, not only a young generation of anthropologist contested the rationale of Mexican Indigenismo, but responses to Aguirre Beltrán’s approaches emerged even in disciplines such as Sociology. From a marginalist point of view González Casanova (1976) located Indian-Ladino relations not only regionally but within a national “continuum.” The author used the concept of internal colonialism to locate Mexican indigenous groups as a colonized group within the national society. According to González Casanova, Indians were marginalized from national development by the Mexican government. As a consequence the country was divided into two worlds, although connected, through internal colonialism. Indigenous people were part of a predominantly rural marginal population characterized by the author with a similar dichotomous model as the used by Indigenismo. González Casanova identified cultural traits needed to be replaced from indigenous populations by those of an idealized national culture. His typology of marginal population included: high levels of illiteracy, low consumption of wheat, meat and milk, and even the scant use of huaraches or leather sandals used in Mexico’s rural areas. The marginalist approach pointed out that the Mexican indigenous communities functioned as internal colonies of the nation. Ladinos exercised economic monopoly over Indian trade as well as land dispossession, and cultural discrimination. By pointing out these forms of deprivation, it seems there were areas of agreement between Indigenismo and marginal theories. However, contrary to the ideas of Aguirre Beltrán, marginalist theory pointed out that such relations of exploitation prevailed in the entire nation. (For Aguirre Beltrán’s responses to internal colonialism approach see his Obra Polémica XI. 1976). Stavenhagen pointed out that the existence of ‘internal colonies’ was strongest in Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas where “the exploitation of the peasant population as a social class is here reinforced by its exploitation as an Indian group, that is, as a colonized people and an oppressed minority” (Stavenhagen 1970:268).

159 In discussing and responding to Aguirre Beltrán arguments on the proletarianization and semi-proletarianization of indigenous people, Pozas and Pozas (1971) noted that regions of refuge were wage-depressed areas incapable of attracting labor (and capital) and in consequence were ethnic enclaves of labor supply. Pozas and Pozas suggested that the function of regions of refuge in contemporary Mexico was a result of national wages differences: “wages become a source of attraction for men from rural areas, and the production sites with high wages emerge as immigration centers” (Pozas and Pozas 1971:72).
Batalla pointed out that indigenous communities were not subject to class exploitation but to so-called *vicarious exploitation* as a marginal or secondary form of economic exploitation within the capitalist system. Like Aguirre Beltrán, he deemphasized the role of class in the deprivation of indigenous communities. This assessment had tremendous consequences in Bonfil Batalla’s envisions of a political alternative for Mexican indigenous. Aguirre Beltrán proposed that they had to get into the class relations. Instead, Bonfil Batalla noted that unlike the urban proletarian people that had a political alternative within the system through class struggle, the indigenous population only had a social and political alternative “outside the system;” that is, outside the western culture that has shaped Mexico’s national formation.

Bonfil condemned morally and politically the economic and cultural deprivation as ethnocide resulting in the integration of indigenous peoples to the nation as proletarians. Addressing the effects of indigenous proletarianization, Bonfil Batalla (1987) pointed out the existence of “ethnocide forces” driving the politics of what he called the Imaginary Mexico, a nation envisioned by the Mexican ruling class in opposition to the indigenous world or what he called the *México Profundo*. Bonfil Batalla asserted the existence of two civilizations in Mexico: the Mesoamerican and the Western -- the *México Profundo* that embodies the Mesoamerican civilization and the Imaginary Mexico that embodies the dominant project of the Mexican ruling class.  

Bonfil Batalla presents this contradiction as part of the cyclical intents of national modernization by the Mexican elite. A tragedy resulted from the fact that the *México Profundo* has no place in the imaginations of the nation’s modernizers.  

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160 This approach, “Critical Anthropology,” developed by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla was later on known by his critics as “ethno populism.” Francisco Javier Guerrero coined the term in 1981 in the context of the XIV Latin American Congress of Sociology in Puerto Rico (Burguete Cal y Mayor 1984).

161 Bonfil Batalla 1987:43.
perceived as in a permanent state of cultural and economic backwardness, as an obstacle that has to be destroyed to achieve national modernization. As noted by Bonfil Batalla, in its tremendous appetite for modernization, the ultimate purpose of the Imaginary Mexico is to destroy the original collective identity of the México Profundo. The ideas of modernization and social change by the Mexican elites were not only intended to replicate the modernization ideas by elites in metropolitan countries but to desindianizar Mexico by socially, economically and culturally destroying and depleting the México Profundo.162

Bonfil Batalla pointed out that the economic policies of the Imaginary Mexico were ultimately directed to undermine the material living conditions of the indigenous population, as well as their capacity to preserve their ethnic and social organization. However he did not acknowledge that such economic policies would deprive both mestizo proletarians and indigenous communities albeit in different ways. He argued that such “ethnocide forces” would annihilate the historical continuity of the Mexican indigenous population as a socially and culturally differentiated unit.” However, the so-called desindianización of Mexico did not mean a total cultural destruction of the indigenous population but at least the destruction of the material support to develop its own culture.

According to Bonfil, one of the instruments to achieve this desindianización of Mexico was the eradication of the ejidal and communal lands. In pointing out the central role of the land, he foresaw major changes in the social, economic and political organization of the nation, and in the relationship between the Mexican state and the peasants: “The central conflict between the Imaginary and the México Profundo is the land.”163 Along with land dispossession, or better said, in order to carry on with it, came murder, imprisonment, torture as well as legal

mechanisms. And I would add: the displacement of people through proletarianization via migration.

The integration of “México Profundo” to the national culture, or the Imaginary Mexico was a violent act of power. Another outstanding critic of Integrationism shared this same idea. Like Bonfil, Arturo Warman asserted that this was not a national project but an historic conflict between ideas about the national formation:

There is not a unique and precise formulation of integration, but there is an agreement that this is the process by which the country’s indigenous cultures will disappear making way for its members to form part of a Mexican national culture. Thus, integration is a process of transit from one state to another, from one pole to another, which it supposes an improvement for the Indians and for the country.” [However] the Mexican national culture or nation is a nonexistent entity; it is a project or program. For some scholars, such as [Alfonsó] Caso, the Mexican community seems to be an obvious and indisputable truth that requires no description. Often, national culture is used as an abstraction and not as a cultural reality; the abstraction is used to indiscriminately indicate what is indigenous from what is not.  

In the late 1970s and 1980s, scholars of the so-called national-ethnic question expanded these previous critiques to Mexican anthropology’s notion of integration. From the beginning, the debate was far beyond the limits of anthropological thought, classrooms or scientific journals. As was noted in the introduction, the debate was located within the politics of the Mexican state for the indigenous population. Scholars such as Díaz-Polanco (1986) criticized Aguirre Beltrán’s Integrationism not only for the use of binary and lineal evolutionist categories such as the opposition indigenous versus national culture, and the location of indigenous cultures

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164 Warman quoted by Téllez 1987:372-372. Although Warman did not formulate a binary category as Bonfil did, he disputed assumptions the idea of a unique classless national culture defined in its terms by the Mexican state. Besides, he challenged the evolutionist formulation of the concept by Mexican anthropology.

165 As noted by Chilean anthropologist Felipe Bate in the introduction of his classic book on the national-ethnic question: “The Indian problem, the ethnic question and the national question are issues that arise predominantly to answer practical requirements. Their discussion as a theoretical, scientific and political-ideological problem emerge from the needs of the class struggle taking place inside of the current socio-economic system” (Bate 1984:7).
at the bottom of the national project vis-à-vis a mestizo nation on the pinnacle. Diaz-Polanco also condemned the political nature of Integrationism as an ethnocide, authoritarian and culturally homogenizing state project. He noted (as Warman did previously) that before assuming the necessity to integrate the Indians to the nation, the key question was to ask first into what kind of nation they were to be integrated.

Also, as previously noted by Pozas and Pozas (1971) one decade earlier, Díaz-Polanco pointed out that in fact Integrationism, never really intended to forge a nation on the basis of the elimination of Mexico’s cultural diversity but to facilitate the political and economic rearrangement in densely populated indigenous zones (regions of refuge) through the dispossession of indigenous territories and the proletarianization of their inhabitants

In addition, López y Rivas (1988) pointed out that on its aim to improve the Indians’ material conditions of life, the state and Integrationism was trying to rationalize the social tensions produced by capitalist expansion in Mexico. The author continued the previous criticisms made by Bonfil Batalla and noted that the integration of Indians into the nation meant to integrate them as proletarians within the social fabric of inequality of the capitalist class

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166 Scholars of the National-Ethnic Question School in Mexico elaborated a non-orthodox Marxist approach to interrogate the so-called Indian grounded. Their discussion was grounded also in the former debates on the national question by Eastern European Marxists such as Bauer (1979), Borojov (1979) and Luxemburg (1979). The group of scholars that integrated the National-Ethnic Question was based in Mexico City and was formed by Mexican, Dominican, Chilean, Venezuelan scholars.

167 This issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but this discussion has continued in the last decades within Mexican anthropology, particularly with the ideas of regional autonomy by Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez (2002). Regional autonomy includes the contributions of the national ethnic question made by anthropologists in the previous decades. One of the key assertions of the regional autonomy project is that the cause of marginalization and poverty, social and economic injustice that 12 million Indians suffer in Mexico is consequence of their political and social exclusion by the Mexican state. The authors point out “the marginalization of indigenous peoples is not derived from their cultural traits “but primarily [because of] their lack of political power” (Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez 2002:89). The authors point out that the nation-state formation was based on the assumption on the need to reject the nation’s ethnic diversity because cultural heterogeneity was incompatible with national unity and economic development. Thus, regional autonomy is based on the need to resolve the old ethnic-national conflict by creating a new national legal framework to grant regional autonomy to the indigenous peoples and to cancel the assimilationist practices of the state. Regional autonomy critiques the Mexican State intervention as follows: 1) its authoritarian, centralist, homogenizing nature and its rejection of the ethnic plurality of the country as well as the collective and individual rights of Indians as citizens; 2) to reform the nation-state requires the existence of regional regimes, decentralized, and democratic. In sum a federal and multi-ethnic state is needed.
system. For López y Rivas, Integrationism was not about bringing justice between mestizos and indigenous and so resolve the “indigenous problem;” neither was it intended to provide a sense of future for a third-world Latin American nation.

In sum, in the early 1980s the critics of Integrationism saw it as a state ideology elaborated through anthropology and by anthropologists, to dismantle the indigenous communities and allow the expansion and development of capitalism in Mexico (Burguete 1984). Burguete (1984) pointed out that the assumption that the national culture was an embodiment of progress and modernization was incorrect. Like Warman and Díaz-Polanco, Burguete also raised the question: into what nation should the indigenous be integrated?

Aguirre Beltrán (1967) was confident that the annihilation of the caste relations based on status and ethnic differences in the so-called regions of refuge, and the substitution of class relations would improve the material conditions of the indigenous population, albeit as proletarians. Therefore the faith of Integrationism relied upon accepting the idea of a class-based nation-state formation based on cultural unity. Finally, according to Luis Villoro (1950), Integrationism in post-revolutionary Mexico portrayed the Indians as ‘objects’ without agency, an idea later on reinforced by Bonfil Batalla. In the Imaginary Mexico, Bonfil argued, the idea of the nation was the vision of the mestizo elite or the criollo upper class, without consideration of the indigenous population.

Thus half a century later, we can ask again, like Juan Rulfo’s characters, “In which country are we living in, Agripina?” There are two possible answers: one in which, to quote Alfonso Fabila, the “unpleasant feeling of being in a strange and absurd country” prevails; and the other, in a country that has “taken care of men, the greatest treasure of peoples and nations.” Half century later, and if looking at these questions through Othon’s life story, we can ask then

168 Díaz-Polanco 1986:156.
how has the indigenous population of the Montaña been integrated into the nation? “We have been abandoned,” responds Othón (see Chapter 1) in the middle of the night and thousands of miles away from the Montaña region. So, one must tragically admit the “unpleasant feeling” of living in “an absurd country,” where the indigenous people of the Montaña region have been integrated as day laborers in Sinaloa and then as proletarians in the U.S.-Mexico transnational migrant labor market.

Is this integration based on social equality and the well-being of its people, as Fabila, Gamio, or Aguirre Beltrán imagined in the mid-twentieth century? Or is it rather the integration the critics of integrationism warned against in the late 1970s? Did integrationism alleviate the social conditions in the Montaña? Has the “ruinous exploitation” and the social and economic injustice in the Montaña shown by Alfonso Fabila in the 1950s ended?

No. The persistence and worsening of such social inequality is a profound theater of the abandonment. Drawing on Bonfil Batalla’s assertion, material abandonment and the languages of the abandonment it produces are in part the result of the tension between two opposed national projects: the “ruinous exploitation” of indigenous men and women from the Montaña were in the 1950s the dreams of economic modernization of the Mexican ruling class. The nightmares of Mixteco day laborers like Othón working in Sinaloa or crossing the U.S.-Mexico border are now the dreams of the Mexican ruling class, conveniently dressed up in the fashion of commercial and economic complementarity.

*The political economy of the abandonment*

In which region are Othón and his people living? To what region do thousands of Mixteco peasants and day laborers belong? What is the nature of a region where annually entire Mixteco
families must drift away to seek their survival? What is the nature of a place that gives birth to the languages of abandonment and the necessity, a place annually visited by the enganchadores to recruit men and women to work in northwestern Mexico’s fields?

In July 2005, Mexican president Vicente Fox arrived in the Montaña. During his tour, the President asked (in Spanish) Angelina Rojas, a Mixteco woman from the Metlatónoc municipality, “¿Qué les falta?” or “what do you need?” According to the press accounts, a Mixteco translator communicated him the woman’s answer: “She said she needs everything, water, floors at home.”169 Fox was visiting the region after the United Nations Development Program released the Human Development Report for 2004. The report indicated that Metlatónoc was the poorest municipality in Mexico, with social and economic conditions comparable to those existing in some African countries.

Before leaving Metlatónoc, Fox declared that poverty in the region “comes from a long, long time ago, the abandonment of [the people] and their families comes from a long time ago.”170 Before concluding his visit, the president promised to the people his government would

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170 Presidencia de la República 2005. The former president was not the last Mexican politician that visited the region. Months later, on January 19, during the 2006 presidential campaign, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution) or PRD, and the center-left coalition’s candidate, began his campaign in Metlatónoc. His campaign slogan was “Por el bien de todos, primero los pobres” (For the people’s sake, the poor are first). He also visited the municipality of Cochoapa el Grande (created in 2005) that by then had become the poorest in the country. Also, in 2004, the PRD candidate to the government of the state of Guerrero, Zeferino Torreblanca, began his campaign in Metlatónoc. Journalist Zosimo Camacho mocked about the visit of the so-called leftist candidates. With the visit of Torreblanca, the Indians of Metlatónoc: “won a pair of asbestos sheets” as part of his political campaign (Camacho 2007b). With López Obrador, “the Indians served as scenery” (Camacho 2007b). In Metlatónoc, the leftist presidential candidate Obrador spoke in Spanish and without translation about the “macroeconomic indicators” in a place where 95 percent of people do not understand Spanish. However, despite the contempt that the political apparatus of the PRD showed for the indigenous, the region has been politically relevant for the left since the 1980s when the Normalista teacher Abel Salazar Bazán of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party) or PCM, first won the government of the Mixteco municipality of Alcozauca on December of 1980. Since then, Alcozauca has been a bastion for the Guerreroense and Mexican left that has won the municipal government in seven elections. In 1986, the communist teacher Othón Salazar Ramírez won the municipal elections defeating the Partido Revolucionario Institucional ( Institutional Revolutionary Party). Salazar was candidate of the Unidad Popular Guerreroense (Guerrerense Popular Unity), a leftist coalition between the Partido Socialista Unificado de México ( Unified Socialist Party of Mexico) or PSUM, and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores ( Revolutionary Workers Party) or PRT. As a consequence of the strong
provide electronic blackboards and software translated to Mixteco for the region’s schools. His promise to bring technology to this poor region was not simply coming from the pressure of the public opinion after the release of the Human Development report in 2005. It was an example of what Marshall Berman (1982) called “techno-pastoral discourses,” a set of discourses and ideologies advocating the mighty potential of technology to modernize and materially transform the life of the individuals in many positive and unimaginable ways. As Berman notes, techno-pastorals discourses, in underdeveloped and third world countries like Mexico, do not bring the promised material transformations but nightmares, more tragedies, and suffering for its inhabitants.

The profound disjunction between the Imaginary and the México Profundo as noted by Bonfil Batalla (1987), is tragically expressed in the Mexican president’s promise to bring “software in Mixteco” to a predominantly rural, impoverished, and indigenous populated region where many schools have no electricity or even have classrooms. In 2005, the year Mexican president Vicente Fox visited the Montaña region, comprising 19 of the 81 state municipalities had a total population of 319,393 (10.2% of the state’s population) and it was predominantly rural (with 281,418 inhabitants living in rural areas). Tlapa was the only municipality in the region with urban population (27,788 persons) surpassing the rural (see Table 8).

Poverty in the region has grown in the last three decades of market-oriented policies in Mexico. According to the Mexico’s Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, CONEVAL (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development)

influence of the PCM, the region was known as the “Montaña Roja,” (the Red Mountain) (Flores 2001).

171 The Montaña region, located East of the state, is one of the seven economic regions: Costa Grande, Costa Chica, Acapulco, Zona Centro, Zona Norte, Tierra Caliente, and the Montaña.

172 The 2005 population by municipality in the region was as follows: Acatepec (28,525 inhabitants), Alcozaucy de Guerrero (16,237), Alpoyeca (5,848), Atlajamalcingo del Monte (5,143), Atlaxtac (23,371), Cochoapa el Grande (15,572), Copanatoyac (17,337), Cualac (6,816), Huamuxtitlán (13,806), Iliatenco (10,039), Malinaltepec (26,613), Metlatónoc (17,398), Olinalá (22,437), Tlacoapa (8,733), Tlalixtaquilla de Maldonado (6,534), Tlapa de Comonfort (65, 763), Xalpatláhuac (12,615), Xochihuehuetlán (7,005), and Zapotitlán Tablas (9,601). (CONEVAL 2005).
Policy), in 2005 Guerrero has the second highest rate of Índice de Rezago Social (Social Gap Index).\textsuperscript{173} CONEVAL recognizes three types of poverty in the country: \textit{pobreza alimentaria} (food poverty); \textit{pobreza de capacidades} (capability poverty) and \textit{pobreza de patrimonio} (patrimony poverty). The data for Guerrero (with a total population of 3,115,202) is as follows: food poverty, 40.2%; 50.2%, for capability poverty; and 70.2%, for “patrimony poverty.”\textsuperscript{174}

According to the same source, in 2005 in Guerrero, 19.9% of the population 15 or more years old was illiterate; 7.1% of the population between 6 and 14 years old did not attend school; 58.0% had incomplete basic education; 74.1% had no access to the health care system; 31.6% of the dwellings had soil floors; 29.2% of dwellings lacked toilets; 34.5% had no access to water supply; 8.5% no access to electrical power, and 33.5% of the dwellings had no refrigerator. For decades, urban and rural differences have been expressed through the growing social inequalities in the Montaña, especially among the indigenous population: Mixtecos, Nahuas, Tlapanecos and Amuzgos. In 2005, 11 municipalities in the region were ranked with “Very High” in the Social Gap Index (see Table 9).

In 2007, Mexican journalist Zosimo Camacho traveled the region and the municipalities visited by Vicente Fox two years before. His chronicle has no mention of the electronic blackboards or the software in Mixteco promised by the president, but instead of “malnutrition and death from curable diseases… shacks improvised as schools, schools that have been abandoned by the teachers who are not resigned to the curse of living in the poorest area of the

\textsuperscript{173} The “Social Gap Index” measures education, access to health care, and housing, based on data from the II\textit{Conteo de Población y Vivienda 2005} (Population and Housing Census) of the Instituto Nacional de Geografía e Informática (National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics). In addition, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca are among the states with the lowest Human Index Development in Mexico (UNDP 2010). An English translation of the categories used by CONEVAL to measure poverty can be found at: \url{http://www.coneval.gob.mx/Medicion/Paginas/Glosario-en.aspx}).

\textsuperscript{174} Food poverty is the inability of getting a basic food basket even if using the entire household income. The basic food basket created in Mexico in 1985 comprised “for the urban areas 2,220 calories and 40 grams of protein per person per day; for the rural areas 2,180 calories and 37 grams of protein per person per day” (CONEVAL 2005).
country.” He saw the exhausted body of Apolinar, an indigenous inhabitant of the region, shivering under a dirty blanket and staring with his “big eyes,” delirious, and babbling as a TB patient, while his spasms revealed his “skeletal torso” (Camacho 2007). He saw the Nu’saavi, or Mixteco community, where “naked children infested with parasites” helping their parents. In Nu’saavi, people preferred to die at home rather than at the nearest hospital where they are mistreated, and there are no translators from Mixteco to Spanish. He found, in short, a very similar picture to the one found by Fabila in 1955:

There are only the following health facilities for all the people in the mountain region: a very small hospital, and six offices belonging to the Servicios Coordinados de Salubridad y Asistencia (Coordinated Services of Health and Welfare) in the state. These services lack almost everything to comply with the purposes for which they were created. The hospital is located in the city of Tlapa ... is attended by one doctor and three nurses, but there are no medicines or beds. It is impossible for the Indians to get access to the hospital this way.175

So we can now re-assess President Fox’s explanation of poverty as an inheritance of the region’s ancient past and argue instead that the lack of the material and structural conditions that have reproduced social exclusion generation after generation are quite contemporary and not just nineteenth-century legacies. As I will show next, the history of people having no access to education, or food, and of people that most likely will be recollecting their own history of deprivation twenty or thirty years from now, is the present, and even now the everyday life of thousands of inhabitants in the Montaña region. This history is the result of the contemporary politics of the Mexican elite whose voices echo in turn the visions of international financial institutions about the origins of social inequality in this part of Mexico: “Poverty in South Mexico is a centuries-old problem. Colonial history casts a long shadow over the region, which

has long been viewed as an intractable development problem for Mexico.”

By the same token, we may then fetishize history and blame it for the tremendous social inequality in south Mexico. We may presume then that through normative market oriented policies Mexico will ‘solve’ inequality, level the standards of living, and achieve the integration of the indigenous population to the nation, as envisioned by post-revolutionary Mexican anthropology. However, since the 1980s what the successive neoliberal governments have accomplished is the successful integration of indigenous people with the market. In less than three decades the Mexican state has substituted the former normative, moral, and political notion of indigenous integration for ideas of labor complementarity between Mexico and the United States.

If in the 1950s Fabila foresaw an almost utopian realm where modernity and infrastructure will penetrate the region to incorporate it and the indigenous people to the nation, he could not even imagine that decades later new but similar visions of the Montaña and its people would emerge. The ideas of an infrastructure needed to connect the region would be advocated again but not for the social purposes that Fabila desired. Access to hospitals and schools for all people would be equally adjusted to the logic of profit. Hall and Humphrey (2003) wrote,

Perhaps the most significant factor rising the operational costs for businesses in Southern Mexico is the absence of physical integration of this poor region with the Southern states, and in turn of the Southern states with the rest of the country and the outside world. Moving products, people, and information in and out of the Southern states results unreliable, time consuming, and expensive.

Like president Fox, Hall and Humphrey commented that this picture goes back in history, to a circa nineteenth century environmental determinism: “the difficulty of access can be

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177 Hall and Humphrey 2003:12.
explained by the mountainous geography of the South.”\textsuperscript{178} And they concluded, that it was necessary to overcome this ‘difficulty’ in order “to attract capital investment” to this region, which was seen as “an abundant supply of labor.”\textsuperscript{179} In the new language of the Mexican elite, “remote regions” limit “the ability of local residents to freely seek new markets for their goods and services to help improve their economic prospects.”\textsuperscript{180} But what makes regions like the Montaña “remote” and in consequence “abandoned,” difficult to reach and inaccessible to the state efforts to modernize them? Does the market really fulfill the promise of integration and improve the economic prospects of peasants and indigenous population in this region?

After two decades of capitalist orthodoxy pursuing economic growth as the ultimate path to social and economic equality, scholars have gathered enough evidence to assert that, “economic growth is not enough to create equality.”\textsuperscript{181} Even so, Mexican state agencies, as CONEVAL persist in sustaining that “a steady reduction of poverty requires a higher economic growth.”\textsuperscript{182} The same rationale dominated the agenda of the Mexican technocracy during the negotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s: rapid economic growth will be transformed into employment and a steady elimination of poverty. Furthermore, throughout Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s presidency, the dominant idea was that NAFTA would end the so-called migratory problem by means of creating jobs and fixing the Mexican labor force to the Mexican territory (Sandoval 2006).\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{178} Hall and Humphrey 2003:12.
\textsuperscript{179} Hall and Humphrey 2003:11.
\textsuperscript{180} Hall and Humphrey 2003:8
\textsuperscript{181} Blim 2004:30.
\textsuperscript{182} CONEVAL 2005:25.
\textsuperscript{183} In October 1993, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno declared: “We will not reduce the flow of illegal immigrants until these immigrants find decent jobs, at decent wages, in Mexico. Our best chance to reduce illegal immigration is sustained, robust Mexican economic growth. NAFTA will create jobs in Mexico-jobs for Mexican workers who might otherwise cross illegally into America” (Quoted by Audley et al 2004:43).
Two decades of NAFTA have provided strong evidence against it. According to Arroyo (2009), since 1994 and for the next 13 years, Mexico’s annual growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was 1.58%. According to the same author, between 1982 and 2006 the GDP per capita growth only 0.7%. Data provided by the World Bank (2010), show no correlation between the increase of the GDP and the decrease of poverty in the country. In two decades the GDP increased from $262.7 US billion in 1990 to $1,034.8 billion in 2010; yet the rate of poverty increased from 2004 to 2010, and it slightly fell from 46.1% to 45.5% between 2010 and 2012 (see Table 10). 47.2% of Mexico’s population lived below the poverty line in 2004, and 51.3% in 2010.

Regionally, there are important differences. Between 1993 and 2000, in the southern states the annual GDP growth was 2.1% against the 6.9% national rate. Comparatively the poverty rates were decreasing at slower rates in southern Mexico than in the rest of the country: from 1992 to 2000, the poverty rate in Guerrero fell 18%; while the rate nationwide fell 22%. The 2004 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) data showed the prevalent regional and social inequality in Guerrero. The state ranked 30 out of 32 in the Human Development Index (HDI).

Guerrero was well below the national average on health, education, and income indexes

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184 Since the 1990s the Mexican government has created numerous anti-poverty targeted programs, such as the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program) or PRONASOL; the Oportunidades (Opportunities), and recently the so-called Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre (National Crusade Against Hunger) or CNCH. The programs have slightly ameliorated poverty by providing the poor population with a subsidy to consumption. Nevertheless, they also have worked as a renovated mechanism of political and electoral clientelism and political bargain at local, state, and federal levels. The programs on the other hand, have been also used as instruments of counter insurgency against social movements in states like Chiapas and Guerrero.

185 CONEVAL 2013. However the actual number of people living in poverty between 2010 and 2012 increased from 52.8 million to 53.3 million, due to the total population grew (from 114.5 to 117.3 million).

186 World Bank (http://data.worldbank.org/country/mexico. The World Bank defines the National poverty rate as the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line.

187 Hall and Humphrey 2003.

188 In 2002, the Mexican states with the lowest HDI were: Guerrero (0.7296), Oaxaca (0.7164), and Chiapas (0.7076 ). UNDP 2005.
Globally, Guerrero ranked 101 in the HDI, and Metlatónoc was ranked as the poorest municipality in the country. In 2003, the World Bank noted that Guerrero had lower social indicators than the northern states. At the same time, the local statistics for the 19 municipalities in the Montaña region show no significant evidence that the living conditions were improving. On the contrary, poverty has increased steadily, particularly among the indigenous populations.

The UNDP (2004) data provides evidence that health, education, and income indexes in the Montaña region are below the state and national average. The municipalities of Metlatónoc and Acatepec had the lowest health index in the region. The education gap between the municipalities of the Montaña and the country is even greater. For example, Mexico’s education index was 0.8190 and Alcozauca had the lowest index in the region (0.4634). Even the city of Tlapa (0.6804), is well below the state and national indexes (see Tables 11 and 12). In 2005, CONEVAL data showed the highest levels of social and economic deprivation in the region. For instance, in Alcozauca, out of a total population of 16,237, 76.1% was in food poverty; 81.8% in capability poverty, and 91.6% patrimony poverty (see Table 13). In sum, social inequality in the region has deepened in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The arrival of the new century found the indigenous of the Montaña region living in a region that concentrated a quarter of the poorest Mexicans in 2000, and scattered in at least three different geographical and social and political locations. While many of them remained in the region, others continued

\footnote{Metlatónoc, with a HDI of 0.3800, was also ranked among the ten Mexican municipalities with the lowest health, education, and income indexes. According to the UNDP (2005), the fifteen Mexican municipalities with the lowest HDI were: Metlatónoc (Guerrero); Coicoyoyán de las Flores (Oaxaca); Tehuipango (Veracruz); San Simón Zahatlán (Oaxaca); Sitalá (Chiapas); Santa Lucía Miahuatlán (Oaxaca); Santiago el Pinar (Chiapas); Santa María la Asunción (Oaxaca); Aldama (Chiapas); Santiago Ixtayutla (Oaxaca); Chalchihuitlán (Chiapas); Huautepec (Oaxaca); Santo Domingo Tuxtepec (Oaxaca) and Mitontic (Chiapas).

\cite{Hall and Humphrey 2003}

\cite{Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática 2000, quoted by Hall and Humphrey 2003}
migrating to Sinaloa, and another segment had migrated to New York City.

Those who remained in the Montaña were found living in extreme poverty. ‘Which region are they living in, Agripina?’ we might ask using Rulfo’s voice. According to CONEVAL, in 2010, 84.89% of the population in the Montaña (293,048 persons) lived in poverty, and of this total, 55.51% (191,614) lived in extreme poverty, (see Table 14). 133, 496 (38.6%) people in the region were deprived of education; 146,509 (42.4%) lacked access to health services; almost the entire population in the Montaña, 317,054 (91.8%) did not have access to social security; and 182,471 (52.8%) did not have access to food (see Table 15). Yet the state of inequality goes deeper. The municipality of Tlapa, with a total population of 83,302, had the highest numbers of social deprivation in the region. Among other indicators, it had the highest level of absolute poverty, with 76.65% living in poverty (see Table 14); 32,943 persons (39.5%) had no access to health services, and only 11,222 (13.42%) had access to social security. And in Cochoapa el Grande, a Mixteco municipality, 87.1% of the total population (15,041) had no access to health service and 96.2% lacked social security (see Table 15 and 16).

With this picture in mind, it might be possible to ask now, to what extent is abandonment, as a form of social inequality, driving people from the region? In the language of abandonment, that is, how people are rationally articulating what is behind their actions and decisions to leave the region, the answer is: “because of the necessity. The necessity (the unsatisfied social needs) is produced by the abandonment. If any significant meaning can be found in the language of the abandonment, it is precisely this capacity to address the relationship between inequality and migration. Abandonment connects the recent migrant experience and the social oppression and material dispossession located back in Guerrero, and forms the base of the people’s oppositional history.
In the oral narratives, Sandro, the former bassist of the Mighty Group La Montaña, Othón’s friend and someone who, like him, went to Sinaloa to work when he was a child, illuminates the former aspect. He explained to me, in Spanish (Spanish is the second of three languages he speaks: Mixteco, Spanish, and English) the cultural meaning of the need. “Life is a little bit more complicated. There are people who have lived a more normal life than others, but not me. I never had a normal life, I never lived in peace, lived always in need of education, or a job, food, had nothing to eat. In the region your harvest depends on the rain, there’s only rain-fed agriculture. There are no jobs, and when you do not have a job you start to worry and ask what you are going to do to get the money and so survive with your family. It is a hard life.”

When Sandro talks about his childhood, he recalls, “We always ate beans, and when we had some money we ate chicken. I went to school when I was eight or nine years old. I went to school, but not regularly. I had to take on or two days off to help my father to work the land. So, I did not study. We used our free time to work, to pick up the firewood or take care of the animals we had. It was a hard life. Everybody worked: boys and girls. There are some health care facilities but they are not open daily. So, those with health problems or who are sick must go to Tlapa, but it is expensive. Many people had lost their love ones because it is very difficult [to get medical attention]. You survive, but sometimes you can’t make enough, so that is why we must go to work somewhere else.”

Scholars, like Smith (2006), have pointed out that the Mexican migration to New York City was the consequence of Mexico’s low economic growth during the 1980s. In the 1990s and 2000s Mexico’s growth domestic product per capita declined from 1.3% to 0.8%. Yet, as it has been shown, it is possible to examine the increasing Mexican migration to New York City.

192 According to this author, the third phase of the Mexican migration to New York City (late 1980s to mid-1990s) was a mass migration resulting from the lack of economic growth in the Mexican economy and the preference of New York City employers to hire Mexican labor force.
not only in terms of these shifts in the Mexican economy, but of the persistent historical deprivation of the indigenous population. It seems that the bases of deprivation were already laid out in the Montaña region since the early 1990s, when political and class driven decisions began to change the relationship between the state and the peasants. From this perspective, the Mixteco migration can be understood both as an individual and a collective response to cope with the social and economic effects of such decisions. These decisions have deepened people’s dispossession and driven their proletarianization via migration.

“There was no other option”

As earlier described, Mixtecos seek in drug production a way to escape the trip to Sinaloa, but in many cases they end up returning to Sinaloa to work as day laborers. As Othón described it, for Mixteco people “No hubo de otra”, or there was no other option but to return there. Is then the Montaña migration a forced migration? Based on the evidence provided by Othón’s life story, probably it is, and so we may begin to reframe Mexican contemporary migration as a forced exile. The journey is rooted in the historical abandonment of the Mexican indigenous population by the Mexican state, and in the implementation of free market oriented policies that annihilated any possibility of survival. Paradoxically, as noted by Gledhill (2007), the Salinas centerpiece for the implementation of market-oriented policies in Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), used the same assumption of having no alternative but to accept globalization. Salinas’s strategy had the quality of “shock therapy.”

In June 2004, Javier Usabiaga, Vicente Fox’s Minister of Agriculture declared that it was “necessary to trim down the production of maize,” and proposed to substitute it for more
profitable and market competitive agricultural crops. Usabiaga was part of a group of entrepreneurs, businessmen, and CEOs who took state power after the electoral triumph of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party), or PAN in 2000. Usabiaga was best known as the “King of Garlic,” because of the success of his agribusinesses in the Bajío Region, in north central Mexico.\(^{195}\) So, it can be said that what he was really offering to the Mexican producers was this: profitability or abandonment. *No había de otra*, or there was no other option, to use Othón’s words.\(^ {196}\)

From 1998 to 2006, employment in the primary sector declined from 7,542,243 to 6,164,300, more than one million jobs in less than a decade. Some 2,030,000 hectares were withdrawn from production from 1997 to 2006. And from 1994 to 2006 maize cultivation declined by 1,004,000 hectares. For the same period, even though the national maize production increased 17%, the maize imports from the United States also rose 25%.\(^ {197}\)

Therefore, what was really behind the idea of an unprofitable Mexican agriculture and maize production was the need to integrate small agricultural producers in local and regional

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\(^ {195}\) The “King of Garlic” produced 35% of the national garlic exports in 2000. His businesses included: *Covemex, Empacadora General Agrícola del Bajío, Equipos y Tractores del Bajío y Alimentos Deshidratados del Bajío* (Pérez 2008). Usabiaga’s words resonate the reasoning of Jaime Serra Puche, former Secretary of Trade and Industry in Salinas’s government (1988-1994), who in October 1993, during a visit to the state of Chihuahua, scolded the indigenous peasants and asked them to stop producing if they felt that agriculture was no longer profitable. Serra Puche, a Yale Ph. D graduated, led the negotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) during Salinas’s administration. It is surprising the extent to which the rationale of the Mexican ruling class towards the indigenous peasants resembled those of the Porfrian elite a century early. In 1901, José Yves Limantour, Secretary of Finances stated: “the weak and the ill-prepared [the peasants] who lack the means to victoriously consummate the evolution, must succumb and yield the space to the most vigorous” (Limantour quoted by Carbó 1988:88). In January of 2012, Mexico’s media revealed the famine crisis among the Raraumuri people, the indigenous population in the Sierra Tarahumara, Chihuahua; in the same state where Serra Puche made his unfortunate discourse. According to the United Nations Development Program, in 2005 the six municipalities with the lowest HDI and the highest percentage of indigenous population were located in Chihuahua: Batopilas, Carichí, Morelos. Balleza, Urique and Uruachi. Batopilas HDI (0.3010) was lower than Niger (0.330), the lowest HDI worldwide (PNUD 2005).

\(^ {196}\) As noted by Perales and Reyes (2009), the adoption of neoliberal policies in the agriculture severely affected maize producers because there were no mechanisms to financially compensate the low rentability of Mexican maize in comparison with U.S producers.

\(^ {197}\) From 1994 to 2006 the price of maize declined in 36%, making its production economically unprofitable (Arroyo 2009).


economies targeted for the North American migrant labor market. In the process, the integration of the Montaña region, historically a pool of indigenous labor for the national labor market, required state intervention to create a new regional labor configuration that in the late 1990s that transformed the region into a supplier of labor for the transnational North American labor market, including New York City.

From this perspective, when tracing the migrant labor incorporation of the Montaña’s inhabitants to a North American regional labor market, it seems that the argument of the economic decline in Mexico is not enough to explain how the region began to feed the labor necessities of the changing New York economy during the late 1980s. It rather seems that the formation of this transnational labor market and the incorporation of new regions and ethnic groups to the stream of the Mexican migrant labor force in New York was also the result of a state driven class rearrangement and greater social inequality in Mexico.

Half a century earlier, in the 1940s, the paradigm of state intervention to promote industrialization, planning, development, and the formation of a capitalist internal market prevailed in Mexico and Latin America, with the idea of alleviating the economic dependency on the developed countries. Even though the model supplied the internal market with food at low prices, and raw materials for the industry, it likewise polarized the Mexican agriculture between commercial capitalist agriculture and subsistence agriculture. Subsistence agriculture was hit the hardest in the late 1970s, pushing peasants to complement their household income with wage-labor (Paré 1977). In the 1980s, and in order to respond to this crisis, the Mexican state began to ‘modernize’ agriculture by subjecting it to free market-oriented policies. These policies

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198 Appendini (2014) has pointed out the extent to which the restructuring of Mexico’s domestic maize production (rationalized by discourses on food security) was made to openly promote the participation and the control of private agents over production and distribution (concentrated in northwest Mexico). With the resulting displacement of agricultural workers to non-agricultural activities.
included: the dismantling of state financial and credit institutions formerly allocating resources to promote agricultural production, such as the National Bank of Rural Credit (BANRURAL), and the Mexican Coffee Institute (INMECAFE), the elimination of subsidies to production and guaranty prices for producers, and the reduction of credits and technical assistance. As a result, the cost of production for maize increased and the profit rates dropped in the market (Calderón 2009).

The Constitutional amendment to Article 27 in 1992 represented the peak of this ‘modernization.’ The effect was devastating to the point of being condemned as part of a “neoliberal counter revolution” (Guillén 1997), because of the attempt to destroy a social right that had been key in the formation of the “Mexican state community” (Gilly 1997). According to Gilly, Article 27 integrated three major ideas of Mexico’s post-revolutionary ruling class: the right to the land, the national property of oil, and the idea of the nation as a social contract between the rulers and the ruled (ruling class and subalterns). The Constitutional reform broke this social contract by granting to ejidatarios and communal landholders the legal right to buy and sell their lands, and thus decreed the end of the land distribution. As previously noted, anthropologist Arturo Warman, who served in the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was a key actor in this counter reform, arguing that there was no more agricultural land to be distributed.

But where could the lands have gone? In 2000, in one of his presidential campaign speeches, Vicente Fox ‘encouraged’ peasants to go for the entrepreneurial spirit and take advantage of “the opportunities” and “challenges globalization” was bringing to the country, in

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199 In 1917, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution also established the inalienable nature of ejidal and communal lands.
short to “be skilled enough to sell, rent, or mortgage their property.”²⁰⁰ Ejidos and communal lands, which before the amendment have been owned by the nation, were offered for sale or were abandoned. With time, lands and men were thrown out to buy and sell, everyone on his own, each one at its own price. Those who had been peasants found themselves migrating from place to place, permanently chasing peaches, plums, beet, grapes, apples, and cotton crops in faraway places, just to find out at the end of the day, when the sun went down in the fields, that no había de otra, but to start over the next morning. Later, some of them eventually traded the agriculture fields for a corner on Roosevelt Avenue in Queens to work as day laborers, or in kitchens in East Harlem or the Upper West Side.

The amendment to Article 27 opened the doors for the land to be transformed into a commodity.²⁰¹ The neoliberal reform was not only intended to allow the transference of ejidal and communal land to the market. As noted by López y Rivas (1996), it was also aimed at the territorial, social, economic, political, and cultural dissolution of the indigenous communities as advocated by Bonfil Batalla.²⁰² Peasant communities were fragmented, and then individual producers became a link in the chain of production, losing their collective ancestral and legitimate rights to the land. The people from the Montaña tried to adapt to these sudden new needs of the market, but producing maize was not profitable enough to stay in the region. So in

²⁰⁰ Vicente Fox, quoted by Najar: 2000. In fact, the government created the Programa de Certificación de Ejidos (PROCEDE) in order to facilitate the privatization of land by setting the territorial limits to issue the ejido land property titles (Calderón 2009).

²⁰¹ However, there is evidence of collective responses to economic globalization and neoliberal policies, especially among the indigenous in southern Mexico (Stephen 2005). The author documented the case of Teotitlán del Valle, in Oaxaca. This Zapotec textile-producing community utilizes local traditions to organize textile cooperatives and so reinforcing economic, political, and cultural rights.

²⁰² The so-called contra revolutionary reform of 1992 to Article 27, went against the centrality of the land tenure regime, central to the national-ethnic question, as Carlos Mariategui (1928) had pointed out more than half century ago. The main problem of the indigenous population in Latin America, said Mariategui, was the unequal access to land. The indigenous question was not rooted in the cultural differences between the indigenous groups and the nation (in fact, he considered such approaches as “sterile theoretical reflections”), but in the political economy of the nation state. (Mariategui 1928:35).
the midst of the rural crisis in the 1990s, they began to cultivate drugs. Peasants and their sons became poppy producers and hence began to be the objects of the military repression and criminalization. Town after town, the Montaña became a hunted region. Historically, the Mexican army has intervened to control and repress social movements, guerrillas and political opposition in the state. Probably in no other state, with the exception of the state of Chiapas since 1994, has the Mexican army more openly worked as an instrument of social and political control against social and political movements.

As shown in this chapter, today, more than a half a century later, people in the Montaña have not been integrated with the justice and equality envisioned by then young anthropologist Alfonso Fabila. The ‘integration’ of the indigenous population of the Montaña has never occurred, or at least not in the terms Gamio and Aguirre Beltrán dreamed of for the Mexican indigenous population. Quite the contrary, the evidence of the persistent structure of social inequality and poverty in the region is overwhelming, and it has been such regional inequality and poverty that has triggered labor migration to New York City, as well as the formation of the language of abandonment.

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203 According to Hall and Humphrey (2003), the U.S. government estimates that for that year the southern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca annually cultivate opium poppies equivalent to two to four tons of heroine. For a discussion on the criminalization of poverty in the Montaña region see: Mora 2013 and Sierra and Aragón 2013. As a result, there is evidence of an ongoing transnationalization of criminalization of poor indigenous Mixteco peasants and migrants operating at both sides of the U.S- Mexico border. If we locate the history of the population of Guerrero within this frame, we can distinguish a three-fold cycle of criminalization: first, the criminalization of the people involved in social movements, next, of peasants as drug producers, and last, the criminalization of Guerrerenses as undocumented migrants by the U.S. government. However, in the last two decades, more attention has been given to the consequences of militarization, immigration and law enforcement of the U.S-Mexican border (Sandoval 2005). Yet it is crucial to highlight the regional process of continuous violence and militarization of the Mexican state, particularly in the case of the Montaña region. Since the 1990s, the Mexican army has been displayed to eradicate the drug production and become the state institution with major presence in the region.

204 During the 1970s and the 1980s the Mexican Army had a strong presence in Guerrero. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, it started to handle policies and law enforcement strategies to eradicate the drug production in the entire country.
Photo 1. Picture of Tlapa in New York City, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 2. City of Tlapa I, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 3. City of Tlapa II, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 4. Downtown Tlapa, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 5. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 6. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 7. El Señor del Nicho, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 8. Willy for President, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 9. The Licenciado, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 10. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 11. The Band, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 12. Night Fair, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 13. Tlapa’s liberty, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 15. Courier Services, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 17. New York State of Mind, Claudia Villegas
Photo 18. Candies Steven, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 20. The Original Wetback Band, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 21. Procession I, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 22. Procession II, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 25. The burial of a migrant I, Claudia Villegas
Photo 26. The burial of a migrant II, Claudia Villegas
Photo 27. The burial of a migrant III, Claudia Villegas
Photo 28. The burial of a migrant IV, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 29. Life, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 31. Two Cities II, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 32. In the City, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 33. Looking for a Job, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 34. One Way, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 35. Portrait, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 36. New York, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 37. Winter Corner, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 38. Nebraska, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 40. From Dollars to Pesos, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 41. In the Dance Hall, Rodolfo Hernández.

Photo 42. Rodeo, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 43. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 44. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 45. La Banda I, Rodolfo Hernández.
Photo 46. Black boots; Rodolfo Hernández.
Photo 47. Power to the Workers, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 48. Mask, Claudia Villegas

Photo 49. Mexican Punk in East Harlem, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 50. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 51. Untitled, Claudia Villegas
Photo 52. Summer Punk I, Claudia Villegas

Photo 53. Summer Punk II, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 54. Summer Punk III, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 55. Anarchy in (Mexico City) New York, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 56. Father and Son, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 57. Migrant May Day in Union Square, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 58. New Yorktitlán, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 59. Mexican Worker on Broadway, Claudia Villegas.
WE DIDN'T CROSS THE BORDERS
THE BORDERS CROSSED US.

Photo 60. The Border Crossed Us, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 61. Mexican Day laborers on May Day I, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 63. Hard Worker, Claudia Villegas
Photo 64. “Workers Struggles no tienen fronteras,” Claudia Villegas.
Photo 65. Migrant March on Broadway, Rodolfo Hernández.
Photo 66. May Day in Union Square, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 67. No to NAFTA, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 68. Internationalists, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 69. “An Injury to One is an Injury to All”, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 70. RASH Movement, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 71. La Peña del Bronx, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 73. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 74. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 75. The Colorado Sisters, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 76. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 77. Untitled, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 78. Taco Truck, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 79. Dream Act Now, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 80. “We are the Product of 500 Years of Struggle,” Claudia Villegas.
Photo 81. Prisoner of the México Imaginario (Mural in East Harlem), Claudia Villegas.
Photo 82. Globalization (Mural in East Harlem), Claudia Villegas.
Photo 83. Zapatista Mural in East Harlem I, Claudia Villegas.

Photo 84. Zapatista Mural in East Harlem II, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 85. Occupy Wall Street. Spanish Speaking Assembly, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 86. Virgin of Guadalupe, Claudia Villegas.
Photo 87. Migrant March of 2006, Rodolfo Hernández.
Photo 88. Sunset in New York, Claudia Villegas.
CHAPTER 4

SETTLEMENT AND LABOR IN NEW YORK CITY

The sun is going down. The group has spent the whole day together and the cans of beer are empty. Who is going for the next pack of Mexican beer? No one wants to go, but still the group needs someone to go to the bodega. In the meantime someone begins to hacer la vaca, literally “to feed the cow,” that is to collect the money to buy the beer. Suddenly, Rubén, or little Rubén, receives a phone call. It is from the Captain, who is already on the ferry from Manhattan to Staten Island. It is a warm afternoon, and the Captain is on his way to meet his Mexican friends and to bring them more beer. “Ok guys,” says Rúbencito, “the Captain is bringing more beer, so we do not need to go to the store.” After a big hurray for our Captain, we comfortably wait for him. The Captain is a Russian-American commercial airplane pilot, who just came back from a trip to France. He is also a doctoral candidate at Columbia University, and was a regular customer of an Arab-American restaurant near the university, where he met and became friends with Rúbencito, who worked there as a waiter with members of his family. College students and white upper middle-class customers frequented the restaurant but also hungry and thirsty ethnographers, like me, who often looked for his help to have beer and food for free. Like many restaurants in New York City, in this place the workforce is composed of Mexicans from the Mixteca region (Oaxaca and Guerrero) and West African migrants. In the kitchen, out of the sight of the customers, worked Minacho, a bilingual Mixteco migrant from the Montaña region, and a West African chef who had recently opened a convenience store in his hometown. When not cooking or arguing with Minacho, the African chef supervised the store through the web cam of his laptop.
Un chingo de estos cabrónes, or “A shitload of these bastards”

The group grabbed more food and patiently waited on the Captain to cross the New York Bay. We were certain that the he was on his way to Staten Island. We chatted and drank the last beers and suddenly, el Viejo, or the Old Man, that is Rúbencito’s father, spoke his mind. He told us that he knew some really good jokes about captains, planes, and flight attendants. “Oh no! Shut the fuck up, fucking Old Man,” Rúbencito said jokingly as he was used to talk to his Old Man. He talked to him as if he were talking to his pals from Ecatepec, Oaxaca, or Guerrero, or to the guys playing in a Mexican rock band in New York. “Oh bastard,” answered his father, who strikingly looks like David Alfaro Siqueiros, the Mexican muralist. They began to argue, as they always did, in a friendly manner, while Topo Gigio, Rúbencito’s uncle tried to finish the argument, “Shut the fuck up you two bastards!”

Eventually, the Old Man succeeded and told the jokes. Sitting in front of me, and next to Topo Gigio, the Old Man began telling a joke that illuminates how Mexicans in New York now view themselves as almost endemic to the United States; a picture quite contrasting with those early images of the city in the early 1970s when Mexicans were yet scattered: “A Russian, an American, a Chinese and a Japanese are traveling together on a plane. The plane passes over Japan a couple of days after the devastation of that country by the tsunami in 2011. The Japanese tells the other passengers that he will jump from the plane to bring aid to the tsunami victims. All the others applaud the bold initiative and then agree to drop through the plane’s hatch anything that exists in abundance in their own country to help to alleviate the suffering of the Japanese victims. So the Russian grabs some bottles of vodka and says “we have a lot of vodka in Russia, so here are these bottles,” and he throws the bottles off. Seconds later, he is followed by the Chinese who grabs some rice bags and says, “we have a lot of rice in China, so
here are these rice bags,” and he throws them off the plane. Finally the turn of the American comes, and he grabs a Mexican and prepares to throw him off through the hatch as he says: *allá en mi país tenemos un chingo de estos cabrónes, así que aquí va uno*, or “in my country, we have a shitload of these bastards, so here goes one of them.” The image, reflecting how Mexicans perceive themselves vis a vis the demographic changes, is at the same time historically accurate, having in mind the thousands of Mexican-origin families that got caught in U.S territory after the nineteenth-century U.S. invasion of Mexico.

In the next pages, I present an account of the early days of migration from the Montaña region to New York. Mexicans could not joke about themselves and the demographics of Mexicans in the city in those days, and neither could they address the changes that would come in the next decades. Those were the early days of community formation from the city of Tlapa. So, to some extent the next pages are an account of the childhood of this migration of the Montaña’s people to New York, as told by those arriving from the city of Tlapa and the Montaña’s rural communities, like “the man who has no name” and Othón. As Benjamin Button, the fictional character born in Baltimore in the nineteenth century in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,” who in his childhood was a Septuagenarian male, in the early 1970s the childhood of the Mexican migration to New York was the age span of adult men too. As Fitzgeralds’s Benjamin Button, who gets younger and younger as he grows up, in the late 1980s and since the mid 1990s the massive Mexican migration that followed the earlier flow of adult single men to the city, has turned younger and younger, with a growing young Mexican second generation already born in New York City.

Prior to the arrival of migrants from the Montaña region, in the early 1970s the first flow of Mexican migrants from the Mixteca region came from the state of Puebla, and arrived in

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204 Here, I use the word American for U.S people as in the original joke told by the Old Man.
Brooklyn. Marco Vinicio González, a New York-based Mexican journalist, gathered the narratives and the reflections of this first generation of migrants. Then Mexican migration consisted of male migration, and only adults, fathers, and heads of family settled in New York.

One of his informants recalled:

When I came, there were only older people, adults, fathers, but not youths. Only a few of us were young, because our parents thought that migrating was not for us. Then, parents returned to Mexico, and the sons came to New York. And then a chain was broken in Mexico and people began to arrive in 1973. Then in 1975, people began to come massively because of the situation in Mexico. Everybody was crossing the border. With God’s help, people could cross the border, but others who weren’t, died at the border. People were robbed and murdered. It was a sacrifice to reach the United States. We were coming believing that we were going to be saved from the Mexican crisis, but I think we are not going to make it.205

And he was right; there was no salvation, at least not for the Mexican peasants and the working class. At the end of 1994, Mexico faced one of the worst economic crises in its contemporary history, one that led to the devaluation of the peso. In December 1994, there was a capital outflow of $2.5 billion dollars. In only three days, the country lost $11 billion of its foreign exchange reserves, and the peso lost 60% of its value against the dollar.206 To overcome the Mexican crisis the U.S. government implemented a $47.5 billion rescue package that was issued by president Bill Clinton without support from the U.S. Congress.207 The crisis was the pinnacle of an economic model implemented in Mexico based on the massive concentration of wealth among the Mexican bourgeoisie,208 mainly through the privatization of state owned enterprises and the Constitutional counter reforms to the laws that, since the early twentieth century, granted protection and labor rights to worker and peasant communities. The 1994 crisis

205 González, Marco Vinicio. Private Archives.
207 Harvey 2005.
208 Robinson (2004) has noted the extent to which this massive concentration of wealth has contributed to the formation of a transnational bourgeoisie.
aggravated the wealth concentration and the deprivation of many, such as the Mixtecos of the Montaña region working in the Northwest Mexican labor fields or producing poppy to survive.\textsuperscript{209}

The crisis of 1994 detonated a mass migration from the city of Tlapa, and the indigenous Mixteco and Nahua towns of the region. Natives of Tlapa, “as the man who has no name,” joined the ranks of a population that sought in migration a means to survive. None of the fathers of Mexican Indigenismo such as Manuel Gamio, Andrés Fabila, or Gonzálo Aguirre Beltrán could have ever imagined that their integrationist project for Mexican indigenous populations would occur through an economic crisis produced by two decades of market oriented policies. Rural and urban communities were dismembered, and both mestizos from Tlapa and Mixtecos were re-integrated through living and working together outside of the territory of the Mexican nation-state as disenfranchised undocumented workers of a North American transnational reserve labor army. Like “the man who has no name,” these men and women who had no names either, were invisible in the social and political cartography of the Mexican elite that achieved control of state power in the mid 1980s. There was no place for them except as disposable people, as an economic variable of the Mexican economy.

The Mixteco and Nahua peoples of the Montaña came from the lower ranks of society in the region; as already noted, many Mixteco migrants in New York City had worked previously in Sinaloa and their labor history is completely different from that of the people of Tlapa. They had high rates of illiteracy as a result of their previous status as seasonal day laborers, which often forced their children to drop out of school. As noted by Othón, “That is why they do not speak Spanish, and cannot read or write, they did not have the chance to go to school. You learn

\textsuperscript{209} In 1994, Forbes magazine ranked Mexican millionaire Carlos Slim and another twenty-four Mexican millionaires among the richest men in the world. In 2013, Slim ranked as the richest man in the world with a fortune of $73 billion dollars (Forbes 2013).
Spanish at school or with families that speak Spanish, but most families speak dialect.” And then, Othón continues, one day in the late 1980s and early 1990s, “people began to talk about how life was on the other side [the United States]” and “put the idea [of migrating] in their heads.” Time passed by and then “little kids became men, the opportunity arrived, and they came to New York City, and once they were here, families stopped going to Sinaloa. Most of them did it.”

Paradoxically, in the first decade of the twentieth-first century, as indigenous people migrated in larger numbers, they became “visible” for the elite that had made them invisible. On November 9, 2001, former Coca-Cola Company CEO and Mexican president Vicente Fox arrived to the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). In his speech he referred to the Mexican indigenous population as “our beloved indigenous people in Mexico.” Nevertheless he was precise about locating them and the Mexican labor within the needs of a North American labor market: “The NAFTA society should be the main goal leading to ... convergence in our economies, ensuring that the fundamentals of the Mexican economy converge with the fundamentals of Canada and the United States.”

In the 1990s, the indigenous people came to rapidly populated New York neighborhoods. “The crisis of 1994 was a major one,” recalls the “man who has no name.” “After that, the indigenous people began to arrive. The paisanos (the indigenous population) from la Montaña came to New York coming from Xalpatláhuac, which is a very small village. They were people

210 Montemayor (2001) notes that a common false assumption in Mexico is the idea of hierarchy between Spanish and Mexican indigenous languages. Firstly, Mexican indigenous languages are considered just “dialects.” However, as he points out, “every language is a linguistic system in the same terms as any other, with the necessary grammatical system for a complex range of abstract, symbolic, metaphorical, imperative and expressive communication, and with a particular phonological system” (Montemayor 2001:107). Therefore Mixteco is a linguistic system as complex as Spanish or English. In strict sense, dialect is a linguistic concept to note the regional variations of a language. In 1997, according to the Instituto Nacional Indigenista there were 62 Mexican indigenous languages in Mexico. The Zapoteco language had seven variations and Mixteco had six (Montemayor 2001).

211 Fox 2001.
from the marginalized zones.” Along with the Mixteco population of Xalpatláhuac, people from
the Mixteco municipality of Metlatónoc, and from the Nahuatl-speaking region of Xonacatlán
also arrived. To what extent were they transforming the demographics of the Mexican and the
Montaña stream in New York City? “Before that year, you saw no more than one or two
paisanitos in New York City. Most of us came from Tlapa, or were from Atlixco, Tulcingo, and
Matamóros (in the Mixteca Poblana). A few others were from Oaxaca, but mostly they were
Tlapanecos, or from Mexico City,” said “the man who has no name.”

Mexican and Guerrerense oral narratives point to the late 1980s and the mid 1990s as the
peak of the Mexican migration to New York City. Narratives depict coyotes crossing the border
with “bunches” of Mexicans, and smugglers arriving in vans to the South Bronx dropping off
people on street corners every week. These stories connect the period when just a few Mexican
families lived in the city, and when the first generation of Mexican migrants visited and greeted
the newcomers in New York, with the time of the massive migration when “you couldn’t even
know who was arriving,” noted “the man who has no name.” In the mid 1990s, he recalls, “the
Mexican indigenous population from the Montaña arrived in herds. Every time the coyote
arrived in New York, he came with 20 or 30 people. That was every month. He returned to
Tlapa and then back to New York. This gentleman began to bring more people every time. A
lot of them were brought by plane at the time, but many others were brought in vans from the
border. There were many different ways.”

This way, a region that in previous decades functioned within the national economy as a
supplier of indigenous seasonal day labor became a labor supplier for the North American labor
market. Alongside this migration, the people of the Cañada region (within the Montaña region), began to migrate to New Jersey and New York City. The “man who has no name” continues:

I do not understand what happened, why is it that all these people came here; people from (the municipalities of) Alpoyeca, from Huamuxtitlán. I think they are here because the land was no longer productive, the agricultural production was over. There was a time when trucks arrived from Mexico City to pick up the oranges, mamey, watermelon, mango, boxes and boxes of mango. The region was productive. People came from all the region of the Montaña and the Cañada. It is supposedly the richest region of Guerrero because it had and still produces mamey, papaya, orange, mango, watermelon, and jícama. I had family in Alpoyeca and when we went to visit, they gave us mango or watermelon. The lands were ejido lands.

He recalled that the former agricultural and ejidal lands next to the Tlapaneco River in the municipality of Tlapa began to change in the late 1980s. The once rich agriculture lands irrigated by the river were not productive anymore and became transformed into a soccer field rented by the former ejidatarios. At the same time that the use of ejidal land changed, as deforestation in the municipality of Atlajamalcingo del Monte, southwest of Tlapa, was on the rise due to the penetration of lumber companies in the region. At dawn, cargo trucks loaded with timber crossed the streets of Tlapa. The image of these trucks leaving the city and the region depleted of its natural resources became familiar for the Tlapanecos and especially for the teenagers. “The man who has no name” recalls that the teens named those trucks as los carros de la muerte, or “the death trucks.” Without the trees, the climate began to change from humid and warm weather to dusty and hot. The Tlapaneco River where he used to swim and pick up

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212 The Cañada was a commercial agricultural enclave, also with a previous history of seasonal migration to California since the 1970s.
213 Since 2010, the Montaña and the Costa Chica region in the state of Guerrero have also been penetrated by foreign mining companies. The Federal Government granted Canadian (CamSIM) and British (Holdschild Mining) companies, concessions accounting for 200,000 hectares. The Government has given 30 concessions (for 50 years) to foreign mining companies (over 30% of the territory of the Montaña) without the consent of the indigenous population. Since 2005 the concessions in the state went from 417 mining concessions for 388,225 hectares to 600 (692,736 hectares) in 2013 (Tlachinollan 2013).
fruits on the shore every summer also began to dry out. For all these teenagers, the region was far from becoming a paradise on earth as Alfonso Fabila wrote (see Chapter 3). Instead, peasants were producing poppy or migrating to New York City. Military intervention, growing poverty and social inequality were consuming the region, and the gang violence in Tlapa, the “chemo days” and “death trucks” were there announcing the (no) future ahead for a region and its people. Time went by, the forest of Atlajamalcingo del Monte disappeared, the “death trucks” left the region, and some of those teenagers, like “the man who has no name,” who saw all these changes, now work and live as undocumented workers in New York City.

According to Bergard (2005, 2011) and based on the U.S. Census Data, the Mexican-origin population in New York City grew from 55,587 in 1990 to 183,792 in 2000, and from 227,842 in 2005 to 319,126 in 2009. This change is associated with the escalation of Mexican migration in the 1990s, and the high birth rates among Mexicans. Between 1981 and 1990, 61,053 Mexicans arrived to the city, and in the following two decades the number doubled by more than 100%: 125,181 from 1991 to 2000, and, 138,806 from 2001 to 2010. The total number for the three decades sums to 325,040 (58.5% male). Mexicans in the city grew at a yearly rate of 12.7% between 1990 and 2000 (with a decline to 4.4% from 2000 to 2005). As noted by Bergard, if this trend continues, along with the slowdown of Dominican population growth and the decline of the Puerto Rican population, Mexicans will be the largest Latino group in the city by 2035. In spite of the high birth rates among Mexicans in the city, the percentage of Mexicans born outside the United States still outnumbers the native born. However, their proportion has declined from 64.3 % in 1990, to 56.8 % in 2009 (Bergard 2011).

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214 In 2005 Mexicans became the third largest Latino group in the city, behind Puerto Ricans (790,000), and Dominicans (570,641). Bergard 2005.
In 2006 the Mexican Consulate in New York provided an estimate of Mexican migrants in New York City according to the state of origin. Mexicans from the state of Puebla are the main group with 47%, followed by migrants from Mexico City and Guerrero, with 11% each; Oaxaca and the Estado de Mexico are next with 6% respectively. However, there is no data to determine the number of migrants coming from the 19 municipalities of the Montaña region in New York City, nor to figure out how many of them are indigenous (Mixteco, Nahua, and Tlapaneco) or Mestizos from the city of Tlapa.

Based on oral narratives, I previously have asserted that the men and women from the Montaña region that now belong to the Mexican working class in New York are the sons and daughters of the abandonment, the economic and political abandonment. Considering what has been stated of the situation in Mexico in the mid 1990s, what I am suggesting now is to look at the making of the Mexican working class in New York, its demographics and ethnic diversity included, more as the product of this economic crisis that made the former modes of life as well as the chains of labor supply between the Montaña and northwest Mexico to slow down, as noted in chapter 1. From this perspective, the 1990s is also key to understanding the geographical diversification of the Mexican working class in the city. After 1994, New York stopped to be known as Puebla-York, as migration patterns began to change and to diversify dramatically.

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215 Sada 2011. The estimates were based on the Matrícula Consular, the official I.D. issued by the Mexican Consulate to Mexican born citizens living in the U.S.
Surviving like wild animals

The full transformation of Mexican indigenous from the Montaña as migrant wage workers was preceded by different rounds of semi-proletarianization. For generations, many worked in Mexico’s northwest region trying to find the means for their economic survival, but only to find out that life in Sinaloa “was not life.” Then poppy production became a collective and individual response to provide the basic means for their human reproduction, and even more importantly, an alternative to break the cycle of seasonal migration to Sinaloa. However, the military intervention in the region to eradicate drug production came afterwards, and with it a new round of semi-proletarianization in Sinaloa or eventually via labor migration to the United States.

Following the same path, in 1997 Othón migrated to New York to get reunited with his father. I quote his narrative at length: “The first time I came here was in 1997. Back then it was not as difficult to cross the border as it is now. It was easy; you didn’t have to walk that much. The first time we crossed through Tijuana. I had just married. I married very young, at 14 years old. I stayed with my wife for three months in Guerrero, and then I left for New York. At that time you could get a job in Guerrero, but working as peasant or bricklayer your earnings were only 70 or 50 pesos a day. Life was too complicated. So, since my dad was already here [in New York], I decided to come. My uncle was coming and my dad asked me if I wanted to come here [to New York]. I said yes right away, in part because of my curiosity to see the United States. My dad began coming to the States in 1989. He stayed two or three years and then came back to Mexico. He brought photos and pictures of New York City. All those photos were pretty good. When I was a kid I imagined the city as something beautiful, fabulous. When the opportunity to come finally arrived, I was already excited to see it. I had only imagined the city through the

216 Poppy production slowed the downward spiral: it substituted for the production of maize after the state stopped supporting small-scale agriculture in the 1990s.
pictures. We got a pollero to take us from Acametla to the U.S.-Mexico border. We got the coyote, a man known for crossing the people here, and we came with him. We arrived in the state of Morelos, stayed there overnight and then we flew to Tijuana. We stayed there for a day, and then in the evening we were told we were going to leave at a specific time. It was raining and everyone got plastic bags to cover and hide for the night. I think in those days it was possible to live there, but now it is so violent that I don’t think it is possible anymore. I could not live there.”

“We arrived to the pollero’s house and stayed there for two days. We were treated well. So the next day, we left at eight o’clock in the evening. The distance to the border was about 100 meters and back then the surveillance and border control were minimal. We crossed and started walking across the hills. We walked all night long and we got near to a little town called San Ysidro. We walked for six hours and we were told we would eat once we got there. Since it was raining and it was completely dark, we could not see anything. We were about to cross a canal when we saw two people in the dark. I was a kid so I thought they were la migra, or the Border Patrol. I was very thin and ran like a deer. I was always behind the coyote because he was always at the front. Then we realized that the two people coming were crossing the border too. We got scared, we thought it was la migra, and we ran. But since I was quite light, I ran to the back followed by my uncle and another man. There were a lot of people in the original group, like 25 or 26 and all from different origins. The ones who were coming from Acametla were like ten. There were more people from different regions of Mexico, and some others from Guatemala. So we ran, ran a lot, over 200 meters. We hid in the bushes and when I opened my eyes, I saw my uncle, his father in law, and a woman who was the coyote’s assistant. The rest of the group had not run with us because they heard the scream of those we thought were la migra.
But when they identified their voices they went on their way. The ones who did not run were reunited with the two other people we saw in the dark and all them were crossed that same night; we could not. We hid in the bushes all night long. We did not know what to do because we thought they were *la migra*. When we finally stopped running we thought that the others had been caught. It was cold, and it rained all the night. We began to see ourselves as wild animals, as refugees in the bushes. We had nothing to cover ourselves with, except for trash bags that were not useful enough. We had no food or water. We were hidden in the bushes until dawn. We fell asleep for a while. In the morning when the sun began to rise, the coyote’s aide told us we could continue our way by following the fog. Stay here, she says, I’ll climb up the hill and take a look. She came back after a while and said, ‘come on, the path is clear.’ We went out of the bushes one by one. She had changed the route and we asked her why, but since she knew the path, and we did not, we followed her. When we climbed up the hill we saw a guy from *la migra*. Then, when we turned to the other side, we saw another. So we had to hide in the bushes again. We did not know what to do and by then we could not stand the hunger, as we had nothing to eat.”

“Then we decided to move on over the road we had followed the night before. If they caught us, we would try again. So we kept walking. There, about 50 meters from us, because the fog was thick, we saw another immigration officer, and he saw us too. I always walked at the front, and I saw him as he was trying to hide from us. He was hiding under the bushes and I saw another official coming from the other side of the valley. They surrounded us, and when we wanted to run away, we saw another official. They surrounded us, what could we do? There was nowhere to run. They shouted at us to stop. Then we stopped. They came and handcuffed all of us, except me, I guess they did so because they saw I was just a kid. They handcuffed the
others and they took us to the patrol car, about 100 meters from there, and when we got there we saw four other paisanos, from a different group. They had been caught too and were already inside the patrol car. We were taken to the detention center and there we got some cookies and milk -- a quart of milk, barely for a sip and that was all. We were starving; it was about noon. They did not keep us that long, just an hour or two maybe. The room was crowded, and there were a lot of people packed like animals. The room was like a warehouse, and there was nothing there. It is like being in jail, you must piss right there in front of everyone. There was nowhere to sit except for the floor. After two hours they took us out, ‘get out of here,’ they said. Then we were getting on a bus, and there was a guy from migración, a big black guy, and he asked me my age, I said, 18. Me too, he replied; but he was such a big guy. After putting everybody on the bus, they threw us all in Tijuana through the gate they utilized for people and cars to get in and out."

“We got off the bus there, and everyone went his own way from there. Since we knew the address of the coyote, we took a bus there. He lived in the Zapata neighborhood. When we arrived, we thought that the other people who were with us and had not run either that day would be there; we thought they had been caught too. But we were given the facts: Why did you run? All others who did not run made it; they are there already. So, we waited there for another day until they gathered about 30 people. There are people arriving everyday. Five, six, ten people arrive there everyday. There were three women from Oaxaca with the group we had been with the first time. The second time, there were six women, some from [the states of] Morelos, Jalisco, and from Michoacán. The women were traveling alone, because some were single, some single mothers, while others had their husbands in the US.
“Then the second time we crossed was during the rainy season: it rained almost every day, and it rained when we tried to cross again. We went out again, and we remembered the road where we were going. Then when we got there, to the hill, this time we were with a different coyote. I think they take turns; each trip is guided by someone different. The ones from Guerrero are coming only as guides. They are polleros, the people that guide you to the border. The pollero takes you to the border and leaves you with the coyote to cross the line. They only make the delivery and from there they continue as guides, mere assistants of the coyote. They go with the group, one watching the back, one in the middle, and another at the front. That’s how they work. So the guy [from Guerrero] that had come with us the first time already had crossed with the guys of our first group. The second time we crossed was with other coyotes that we did not know. So when we got to a hill the coyote said: ‘we will sleep here.’ ‘But why? Why we should sleep?’ We asked him. ‘Why do we have to sleep here if this is where we spent the night when all the others crossed?’ ‘It’s because we’re taking a different road,’ he says. ‘We’ll going through Tecate. It’s a two-day walk.’ So, he was changing the route. We did not want to go that way because we had not brought food or anything. The other people, the ones who had come with him, they knew about it, and they were prepared with food because they had come with him, and he had warned them but not to us. We were not prepared.”

“Then we said to them: ‘We’re going this way; we’re going by ourselves, because he’s crazy [the coyote], it’s too far that way. We’re going our way.’ And he said: ‘Those who want to do it that way, do it.’ We started to walk. We were five people, and then the others followed us, even those who had come with the coyote. They followed us because we told them he was crazy, that we had been here before and we knew it was only a couple of hours walking the way
we said and not the other. But he wanted to go the other way. Besides, we knew many people had died in Tecate, so we did not want to go that way.”

“Then people began to follow us. We started walking without the coyote, alone, by ourselves. However, even though we knew which way to go, we weren’t sure where that road would lead us. We did not know exactly where we were going to be picked up. But when we got to the place where we had been caught the first time, we began to remember the way. We were 14 people. And it was as if we were the coyotes because we were leading the group. We had no coyote. The coyote had stayed sleeping on the hill with the others. We reached and crossed a canal. We went through it with the water up to the neck, but it was in calm. It was raining. We crossed and reached the edge of a town called San Ysidro, and the sun was rising. Then we sent two people, my uncle and another man, to find a pay phone and call the people who were going to pick us on the other side. So they went to find a pay phone on the street. But before they get there, there was a fence; I think it was protected by an alarm. Then when they climbed the fence, the alarm began to sound and they went back and, about 20 minutes later two migration patrols passed by, very near to us.”

“We were in a kind of valley flooded by water. So, when we saw the patrols coming, we got into the water and we looked like frogs, our heads poking above the water. Then, once the patrols left we started walking again, dawn was near. There was a river out there, and we walked along the riverbank and the bushes. There was a large and high bridge across the river. Then, when we got there, we did not know where to go. Then we saw another patrol passing just above our heads, and another two already parked. So now what? Dawn was near and there was nowhere to hide; only a few bushes; so the only way out was to jump into the water. Then I think they saw another group of people trying to cross and they pulled behind them, leaving the
way clear for us. Then we said to the people who came with us: we must run. We must run to get there into the bushes. We ran but there were no bushes, the road was clear. We ran like hell. Then, when we turned to see the bridge, the patrol car that was crossing saw us, and it came after us, so we ran. There was a small river, though small it has a strong current, water was deep and it looked agitated, though the river looked narrow. The water was like two meters deep and the river looked narrow so you could jump to the other side. And so I did, I jumped but I could not reach the shore, so I fell in the water. The river dragged me, and then another one, and another. We were about six people dragged by the river. But since I knew how to swim, it was easy for me.”

“We did not realize the current was so strong. The river dragged us about 50 meters and then a Central American man from Honduras who was with us started drowning because he could not swim. We saw his head poking in and out of the water. He was screaming, and then he grabbed a fallen branch, and he began to grab all the others. Then, everybody came out of the water and started looking for a way across. He almost died, he swallowed a lot of water and he was crying for help. When we got to him he was barely breathing, so we took care of him. So, that fallen branch helped us to cross the river. We walked along the river shore because it was covered by plenty of bushes, so we found a spot and we hid there. At that spot the river widens and then we realized the huge amount of water the river was carrying. It was too much.”

“Then we slept. It was already daylight and it was not safe to keep going. They could catch and send us back again. We said: let’s stay here and wait until it gets dark; we have no water, no food, no nothing. We were so hungry, but we hung on. So we were there sleeping all soaked by the river, and in the afternoon the river grew even bigger. We were deeply asleep, and suddenly somebody woke up and he was waist-deep in the water. The river kept rising on and
on, it was huge. So, we started looking for another place to hide. Helicopters and airplanes were flying over, and we hid there, praying they would not see us! Saying to each other, if they catch us again, then better to go back to Guerrero. It’s enough. We were having second thoughts.”

“Then when the night came, my uncle went out again. He understood English much better than us because he had been here before; there were two other guys with him. They looked for a phone. He says, they walked to a street in that little town, a few people living there; San Ysidro was a small town with about a hundred houses, and there was no public phone. It was raining again and then a lady came out and my uncle said to her they were looking for a phone. She said there was no phone, but because they were all soaked, she took pity on them. And she said: ‘You can use my phone quickly and then go, because I do not want trouble with the police.’ She was American. They used the phone and spoke with the people on the other side to give them an idea of their location. When my uncle returned he was very happy. We would not have to walk, just wait for the others to come for us. Then, about 9 or 10 at night they came for us. First we heard the honk of a small car and then a van. And they began to shout: ‘If you are there, then move.’ Then, we got a signal and we moved.”

“They took us to a small town, to the coyote’s house. Then they put us in a sort of basement. There they gave us clothes and used shoes, and something for dinner. They treated us well. We slept and the next day in the afternoon we were on our way to Los Angeles. But they took us back to the same place because there was an immigration checkpoint. Then, the next day at dawn they drove us again, and now there was no checkpoint or anything. They took us to another place with more people and distributed us in two cars. We had to wait until the next day at dusk. Then we traveled to Los Angeles at night; I think though it was far because we didn’t get there until dawn. I hid under the driver’s seat. I was a kid so I easily fit under the driver’s
When we got there, the coyote said to me: ‘You can get out now, it is okay.’ He gave me a hat for the cold and said, put this on, so they can see you’re a cholo. And suddenly the driver began to make jokes and laugh. When we got to the hotel, there we found the people who had crossed the very first time. Some of them had already gone because their relatives sent the money and they were out real fast, but the others were still waiting for their relatives to send the money. We chatted and we told them the whole story. That same night they gave us new clothes; the coyote himself bought the clothes."

“Back then there was no a big deal with immigration, only at the border, but it was not as hard as it is now. We left the hotel about 10 PM. Got to the airport and boarded the plane. I sat down next to a gringa, and I did not know how to say hello or anything. Yo era bien cerrado, era bien cerrado de la mente, (“I was very closed, very close-minded”). Then the plane took off. And when we were approaching New York, it was raining over there and so the plane began to shake, like if it was going to fall. I wanted to scream, but then the gringa started screaming. She was trying to say something to me, and I just said, ‘yes, yes,’ but I did not understand what she was saying. She kept talking and I kept looking at her, I did not know what she was talking about. But I was really scared.”

A more meticulous look into Othon’s narrative draws attention to an important piece of information: the extent to which the U.S.-Mexico border becomes populated by animals. Thousands or millions of chickens which are crossed to the other side of the border, coyotes running, frogs jumping into the water to avoid being caught and sent back to detention centers. Like wild animals, as Othón recalls, they hide in the bushes to survive. Othón’s life narrative is populated by animals -- people treated like animals. His depiction of the labor experience of the Mixteco people from the Montaña in the fields of Sinaloa is also a description of human beings
living and treated like animals, of people being vilified in their search for work, and of men, women and children deprived of their dignity. They are a people materially and morally dispossessed. And when the time to leave Mexico comes, to travel over that vast extension of the continent known as North America, they are turned into beasts and transported as cattle.

The sense of humanity is absent while persons move between two lands, facing the horrors of the border, a border inhabited not by wild animals as in Othón’s narrative, but by a vast collection of human beasts: robbers, murderers, rapists, militarized cartels dedicated to human smuggling, drug cartels, Mexican police and Mexican army extorting migrants, and U.S. vigilantes. All of them contribute daily to the destruction of the communal bonds through which migrants maintain a sense of humanity and compassion as men and women cross the border. Nameless brutal acts hidden in the bushes of the U.S.-Mexico border shape the supply of labor between Mexico and the U.S.

And, in the face of survival before the difficulty and the perilous conditions while crossing the border, community bonds among migrants may become attenuated, as in the following narrative of *el güero* (or the blondie), who left Mexico from the Estado de Mexico at least ten years after Othón: “I killed my best friend and his wife in a car accident. One night my friend was riding his motorcycle with his wife, but the motorcycle did not have front lights. I had already told him: ‘Juanito get your lights fixed.’ He did not do anything and fuck, it was me who killed him and his wife when I was driving my car. We crashed. I had to leave Mexico; I did not have another option. If you do not have money in Mexico and you have killed someone, then you cannot do anything. I had to run, I came to New York alone. I left my town and I arrived in Zacatecas. There is nothing there, the towns are empty, and everyone has left for the United States.”
“Then, I decided to move to the border and since I did not have much money I got any coyote I could” Othon’s friend continued. “I called my home to tell them how things were going. At the border there was fucking chaos. The fucking hotels were crowded because at that moment the Zetas (a drug cartel) were passing a drug shipment through the border and they weren’t allowing anyone to cross. We stayed there many days, and we became impatient, so we forced the coyote to get us through the border. Since I did not have much money, I knew that the crossing was going to be really difficult. So, I called my home again to let them know that the crossing was going to be a tough one and that I might not survive. At the time, I didn’t care, my life was already fucked up, and I had no other options. It did not matter if I died while crossing, I did not care because my life was already fucked.”

“The coyote put us inside an empty tank in a freight train car in order to cross. Then we walked for eight days through the dessert. I crossed with a group of Guerrerenses. Everyone knew each other because they were from the same town. I was only carrying water and chocolates. That was all, nothing else. I was hungry and I asked them for some food but nobody wanted to help me, nobody wanted to share their food with me, including a woman. Then one night, one woman accused me of trying to rape her. She insisted that I was trying to rape her and I told her: ‘Fuck you! How can you say that I am trying to rape you if I can’t even walk, I am so totally smashed!’ And then, another woman in the group could no longer walk. The poor woman couldn’t walk and she was falling behind. So I had to help her because none of her own wanted to do so. They left her behind. I gave her my chocolates to help her resist and then she asked me why I was helping her. I told her: ‘because I am not as dehumanized as all of you fucking bastards. None of the people from your town want to help you.’”
By crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in different ways and circumstances, Mexicans and Guerrerenses running away in the wild came decades later, after arriving and settle in the city, to address themselves as a “shitload of bastards” on a New York City summer afternoon.

Arriving and settlement

The first Mexican migrants arrived to Latino neighborhoods (Puerto Rican and Dominican) such as Sunset Park in Brooklyn, Jackson Heights in Queens, or East Harlem in Manhattan. Since the 1990s Mexicans have been demographically concentrated in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. There were 19,934 Mexicans in Brooklyn in 1990, and 101,533 in 2010. For 2010, Queens and the Bronx were the second and third boroughs with the largest concentrations of Mexicans in the city with 93,101 and 88,245 respectively (see Table 19).

Migrants from Puebla were among the first to arrive, and testimonies point to the town of Chinantla as their town of origin: “Most of the people come from the state of Puebla, but many people came from Chinantla. It is believed that they were among the first to arrive. The paisanos settled in apartments of ten to twelve people because the rent was expensive and people had to save some money to send back to Mexico to their sons and families.217 We lived hidden because sometimes we thought that the migra was coming to get us. We were afraid to go out in the street.” Ana, from Atlixco, Puebla, and a community migrant leader living in Sunset Park Brooklyn, whom I met when I collaborated in a Mexican grassroots organization in the area, notes that in the late 1970s and early 1980s the priorities for the newcomers in the city were: first, to find a job, second, a place to live, and third, to find something to eat: “There were a lot of jobs, almost everyone worked in the factories, though there were a lot of raids. Here in Sunset Park there were a lot of Russian, Jewish and Korean factories. I worked in a doll factory; we

217 González, Marco Vinicio. Private Archives.
were like ants. We worked only where there were other Mexicans, people came from all over the city and even from New Jersey, so that’s how Sunset Park became populated.” In similar ways this form of settlement was replicated in other neighborhoods of the city, that is: to get a job, a place to live, and something to eat.

Interestingly, in the accounts of first generation migrants from Puebla one of the first mentioned needs was finding Mexican food or something that resembled their taste and habitus. At the time, tortillas were made in the Midwest and brought to New York from Chicago. Interestingly too, if Mexicans had crossed the border undocumented, their food seems to have followed the same fate. Stories of Mexican sausages hidden in a case and smuggled from Mexico to New York to be sold for over $25 dollars are woven into stories of finding a place to live or working in the factories. In the 1970s, Mexicans remembered that the only Latino store in the neighborhood was “El Faro 1,” located on First Avenue and 58th Street, where the tortillas arrived once a year since there were not many Mexicans at the time and it made no sense for the owner to supply the store with them regularly.

A small businessman from Acatlán Puebla, and a owner of a successful bakery where I used to buy Mexican style bread and talk with him about the arrival of the first generation of Poblanos to the city, depicted the mood of the everyday life of Mexican migrants in the mid-1980s in the following way: “It was difficult to find people from Mexico. In fact, in the street where I used to live there were only five Mexican families. It was our family and four others, all of them from Puebla, from Chinantla and Piaxtla. The other people in the neighborhood were from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. To be honest, I did not go around outside Sunset Park too often because I worked here. But if I wanted to buy something I used to go to 14th Street in Manhattan, at the time the heart of the Hispanic population in New York City. There
was a bookstore, *Lectorum*, and there was a store where you could find Mexican products. It was the *Casa Moneo* on 14th Street, between 7th and 8th Avenues. You could buy *chiles* and *tortillas* in that store. I think it was the property of Cubans or Spanish, but it was the only store where you could find Mexican products, very few, just *chiles* and *tortillas*.” Years later there appeared the so-called *tortilleros*, people who used to sell *tortillas* in the Mexican migrant neighborhoods (they had visas and drivers licenses). The *tortilleros* used to buy Mexican products directly from the producers and on Saturdays and Sundays went to each Mexican apartment selling their products. “They knew where we lived and they went to our homes and they would say things like, ‘I have *cecina*, cheese, etcetera.’ There were a lot of *tortilleros*, but years later they disappeared because stores began to sell Mexican products.”

Migrants from Puebla were among the first segment of the Mexican stream in the city to be able to legalize their immigrant status after the IRCA 1986, which in many cases laid the path for social mobility, social stratification, and social differentiation among Mexicans in New York City. Economic and legal status appear as markers of differentiation between older migrants (usually from Puebla) and relatively newcomers (from Guerrero and Mexico City). These differences tended to produce tensions and animosity among the segments of the Mexican stream, particularly against the migrants from Puebla who are often depicted as a Mexican sub-group that shows no solidarity with the rest of the Mexicans in the city, particularly to newcomers. Such tensions reinforce the notion among Mexicans that they lack the migrant ethnic solidarity shared by other migrant groups in the city who in their view tend to “usually help each other.”

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218 Casa Moneo was a Spanish food (*tienda de ultramarinos*) store from 1929 to 1988. Located at 210 West of 14th Street, the store was opened by Jesús Moneo a Spaniard migrant from the Basque region (http://espanyu.org/west-14th-st/casa-moneo/).
There is thus a fetishization of divisiveness, which is assumed by some Mexicans to be an inherent feature of the so-called Mexican community. Partition, a lack of a sense of unity within the group is understood as intrinsic and idiosyncratic of the Mexican character. This attributed feature of the national character is not only mobilized to explain tensions but also to describe the lack of political “progress” of the Mexican stream in the city, and its poor social and economic mobility in comparison to other migrant groups. This explanation of the divisiveness among the Mexicans is significantly entrenched among the older segments of the Mexican migration in New York, such as businessmen and community leaders. Although this idea is in some way a heritage of Mexican post-revolutionary nationalism shaped by the conception of national unity beyond class antagonism, it has also been significantly shaped by the experience of the first wave of migrants from Puebla. As noted in Ana’s testimony: “When we arrived to New York City (in the 1970s) there were four or five families, and we saw each other only the shopping day. Some people were from Piaxtla. At that time we were like dispersed beans; some people were living here and some people were living over there. At that time a dozen tortillas cost $1.99. Mexican food was only available on 14th Street in Manhattan. When we celebrated the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe there was a lot of unity among us. In those days, I belonged to the dance group at the Mexican Center. The Mexican Center was the only Mexican Cultural Center in New York, and back then we organized a very simple celebration but with respect and above all with dignity. The Center was located on 23rd Street and 7th Avenue. At that time about 12 families were part of the Mexican Center of New York. We were a family that just wanted to remember our traditions. At that time there was a Mexican community because everyone wanted to work for the Mexican community. We had our internal problems, but we were able to deal with them ourselves. Now, it is embarrassing because the parade celebrating [Independence Day]
September the 15th (on Madison Avenue) and the May 5th Celebrations are a total fiasco. I am sad, and I feel sorry. On September 15th, there is a lack of unity among Mexicans and this is a shame. I am ashamed. Back in those days, Mexican communities worked together to make things right, to try to maintain an identity with respect, but now the new organizations do not respect the first Mexicans. For example, Mr. Magallán (Director of the Asociación Tepeyac of New York, a Mexican migrant organization) is a scoundrel. I am ashamed by the fact that he is Mexican; I am embarrassed because he dared to ask me for $5,000 dollars for being a member of his organization, Asociación Tepeyac. I asked him ‘why should I give you $5,000?’ And he said, ‘well because you have an organization.’ So, he set that condition to have my organization join Tepeyac.”

With the growth of Mexican migration, the previous “ethnic solidarity” based on kinship ties or place of origin has become more difficult to sustain as the Mexican stream becomes more socially and economically stratified and culturally diverse. When the people from Montaña arrived to New York City in the late 1980s, Mexicans in the city went through a process of social and economic stratification that lasted for about two decades. Within this process, people’s legal status, economic mobility and ethnic origins in Mexico were social, economic and legal markers that shaped stratification, but even more the understandings or meanings of “being Mexican or Mexican community” in the city.

What then are the differences between the early stream of Mexican migrants and the latest? Ana, who is a legal resident in the U.S., explains these differences as well as the implications of illegality for collective action among Mexicans in New York: “Being Mexican means to do things well, with honesty, with discipline and especially with a lot of integrity. And these are qualities that the Mexicans recently arriving do not have. They are either lazy or very
dirty, and besides women do not have dignity. We, the first Mexicans to arrive in New York City, were from different social classes but we respected each other. There were people who worked at the Mexican Consulate, or as street vendors, but we were decent people. I understand that here everyone can do whatever they want, but there must be order, respect and above all respect for the laws of this country.”

“Although we crossed the border, that does not mean we are in our home. We do not have the right to do certain things. For example, the phrase: ‘Aquí estamos y no nos vamos’ or ‘Here we are, and we won’t go back’ (in reference to the massive migrant mobilization of 2006 in the United States). It is not possible to say that. People think that because we have children born in the U.S., we are part of the country. No! We will never be part of this country if we do not respect the law, the ways of this country and its people. I did not come here crossing the border from El Paso, that's why I do not feel like the other Mexicans. I cannot defend someone who came breaking the laws. I know and I understand that they have the right, but they do not have the right to humiliate all of us who, through hard work, dignity and above all, great sacrifice have come to this country to open doors. We have to respect the laws of this country. I find insulting what new Mexicans in New York are doing. What they are doing is a real insult. To what are they entitled? What good have they done for this country? Many of them have come to work for less money than we got.”

“Let’s be clear, the first Mexicans, we the ones that are already here, are citizens of the United States and we are free as they say. What we are doing in this country is working and we will continue doing the same: contribute, but with respect. However, the people who are coming now have no respect for anything. I saw many people like that in the mass mobilizations [of 2006]. We must fight for rights, but with dignity and respect. I know they are demanding
something, but the first thing that they have to do is to get their tax ID and pay their taxes. I am ashamed to see that the Chinese are more educated than Mexicans. Even the Dominicans. If you go to a Dominican party, the women are all well dressed and dance correctly. But if you go to a Mexican party, it looks like a dump. All Mexicans arrive badly dressed and they attend it stinking like huarache (sandal) and panties.”

However, these notions about the differences between long-time Mexican residents and later arrivals are not part of a class-consciousness if understood as a rational reaction correlated to specific circumstances in the process of production. This consciousness could only emerge to the extent that the identity of small businessman and community leaders would be politically unified to form a political cohesion, and to that extent begin to form a class. Instead these are fragmentary and individual notions of a group of small businessmen that reflect the socioeconomic stratification and legal divide between first and second wave Mexican immigrants. This divide shapes the negative perceptions among the first generation of Mexican migrants legally residing in the U.S. towards new generations of Mexican migrants. Notably the first Mexicans to arrive from Puebla were themselves former inhabitants of rural worlds, inhabitants whose parents and grandparents were peasants, but now that they are in the city they reproduce old forms of discrimination, as in the case of Ana noticing that stink of “huarache” among the newcomers. In other words, previous differences and antagonisms between the rural and urban areas in Mexico are mobilized in a new urban context to lower the moral stature of newcomers arriving mainly from rural areas. In this context, “the huarache,” is a racist reference used against indigenous peasants in Mexico by mestizos and white people.

And it is in this context that the difference between the town and the city becomes a tension in everyday life. When Mexicans in New York City are asked where they are from, the
usual response is: “from near Tlapa [the city] or [the city of] Puebla. As noted in chapter 2, in the long Mexican history of discrimination and racism against peasants and indigenous populations, to acknowledge coming from the rural areas is to admit a condition of backwardness, to be cerrado de la mente, which also means to be closed to the influences or changes coming from outside. It is also to acknowledge coming from the abandonment, from the lower ranks of Mexican society: an Indian, someone who stinks of huarache. But as well this old mentality of lowering newcomers is connected with new markers in the city to differentiate the stream of the Mexican migration from within. They see themselves as legal or illegal migrants, that is, they use, and with it, acknowledge, a marker defined by the state. “I did not come here crossing the border from El Paso, that’s why I do not feel like the other Mexicans. I cannot defend someone who came breaking the laws.” The process of economic, legal and ethnic stratification within the stream of Mexican migration is ongoing, but such material and legal divisiveness has existed since the 1980s when migration from the Montaña region to New York City began to take shape.

As noted in the first two chapters, the Montaña migrants in New York City came from the ranks of former semi-proletarian indigenous seasonal day laborers and their sons, from the city of Tlapa, workers in the service economy, and teenagers who had never been formally incorporated into the labor force. But there was a third group. In the 1980s, single male ejidatarios from Tlapa migrated to California and later on crossed the U.S.-Mexico border to New York City. Nowadays these men are grown ups and some of them are already dead. “The man who has no name” has memories of these first men: “My uncle Florencio who lived in Staten Island, now he is an old man, but he first went to California with several men of my neighborhood. They were ejidatarios. My uncle came to Tlapa because he married my aunt, but
he was from a small town in the vicinity of Tlapa. I do not know what he was doing at that time, but the men who were with him were *ejidatarios*. They had plots, irrigated lands planted with corn, rice, and beans -- that’s what peasants planted in Tlapa. They also worked in Tlapa because at that time there were two or three sugar cane plantations. I think the production crisis in agriculture influenced their decision to come. They faced larger economic needs, and they said: ‘Let’s try up North.’ And they came as *braceros*, as wetbacks to California.”

Many of these men were seasonal agricultural workers, single men who traveled to the American West Coast during harvests and left the agricultural fields at the end of the season after the *pizca* concluded. When the work was done it was time to leave and wait for the new season to return to California. When they crossed the border, their children were with them. But these children were not like their seasonal agricultural worker fathers because they arrived to live permanently in the city. In the 1980s the people from the San Francisco neighborhood and downtown Tlapa began to arrive in Queens, and they settled in the same neighborhoods in which previous flows of Mexican migrants from Puebla had done before. New York then became then home to Poblanos, Oaxaqueños, and Guerrerenses.

“The memories,” says ‘the man who has no name,’ “I have of the first migrants are of people from my neighborhood of San Francisco! They were my neighbors from across the street, and a boy who lived next to my house who came to New York at 15 or 16 years old. I remember my friends. Two of them worked as butchers in Tlapa and they sold pork meat. They worked for *don* and *doña* Tejedor, a couple who lived near to our house. And then, they disappeared. They went to the North. I remember a kid called Ram. God rest his soul, he passed away. Ram died as well as Pedro García. Ram died in Tlapa. The last time I saw him was in 1995 or 1996, when we were playing soccer in New York. He returned to Mexico and
got sick in Tlapa. People said that he died in an operating room. Two brothers who lived near my house also left Tlapa. They came here too. Another guy, who is also dead, I never knew his name but we called him Grillo (“the cricket”), and his older brother Miguel Hernández migrated too. Grillo also died in Tlapa. Miguel Hernández later on became the first coyote from Tlapa, and he brought a lot of people not just from Tlapa, but from the Cañada and the Montaña region. There were several others from the San Francisco neighborhood. Cuba was the other big neighborhood and several guys came from there.”

Trying to find a reason why all those kids left Tlapa, “the man who has no name” says: “At that time the reason for migration was a bit of everything. It was the economy, and I think also because of the need to see other places. Then, things got tougher. The economic crisis and the lack of money in Tlapa and throughout the region broke out as agriculture went into a crisis, and there were no jobs in Tlapa and young people were really crazy.” In his mind a new expectation of migrating appeared among adolescents, and their culture was totally different from that of their elders. “I think men came here because they wanted to support their family, to send them money, and to provide for the future. Instead many kids had nothing and somehow, I do not know how, they got the money to come.” And then, as in Fitzgerald’s tale, the face of Mexican migration to New York City became younger as the process aged. In the 1970s and 1980s it has the face of adult males. And in the 1990s, it changed quite a bit. It became the face of teenagers like the “the man who has no name.”

*From running in the wild to fighting in the streets*

Violence does not end after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The oral narratives show that Mexican settlement in New York City came with a set of challenges and the requirement to
endure various forms of violence. After crossing the U.S.-Mexico border Othón traveled from
the West to the East Coast and arrived in Newark, New Jersey: “We landed in Newark, and I
think that taxi drivers there are pretty aware about this business with the immigrants, because a
man approached to us and asked, do you come from Mexico? We thought he could be of the
migra, but my uncle knew about all the business and he managed the situation. When we finally
went out, there were four taxis. Where are you going?” One of them asked. “To New York, we
said.” Othón’s first thought when he saw the city was about living in a Manhattan’s skyscraper.
“I was staring at the buildings. I thought, where we are going to live? I want to live up there. I
said to myself, I will climb to the top. But I was wrong, I was ignorant, truly ignorant, I think I
thought that way because we had arrived from the side of New Jersey, so the buildings in New
York really amazed us. And when we got to our final address, the place was not a big deal but
rather a small building. When we arrived, my father came out, and my entire family was living
there already, and they came to meet us. I had dreamed about living in those huge buildings and
having a waterbed. But my dream was too big to be true.”

During the first years of their arrival the people from the Montaña used to live in hotel
rooms, usually crowded with between 10 and 30 persons, like Othón’s father: “At that time,
though my father had been living here for a while, yet he was kind of close-minded; he did not
know how to get an apartment, and he lived in a hotel. Hotels rented rooms. When we got there,
the room was very small, had two little beds, and about 10 or 15 people living in that little room.
Most tenants were people from the street, jobless people, those that are called homeless, as well
as black people in wheelchairs who were drug addicts. The building had such a bad smell.
There were about ten or 20 people there: My cousins, my uncles, all were relatives. There were
no women, none, because at that time only men came. Then my dad went to the marketa (deli),
bought food and cooked for us. The room had no kitchen but there was a shared kitchen on the same floor. There were about eight rooms per floor. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t. We ate, some went to work, and others stayed to rest. The ones who stayed were so happy that we had come, they bought beers and they began to drink. Many lived in that little room at the time. Maybe it’s the same ignorance that my father did not know how to get an apartment. They thought that renting a hotel room was the easiest way. They thought that only people with papeles (visas) could get apartments. So, it was because of ignorance, that is why they could not find another place to live.”

“Then we lived in that little room like bees. We slept on the floor because there was only a bed with four people sleeping there. I thought, ‘is this New York? No, I imagined it differently. I thought I was going to live up there in the big buildings. I dreamed about getting up to the buildings, to the very top, and to see all New York from there. That was my dream, but it never came true. I was a bit disappointed because of how we were living, all sleeping on the floor, in rows, lying on the floor. And we hadn’t any other place to go. You see, if those who had been here longer than us hadn’t gotten an apartment, how were we, the newcomers, going to do so? We had no choice. [My father] just had moved here. He said he used to live in Midtown in a crowded apartment too. About 20 or 30 people lived in a three-room apartment. He said that while some were resting, others went to work at night, it was busy all the time and it was hard to sleep. They fought among themselves. It was unbearable, so they moved up here and looked for a hotel room, it was easier and faster to get.”

In the 1980s, the first migrants from Tlapa also found housing in hotel rooms in Manhattan, families renting alone or sharing an apartment with other families or individuals.

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219 Today, with a $400-500 weekly income, or $2000 a month, to live in overcrowded apartments continues to be a strategy for Mexican families or individuals (mostly single men) in the city.
Today, it is common to hear from men, kids in those days, stories of mothers and sisters who were sexually harassed and assaulted at night in those crowded rooms. Women were also harassed by the hotel staff. They intimidated them, and scared people with false claims of calling to the migra. These kind of experiences are not limited to Guerrerenses but are frequent among Mexican migrants.” As “the man who has no name” acknowledges, “when I arrived here, my family moved to a hotel room. The room was so tiny, I’m not lying, it was a tiny little room. One bed and the sink inside; and a shared bathroom for the entire floor outside. The hotel was maintained by the city of New York to shelter people with special problems, mental problems, elderly, drug addicts. That’s where we lived, we had to live there. You learned to live there, but it’s hard without knowing the language. My mom told me about the first time they came here. There was a guy from Guatemala, who had lived here for much longer, and fooled the paisanos with the rent. “You must pay that much, because if you don’t, I’ll call the migra.” That happened because people didn’t know how things worked out here. But knowing what we know now, you send that bastard straight to hell. It’s a hard learning process, learning how to live in New York.”

The threat of violence by previous migrant groups is also present in the collective and individual experience within the Mexican stream, whether they arrived in the 1970s or the mid-1980s, whether they were coming from Puebla, Mexico City, or Tlapa, whether they were mestizos or Mixtecos or Nahua, or whether they were small businessmen or workers. Interviews conducted by González with the first generation of migrants from Puebla in Brooklyn, offered evidence of the violence of the original residents (of Italian origin) against the Mexican small businessmen settled in the early 1980s: “When we opened the business the first week, everything was quiet. The second week there were problems with the Italians. They came demanding

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220 González, Marco Vinicio. Private Archives.
money on a weekly basis. We asked them what was the reason. They said they were the mafia and they were the owners of this place. Our answer was we will never give them money. So they threatened us saying they were going to burn our businesses. They bothered other Mexicans, but thank God they never attacked us.”

Another small businessman recalls that “the first time they came looking for me, and they wanted money. I told them that I won’t give them anything, but they were many and they began to steal the merchandise and threaten me. The person who was with me gave them five or ten dollars. So they left, but said they would come the next week. And they returned and said they would come every week. When they returned, I was in the basement and they only found my wife. She knew they would come and she began to argue with them. We recorded everything they said and gave the tape to the police. The detectives came in, and then the mother of one of them came to speak with us. She asked me why we were doing that to her child. We told her that he was threatening us. After that, they never messed with us again. But there has been so much violence against other Mexicans. I cannot say exactly how many of them, but several. A friend of mine was attacked with a screwdriver, and another one was beaten in the laundry. Sometimes [they were attacked] because they [the Mexicans] were drunk.”

Street violence became a part of the urban experience for Tlapanecos and people of the Montaña as soon as they arrived in New York. It was part of the process of settling down into a neighborhood, and in the process of forming communities, people died. Their narratives of the early days in the 1980s and 1990s are full of robberies, shootings, stories of young people killed on the streets, or in the subway stations trying to defend themselves from being robbed, or assaulted after work, and on weekends when Mexicans used to carry large sums of cash.

Mexican migrants were prey to Puerto Rican and African-American thugs (morenos or brown
skins, as Mexicans call them). Soon Guerrerenses realized that violence was not left behind in the northeastern Mexican labor fields, nor at the U.S.-Mexico border, violence was here, in the neighborhoods where they were trying to settle down. “The man who has no name,” recalls: “I lost a friend, Carlos. He was killed in a shooting in Manhattan on 116th street in 1992. I used to come around there, and back then, night gunshots were common. The buildings where the paisanos lived were minimal, made of plain wood, no carpets, wrecked; they were like mere shells. You found prostitutes and people with guns everywhere. The Puerto Ricans chased you. They never caught me on the streets, but I was beaten at school. My brother and cousin lived on the West Side and they fought with the boricuas (Puerto Ricans). The Puerto Ricans killed one of my sister’s ex-boyfriends; they beat him with a bat. So Mexicans had to defend themselves. At that time, it was not only having to come to New York to work but to defend yourself from being assaulted.”

There was no reason for this violence, yet it was part of “the system,” says “the man who has no name.” For Mexicans, the border between boroughs and neighborhoods was drawn by the every day life experience of street violence, “entering to the East Side at 116th Street was like going into hell. The borderline with the Bronx was very close to here. All the beautiful buildings ended at 96th Street and Park Avenue, and then, everything changed radically. The border was at 96th Street, with so-called called Spanish Harlem, because it was predominantly borinqueño (Puerto Rican). Then, there was a marqueta, a market, a boricua market, everything was borinqueño, but little by little Mexicans began to arrive.”

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221 East Harlem, or El Barrio, has received the attention of scholars such as Avila (2004), who has examined the local and transnational politics of Mexican immigrants. Sharman (2006) has provided oral narratives of Mexican migrants to examine issues connected to ethnic migration succession in the neighborhood, gentrification and poverty, as well as racial and ethnic politics.
Getting into the hole, or “So you have to learn, bastard”

In the narrative of the “the man who has no name”, as I will show later on, el hoyo or “the hole” is that social place in the city where Mexican workers daily exchange their labor for a wage to live. People commute daily from the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island to Manhattan to wherever “the hole” is located. In this social place, Mexican workers in New York City, despite their cultural and geographical origins, age, ethnicity, or year of arrival, shared this common location within labor relations in the city. And they shared it also with other Latino groups, whether documented (with papers) or not: Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, or with new migrants, such as the Ecuadorians. From a formal perspective, “the hole” makes reference to the location of Mexican migrants within the occupational structure of the city’s economy.

Where are they concentrated and how this concentration has been transformed in the last two decades? Based on the U.S. Census data (Limonic 2008), Mexican workers in New York City are concentrated in the service sector. In 1990, 32.3% were concentrated in services, and 35.1% in production, transportation and material moving. For 2006, the picture was slightly different, with 31% in services, 27% in production, transportation and moving, and 16.1% in construction, extraction and maintenance (see Table 21). Construction is one of the sectors with the highest wages in the migrant labor market. Regularly Mexicans work 40 hours a week with two days off. In general, Mexicans employed in this sector are highly skilled and have spent more years in the city.

Within the service sector, Mexicans are overwhelmingly concentrated in food preparation and services. Both “the man who has no name” and Othón worked as do thousands of Mexicans in the city, in kitchens as cooks, or on the salad and sandwich lines as food preparers, or as dishwashers. Emblematic Brooklyn Italian pizzerias, famous for their oven brick pizzas, are
filled with cooks from the Montaña. Indigenous Mixtecos from the municipality of Alcozauca prepare sushi in Manhattan, or make sandwiches in Arab delis in Harlem. Mixteco women from Huajuápan de León, Oaxaca, are waitresses in American restaurants; Mexican women work as waitresses in Ecuadorian restaurants. Poly-lingual Mixtecos (fluent in Mixteco, Spanish and English) work as servers in Wall Street restaurants. Former Mixteco supporters of the Teachers Democratic Union in Guerrero work as salad preparers, and teenagers from rural indigenous towns from the municipality of Metlatónoc are pizza or Chinese food delivery boys in Washington Heights. But Mexicans are not only employed within the formal sector of the economy. They, and particularly women, enter into the informal sector as street vendors.\(^{222}\) For example, Guerrerense women sell food and flowers in their own neighborhoods, in parks, and subway stations. Also Mexicans, both men and women, get jobs in the streets working as day laborers in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx.

Migrant Guerrerense workers, whether they come from Tlapa or from the indigenous towns in the region, find themselves in New York City working in the same jobs. In the first two chapters I have shown the extent to which the people of the Montaña, Mixteco small peasants, Mestizo teenagers, sons and grandsons of small merchants and school teachers, had their own trades, customs, and labor trajectories, and how each group followed different paths on their way to becoming a migrant wage-laborer in New York City. All these previous differences in terms of the ethnic and labor division are annihilated when migrant workers, former day laborers, small peasants, taxi drivers, truck drivers, and state bureaucrats, enter the New York labor market. In the kitchen of a Latino or Arab restaurant in Washington Heights or Harlem, or a Korean deli in Manhattan, the migrants’ former cultural and class differences in the eyes of their employers are

\(^{222}\) Guerrerense women sell food and flowers in their own neighborhoods, in parks, and subway stations.
eliminated; their identity and particular history as members of an ethnic group in Mexico are homogenized; and their cultural, historical and regional differences are leveled by the necessities of labor.

As noted by Nicholas De Genova (2005), “racialization has always been central in the history of labor struggles and class formation in the United States.” Racism, he adds, goes against the growth of a working-class consciousness and collective action against labor subordination. Despite the increasing ethnic diversification within the Mexican labor force, the racialization of a Mexican indigenous migrant work force is absent all Mexicans at work. However, as De Genova (2005) has noted, Mexican migrant workers have become racialized as “illegal aliens” within the United States. Such racialization sustains and reinforces their vulnerable condition as a deportable, detachable commodity. Striffler (2005) has shown the extent to which hard and unskilled labor is racialized and intrinsically connected with being Mexican in the context of recent Mexican and Latino labor migration to Southern U.S. He offers examples such as “he works like a Mexican” or “Look, we’re all Mexicans here,” statements that show the influence of transnational migration in transforming social categories, in people’s perception across the border, and in the production of new class-based notions of affiliation or identity.

Are mestizo and Mexican indigenous migrant workers producing new social meanings of each other through labor? Are they being racialized in labor? Is there a “Mexican indigenous work force in New York City”? So far the ethnographic evidence discussed in this thesis shows no ethnic labor distinctions and meanings about work resulting from the everyday interaction between mestizo and indigenous Mexicans at their workplaces.

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223 De Genova 2005:137
224 Striffler 2005:124
Judith Hellman (2008), has found similarities in the racialization of “hard labor” in New York City to those reported by Steve Striffler (2005). For example, a documented Central America migrant informant about the extension of the working day states, “You want someone who won’t take even a half-hour lunch break? Go get yourself a Mexican! Hire a Mexican.”

But she does report an internal racialization of Mexican workers that reflects the tensions existing within the Mexican migrants in the city, as one of her informants noted: “Among Mexicans, when there’s a job that’s tough or so badly paid that we think is not really worth taking, we always say, ‘I’m not going to work for crap wages. Let them find a oaxaqueño to do the job!’” However, and in spite of Hellman’s assessment, I have found no evidence strongly supporting an “internal racialization of Mexican labor,” or showing that the hardest and low paid jobs are associated with Mexican indigenous labor, or with a specific geographical origin in Mexico, such as the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Mexican indigenous workers are tagged by their employers as Mexican workers, as migrant workers whose previous ethnic and class position in the Montaña melt away as soon as the working day begins. When talking about workplaces “the man who has no name” says: “they get into the hole, as they call the Mexican migrant labor market, and if you can do the job, then it is yours, and you get it. We all begin working in the same kind of jobs. [Mestizos and Mexican indigenous people] work together but there is an attitude among some Mexicans to address indigenous people, as “paisita” (little countrymen) or mocking them at the workplace saying, ‘hey paisa bring me this, or paisa bring me a broccoli, or no paisita you are doing it wrong!’ It doesn’t matter that they’re working in the same place: they treat them badly. I’ve always disagreed with that. Paisita or paisa is a derogatory term, implying you are inferior to me: Oh you’re a paisita who came to New York!

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226 Hellman 2008:162.
myself use the term at my job, but as a way to identify myself with another person, like: “What’s up paisa?”

How do the Mixtecos from the Montaña get into the “hole?” How did they get a job in the city where these tensions against Mexican indigenous people emerge? For Mixtecos looking for a job it is not an individual affair but a matter that involves the participation of the whole group of men, new comers and old, where kinship is also mobilized to get a job. Right after Othón and his group arrived in the city, and after he joined his father in a hotel room, the group started to search for a job: “We went in groups of three or four people and in each group there was someone who already knew the city: ‘You are going to this street, and go all the way down.’ They split the group because there were many newcomers. We started walking; one of my cousins was with us. After walking for a while, we arrived at a “Subway” store to have lunch. I ordered chicken broth, of course they had only sandwiches but I knew nothing! I was ignorant. Then, we kept walking all over Broadway and reached 59th Street, but there weren’t many businesses in that area. Then my cousin said: ‘Come over to this street!’ We reached 45th Street and 9th Avenue and we found a pizzeria. I told the paisanos who worked there that I was looking for a job. They said, ‘what can you do?’ Hardly anything, I told them, because I just recently have arrived from Mexico. They talked to the boss and told me I could stay to work. I was happy. I told my cousin that I had gotten a job, but I did not know at what time I would return home. ‘No problem, your dad is working but he leaves early, so he will pick you up. So that day I stayed to work. The place to wash the dishes was pretty small, and there was no dishwashing machine or anything like that. I had to wash the dishes by hand.”

Mexican indigenous migrants from the Montaña region and Mixtecos from Oaxaca must tolerate other Mexicans referring to them as “Oaxaquita,” or “paisanito.” The Latinos usually
addressed them as “México”: “Hey Mexico, listen Mexico, what’s happening Mexico?” are common phrases, and are sometimes used derogatively at the working place. Notably, this arbitrary use of “Mexico” to address Mexican migrants denotes the extent to which ethnic differences among Mexicans may pass unnoticed by Latinos in the city. However, among Mexicans the use of derogatory terms is intentional to mark ethnic differences.

This tension, Othón explains, emerges in the workplace where people are labeled simply because of their lack of a proper knowledge of the English language, or the skills to perform the job. “There are good and bad paisanos. There are some paisanos that take advantage of you, abusing you and mistreating you. The cook asked me: do you know how to wash the dishes paisano? He called me paisano to humiliate me. He was from Puebla. So I responded: No, but I am going to ask. Then he asked me if I knew how to do ‘deliveries,’ and I had to ask what he meant. And he said, ‘Don’t you know what is a ‘delivery?’ No, I said. ‘It means to distribute food out in the street,’ he said. But I just recently got here and don’t know the city, I replied. ‘You do not know it, then why the fuck are you looking for a job?’ I was sad but I tried to ignore him, and kept washing and washing the dishes.”

“Then he sent me to the fridge located in the basement. And he said, ‘hey paisano go downstairs and bring me a tuna. But tuna is a spiny pear in Mexico right? So I asked again, a tuna? And he said, ‘yes, go down and get me a tuna!’ The paisano was a bad person, he didn’t explain me what ‘tuna’ meant in English, and I was very ignorant. So, I went downstairs to look for the tuna but couldn’t find it. I was looking for the spiny pear. Where is the fucking tuna? I asked myself. So I went upstairs and told him that I could not find it. ‘But it’s in the freezer,’ he

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227 Mexicans often intermingle the word “delivery” in English in their daily conversations in Spanish.
228 In Spanish, tuna (tunas in plural) are prickly pears, they are edible fruits grown from cacti. Cacti are also known in Mexico as “nopales” and they are green.
told me, you know what a freezer is, don’t you?\footnote{Mexican migrants mixed the word ‘freezer’ in English, into the Spanish language.} Yes I said, I know what it is. ‘So, go then and look inside,’ he said again.”

“I went downstairs and I couldn’t find the fucking tuna, I only saw ravioli, which at that time I didn’t know what was it, but it was green. It was spinach ravioli; I saw it was green so I thought it was tuna. So, I grabbed a package and went upstairs. And then, the cook said: ‘What is this?’ I said, I do not know if this is tuna or not. Then, he wanted to yell at me. He said ‘to tell the truth fucking paisanito, I think you’re not good to work here.’ Then he angrily went downstairs and came up with a can of tuna, and asked me, ‘Mexico, how do you call this can?’ We called it atún (in Spanish), I responded. ‘Ah, fucking paisano, here it is called tuna. I said, well you could have explained that to me, you know I don’t know anything. ‘If you don’t know why the fuck did you come to look for work?’ He said. Then, I started feeling bad.”

“When I finished my day, my dad was already waiting for me outside the pizzeria. We came home and he explained to me how to return by myself: ‘When you return home, you have to walk in this direction on this side of the sidewalk and then you will find the subway station. There are two trains, one goes downtown and the other uptown. Then, the next morning my dad got me to my job. I started working again, and the cook sent me to make some deliveries. He told me: ‘Make the deliveries so you can learn.’ No, I said. I’m afraid I will get lost because I do not know the streets. I just do not know anything. Let me learn a little bit; give me a week. He humiliated me a lot, he said that I did not go to school, and he asked me, ‘Do you know how to read or not?’ I said, ‘Yes, but I do not know the streets.’ I asked him, ‘Did you know everything when you arrived?’ ‘So you have to learn, bastard,’ he said. ‘I’m going to learn, just give me a week and I will learn, I will do the deliveries,’ I said. However, every day he humiliated me. I lasted just one week working, and then they let me go. I think he put the boss
against me. The boss was a Moroccan. So, when I arrived the next morning the boss told me there was no more work for me. I asked why. “Because you don’t know how to do anything and I need someone who knows how to make deliveries. Here's your money, thank you, there is no more work.”

“I left and I began to walk uptown where my cousin worked, and told him that I had been fired. ‘No problem,’ said he, ‘I will go out around here because someone told me they needed some help.’ Then, at his break, we walked out to 59th Street and Ninth Avenue. There was a tiny flower store owned by a Korean. My cousin could speak a little bit of English and he asked the Korean to employ me. He agreed and I got the same work schedule as my cousin, so we went to work together. I worked 12 hours, from 8AM to 8PM. At that time the pay was scant. I earned $240 for six days a week and eight hours a day. Besides the Korean and his daughter, I was the only employee because the store was very small.”

“I began to know how to move in the streets, and to make flower deliveries to offices and hospitals. I liked to work there. What I did not like is they did not give me any food, so I had to buy it. But I was doing well with the tips. When I delivered a large package of flowers some people tip me 10 or 15 pesos (dollars). I lasted a while in that job. But then they began to delay my payments. They gave me 100 pesos one day, and then two days after they gave me another 100 pesos, like in installments. Since I could not speak English, I told my cousin: ‘Hey this dude does not want to pay me, two weeks have passed and he have only gave me 100 pesos, and then after two or three days he gave me a 100 more.’ So, my cousin went to talk to him. The Korean said, that the business was running slow and that it was OK if I did not want to work no more. All right, I said, tell him I’m leaving right now. I will look for another job, but he ought to pay
what he owes me. He owes me one week.’ ‘No, he said to my cousin, tell him that he is fired
and that he can come back for his money next week.’”

“In the afternoon I said to the Korean that I needed my money. I only knew how to say
‘$100 dollars’. ‘Take these $100, he said, I will give you the rest until the next week.’ I went to
work the next day and there were two big flower bouquets to be delivered in Brooklyn. He sent
me to Brooklyn and since by then I knew more or less how to move in the city. He showed me a
map and said, ‘you have to catch this train and get off at this place.’ However, ever since I asked
him for my money he did not treat me well. He changed and started to shout at me for no reason,
for arranging the plants, for watering the flowers or because they hadn’t enough sunlight. And I
could not understand all the things he was saying to me. He asked me to work faster, and he
insulted me, but at that time I could not understand any English. So, that day I made the delivery
in Brooklyn. There were two bouquets. I think one cost $150 and the other one $75. That
amount was equal to what he owed me.

“So, they paid me the flowers and gave me a $25 tip for the two bouquets. So I told my
cousin: ‘You know what? I won’t go back with this dude; he doesn’t want to pay me. I will
collect my money from the money I just got from the deliveries. After that I did not go back
with the Korean and I think I was unemployed for about two months because I was a too skinny
and nobody wanted to hire me. When I went to look for a job the first thing they always asked
me was my age. I told them I was 18 years old, but I was really 14. They did not believe me. I
was a kid. ‘You are a little kid,’ they said.’ Some told me to go to school, others simply rejected
me, until one day, the son of my godfather told me about a dishwasher job in an Italian
restaurant. It was a big restaurant. They had a dishwasher machine, and two dishwashers. They
hired me the next day and introduced me to the chef. The first thing he asked me was my age. I
said I was 18 but look like a kid. And he said, ‘you got ID?’ No, I don’t have it. I lost it. He told me to get it because I was just a kid and he did not want any trouble. The chef was Italian, but spoke Spanish.”

“The restaurant was located on 78th Street. They treated me very well. We started at 11AM and went out at 1AM. In the morning we used to clean the restaurant, the windows, the stairs, and the bathroom. In the meantime the cooks had prepared food for all workers. We ate pasta, chicken; we had different food every day. At that time I did not drink alcohol, but that’s when I started drinking. Every day they gave us chelas (beers) and food before going home, two beers and then home. And also we ate before working. Most of the workers in the kitchen were Peruvians and Ecuadorians. The second chef was Peruvian, the first chef was Italian and the two dishwashers were Mexicans. We were the only Mexicans. Our work was divided in sections; each person had his own. I washed the plates and glasses, and my coworker the pans.”

“The chamba, or the work was pretty good. For example, when there were dessert leftovers, they said, ‘come kiddo, come and eat dessert.’ It was really nice. However, I had to leave it because my uncle arrived in the city and I felt compassion for him, as he was a newcomer. I already knew how to defend myself in the city and how to find work, but he had many debts and I told him that if he wanted my job, he could take it. So, I talked with the chef and I told him, ‘I cannot work anymore, I’m going back to Mexico, but my uncle can work with you.’ He agreed, so I brought my uncle to the restaurant and the chef gave me my money. My uncle stayed working in the restaurant and I found a job in a pizzeria making deliveries, so I did not have salary, just the tips.”

“Then, my relationship with my dad began to change. We couldn’t get along anymore. All the money I earned I gave to him, and just had some for my personal expenses. One day I
called to Mexico and realized he hadn’t sent anything back home. So we began to argue about my money. What did you do with my money? I asked him. ‘Oh I’m paying a debt,’ he said. So I asked my cousin who had lent him the money to bring me to New York, and he told me that my dad hadn’t paid him. I spoke with my dad again: ‘I do not know what are you doing with my money because you are not sending anything.’ Something was wrong, because my wife was then living with my mom in Mexico. So I did not know how she was living without money. We began to fight, we could not get along.”

“The next week after our argument he began to drink again, and this time I refused to give him my money and he beat me. I told him: ‘Enough, I already gave you too much money, you have not paid anything or sent any money to Mexico, and now you want to control my life. I’m sorry but that’s enough.’ I grabbed my stuff and moved in with someone I knew from my town. I got a new job, but I began to drink too much. I was falling into an abyss. I lost my job and spent a lot of time looking for another, and when I finally found something, I used to last less than a month and then had to start all over again. I wasn’t making it; I wasn’t the same. Then my father came and told me to go back to Mexico. ‘But I have nothing,’ I said, ‘I haven’t done anything. I gave you a lot of money every week. As a dishwasher I earned $360 a week. At that time it was too much money. I used to give you $300 and kept just $60 for me. It was a lot of money. It was enough to pay the debt, since at that time it cost $1,500 to bring a person from Mexico to New York. So I did the math and it was too much money, about six thousand dollars. With that money I could have done something in Mexico.”

In this chapter I have elaborated an account of the arrival of the people of the Montaña to New York City. They arrived from the abandonment, from the labor fields in northwest Mexico. Semi-proletarians and small maize producers transformed themselves into poppy producers to
stay in the region. For many of them there was no other option but to join their parents in New York City to avoid returning to Sinaloa, as in the case of Othón. The mestizo teenagers like “the man who has no name,” the survivals of the *chemo days*, found solitude in Tlapa’s sunny afternoons. They found shelter on the roofs of their houses, smoking marijuana and chasing the clouds as they passed by above their heads. Meanwhile, in the late 1980s the region was steadily transformed into a labor supplier for the North American labor market.

They did not imagine that one day they would join the ranks of the disposable people transformed into a comparative advantage by the Mexican ruling class. As they crossed the border they were carry on their own individual and collective histories. Some of them experienced the deprivation of their dignity as they crossed the border.

Even though they came as disposable workers, as any subaltern or oppressed group, they also have a story to tell. But as Bonfil (1980) noted for the case of the history of the Mexican indigenous population, these histories are unwritten histories that need to be written. They have to be told. They must be. But as they arrived to the city, both indigenous and mestizos entered the *hoyo* or the New York City migrant labor market. They entered the same job market, they settled in the same neighborhoods, and in spite of their previous ethnic differences they were leveled as Mexican migrant workers.

Finally, a half century later, the ideas of integration through Mexican *indigenismo* crystallized in a way different than was imagined. Mestizo and indigenous Mexicans were integrated as equals in the kitchens, in the pizzerias, restaurants, the construction sites, the factories and the streets where they worked as street vendors. The day came when finally they were equals at the eyes of their landlords, their employers or the New York City Police. Tragically they were not equals in their own country.
The integrationist project that emerged after the Mexican Revolution failed as by the late 1980s a steady flow of migrants from the Montaña arrived to the working-class neighborhoods of New York City. The strong confidence of Alfonso Fabila (1929) to stop the labor flow of Mexicans to the United States was defeated. Instead, the Mexican ruling class promoted Mexican migrant labor as a comparative advantage. In the last two chapters I listen to the voices of a generation of teenagers from Tlapa that found the means on both sides of the border to contest being disposable migrant workers. For this purpose Othon won’t be with us any longer through the pages of this dissertation. We can say goodbye to him as he returns to Guerrero and then after spending some time in the Montaña travels again to Sinaloa, but this time to advocate for the rights of day laborers, and then he return again for a second time to New York City. In the meantime “the man who has no name” will stay with us to recall the voices raised in fury and urgency by a group of teenagers in Tlapa -- the same fury and urgency with which the Mexican ruling class began to dismantle the country in the late 1980s.
Surrounded by robots, action figures, boxes full of comic books, and an impressive punk vinyl collection, Vigo sits in front of his desk watching a YouTube video of the *Ricardo Flores Magón Band*, a Rash French band. Leftovers of his vegetarian lunch are next to the computer. He is drinking a Budweiser, the bottle is on his desk right next to a smiling rubber figure of Crusty the Clown, the *Simpsons*’ character. Vigo is watching the computer again, the Brigada is singing “C’est notre, c’est notre identité, Oui c’est notre, c’est notre identité, Pas besoin de graver les mémoires.”

His eyes are now on Crusty the Clown, he takes another sip of beer, and then begins to talk of his memories, the memories of his generation: the first generation of rockers and punks in the city of Tlapa. I am sitting on his bed, my recorder is on; I have a beer in my hand and I am ready to listen. He remembers how rock music arrived in Tlapa in the mid 1980s, changing and shaping the attitudes, behaviors, and ideas of then new young generations, the first “rockers” and “ punks” in the city. Punk and rock shaped the visions of his generation, in the threshold between childhood and adolescence, countless lonely afternoons spent lying on the rooftops of their houses during the *chemo* days (see Chapter 2).

As I will show in this chapter, for a whole generation of young Tlapanecos punk and rock music helped them become conscious of themselves and the social and political life in the

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230 It’s ours, this is our identity/ Yes, its ours, this our identity/ No need to bury the memories (Identité. Brigada Flores Magón). Rash, the Red and Anarchist Skinhead, is an anti-racist, anti-fascist and left wing skinhead punk movement (identified for the three arrows antifascist circle symbol). It emerged in New York City during the early 1990s as a response to right-wing skinhead attacks in the city.
Montaña and a means to express class conflict, state oppression, and the social inequality in the region. As Vigo’s story will illuminate, this collective experience is powerfully connected to the labor migration from Mexico to the United States.

“C'est notre, c'est notre identité,” go the lyrics of Brigada Flores Magón, and if you look at the history of a group of now young adult Guerrerense migrant workers from the Montaña in New York City, this is very true. They are punks, ‘Punk est son identité’. They use punk as an identity to confirm and contest their belonging to the Mexican and Guerrerense working class. With it, they share a history of abandonment that goes beyond their ethnic and cultural differences as well as the class experiences that separate mestizos and Mixteco indigenous people. On a Sunday morning, and after several previous attempts, I finally took the ferry to Staten Island ferry to meet Vigo. Later that afternoon, the phrase “pas besoin de graver les mémoires,” from the Brigada Flores Magón’s song, resonated in my head. After all, the phrase ‘no need to bury the memories’ makes a lot of sense particularly if those ‘memories’ inform us about a people’s social history.

“He is like a hermit,” “the man who has no name” told me several months before. “He doesn’t like to talk to any one,” he added laconically. But in spite of his warning, I got Vigo’s number and called him. We did not know each other. I really wanted to meet him, I did not care whether he would show interest in my research or not. A couple of weeks later we were in Staten Island drinking beer in a small house he shared with two Mexican roommates, a home he described as “a place where God never set foot,” in reference to the hardship of the living conditions on Staten Island. At that time, he was living in the south of the island, away from Fort Richmond, the Oaxaqueño enclave in the borough, and the heart of the Mexican community there.
This was a tranquil suburban area that contrasted strongly with the hardcore punk scene in New York City and the mosh pits where Vigo liked to spend his time off. To some extent, he was really a solitary person, mentally and physically. His surroundings resembled this solitude, an attitude and a state of mind miles away from the fury and wilderness of the New York City punk gigs. There were a few houses around his, and there was a Russian mini market where we often bought beer and junk food, and a pair of convenience stores. The lonesomeness of the streets during that sunny day seemed to be an extension of his persona, a lonely man living “where God never set foot,” ironically an atheist who chose to live there for a practical reason: his job was there. He worked as night clerk and plumber in a motel, a cheap motel full of stories of Mexican women beaten and sexually abused, and customers murdered in their rooms. He worked the evening shift at the front desk, attached to a small room with a TV set, a monitor, a desk and a carton of cheap beer.

The motel was half a mile from the shore. The Verrazano Bridge and the cargo ships pulling in and out of the Brooklyn bay were visible from there. The solitude of the streets contrasted with the patina of history and the landscape of the shore, the same landscape thousands of nineteenth and early twentieth century European immigrants saw on their arrival to New York City. It contrasted with the sadness of the empty street I saw on that sunny Sunday morning, with a Tae kwon do gym closed, and the image of Vigo, a man in his early 40’s standing alone at the bus stop, waiting for me. Yes, maybe Vigo was a bit like a hermit, as “the man who has no name” had warned me. But the day I met him in that quiet empty suburban Staten Island street, I found him to be a friendly and sociable guy.

Vigo arrived to New York City about two decades ago with the plan to stay for one year, but as he notes today, “a shitload of time has already passed,” and though he has come and gone
to Tlapa, he has never returned permanently. The dust accumulated on a legion of toy robots surrounding and watching him in his bedroom serve as a time marker; recording the passing of time, measuring the length of his lifetime in New York City since his brother passed away. The dusty robots that belonged to his brother are memory keepers standing in the same place where he left them. Vigo gives a glance to one of the many robots placed on a shelf next to a window, a biped brown robot with red and yellow blasters on its chest. No one or nothing escapes the imperative of time. “There is a lot of stuff from my brother here. I hardly have touched anything. He lived here, so I’ve hardly moved anything. This dude was in love with his fucking robots.” His brother is dead but the robots are still his. Vigo stops talking and goes out of the bedroom to bring some stuff to show me: comics, books on punk and anarchism, photographs of their early days in New York, and old copies of Banda Rockera (a Mexican zine edited in Mexico City since the 1980s). “I will return to Mexico next year, so I am going to give you all my personal library, I don’t want it.”

Months passed since our first meeting. A new year came and he did not leave New York City. “He has been saying that every year, but he never leaves New York,” said “the man who has no name.” Like many Mexicans migrants in New York, Vigo talks about finally returning to live in Mexico, year after year; but as in most cases the day never arrives. Many wake up living in the same city, having their mind fixed on a faraway place.

A day in the fall of 2012 Vigo woke up and his brother’s robots were no longer in his bedroom. A wild woman had come from the south and took almost everything he had. With no mercy she had taken his inner world away, wiping out what he had built during two decades of living in the city. He could not have imagined his life would be swept away by such a violent force, one similar to the one that took his brother away. His books, comics, records, rock bands
t-shirts and his brother’s robots; everything was gone, destroyed by hurricane Sandy. Yet, he did not leave his place. He remained there for two more days and then moved to a small bedroom in the motel where he worked as clerk. In the aftermath, he lived in the dark, with just a candle illuminating the bedroom; he had no clothes, he had lost everything. “The man who has no name” was the first to contact him and the one who told me Vigo had lost everything: “He wanted to cry, but he said he was alive and still had both of his arms to survive.” With no electricity it was impossible to communicate with him, his cell phone battery had run out.

It was only after a week that I could talk to him. “I don’t have a house, there is nothing left, my house was torn down… it was torn down and I could rescue almost nothing, just a few t-shirts. That’s all, nothing else.” But he was not correct: Sandy had not stolen everything from him. Something remained. Months before, Vigo had loaned me some of his photographs, a very small personal photo archive of his early days in New York. He had completely forgotten. He was sure that those images of his early life with his brother in the city had been destroyed, that Sandy has swallowed them.

“I have your photos, including your brother’s. Don’t you remember?” I told him.

“Really! I was shouting and screaming like a crazy man. I looked for them in the debris, but thought they were gone, I thought I had lost them forever!” Those photographs were the only objects ‘saved’ from his house and the only images he has of him and his brother. But those images were also pictures of the early days of Tlapaneco punks in New York City. In those amateur photos he is sitting in the kitchen, or playing his guitar with a Sid Vicious poster in the back of his bedroom. In others, it is possible to recognize suitcases signifying the time when Vigo traveled between New York and Tlapa, two cities that apparently were culturally distant
(particularly in the late 1980s) but in reality were connected through punk music flowing north to south of the border.

Unlike Mixteco migrant workers, who have developed a set of ideas and aspirations of New York City by family postcards with skyscrapers that nurtured the idea that one day they would climb and live in those skyscrapers, the urban youngsters from Tlapa had an image of the city connected to rock and punk. When Sandy hit Staten Island destroying Vigo’s house, it was not the first time he had faced and endured loss, whether of a loved one or the material effects of his life, whether in Tlapa or New York.

At different moments of his life, he had lost people and meaningful objects of his inner world. Late in the 1980s, his father passed away in Tlapa. “I got sick, apparently depressed. I loved my father so much. Of all my brothers I was the son closest to him. I stopped eating, and I began to get thinner, and thinner, and thinner. I got the HIV test, and my uncle said, ‘probably you had sex with a faggot.’”

Years later, his brother who lived in New York City passed away, and Vigo returned to bury him in Tlapa. His mother had sold the family house by then and moved to a new one. “My mother sold the family house, but all my comics and my records stayed there; everything went to hell. ‘Oh, yes!’, I said to her, ‘you moved out what you needed but you left behind my stuff!’ ‘What do you need your stuff for?’” was her response.

“At that time I had the Chac Mol album. I had a fucking great vinyl collection; today it would be very expensive, if I still had it. I had the first Sólo para Punks album, (For Punks only) the first album of Los Yaps, as well as the first albums of Massacre 68 and the Blues Boys. I had more than 300 albums and a collection of rock magazines. I had the Banda Rockera, Sonido, and Conecte magazines. Conecte was really fucking great: I think Walter Schmidt from Mexican
band Casino Shanghai edited it. Back then I always wanted to be at every concert! When Jorge Reyes went to Tlapa he autographed my album and I thought, oh dude, this is the first fucking rock musician that I met here in Tlapa!”231

“I remember when he signed my copy of his White Album, he told me: ‘These copies are very rare.’ And I just bought it from a street vendor in Tlapa. I bought it just because someone came to sell records to the city. Jorge Reyes told me, ‘this album is very rare.’ He signed my copy and wrote down: ‘the darkest place is under the lamp.’” To this day Vigo has no interpretation of Reyes’ words. “What do they mean?” I asked him. “I don’t know,” was his response. Oddly enough, years later, when Sandy, a woman who came from the south, hit and vanished from New York, she left him and thousands of New Yorkers in the dark. In those days Vigo had no alternative but lighting the darkness with a candle that seemed as fragile as his own existence.

Finding the “navels” of Mexican Rock in New York City

The following are the individual and collective recollections of a group of young migrant workers in New York City. It is the history of their affections, sentiments, and grievances about the social world they see and live in. As a social world they despise it because it is based on social inequality and political oppression, and because this is a world they could not transform into a better place. Or at least that is the conclusion to which they have arrived after their life experience as migrants. However, and paraphrasing here the song of the Brigada Flores Magón played that afternoon at Vigo’s house, there is no need to bury their memories, and even less

231 Jorge Reyes (1952-2009) a musician trained at the National School of Music of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México was an ethno musicologist as well as the founder of one of the first rock progressive cult bands in Mexico, Chac Mool. Similar to European trends in progressive rock in the 1970s, Chac Mool challenged the boundaries between so-called upper culture and lower culture. As a Mexican educated musician he played rock and also began to experiment with the incorporation of pre-Hispanic instruments.
when they carry the ideas, sentiments, affections, and beliefs of proletarians, Mexican members
of the working class in New York City.

One winter night in New Jersey, Aragón, a Mexican migrant songwriter and singer in a
Mexican rock and roll band asked me about ‘el ombligo’ or ‘the navel’ of Mexican rock in New
York. He was trying to figure out where Mexican rock in the city was born and where the first
gigs or **tocadas** or **toquines** of Mexican rock had started in the cultural geography of the city. I
do not know, I said. And I asked him the same question. He answered in a quiet desperate tone
that he did not know either, and that the question had worried him for a long time. “It is the
same question I asked myself over and over again.” He stared at me truly worried for not
knowing the place where the Mexicans and **la banda** (see Chapter 6) began to **rocanrolear** or to
play rock music. Where was Mexican rock born in New York City? Or where is the navel of
Mexican rock located? It is not a futile and superficial question for a member of **la banda**, for a
**roquero** and for a migrant. To know where Mexican rock in New York City was born is to know
the place where he comes from, the origin of the community to which he belongs. As a matter of
fact the question is still disputed in the narratives of both Mexicans and **roqueros** (those who
enjoy listening and playing rock) in the city.

The birthplace of Mexican rock, that genre played by Mexican migrant workers, has not
one but at least three navels located in different boroughs of the city. The first is located in
Manhattan on 125th Street in East Harlem, or “El Barrio,” one of the neighborhoods where
Mexicans from the state of Puebla first settled. The rock gigs, or **tocadas** began to be organized
in the mid-1990s by Mexican **sonideros** at a time when the neighborhood still was primarily

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232 The *sonidero* is a working class variant of the DJ. The *sonidero* is the owner of audio and illumination
equipment dedicated to organize popular dances, usually in working-class neighborhoods. The events organized by
the *sonidero* are usually held in public spaces or streets that are closed for the purpose of carrying the event.
Originating in the 1970s and early 1980s in Mexico City working-class neighborhoods, the *sonidero* emerged as a
Puerto Rican. The gigs were usually held on weekends and in clandestine locations, usually basements. At that time, there were no flyers but people themselves spread the word about the *toquines*. ‘El Jack,’ a migrant from the Mexico City periphery, a butcher, and member of a Mexican rock band in New York recalls that “clandestine locations were rented by the organizers to avoid the arrival of the *tira*, or the police,” and they often ended with *putazos* (fights) and street brawls. At dawn, the young Mexicans used to gather on the street outside of the clandestine locales, and they aroused the suspicion of the police. Often the gigs were banned.

The second navel of Mexican rock was located in Woodside, Queens. In the mid-1990s the *sonideros* organized the first rock shows with “Mexican local bands,” usually bands of Mexican migrant workers playing covers of Spanish and Mexicans bands. “El Jack” and his rock band were among the first Mexicans playing in bars, or *barras* in Woodside, near Jackson Heights. Thousands of migrants from Mexico and Latin America arrived to this area in the early 1990s. Probably the third navel, located in the basement of a building on 9th Street in Brooklyn is the most interesting for its great influence over the future of Mexican rock, and the formation of the Mexican community in New York City. *Los Oprimidos* or the Oppressed used to practice there on weekends.\textsuperscript{233} *The Oppressed*, formed in 1994 by the Flores brothers (Ricardo and Enrique) from Oaxaca, was one of the first Mexican metal bands in New York City.\textsuperscript{234} In no

\textsuperscript{233} The name synthesizes the grievances shared by many Mexicans not only about their location within the labor structure as migrants, “we do the work of slaves in this city,” but also within Mexican society, as noted for example in the case of the Mixteco day laborers (See Chapter 1). As I finish this dissertation *The Oppressed* has been reunited to play again.

\textsuperscript{234} In the early 1990s young Mexican migrants in New York from the Estado de Mexico, Puebla and Guerrero with a previous affinity for rock in Mexico attended Metal concerts in Manhattan in venues such as Coney Island High, Wetlands, Roseland, Irving Plaza and Limelight. For this period also was formed the Metal band *Corazón de Metal* or Metal Heart which later on was named *Vértigo Fatal* or Fatal Vertigo and then *Fósiles* or Fossil. Guitarist Ángel Leyva, a Mexican migrant form the state of Tlaxcala was the leader of Metal Heart (Morán Unpublished manuscript).
time, this basement became the weekly gathering place for young Mexican migrant workers from the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and the State of Mexico as well as Latino migrants from Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala. They were followed by the White teenagers of Castigate, a metal band in which one of the Flores brothers played.

Young migrant workers coming from different states of Mexico arrived to this Brooklyn basement every week to listen to the rehearsals and drink beer all night long. Nowadays, the social function of this place could be interpreted as the locale where Mexicans gathered, socialized, and began to form a music community. The former fact becomes relevant not only because almost all members of the first Mexican rock bands in the New York City socialized in this basement, but because the bond connecting them was not their place of origin in Mexico but their affinity for rock music.

“Death boy,” a migrant from the state of Morelos and later on vocalist of The Oppressed recalls the beginnings of this Mexican community. “I met them because I worked in a company called the Burrito Bill, and the manager [a migrant from the state of Oaxaca] put me in touch with The Oppressed and we went together to the basement where they practiced. At the time, Santiago [from Tlapa, Guerrero] was the vocalist. [Also] their mother invited us to eat and it was nice because that way you could preserve your traditions. So I liked it because a lot of people gathered and then gradually we got in touch with other people. We became friends and started to hang out with them.” Every week at night, rockeros from all over the city met at that Brooklyn basement just to disappear at dawn, running away to recover from the hangover and then returning the next day to the tedious routine of work. At the same time, the basement
became the place for Mexican migrants to create their own sounds and imagine their own future rock bands.\textsuperscript{235}  

Basements are strongly connected to the settlement of Mexicans in New York City as key social and symbolic sites where the political and cultural urban experience of Mexicans have taken place. Literally, Mexicans in the city have lived, been educated, and organized politically ‘underground,’ in the basements. Political organization, for example, has passed through the formation of committees among Virgin of Guadalupe devotees (Comités Guadalupanos) in the churches of the Archdioceses of New York, or groups of solidarity and support for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).\textsuperscript{236}  Mexican rock has not been on exception; it also came

\textsuperscript{235} The lack of rock venues where the Young Mexican migrants could listen to rock in the Spanish language rock was a factor in transforming the basement where the Oppressed used to rehearse into a locale in which to socialize. As noted by Deathboy (the Oppressed vocalist), “at that time [in the mid and late 1990s] there were no Mexican metal bands and there were no venues for listening Metal in Spanish, there were only American bands, and you had to pay for it.” In the late 1990s there existed three venues in New York City’s boroughs where Mexican migrants listened to rock.

\textsuperscript{236} An example of basements as locales in the community and political formation of Mexicans in New York City is the case of the so-called Comités Guadalupanos in the parishes of the Archdioceses of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn. The Guadalupano Committees were created by Mexican migrants to participate in the parishes’ pastoral activities. Most of the committees emerged as groups intending to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in their parishes on December the 12th. In most of the cases the members of the committees gathered at the end of the year to organize the festivities consisting mainly in preparing flower arrangements to place before the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and in the case of those oldest committees to bring Mariachi music and food to celebrate “the birthday of the Virgin.” However there are cases in which Mexican migrants (with the support of priests) transform the function and objectives of their committees and they begin to work beyond the limits of catholic festivities to develop a collective organization to provide solutions to problems by offering legal advice to their members, creating after school programs, providing health, labor rights information, or by being involved in political activity towards migratory regularization or transnational participation. Nevertheless tensions emerge among them as the result of authoritarian practices among some board members, corruption or the intrusion of external organizations advocating Mexican migrant rights, as has been the case of the Asociación Tepeyac of New York, that sought to integrate committees as part of its internal structure whether to impose its own institutional agenda as NGO or to obtain a profit from committees through the imposition of membership and services fees. In their early days committees were headed by individuals and then were organized by boards organized by kinship or groups of families. Important to note is that the location of the Virgin of Guadalupe image within New York’s parishes refers in fact to the location of Mexicans and Mexican community formation within the racial and ethnic structure of the parishes. First of all, the presence of an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe within New York’s parishes is a marker of the arrival of Mexican migrants to the parish and the neighborhood, but it also informs in most of the cases a process in which Mexican migrants have negotiated their membership as part of the community. The terms and the length of their incorporation depend upon different factors including the racial and ethnic structure of the neighborhood and the community. For example, parishes with a strong presence of Latino migrants, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, tend to present conflicts through the increasing incorporation of young Mexican migrants that tend to replace or co-participate in the everyday life decision of the parishes as well as to incorporate Mexican catholic festivities alien to the rest of the old Latino migrant population. Interestingly, there are cases in which membership
out from below, down below the streets of New York. Long after Mexican migrants began to
gather in Brooklyn to listen to the Oppressed, numerous Mexican bands emerged. Years have
passed and New York City has not only seen the Mexican rock bands emerge from these
basements where they originally rehearsed in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan, but it has also
witnessed their growth in number and genres such as metal, black metal, death metal, hard-core
punk, ska punk and so-called rock urbano. Cooks, waiters, dishwashers, delivery boys, and
construction workers from urban and rural Mexico – from the state of Guerrero, Estado de
Mexico, Mexico City, Puebla, Oaxaca, Querétaro, Veracruz, Morelos, Michoacán, and California
in the U.S. – play in these bands. They play almost every weekend in Queens, the Bronx,
Brooklyn, Staten Island, Manhattan, Passaic, New Brunswick, Yonkers, Philadelphia, Boston,
and Maryland, among others.

However, Mexican rock in New York is connected to rock traditions located south of the
U.S.-Mexico border as well: some roqueros joined or formed their own punk bands, published
independent zines, or participated in amateur radio shows. In the geography of the urban and
socio-political margins of Mexican society, a group of youths connected the experience of rock
to the (class) experience of being proletarians and by doing so, as tiny rolling stones, on their
own, and carrying their personal stories, they began to roll north and south across the borders of
two nation-states. The history of Mexican rock in New York is connected to Mexico’s
proletarian neighborhoods like Ecatepec in the outskirts of Mexico City, the migrant settlements
in Chalco, in the Estado de México, or the “abandoned” regions such as the Montaña, in
Guerrero. It has its origins in scattered cities, neighborhoods, and states that are the navels of
Mexican rock in New York City south of the U.S.-Mexico border: Ecatepec, Puebla, Mexico

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in the parish’s community depends, and can be conditioned, on the extraction of Mexican labor by the priest to give
maintenance of the often deteriorated parishes’ buildings in poor and working-class neighborhoods in the city, as in
the Bronx. (Hernández 2004).
City, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Morelos, Michoacán, Querétaro.

**The navel south of the border**

The city of Tlapa, in the Montaña region is one of those navels located south of the border. Vigo remembers that in the 1980s he used to see a man walking on Tlapa streets. He walked staring at the ground all the time and was called “el Buscaveintes” or the Penny Seeker. The *Buscaveintes* looked and dressed like John Lennon and even wore small circular glasses. When he was not seen walking on the streets in the neighborhoods of *San Pancho, El Peligro*, or in Tlapa’s downtown, he was driving a taxi. He was a taxi driver in Tlapa, a small city then, with 33,581 inhabitants in 1980 and no significant history of migration to the United States. Vigo remembers him with particular enthusiasm because the *Buscaveintes* had an enormous and impressive vinyl rock collection. Maybe this particular memory is so relevant in Vigo’s story for two reasons.

First, in the 1980s the national and regional market for rock music did not include small semi-rural cities such as Tlapa, so rock arrived through individuals who traveled back and forth from Tlapa to Mexico City, and the city of Puebla, or had individual connections outside the region to obtain records and magazines. However, their consumption, as I will note later on, was limited to a very small group of students and small businessmen. Second, back then the consumption of rock music among youths in Tlapa was an individual rather than a collective experience. It was not until the late eighties and the first half of the 1990s that their everyday life attitudes, language, behaviors, and dress codes started to be transformed collectively as rock music began to arrive with migrants returning from the United States. Rock and punk in Tlapa became meaningful culturally as instruments to convey and shape their visions and interpretations about being young, and about social and political life in the Montaña. Teenagers
began to wear black pants, white shirts, and boots, and later on formed incipient organizations such as colectivos or collectives; this way rock and punk was appropriated as a language to contest the social inequalities they were experiencing, including the forced displacement of their people through migration.

During the 1980s, in the middle of an economic crisis in Mexico, hundreds climbed out of the Montaña region searching not for utopias or peasant rebellions as in the 1960s (Bartra 2000), but like Julián, Othón’s grandfather, they climbed down the mountain looking to save themselves and their families by migrating to in Sinaloa. For others, the only alternative to poverty and unemployment was migration to the United States, and leaving their children behind. As mentioned in Chapter 2, several of these kids and teenagers left behind ended up marginalized: they “lost their way,” becoming drunkards, addicts, junkies, and gang members, in trying to fulfill the social expectations around them, and in the long run many of them migrated to the United States as their parents or family did before them. In the course of their journey, some found other marginalized teenagers from Mexico City, Estado de Mexico, Puebla, Morelos and Oaxaca. Like what happened in other Mexican cities, they found in rock and punk music a language with which to respond to marginalization, political disenfranchisement, and the police brutality against urban teenagers under the PRI regimes (Partido Revolucionario Institucional).

If looked at as micro-history, Guerrero is popularly known as Guerrero Bronco, or Tough Guerrero, because of the violent way social and political relations are manifested, and conflicts and tensions resolved against social and armed movements in the state as the case of the Genaro Vázquez and Lucio Cabañas guerrillas.

237 Genaro Vázquez, a normalista teacher and former militant in the PRI, was part of peasant organizations in the state and in the late 1950s became member of the Comité Cívico Guerrerense which later became transformed into the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (ACG) whose members were known as “los cívicos.” The ACG intended to
Hence we could say that the punk in Tlapa was a Punk Bronco, a reaction to the same violence with the anger and rage of playing punk music and being a punk. Now, if Punk Bronco is connected to class formation, the arrival of punk to Tlapa turns into a means for young proletarians to express their sentiments and reflections on the violence they experienced daily, the profound racial discrimination against the indigenous population, and the social and individual pain caused by family migration.

Punk lyrics in general fit in three-minute songs that challenge the popular and media representations of Mexican migration as a passive and victimized labor force. Tlapaneco punk both in Guerrero and New York is about social and historical demands that were out of their control. They included the need for indigenous workers in Sinaloa from the 1970s, the pull of migrant labor to the New York economy in the late 1980s, and the development of a national and international drug market in Guerrero in the 1990s. They also expressed their pain in coping with the social inequality that became the norm for the majority of its population. The songs tell the histories of people for whom migration was a choice brought on by necessity and who dream

overthrow Guerrero’s governor of Raúl Aburto Caballero. In a manifest to the nation the ACG declared that: “The history of Guerrero is defined by its permanent struggle for liberation. The life and customs of its people are based in its firm desire to be free... As a product of historical reasons, the state of Guerrero is the contemporary theater of the most tremendous degeneration and political bankruptcy exhibited by the PRI that represents the most reactionary, anti-Mexican and retardant [sector of the state]”(Asociación Cívica Guerrerense 1980:255-258). In the late 1960s the ACG and Genaro Vázquez decided to quit from electoral politics. The ACG became transformed into the Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria (ACNR) to overthrow the Mexican government. The ACNR maintained military operations until the early 1970s in the Costa Grande Region when Genaro Vázquez was killed by the Mexican Army after a car accident in the state of Morelos. The Lucio Cabañas guerrilla and his Ejército de los Pobres or the Poors People Army was active during almost seven years from the late 1960s in the Costa Grande region. Lucio Cabañas, born in Atoyac de Álvarez was the son of peasants and a former rural school teacher in the 1960s. He was involved with Othón Salazar in the teacher’s movement as well with the ACG to overthrow Aburto Caballero’s government. His Army as well as his Brigada Campesina de Ajusticiamiento (a brigade in charge of conducting bank robberies and kidnappings to finance the group’s activities) had strong peasant support. On September 8, 1974 Lucio Cabañas was killed in combat by the Mexican Army. The annihilation of the social and community support to Cabañas’ guerrilla consisted in the physical torture and massive killing of thousands of supporters in Guerrero’s communities and permanent militarization as part of the so-called Guerra Sucia or Dirty War launched by the Federal Government of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976). For an impressive literary account of Cabañas’s guerrilla see Guerra en el Paraíso (War in Paradise) a novel written by the poet, writer and historian Carlos Montemayor (1947-2010) in 1997. His novel stands as the best account of Lucio Cabañas guerrilla in Guerrero and the military response of the Mexican state.
of transforming their own lives.

Punk and rock formation among youths in Tlapa was as much an economic as a cultural experience connected to migration. When the neoliberal government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), claiming comparative advantage, put the mass of Mexican workers on sale, migrants from Tlapa began to travel back and forth, and with them rock and punk music grew steadily. On the one hand, through remittances labor migration provided a segment of the population with the material possibilities to get access to rock music. And on the other hand, the young returned migrants brought with them the so-called *el material*, records and rock magazines they shared with other youngsters.\(^{238}\)

Vigo recalls that one time a Tlapaneco who had returned from Texas asked him, “What’s up dude? Do you like metal?” The first returnees, including “the man who has no name’s” brother, brought with them their records as well as their taste for rock and roll. “They brought a shitload of magazines,” Vigo continues, “and I thought, man, it must be fucking good in the United States!” They brought to Tlapa the music of U.S. and British rock bands such as Guns and Roses, Metallica, Led Zeppelin, Bad Religion, Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Beatles, Judas Priest, Pink Floyd, Rolling Stones, The Doors and Credence Clearwater Revival. The music of Mexican rock bands such as *el TRI*, Luzbel, *Transmetal*, *Next*, Atóxxico, Masacre 68, Botellita de Jeréz, and the *Blues Boys* began to be introduced at the same time.

Contrary to what occurred with the arrival of rock and roll in Mexico City in the 1950’s and with punk in the 1970s where genres arrived through the consumption of the middle

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\(^{238}\) As noted by García (2005) rock arrived mainly to the following neighborhoods: Centro, Caltitlán, San Francisco, San Antonio, and Aviación.
classes, rock music was brought to Tlapa by the proletarians of the north, the returned migrants from the United States in the 1980s. Although the region’s proletarianization through transnational migration and the arrival of rock are indeed part of the same song, rock and punk music also arrived to Tlapa by means of internal labor migration to the states of Morelos and Puebla, the cities of Cuautla in Morelos as well as Chilpancingo and Acapulco in Guerrero, Tijuana in Baja California, and Mexico City (García: 2005).

Very importantly, teenagers from Tlapa traveled to Mexico City, expressly to the Tianguis Cultural del Chopo to conectar el material; that is to buy and exchange music and magazines. But as Vigo recalls from his trips to el Chopo, these visits were key for them to get in touch with bands, collectives, and individuals related to Mexican rock: “We had the chance to meet many people, many important people at the time. We met Vladimir Hernández in his stand of Banda Rockera. We knew his magazine very well. It was brought to and sold in Tlapa by a man from Mexico City”.

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239 Zolov (1999) notes that rock and roll arrived to Mexico as a result of the expansion of transnational capitalism. The arrival of rock from the United States in the mid-1950s was not connected in any form to youth rebellion but to the desires of Mexican adult urban middle-classes to be modern and cosmopolitan.

240 In 1978 in Mexico, Illy Bleeding, a young Mexican student in Canada formed in Mexico City the cover band Ledy Bleed. In the same year was formed Dangerous Rhythm a pioneer punk band in Mexico formed by Mexican and Cuban upper middle class teenagers that used to sing all their songs in English. Even some of its members adopted English names, such as Johnny Danger (Detor and Hernández: 2011). At the end of the 1970s and early 1980s punk reaches the proletarian neighborhoods of Mexico City and the first punk band, Rebel D’ Punk, with working-class roots was created. Javier Baviera, from the Tepito neighborhood one of the oldest working-class neighborhoods in downtown Mexico, later on migrated to California and New York. In New York City he played the saxophone with the Mexican rock band Vagabond (Hernández Unpublished manuscript).

241 The trips or los viajes to the Tianguis Cultural del Chopo in Mexico City contributed not only to the punk formation in Tlapa, but also in the Mixteco region of Oaxaca during the late 1980s (East to the Montaña region). In the late 1980s there already existed a punk circuit between the cities of Oaxaca and Huajuapan de León, and the formation of punk bands in Oaxaca even included the participation of female among the bands. As Tlapaneco punks, former punks from Oaxaca migrated to New York City in the late 1980s (Hernández Unpublished manuscript).

There was a time in Tlapa when “the man who has no name” was known as the Armadillo, *Don Armadillo*, as a matter of fact due to his respectable social status… at least as a radio show character. *Don Armadillo*, the character, existed in the days when “the man who has no name” joined a group of teenagers to participate in a radio show transmitted by a community radio station in Tlapa. As explained in Chapter 2, I have so far purposely referred to ‘the man who has no name’ exactly as that, without name or pseudonym. I have also explained the reason why he actually decided to have no name for this ethnography, yet in his hometown Tlapa, more than two decades ago, he participated in a radio show known as *Don Armadillo*, and he will be *Don Armadillo* in this text from now on.

Though, maybe there is actually no truly convincing motive beyond the fact that after knowing him very well, this name, *Don Armadillo* plainly reflects his individual expectations about life not only as an individual but also as member of a broad community of Tlapaneco teenagers. Maybe because *Don Armadillo*, like many of his generation, never imagined those expectations would one day lead him to the restaurant kitchens or the construction sites of a North American city. Maybe because *Don Armadillo* in part reflects what he once wanted to be in Tlapa, including his desire to study anthropology “in the same school where you studied Rodolfo,” or maybe because the name embodies the tensions between the desires, possibilities, pains, and realities of his people, a “people on its knees,” says *Don Armadillo*, unable to free itself. Whatever the actual reason might be, the truth is that the line drawn between “the man who has no name” and *Don Armadillo* is becoming thinner and thinner every time. So, even if he is not in Tlapa anymore, even if the radio character and the show do not exist anymore, even

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243 The radio belonged to the national system of indigenous community radio stations in Mexico.
so, he still can be the same storyteller Don Armadillo used to be on the radio. So be it, at least in the remaining pages of this account of his life and the life of a people.

The radio show that gave life to Don Armadillo broadcast children’s stories from the Montaña region, stories ‘originally’ spoken in the indigenous languages of the region but translated to Spanish, as he remembers. This was the case of the story “Ozomatli and Don Armadillo.” The stories were performed as part of a workshop for children during the 1980s: “when we started to participate in the show we were part of a small music, dance, theater, and painting workshop. Boys would learn a craft there. I was in the drawing classes first and then I began to attend the acting workshop. Our teacher then wanted to produce a play which had never done before due to the lack of economic resources.” The original children’s radio show became a weekly radio show for teenagers, and Don Armadillo came to life, and then in 1986 became one of the hosts of the first rock radio show broadcast in Tlapa and the Montaña.

The radio show started, according to Vigo, because of the intervention of an anthropologist from Mexico City, though nobody remembers what his business was in the Montaña for sure. He was living in the housing complex of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and met Vigo because the house plumbing needed repair. “I met this dude who was kind of a hippie. I think he was an anthropologist. He was very skinny and his wife was white, they were white, like gringos, although they were Chilangos.\footnote{Derogative name for people from Mexico City.} My dad was a gas seller in Tlapa and one day the anthropologist asked me, ‘Can you do me a favor? There is something wrong with the house plumbing.’ I said, ‘Sure, where do you live?’ ‘I live in the small houses of the INI.’ So I went to his house. At the time Jorge Reyes had been in Tlapa to participate in a workshop and collect music from the region. I saw the anthropologist again and he asked me, ‘Hey, do you
like rock?’ I said, ‘yes.’ I never knew what the fuck the anthropologist was doing there in Tlapa, and later on he left. I never saw him again.”

Later on Vigo crossed paths with the anthropologist Eduardo Valenzuela, who supported the idea of creating a rock radio show for the growing youth population in Tlapa. “I met the director of the radio station, he liked to smoke pot. This dude really liked the music of Cecilia Toussaint, especially her album “Arpía.” And I told him that I had a copy. And he said, ‘really?’ Then he asked me about other musicians; including the Rupestres, and I told him I knew their music. And then he told me, ‘let’s see if we can hang out together. Where do you live?’ Downtown, I said. So he picked me up and we went together to the radio station, he showed me the station’s record collection. I remember that I wanted to hear an album of the Rolling Stones. I don’t remember which one, but they had it there. So we were already there, and then he asked me, ‘Do you like to smoke?’ I said, yes, sure I like to smoke, but I thought he was offering me tobacco not mariguana. ‘Really? Do you have some?’ ‘Ok, let’s give a try.’ And we began to smoke.”

“We were smoking and talking and then suddenly he said, ‘Hey, why don’t we do a radio rock show?’ And I said, ‘Oh, well, you know, I had the same idea and I was going to say it, but maybe we cannot do it because this is a public radio station. ‘No problem,’ he said, ‘I can give you the authorization. Just get together with a couple of friends and bring me the application to produce the show.’ I remember we were very stoned. And then I asked, ‘how are we going to name the show?’ That same day Vigo and the anthropologist agreed on a name for the radio show, a name connecting the past and the present of the region as well as the neighborhoods in Tlapa, the indigenous brass bands, and the other bands, the ones coming North to South of the U.S.-Mexico border with their sympathy for rock. “I remember, Vigo continues, “our radio
show was on Fridays at 6 PM, the last show of the day, because at that time the station closed at 6. He and his wife directed the first three shows. When I brought my album collection to the station, he said, ‘Wow, you have a shitload of albums. You have even more than me and I have a job!’ It is very likely we won’t ever know the name of the song being played when Vigo and the anthropologist figured out the name for the show. Probably they got it when Mick Jagger sang, “Shine a light,” and then the “darkest place under the lamp” got illuminated for a while without any intention but to create a space to share their sympathy for rock with teenagers in Tlapa and the Montaña.

Don Armadillo was another of the amateur producers and founders of the radio program in 1986. Originally, he recalls, the radio show was created with the idea of broadcasting ‘the material’, or the music they were able ‘to collect.’ Since then, the radio program has continued transmitting thanks to the collective and autonomous participation of new generations of amateurs and radio producers from Tlapa. The show remains as the only one of its kind throughout the system of community indigenous radio stations in Mexico, and has remained on the air for more than two decades with no budget. In 2002, fourteen years after the first program was broadcast, one of the founders summarized the experience in the pages of an independent zine, edited by a colectivo in Tlapa:

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245 In fact, and over time, the private record collections of some of the producers have become property of the radio station. For example, Vigo recalls that, “part of my collection is still in the radio station, they own my collection now, which is fine because the albums are better cared for”.

246 After more of two decades of broadcasting, the radio show has had the participation of new generations of young mestizos from Tlapa. The radio show is broadcast in Spanish and there is no evidence of its impact among indigenous speakers youth in the Montaña. Rock in the Montaña region is predominantly listened by young mestizos. Recently there are some expressions of hip hop in Mixteco. (Although its main audience is located in the city of Tlapa, the radio show has provided a connection between a few tlapaneco migrants in New York that listen to it through the Internet and eventually connect with former friends in Tlapa by making phone calls from New York to Tlapa). Young Mixteco or Nahua migrants from Guerrero or Puebla to New York had not yet formed Mexican indigenous rock bands. Then, Mexican rock formation in New York City still remainsthe cultural product of a urban mestizo migration with the only exception of youth mestizo migrants from rural areas from Puebla who have created rock bands in the city.
Many may not have noticed it, but others may have listened to this space and found they enjoyed rock music. 14 years have passed since the first historic broadcasting, listened by all those followers of this great music genre in this region of the Montaña. In that first broadcasting during the days of 1988 the bandorocanrolersos, (or rock supporters) arrived with their vinyl records under their arms and ready to experience something unknown for them: to be seated in front of the microphones [of the radio station], to talk continuously and to program music for the audience ready to listen and enjoy a good rock and roll. During all these 14 years many people have supported the program and thanks to them [the radio show] is still alive and ready to continue, until our body lasts. The survival of the program in this radio station does not depend on ratings, because this is a non-commercial radio station. Survival has not been easy, considering that few radio stations in the country open their doors to the rock made in Mexico.247

The radio show was entirely dedicated to introduce rock music both in English and Spanish to young audiences in the region. To broadcast rock in Spanish was and still is remarkable, considering the sub genre is not widely transmitted by any national public radio station in Mexico, not even a commercial one. Also, from the beginning the show promoted rock music to support to social and political movements in the region, such as the “Otra Campaña,” or the Other Campaign of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. None of the founders of the radio show remained in Tlapa or in the radio show, but with the incorporation of new generations of amateur radio producers, the radio show keeps going. But what became of the kids who were part of the first generation of the radio show? Along with Don Armadillo, three other original members of the radio show migrated to New York City.

In the late 1980s Vigo and his friend Farri joined the cohort of young men and women that migrated from Tlapa to New York. Vigo remembers that back then los polleros (the smugglers) “brought people by the dozen to the United States.” They went with their families, parents, or brothers. Vigo recalls having been told by his brother, “‘let’s go to New York,’ and having answered him, ‘no way brother.’” But suddenly when I noticed it I was saying goodbye to

247 Ibarra 2002:7
my mother.” Don Armadillo left Tlapa too: “I did not want to come to the United States. I was brought here almost against my will,” he said. Now he has become the second lead vocalist of one of the cult punk hardcore bands of Latin American origin based in New York City. The band’s records and t-shirts have become a precious object of collection among young Mexican punks in the tianguis del Chopo in Mexico City where he himself used to travel from Tlapa.248

Hence, to a great extent the history of punk in Tlapa and of the formation of a punk community by a group of Tlapaneco teenagers, as well as the production of a radio show in an indigenous communitarian radio station, got caught up in the same tensions that in the beginning made the arrival of rock to Tlapa possible through the migrant returnees. Rock and punk formation in Tlapa is connected to the different moments of Mexican and Tlapaneco migration to the United States. Rock arrived in Tlapa in part because of the so-called “circular migration” through which Tlapaneco returnees brought rock music back with them from north of the U.S.-Mexico border. For many teenagers in Tlapa, the affinity for rock made way for a sense of community and belonging in the midst of family separation, family migration, school dropout, drug consumption and social disruption reflected in the loneliness of the chemo days (Chapter 2).

For many urban adolescents in the city of Tlapa, the chemo was an escape from the disruption produced by the economic distress of families, particularly during the 1980s economic crisis, the mass migration, the escalation of poppy cultivation in the region, and the collective sense of having no future. An entire generation of youngsters agarró el chemo, or they were

248 Former Tlapaneco rockers, now in their late 30s and early 40’s living scattered in New York City resembling the same scatter demographic distribution of Mexican migration in New York City as well as the Tlapaneco and the Montaña region migration. Although the mestizo people from Tlapa, Alpoyeca and the Montaña settled predominantly in the Midtown and Upper Manhattan at the end of the 1980s; in the last two decades they have continually moved to the five boroughs. Former Tlapa’s and Alpoyeca inhabitants currently are settled in Upper Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island or Brooklyn keeping their bonds by kinship, by forming community organizations or by soccer teams. Also, the indigenous population from the same municipalities from the Montaña is becoming to be settled in different New York City boroughs and Mixtecos from the same town are now living in Harlem, the south Bronx and Jackson Heights.
drawn to the *chemo*. However, some teenagers found in punk and in the punk philosophy a meaningful system of ideas, moral codes, and a language that provided a response to the sense of no future of the *chemo days*. Participation in the radio show was part of this response, even though they did not rationalize it that way at the time.

Migration played a big role in giving continuity to the radio show and in strengthening the punk community not only through the stream of returned migrants, but sometimes as motive itself for migration, as happened with Vigo. The bond his generation created through rock and roll moved young people like him to decide to migrating to New York: “I see it in this way, they were coming [to the United States] because they had that dream of seeing a rock and roll band, I think that’s the reason, to see rock and roll bands,” notes Vigo.

In the next decades Mexico came depleted of its youth population. Youths were massively leaving the country in the 1990s, not with the intention of getting a ticket for the next rock concert, but plain and simple, to get a ticket out of a country to survive. Massive youth migration from all over the country was a sort of *portazo*. In Mexico the *portazo* was the usual collective act of breaking the doors to get into a rock concert or a gig venue without paying. Lads usually wait until the very last moment before the opening to smash the doors and charge security at the entrance. Perhaps even the *portazo* metaphor is not suitable for in this case as the Mexican state has deliberately left the doors wide open, not to let people in but to let their young out.

In 2005, in the midst of the tremendous mass migration, Armando Bartra wrote (and echoing Fabila’s sorrows), “the country is demographically bleeding to the *gabacho* (the United States) at the rate of half a million a year, more than forty thousand a month, and one person per
minute.” Mexican elites and the U.S-educated Mexican technocrats that took state control in the late 1980s may have felt optimistic about such demographic transformation. However, Bartra’s final assessment is even more striking: “the technocrats believe that to export compatriots seems a good deal [with the United States]: if migrants are a labor surplus because supply is greater than demand [in Mexico].”

The Mexican State has hence deliberately left the doors wide open. According to Robinson (2008), the production of an uprooted global labor reserve army incorporated into the U.S. labor force is the outcome of a broad national policy to massively exclude the youth population from formal education and employment in Mexico. They become an entire generation without social and political rights. According to Bartra (2005), in the first decade of NAFTA, from 1994 to 2004, nearly 13 million young Mexicans reached the age to enter the national labor market. However only 2.7 million new jobs were created in Mexico, and for the period unemployment rose to ten million. Mexico was rapidly transformed into a labor-exporting country. For 2009, 21.6%, or seven million youths between 12 and 29 years old did not have access to education or employment.

First gigs and rock bands in Tlapa

According to Vigo, Qual, from Mexico City, was the first rock band that played in Tlapa and this occurred in 1984. “I was the only one who went to that concert,” he remembers, “none of my friends went that day, not even Don Armadillo. There were three other guys and some other kids who liked the chaos. Qual had been invited to play by the Party of the Democratic Revolution, and they arrived in a Party’s bus. That was the first group we had in Tlapa, they played in the

249 Bartra 2005.
250 Bartra 2005.
auditorium.” According to García (2005), the gig was held at the High School Number 11, apparently with the support and promotion of some faculty who were members of the Partido Socialista Unificado de México, or Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM) and the Union of the Autonomous University of Guerrero (STUAG).

Three years later, in 1987, Vigo and some friends organized their first gig, a small private event in downtown. “I remember the gig was in my dad’s garage, everyone contributed five dollars, and we brought a tape recorder.” In Vigo’s recollection, the attendance at that first gig was poor, indeed reflecting the small impact rock had among the young in Tlapa back then. As a matter of fact, he remembers no more that 20 or 25 “young rockers’ in Tlapa on those days. In an interview with Romeo Flores, another of the organizers, the number of people who were at the gig was about 60: “It was very big, it was the first time so many guys gathered, and I did not know where they were coming from.” In photographs of the same period by Jaime Soriano of the High School number 11, there are no more than 15 young males dancing at the gig. One way or the other, it is difficult to set up a figure of the young Tlapanecos that in the late 1980s felt sympathy for rock within a municipality of 35,581 inhabitants. But this was a period in which rock in Tlapa began to slowly move through individual and private experiences, from the individual time of the Penny Seeker to the collective experience of rock.

Vigo’s memories of those first years of rock in Tlapa are approximate, he recognizes, because that was the time when his father passed away. “After that gig in 1984, we invited Paco Gruezo and Atoxxico [from Mexico City]. I think that Atoxxico played. It can be said that we started rock in Tlapa. Nobody wanted to do it. Atoxxico played the second gig and then we had a Metal gig. I remember that my dad was very sick, and he was in Cuautla, Morelos, receiving

251 Flores quoted by García 2005:37.
252 See García 2005.
253 INEGI 1980.
medical attention. So after this period in which my father was sick, I don’t have a clear image of what really happened, because I lost my interest in rock. I was too much worried about my dad. And then, after he died, I migrated [to New York].” According to other existing accounts of the history of rock in Tlapa, that second gig with the punk band Atoxxico was intended to be held in 1987 but it never happened because the band was arrested on their way to Tlapa. So the first punk gig in Tlapa was organized several years after, in 1993 with the band Herejía (García 2005). That same year, Euforia, a band from Tlapa played in the city for the first time. Also in 1993, Subversión, the first punk band formed by Tlapanecos, recorded the first punk demo in the region’s history. In contrast to Euforia, which only played covers, Subversión wrote their own three-minute lyrics that were intended to be a social and political critique of inequality and the discrimination against indigenous population in the Montaña.

I suggest that these songs are testimonies of an incipient, fragmentary, and contradictory class formation among young Tlapanecos and migrants: “When we write our songs,” the members of Subversión said, “we do it thinking about life in the region. Like the song about the doctors giving medical attention depending on your economic status -- for that reason our

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254 The gig was held in the San Antonio neighborhood. Among some of the groups that visited the city were Incinerador, Desahogo Personal, Invectiva, Lucha Autónoma, Cristo, Sin Dios (Spain), Electroduendes, Vómito Nuclear, Hangar 18, Arturo Meza, and Camaleón. Since 2000, bands with a wider national audience among young proletarians such as Tex Tex, El Haragán, Luzbel and Liranrol, began touring in Tlapa. These rock bands began touring in the United States, including New York in the same decade to play to Mexican audiences. During the decade of the 1980s Tlapaneco youth began to create collectives. They were affinity groups organized around punk and anarchist ideas that led to the publication of zines. In the 1980s several collectives appeared by teenagers with the aim of editing independent zines. One year before, in 1992, the so-called audiciones appeared in Tlapa. The audiciones were rock parties held during weekends in houses and streets and organized by teenagers (For a brief account on the dates these bands visited Tlapa and the formation of collectives, see García 2005).

255 Previously, two years before, the band Euforia or Euphoria was created by former Tlapa migrants in New York. In the 1980s the Valdemar brothers migrated to New York and once they returned to Tlapa, they formed a cover band with an ephemeral existence of only one year. The band was started by: Valdemar Flores (bass), Romeo Flores (battery); Salvador Basurto (guitar); and Santiago González (vocals).

256 Among the band members, was Santiago (not any connection with Santiago González), who later on migrated to New York City.
indigenous brothers have the highest rates of mortality” (see Chapter 3).257 Through punk, as I will discuss later, they were attempting to describe the “ruinous exploitation” of the indigenous population in the Montaña region described by Alfonso Fabila in the mid-twentieth century (see Chapter 3). But also, through punk they narrated and depicted the class and race position of the indigenous population in the region, and once they migrated, they depicted their own social and political location as Mexican migrants in the United States.

In spite of the “ruinous exploitation” that he documented, Fabila was confident that a positive future in the region could be achieved by means of state intervention. Half a century later, and quite contrary to his optimism, in its songs Subversión claimed the impossibility of any true social transformation in the region. Yet they used their songs to interrogate their social and political reality and tried to understand the ancient pain of the abandonment and of being abandoned, and the pain produced and inherited from all those social needs never fulfilled. For a group of young Tlapanecos, Punk was the language through which to answer these questions. Subversión, the first punk band formed in Tlapa, provided an answer to this question in the back of their first and only demo. “Why is punk not merely a style? While poverty, misery, racism, discrimination, unemployment, shortage, illiteracy, children living in the street, prostitution, and corruption exist, punk won’t die,” Subversión claimed.258 After finishing the demo, the band disintegrated, and its members experienced the same misery and unemployment they sang about in their songs. Some of them left the Montaña and migrated to find work in New York City.

If in 1977 the Sex Pistols from far away, culturally, socially, and geographically, warned about the lack of a future for British youth in neoliberal England,259 years later Subversión

257 Quoted in García 2005:53.
258 “¡Por que nos una Moda? Mientras hayga pobresa, miseria, Razismo, Descriminacio,Desempleo, Carestia, Analfabetismo, Niños de La Calle,Prostitución,Corrupción, No. Morira (sic).” Subversión Demo.
outlined the future entitled to Mexican indigenous people in neoliberal Mexico: the right to perpetual labor migration, to be part of the neoliberal enganche, a system of extreme labor exploitation in northwest Mexico’s export-oriented agriculture. Their songs were intended to mirror the most negative aspects of Montaña society. Their anger reflected those shouts of anger and discrimination against the Mixteco day laborers waiting on the sidewalks next to the Xale River in Tlapa, waiting with their families to be transported like cattle to Sinaloa. The crudeness and bad intonation of their vocalism mirrored the shouts of the enganchadores in the Xale River: “Do you want to work, motherfuckers?”

The early Tlapaneco punk of those years reflected the feelings, emotions, and grievances that are part of the historical experience of the Montaña people, the product of a generational experience of dispossession and abandonment in the region, the set of ideas and anger that can give life and meaning to a collectivity as member of a dispossessed class, endlessly echoing the words of the Rulfo’s novel character “What a country we live in, Agripina?” In a country where Mexican indigenous population is starving to death, Subversión sings:

\begin{verbatim}
El hambre es el miedo que desnutre a todos mis hermanos
No tenemos trabajo ni comida que tragar
Nos vamos a chambear, al Norte o para Culiacán
Porque este sistema no puede ni podrá solucionar
La pobreza de la gente que día a día sufre más
Cada vez más, más corrupción
Cada vez más hambre y miseria
En nuestra Montaña los pueblos indígenas mueren de hambre.
\end{verbatim}

Misery is the worst concern in the Montaña region
Hunger is the fear starving all my brothers
We have no job, no food to swallow
We leave to work in the North [the United States] or Culiacán
Because this system can not and won’t solve
The poverty of the people who daily suffers more
More and more, there is more corruption
More and more hunger and misery
In our Montaña the indigenous population is starving to death.  

In 2010, years after Subversión recorded its first demo, the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) reported that 133,496 (33.68%) people in the Montaña lacked education; 146,509 (42.45%) had no access to medical services; 176,171 (51.05%) had no basic house services; and more than half of the population in the region had no access to food. In short, the state agency acknowledged what a decade before a punk band from Tlapa had sang in a two and a half minute song: “more and more hunger and misery.” But the situation was even worse. The municipality of Cochoapa el Grande, with a high density of Mixteco population, had the highest levels of social deprivation in the region. Of a total population of 15,041 inhabitants in 2010, 13,099 (87.1%) had no access to medical services. Physicians, in Subversión’s songs, make a profit for human suffering and the body illnesses, “You’re a fucking asshole Physician,” goes Doctor Ghaleno (sic), in one of their songs:

_Eres un pinche doctor culero_
_No curas a nadie_
_Sólo quieres dinero_
_No te importa nada_
_No te das a respetar_
_A ti te vale madres_
_Sólo quieres chingar_

You’re a fucking asshole Physician
You don’t cure anyone, you just want to make money
You don’t care a fucking thing
You don’t respect yourself
You don’t care a shit
You only want to fuck everyone.”

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261 Subversión Demo.
Anthropologist Alfonso Fabila conceived of the existence of men as the greatest treasure of the Montaña region. Men were the means to valorize capital in Sinaloa for the owners of the global factory. As already noted, in 1929, twenty years prior to his fieldwork in the Montaña, Fabila warned about a serious threat for Mexico: the problem of migration to the United States and the responsibility for it of the Mexican government. According to the anthropologist, it was the government’s duty to “urgently” provide the deprived people with the means to subsist, and to do so in their “very own land.”  

But as discussed in Chapter 3, the ideals that promised the integration of the indigenous peoples to the nation were not fulfilled as Fabila imagined.

Instead, since the 1980s, new chains were attached to the necks of men and women dragged every year with their children into the brutal labor market of the enganche to Sinaloa. Moreover, the successive Mexican neoliberal governments threw even heavier chains around the necks of Mixtecos to ensure generations of this labor supply for the economy of the United States. The Tlapaneco mestizo punk teenagers followed the footsteps of the Mexican indigenous population to the United States and once in New York both they and the Mixtecos, each with their own traditions and experiences, entered “into the same hole” in the same migrant labor market (see Chapter 4).

For former punks and rockers in Tlapa it was not necessary to listen to the British punk band, the Sex Pistols, singing “‘God save the Queen’: “there’s no future, there’s no future for you, in England’s dreaming” to realize their own impossibility. Mexican punks had a lot to say about their dreams for a future, or the no future for the Mexican youth population under the PRI, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the PAN, the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party) regimes. The right-wing technocracy that assumed power in the late 1980s could not have said “God save the Queen” as the Sex Pistols did

in 1977, but they might have paraphrased the Sex Pistols in the midnight of Mexico’s neoliberal orgy with “there is no future for you in neoliberal Mexico.” But as punks saw no future, at least in the Montaña, Mexican technocrats saw the possibility of expanding their “web of national and transnational elite networks,” as pointed out by John Gledhill:

Mexico’s big business groups were increasingly operating across national boundaries, and emerging from their previous political quiescence as the vast expansion of public enterprise and state intervention during the 1970s began to impact negatively on their operations. At the same time, leading members of the political class had become key players in their own right to within the world of business. Social and business ties at elite levels crosscut party affiliations, while regional elites were no longer isolated from the web of national and transnational elite networks.263

But, if in the mid-term future the Mexican technocrats were dreaming of market integration with the so-called “North America community,” a community free of asymmetric relationships between North and South,264 then, what were the young Mexican punks dreaming about the future, or better saying about their future? And where was this future geographically located? I have shown in Chapters 1 and 2 how the mere existence of a place named ‘New York’ was unimaginable for the Mixteco from the Montaña’s rural areas and the mestizo teenagers from Tlapa. So what they were dreaming of?

Buenaventura, a close friend of Don Armadillo and, a Mexican migrant construction worker from Ecatepec, once explained to me at his apartment in the Bronx, that for the children of the Mexican working class “the only future you can see is what you’re building in your present. You never thought ‘what will I be doing in the next 10 years or when I am 30 years old? What am I going to do when I finish my elementary school?’ You never think that, not really. There is no such thing. It simply does not exist, it doesn’t! So, at the end of the day you end up rejecting society. You say: ‘why are there people who have the privilege of having a future

263 Gledhill 1995:337
264 Calderón 2008.
when we do not have one? For us, the idea of a future simply does not exist.” This present without a future can be given the name of the abandonment in the indigenous communities of the Montaña’s, or the chemo days in the city of Tlapa.

Where are the young Mexicans? Where is the jewel of our demographic crown? asked Armando Bartra (2005) in reference to Mexican youth. What has become of them? Some of them are planting poppy and marijuana in the Montaña and serving as drug producers, others are working in the informal sector of Mexico’s urban areas, or in the maquiladoras in the U.S.-Mexico border. And many of them are migrating from Tlapa to the United States, or from densely populated indigenous and marginalized regions to the migrant proletarian and industrial urban areas nearby to Mexico City, carrying with them these every day life experiences, sentiments, ideas, and beliefs about having no future that later on they will express culturally through punk. But by constantly migrating from one city to another, ‘the jewel of the Mexican crown,’ as Bartra called the migrant Mexican youth, was also giving birth to the punk from the Montaña, to the punk bronco of Mexico’s neoliberal times, to the punk bronco of a region where a people is “on its knees,” and eventually to the punk bronco in a foreign land.

These collective and individual experiences shaped the formation of punk in the Montaña region, as in the case of Santiago, the former bassist of Subversión. He was one of thousands of inhabitants from the Montaña who before migrating to New York City fed the labor needs of the medium and small industry in industrial belts in Mexico City’s periphery, such as in Naucalpan of the Estado de México.

Santiago was born in a small town located near to the city of Tlapa. At the age of five he migrated with his mother, his father and his sister to Naucalpan. Later his three brothers were born both in Naucalpan and Tlapa: “My father first went to Mexico City to work for the army.
One year later, my mom was following him, which is what women are supposed to do.” In Naucalpan, his father was working for the army and his mother worked as street vendor: “When I lived in Naucalpan I helped her. We put a small stand on a street corner. I used to go with her to assemble the stand and stay with her for a while. Then she decided to put another stand next to a shop and I began to work there. I had to work since I was a child, but it was not hard work. I knew I was working, but it was not work to me. It was not like a duty for me to be there.”

After living in Naucalpan for about 14 years, Santiago’s family returned to Tlapa. “It was difficult [to return to Tlapa]. I had changed my musical taste; I started to like rock and roll. In Naucalpan I listened to disco music every day. But when I was about to returning to Guerrero, Chava, a friend of mine gave me some cassettes as a gift before I moved. He gave me my first albums of the ‘Three Souls in my Mind’, pure rock from the sixties. And since I was a kid, since I was eight years old, I always wanted to learn to play music. I wanted to learn to play the guitar. I always wanted to play it, but my parents never bought me anything.” Before entering high school Santiago met another friend in Tlapa, Israel, who invited him to his band rehearsals, “I went to see them play everyday.”

Later on Santiago dropped out of school: “For one year I did not attend school and during that time I worked to help my mom, I helped her and also attended the band rehearsals.” His friend’s band had no name. It was when they finally wrote their own songs that they found a name: Subversión. The band was also part of a collective that organized gigs and disseminated rock culture in Tlapa.

Santiago was not directly involved in collective participation because he was helping his mother: “I was not really hanging around with them because I was helping my mother. I had to help her to chambear, or to work as street vendor. So I was not able to participate in the
colectivo, but I tried to hang out with the banda. And when you are a rebel, you figure out a way to hang out with the banda. But, my mother was sad, as she was always struggling as a street vendor. I was in high school but I barely attended it because I used to help my mom to sell jellies and tortillas on the street. She made them. I remember that I helped her to sell jellies in the morning and in the afternoon I helped her to deliver tortillas. After that I went to school and then went home. That was my routine. All her life she brought the money home because my father was an alcoholic. When I say it, I say it bitterly. To date I still hate my father. I always feel anger when I think of him, and now my mom is sick with diabetes and my father is no longer alcoholic. It is always assumed that men must work harder, but my mother was the one who always worked hard because she had the courage to survive. Even today. She says she keeps working to not get bored and also to help my father because he is too old and cannot get any work. My mother is a very tough woman and she possesses a very strong will.”

After being invited to the rehearsals, Santiago was called to play the bass with the band: “I got my chance to play the bass. It was cool playing a while, even though we played very little.” He sums up the concise dialogue he had with Farri, another of the band members when he was invited to join the band in the 1990s: “Do you want to play the bass? -Yes, it is okay.” Shortly after that the band broke up due to financial constraints. The drummer had to sell his battery in order to buy a compressor he needed to get a job. The bass played by Santiago actually belonged to Farri’s friend, the bandleader, who had died and the family wanted it back.265

So, the first punk band in Tlapa’s history despite its desire to smash the state and its class system once and for all, came to an end with a battery that had to be sold to buy some machinery,

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265 Before disintegrating Subversión played in a couple of gigs in Tlapa and recorded a demo that later on was commercialized without their consent in the Tianguís Cultural del Chopo in Mexico City.
a bass that belonged to a dead friend, a crippled guitar, a mother who needed her son to help her carry on her job as a street vendor, and a former punk abhorring the state getting a low-paid job in local government. Yet, *Subversión* and its lyrics remained as the first collective testimony of how young Tlapanecos reflected on the Mixteco migration and the social life in the Montaña. However, this reflection could not transform their own social location and so punk in Tlapa remained as a testimony of the youth discomfort with their social place and their sense of no future.

At the end of 1997, Santiago and his brother migrated from the Montaña to work in construction in New York. Santiago crossed the U.S.-Mexican border to never return to Tlapa and his brother died in a gang fight in the streets of New York. He joined the stream of Mixteco migrants who had previously migrated to Sinaloa and whose social and labor experience he had depicted in a *Subversión* song. One night in Union Square in Manhattan he told me: “I felt no attraction to migrate to the United States and even less to the city. One of my brothers always wanted to come here, he always wanted to come. I used to be so punk, even xenophobic -- 100% xenophobic. So, I did not want to leave my country.” In 1997, a coyote, suggested that he make the trip: “What’s up? Want to go over there? I can get you there,” said the coyote.

Santiago, then 21 years old, asked permission of his father and started the journey to the United States. Some friends in New York would help him. At the end, the coyote could not arrange the trip so he was sent to another smuggler. “Then when I got here, my friends did not have the money to pay the coyote. But my friend told me: ‘No problem buddy, you are already here, so tell the coyote that you will pay him later.’ And then the coyote responded: ‘No way, then I have to return you to Mexico.’ ‘Okay, no problem,’ I said. But then he changed his mind, ‘Ah! Okay, stay here and pay me later, I already brought you here.’” He acted very cool; others
would have taken me back [to Mexico].”

Once he was in the city he found a job in construction, became a musician and played in several rock bands of Mexican migrants. Santiago belonged to the same young generation as Vigo and Don Armadillo. They were founders of the radio show in Tlapa, and Santiago has been also an amateur rock radio host. When Santiago migrated to New York City, a cycle of migration ended for a generation of teenagers in Tlapa bonded together through rock. Santiago had followed the path of Vigo, Farri, and Don Armadillo to New York City.

_Becoming a punk in Tlapa_

Mexican punk in New York comes from two different geographical and political locations. Although it is a marginal subgenre within the Mexican migrant population, it grew up from teens who were punks in Mexico and brought with them traditional forms of collective political organization and participation connected to punk and anarchism, especially from Ecatepec (or Ecatepunk, as it was also known by youths), a proletarian and industrial region on the margins of Mexico City. Punks like Don Armadillo, Vigo, or Santiago brought with them experiences such as the creation of autonomous collectives, the creation of zines, the organization of gigs, and the broadcasting of a radio show that intended to connect rock and politics in Tlapa. They tried to use punk as a confrontational genre, although punk developed a more general middle class base in Mexico during the 1980s.

Historically, the penetration of rock and roll in Mexico was not exempt from the contradictions that resulted from its urban young middle class origins and its arrival to Mexican territory following the imperatives of the market. Its social origins in the 1950s were very different from those that characterized in the 1980s the arrival of punk in regions such as the Montaña or the state of Oaxaca. Punk had been brought to Mexico by labor migrant returnees.
Mexican writer, José Agustín (1991) has pointed out that in its beginning, rock in Mexico was predominantly a middle class expression echoing the music produced in the United States and possessed of little creativity.

The arrival of punk in Mexico in the 1980s was not very different. Detor and Hernández (2011) noted that Mexican middle and upper middle class youth brought punk music from the United States and Europe to Mexico City and Tijuana. According to the authors, punk was “imported to our country [Mexico] just as a copy of punk rock [produced and consumed] on the other side of the border.”

On the class divide that marked the arrival of punk to Mexico, in his essay on Mexican counterculture, José Agustín (1996) noted that “punk was a phenomenon of the fucked up or jodidos young, lumpen proletarians. Some middle class kids wanted to live the myth of punk but with ridiculous results. Also, some middle class kids were very excited with the punks, but they always stood outside.”

In tracing the history of rock in Mexico, José Agustín locates the lack of originality of Mexican rock not on its class origins but in Mexico’s long-term dependency and historical underdevelopment. “At the end of the 1950s, Mexico, as always, docile following the trends, good or bad, from other countries, had a youth population nurtured by the gringo archetypes.” In the late 1960s rock became increasingly a popular genre among the young urban population. Despite its middle class origins rock began to be consumed by young proletarians and at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s (after the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco, and the student assassination of July 10 of 1971 in Mexico City), the regime of the Institutional

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266 Detor and Hernández 2011:64
267 Agustín 1996: 104. Interestingly, Agustín also asserted, contrary to what this history of punk in Tlapa suggests, that Mexican punks, “did not have a specific way of thinking, except for the idea that nothing was worth because the apocalypse had arrived. Usually they did not make scandals and their dress code was their proclamation to send everyone to hell (to “la chingada”) (Agustín 1996:104).
268 Agustín 1991:52
Revolutionary Party launched a crude campaign against rock in Mexico.

Rock was demonized as an instrument for youth expression particularly because young people began to use it to convey a political message against the PRI regime and the authoritarianism prevailing in Mexican society. Federal and local authorities actively enforced state repression; the urban youth in marginal areas of Mexico City were the targets of police brutality with the consent of the PRI authorities. Rock became socially and geographically marginalized. The police banned the organization of rock gigs or tocadas among young proletarians and so displaced rock to the social and urban margins of Mexican society. The marginalization of rock followed class lines, and one of the outcomes was the formation of the hoyos fonquis in the 1970’s. The term was coined by the Mexican writer Parmenides García Saldaña (1994) to describe the places in the urban outskirts of Mexico City where gigs were held and attended by proletarians youths.

The very marginal geographical and social existence of the hoyos fonquis expressed the relationship between them and the PRI governments. The word “hoyo” or hole was strongly connected with the sort of places and unsafe conditions where rock music was played. The word ‘fonqui’ a Mexican translation of the English word “funky” meant the macizo, grosero and pesado side of the urban youth life in the second half to the twentieth Mexican century. It meant literally the hard, dirty, and heavy side of social life in Post-revolutionary Mexico under the PRI governments, or the Mexico Bronco -- the heavy and dirty side found whether in the proletarians neighborhoods with low paid jobs, or in the abandoned peasant indigenous communities.

As the indigenous peasant communities, the hoyos fonquis and the urban Mexican youth were not part of the Mexican ruling class imaginary. Instead they were seen by the Mexican elite

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269 On police harassment against punks in Mexico, José Agustín wrote, “the police never stopped harassing them, and like the hippies, they were arrested just for their look” (Agustín 1996:104).
as dysfunctional social expressions that hindered its dream of progress and modernization in the 1970s. But the *hoyo* can also be used to depict the kind of politics that the PRI governments established to control and repress not only the young urban *roqueros*, but the social movements, students, and peasant guerrillas of the time as well. *Maciza, grosera*, and *pesada*, or hard, dirty, and heavy was the kind of political and military response of the PRI regime as it was the case of the so-called “dirty war” in Guerrero.

The violent finale in which gigs ended with riots, the infamous *razzias* or police raids where youths were physical and verbally abused, were a tiny echo, a micro-reflection of the authoritarian regime. The *hoyos fonquis* were not only clandestine places where rock concerts were held without minimum security for the audience (usually abandoned factories, basements, or wineries), but in places that reflected the state brutality. *Hoyos* and youth experiences in them mirrored the every day life of a rigid society informed by State authoritarianism and the lack of formal democracy, a society where the vast majority of youth could not get at least some satisfaction. This way, rock as a proletarian and urban expression in Mexico was born in the 1960s in direct conflict and confrontation with the police as an extension of the military apparatus used by the PRI to rule the country.

Such confrontation grew, as Mexico was getting closer to the 1980s economic crisis. For individuals like Vigo or Don Armadillo, to be a rocker was and still is for many young Mexican proletarians an implicit political response to Mexico’s authoritarian regimes and their devastating impact on the material conditions of Mexico’s youth. The marginal geographical and social location of the *hoyos fonquis* were the product of a political effort to silence the hard, dirty, and heavy demographic segment growing in the Mexican population since the late 1960s.

However, observers of the history of Mexican rock such as Arana (2004) have pointed
out that in the midst of growing social conditions of inequality and economic exploitation in the country, and the PRI’s repression of the *tocadas*, the Mexican *roqueros* were incapable of elaborating a response to State violence and police abuse, as well as to the social contradictions faced by the Mexican youth. According to Arana, this political passivity among rock musicians was one of the main contradictions, or as he said, one of the seven sins of “Aztec Roc” (Mexican rock). For a considerable segment of the Mexican youth and urban population he observed, rock music was merely articulated as a musical genre and an aesthetic attitude: “As usual it seems that the problem [among rock musicians] is the contradictions between their verbal and real behavior.”

When rock became a part of the urban proletarian culture among youth, it turned immediately into an anti-authoritarian form of expression. Even though rock’s rebel attitude was reinforced by the influence of the U.S counterculture in Mexico in the 1960s, for the young proletarians rock was and still is a medium to express oppositional languages against social and political institutions such as the police, the church and the family. In the 1980s the influence of antifascist and anti-authoritarian punk from Spain informed Mexican punk as a progressive proletarian expression connected to anarchist and libertarian ideas (see Chapter 6). This tie opened a window among Mexican punks to rethink left politics far away from the traditional left parties in Mexico that lacked a real progressive agenda for youth population in the country.

In this context a group of young Tlapaneco punks located themselves within the history of abandonment of the Montaña and the sense of social displacement they shared with the youth of proletarians neighborhoods in Mexico. As noted also by Buenaventura, punk aroused in Tlapa

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270 Arana 2004:207.
271 As I will discuss in the next chapter, Mexican migrants still use rock to elaborate these oppositional languages in a new context. In this case, rock as an oppositional language elaborates responses to the U.S., government’s migrant and border enforcement, the Mexican migrant political disenfranchisement, or labor migrant exploitation.
a response, a reaction and a rejection to what they were as “a product of society.” It was in fact a response to the sense of no future embodied in the chemo days.

As noted by Buenaventura, “When you look at what society is, especially at your family because here is where you grew up, you simply don’t like what you see because you are unsatisfied, you, your father, your entire family is unsatisfied. No one is happy and you grew up watching all these problems. So punks reject society because we are the product of that unjust society. We are here [in the United States] because we are products of this society. You are what you are because the society rejects you in all aspects. It doesn’t accept you because you must live according to the needs of the system. The whole thing is the result of poverty. All the fucking shit is because of poverty: material poverty, economic poverty, spiritual poverty, and educational poverty.”

“Everything comes as a result of poverty. And then, the punk bands educate you with their songs and their politics and they teach you why you do not have a future and who is responsible for this lack of future. But they also teach you something else: that if you really want a future you must fight for it, not as an individual but as a society. You must fight as a society, that’s the idea of punk. The solution is collective and you must get organized to obtain something, to get a benefit, but as a society not as an individual.”

As recalled by Vigo, for many teenagers in Tlapa tensions emerged within the family. “At home they always said that I was a communist because I did not want to go to church. At that time, I had two books, one about Gandhi, and the other I don’t remember about what. And then, the day I just finished the book on Gandhi, my uncle came into my bedroom and took the book away. I asked to my mom: ‘Why is he taking away my book?’ My uncle was a politician and the municipal president [from the PRI], and he began to tell my mother: ‘This kind of book
is not good for him.’ That’s how they saw things. Still I asked him: ‘Why did you take my book away? Give it back to me.’ And he said, ‘No, no way. This book is not going to help you in any way’. ‘But why?’ He did not answer me.”

“At that time I had a long, long hair, so he told me that I also had to cut my hair. Around those days my grandfather passed away. So, my uncle told me that the only way I could get into my grandfather’s bedroom to see his body was to cut my hair. They cut my hair. Then I asked him for my book again. And he answered the same: ‘No! Some books if fallen into the wrong hands could become dangerous because people do not understand them.’ If it wasn’t enough, I wanted to become vegetarian. ‘I am vegetarian,’ I said, and my family asked me: ‘But why he does not want to eat meat? Maybe he is becoming a faggot.”

Punk as an oppositional language points out the system of social inequalities, discrimination and political imbalances between the haves and the have-nots. As previously pointed out by Buenaventura, punk bands formulated a coherent system of ideas on the political meaning of living during the chemo days in a Mexican proletarian neighborhood. Punk in Tlapa unveiled the indigenous labor exploitation and discrimination in the region to build up a common identity between Tlapa’s teenagers and indigenous people from the Montaña and against those social groups and individuals who designed the social, political and economic architecture of contemporary Mexico.

Santiago, the former member of Subversión, connects the experiences lived by the Mixtecos in Mexico and the situation of Mexican migrants in New York City, with his own experience as a migrant in Mexico City: “When we arrived in Mexico City, people said to us: fucking Indians, or [indios] patarrajadas (cracked foot). Sometimes kids grabbed me by my
shirt and hung me on a tree. I was left hanging there. So the kids were really hard with us. They referred to us a ‘fucking patarrayada Indians.’ We were always called huarachudos.272

And when my uncles came to visit us, they were also called huarachudos or huarache veloz (fast huarache). So, I never learned to speak Mixteco because of the way people made fun of the language. I told my mom that I did not want to listen to her speaking Mixteco anymore. And after that, I was never interested in learning Mixteco, though my dad and mom speak Mixteco and they talk to each other in Mixteco. And here in New York something similar is happening. The children who come to New York City from Mexico do not like to speak Spanish, mainly because if they do so they are discriminated against. When I returned to Tlapa after living in Naucalpan, I was depressed. I had left all my friends in Mexico City. And then in Tlapa I faced discrimination. It’s very funny that even though the people from rural areas make fun of the people coming from the city, yet they want to talk like them, like a Chilango.273 People in the villages always want to imitate the speech of Chilangos.”

Santiago returned to Tlapa at 14 years old, and then he was perceived as Chilango. “They treated me badly. They thought I was a Chilango. Yes, they treated me very badly. In general, people treat you badly just because you are from the city. Several times I was involved in verbal fights. Even though I was born in Guerrero, but for the simple reason that you came back from the city they stereotyped you. For me, rock meant liberty, self-awareness and self-control. Through rock music you can govern yourself: you do not need laws, government, or anything. When I lived in Guerrero, I used to dress like a punk, in odd clothes. I considered myself as a punk, mainly for the ideals I followed. We were all punks, but not orthodox punks.

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272 In Mexico, huarachudo is a derogatively name to call people wearing leather rustic sandals, usually peasants. By extension a huarachudo individual is considered as someone in a permanent condition of cultural and economic backwardness.

273 Chilango is the nickname of inhabitants of Mexico City. It can also be used derogatively.
We were punks because the radio influenced our musical taste. I did not only listen to rock but to all kinds of genres. I learned to listen and appreciate good music. *La Voz de la Montaña was a very special radio station.*”

Thus, being a punk in Tlapa meant developing an oppositional attitude toward society, a closed society ruled by the PRI governments until 2000, a society in which literature about Gandhi was considered “communist,” and where to even try to be a vegetarian was a sign of homosexuality. Being a punk in Tlapa also meant, as in the case of the punk band *Subversión*, creating songs that depicted the social reality of the indigenous population in the Montaña. Although the depiction of human misery is common within the punk genre, the lyrics of this band from Tlapa provides evidence of a shared identity connecting the experiences of a group of Tlapa teenagers living in the *chemo days* to the experience of marginalization of the abandoned Indigenous population of the Montaña. The experiences of the *chemo days* and the education provided through punk bands made this development of affinities possible.

For some of these teenagers, being a punk in Tlapa also meant being stoned on the roof of your own house smoking pot and being far away from your parents without having a sense of a future ahead. Teenage punks in Tlapa were just kids imagining themselves to be armadillos, attending a rock concert in the United States, or traveling to Mexico City to buy new rock records. In those days they were just kids who found in punk and rock a way of imagining a meaningful future beyond their sense of no future and the loneliness embodied in the *chemo days* of the new *Barbarous Mexico*. 
“Willy Reyes is here,” Don Armadillo informed me. Tlapa’s municipal president, Willy Reyes, a young politician from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) would meet with migrants from Tlapa in New York City. As usual, Don Armadillo often referred in our daily conversation to certain events or people as unimportant. And this was just another irrelevant event in the daily life of the city. However, I must say that in some way he was uncomfortable acknowledging the meeting of the president with the people of Tlapa. “Should we go?” I asked. We were having a pleasant dinner the night before Thanksgiving. He cooked one of his special pasta recipes, so everything was fine until the name of Tlapa’s municipal president jumped into our conversation. Don Armadillo did not answer my question. Was his silence a negative response? Yes it was. Silence and changing the conversation was a negative response, but he was also telling me: I do not want to go to that place; I do not want to meet Willy Reyes. It was 9 PM. Then he said, “Do you really want to go?” Yes, I answered. He did not say anything; he took his cell phone and made a call to find out where the meeting was going to be held. Don Armadillo took me to the meeting on his way to his nightly job in a Mexican-Ecuadorian restaurant where he works as a singer and DJ. “You are not going to find anything worthwhile, Rodolfo, but lets go. He [the municipal president] is a drunkard. I remember that I saw him last year at his sister’s apartment in New York City and he told me: “How can the Mexican migrants live in these pigsties?”
We reached Amsterdam Avenue, a desolate street, as he described it, passing by the “tigers” or Dominican drug dealers waiting for customers outside a building, a *bodega* on a street corner. Almost all the businesses were closed; just the hair salons and the *bodegas* were open and crowded. They were the only places with social life at that hour when nobody walks in the street. Then, we walked through his recent past in New York City, as we passed by an abandoned restaurant, it is abandoned as the region as he comes from, and he recalls it as one of the places where he used to hang around when he was teenager. “*Era yo bien chemo, Rodolfo,*” he recalls without shame or regret. He just describes who he was: a *chemo.*

We continue walking for a couple of minutes and we arrived at the Mexican restaurant owned by a Tlapaneco small entrepreneur. At the front door there was a white banner with the legend in red ink: “*Bienvenido Willy Reyes.*” From the outside the place looked dilapidated. It was located next to an old building and a dirty *bodega* from where a group of young Dominican males stared at us. We walked to the door and these guys followed us to the entrance, but they did not enter; they just stayed outside trying to figure out what was happening inside. The Dominicans could not see what or who was inside. But Don Armadillo could. What he found that night is that no matter how far he had traveled from the Montaña and Tlapa, “the dinosaur” was still there in the middle of a restaurant on Amsterdam.

The discovery was part of his worst nightmares back in Tlapa with the shouts of the *enganchadores* outside of the family house in Hidalgo Street; the same caciques his grandfather faced in the Montaña trying to avoid peasant land dispossession; the same face of the political regime that assassinated some of his family members; the *maciza, grosera* and *pesada,* or the hard, dirty and heavy apparent human face of a regime that has refused to fade away. In 1954,
the Guatemalan writer Augusto Monterroso wrote *the Dinosaur*, the acclaimed shortest story in Latin American Literature: “When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there.”

In spite of the multiple literary interpretations and meanings of this short piece, this piece is used as a metaphor to refer to the capacity of PRI regimes and *Priistas* politicians, derogatively known in Mexico as dinosaurs, to adapt themselves and survive Mexico’s political changes and rule the country since the Mexican Revolution.

So, that night when we crossed the restaurant door, the dinosaur, Tlapa’s municipal president, was in there. A DJ was playing Mexican folk music and projecting images of Tlapa on a screen. Men and women from Tlapa were seated and talking, and Willy Reyes was there. For Don Armadillo, PRI’s political rule in Mexico was not a mere abstraction: his family experienced directly the consequences of the raw power of the *Priista* regime in Tlapa, and he sees himself as having migrated to New York as the consequence of this rule. So, this night he was meeting with an individual who embodied the things he despised the most from Tlapa and Mexico.

He had to meet Willy Reyes of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, a man elected in 2009 as municipal president from Tlapa.274 He was traveling to New York for a second time to meet the people from Tlapa in an effort to organize them into a Committee of Tlapanecos in the city and to get them to contribute to the municipality by financing the construction of Tlapa’s public infrastructure. In the restaurant there were different kinds of workers: chefs of private schools and restaurants, men working in a deli, and sales men from a Midtown jewelry store. These were men and women who have not returned to Tlapa in two decades, or only just temporarily for a family emergency.

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274 A year later, the Tlapa municipal president was accused of ordering the assassination of a Mexican Congressman.
These were individuals who recalled having worked two years without a day off, working from Monday to Friday in a restaurant during the day and cleaning offices at night, working also during the weekends and having free time only to do their laundry. Almost all of them had crossed the U.S.-Mexican border “por abajo,” or from below, which means with no visas, as undocumented migrants. But also, among them were a small group of small business people who also crossed the border from below in the 1980s; some of them came from the same neighborhoods in Tlapa. Members of this group recalled having slept in New York’s trains when they arrived, and now are the owners of Mexican restaurants and praise the Lady of Guadalupe and refer as her “jefa” or her boss (her plaster figure is at the back of the restaurant).

There were also the owners of courier services business, musical groups, members of charity groups organized by Tlapanecos, and individuals participating in amateur football leagues in New York City. Among them were some of the founders, owners, and players of the first soccer team from Tlapa founded about two decades ago. One of them talked insistently with me that night: “I am going to make a business in Valparaiso with a Chilean. And after this business, I am going to be Mexican deputy, then senator and finally I am going to be the president of Mexico,” he said seriously. And he added: “Listen, instead of writing about the people of the Montaña, you should write a book about me, you know? You should write something more personal about me to highlight the things I’ve done. You can go next Sunday to the soccer field to watch me as a referee (which I did) in the final game of the season and the trophy ceremony.” And also Willy Reyes’ sister was there, keeping track of all the guests in her notebook, with the names and telephones of all. She had migrated in 1998 to Queens, New York to work as a housekeeper.
The majority of these people were part of the first wave of the Tlapa migration to New York City. Some of them belonged to the oldest families from Tlapa in New York, and many of them had acquired permanent residency in the United States, often by marrying a U.S. citizen. Inside the restaurant was a small universe of the Tlapa community with its incipient economic and social stratification. These were people who used to live in the same neighborhoods in Tlapa in San Francisco or Cuba. People who went to the same schools and played in the same soccer teams, and helped each other to cross the border and find an apartment or a job during the days of the early Tlapaneco migration to New York City.

In those early days, during the childhood of this community formation, people from Tlapa drew from their common origins bonds to organize themselves. Even Willy Reyes went to the same public school and played childhood games in the same street with some of them. “I used to beat him and he cried and ran away all the time,” says Don Armadillo says of Reyes on our way to the restaurant. But now, he and Willy Reyes are located in two different social, political, ideological and geographical locations.

No matter that they went to the same public school, or that one beat the other in their childhood. Some things have changed. Willy Reyes comes from a small businessman family, went to college to fulfill in his own words “his dream” of becoming municipal president” and stayed in Tlapa. Instead, in his adolescence his mother brought him to New York. Willy Reyes belongs to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the political party that ruled Mexico for over seven decades, and after 12 years of right wing governments, returned again to power. Don Armadillo comes from a family whose members, including his grandfather, fought against the PRI caciques in the region, and he understands the migration of the people of the Montaña as the
consequence of poverty and social inequality produced by PRI governments, a result of the “abandonment.”

Both have crossed the Mexico-U.S. border. Willy Reyes crossed the border “from above” and returned to Tlapa in two days. Don Armadillo crossed the border “from below” and has not returned to Tlapa in 22 years, not even to see his father’s grave. Willy Reyes is in the high ranks of Tlapa’s local political structure; Don Armadillo is in the lower ranks of the Mexican and U.S. labor and political structure. Don Armadillo is an undocumented worker in his early forties, having lived in New York more than half of his life. Nonetheless, he is one of the two lead singers of one of the most famous hard-core punk cult bands of North and Latin America. “If I do not sing in the band I think I would die,” he says. He is the member of a band whose t-shirts are worn by teenagers in Mexico City, in the Tianguis Cultural del Chopo, the same place where he used to hang out in search of music and rock magazines in his teens.

Now, Tlapa’s municipal president and Don Armadillo are in the same restaurant in Manhattan for a couple of hours. Don Armadillo walks to the back of the restaurant while he greets and introduces me to his friends and relatives. I follow him to the back where Willy Reyes is seated. He greets Don Armadillo:

“How you doing? Are you still singing?”
“Yes, I am still singing.”
“Oh really? And what kind of songs do you sing? Rancheras? (Folk songs)”
“No, I sing protest songs.”
“Oh, so you are a troubadour or what?”
“No! I sing protest songs. Against the PRI. I sing songs against your party!”
Willy Reyes is speechless. He nervously giggles and after a pause changes the conversation by addressing someone else sitting next to him. After this brief conversation, they did not share a word the rest of the night, not even when Don Armadillo left the restaurant to work. However, Tlapa’s municipal president had a clear intention that night. He wanted to persuade people to create a Tlapaneco committee in New York. Growing poverty in the Montaña region has not only diminished the social and economic living conditions, but has also pushed the local and municipal governments to look for economic resources abroad.

As Mexico’s rates of poverty and social inequality have increased in the last two decades (see Chapter 3), the municipal, state, and federal governments have built a transnational structure of dispossession by the migrants’ economic resources to build infrastructure back in the migrant’s hometowns. In Don Armadillo reply to Tlapa’s municipal president, he was making visible the existing fractures or tensions within the migrant Tlapaneco community in New York.

Rather than being a homogenous community bonded by place of origin, a small segment within the Tlapaneco migration has achieved a greater economic (and geographical) mobility than the rest of the Tlapaneco migrant workers. Different expectations, sentiments, beliefs, and grievances are shaping the formation of a Tlapaneco migrant community. On the one hand, restaurant owners, couriers, and musicians travel once or twice a year to Tlapa for vacations or to invest in small business, or real estate whether in Tlapa or other cities in Guerrero; on the other hand a mass of excluded invisible workers ignored by the state authorities in Guerrero, but who have become visible, and valuable. Tlapaneños who rose up in the social ladder and became small businessman in New York City, and are recognized as “leaders in their community.” They are the ones who are not abandoned any more, either in form or appearance.
Yet, Don Armadillo’s response to Willy Reyes came from opposed political direction and
tradition, on the one hand informed by his individual and family experience of state power in
Mexico, and on the other identified with his identity as punk. Rejecting the state and the PRI
regime was not merely a rhetorical stance but an attitude to confront it everyday. If historically,
the PRI regimes silenced politically social movements through means including raw violence,
then it is understandable why from Don Armadillo’s point of view nothing worthwhile could
emerge from the visit of the PRI’s municipal president. “You are not going to find anything
worthwhile Rodolfo.” Sadly for him, that night the dinosaur was still there.

Those recondite northern places of the continent
Perhaps, in order to better assess the significance of the activities and presence of Willy Reyes
that night in a restaurant in Manhattan, it is necessary to note the extent to which the
transformation of the Mexican state has influenced the relationship between the municipalities
and the migrants, as well as the formation of migrant’s organizations. We ought to consider first
in depth the recent reconfiguration of the political and territorial structures of power of the
Mexican state. Historically, municipal governments in Mexico have depended economically and
politically on the state and federal governments (González Casanova 1976) for their development
funds, such as financing and constructing public and productive infrastructure. Therefore they
lack the needed political and economic means for effective governance.

As González Casanova has pointed out in a classic essay on Mexican democracy, “the
municipal penury, both in relative and absolute terms, is the dominant feature in the municipios,
and is the indicator of their political and economical weakness.”275 And, the author continues,
“the municipios have been transformed into political entities dependent on the federal and state

275 González Casanova 1976:42.
governments… Municipal autonomy is an institution that is frequently inexistent. Neither the local structure of power, nor the political activity of the people resembles municipal autonomy. And the political entity that emerges and the so called free municipality, or municipio libre are indeed controlled by the state and federal governments.”276

The analysis of this growing dependency between the political and territorial structures of the Mexican state, particularly as a result of the implementation of market-oriented policies in the last two decades in neoliberal Mexico, is beyond the scope of this research. Yet neoliberalism has brought transformations in the scalar configurations of political power as well as changes in the re-configuration of state institutions and practices (see Harvey 2005). If we understand geographical scales as “particular scales of social activity,”277 then we can argue that the municipios are also transforming their function and practices towards the Mexican migrant workers.

One example of this change is the municipios’ attempts to extract surplus value from migrant workers through federal programs that allow the municipal governments to use hometown migrant organizations in the United States to finance municipal public infrastructure. This public infrastructure can serve different purposes such as allowing capital accumulation at the local or urban scales, or providing social services necessary for the social reproduction. In the context of the spatial inequality between federal and municipal governments, the municipios negotiate and commodify their relationships with immigrant groups in order to obtain from them the funds that they are no longer receiving from the federal government. This re-functionalization of the municipality to promote the formation of transnational structures of

276 González Casanova1976:43. According to the same author, the municipal budget has been reduced since the 1940s. For example, during the 1930s the municipalities received 8% of the total of the annual federal budget, while at the beginning of the 1960s, they were receiving only the 3%.
dispossession of their former inhabitants is a two-fold process, as in the case of the Montaña region and the city of Tlapa, in which an entire region or a city is transformed into a labor supplier for the North American transnational regional labor market.

Contrary to the idea of scale as a bounded and fixed space, the notion of the state as a multi-scalar form of capitalist territorial organization (national, sub-national, supranational) has a central function in the mediation of uneven development among different geographical scales. Thus, the role of the state (as mediator and scale producer) transforms the scalar structure of the state at each round of capitalism (Brenner 1997). In this context, the so-called transnational communities are integrated into new scalar configurations where former scales have new roles, and where the state has also acquired a different multi-scalar role. As Brenner suggests, the state still functions as a fundamental agent to plan, produce or create large-scale infrastructure for the production and the territorialization of capital.

But in this new relationship between scales, the state can incorporate new agents, such as the migrants, in order to create, for instance, local infrastructure (a role that previously was historically part of state functions). In other words, remittances are extracted by the state at the local level (through the negotiation between the municipio and its migrants). Besides, household remittances are allowing the reproduction of the labor force but also the integrating local economies into national and international economies as part of new spatial configurations. To achieve this objective, the municipal governments use kinship structures, religion, and prior neighborhood ties in Tlapa, to garner consent among Tlapanecos in New York City, that the migrants might finance public infrastructure.

Before his presentation Willy Reyes was interviewed over the telephone by a Tlapa radio station. His cellphone was connected to the restaurant speaker system, so it was possible to listen
to the interview. Reyes explained that his visit to New York was part of a three-day work visit with the Tlapaneco people in the city. After the interview he shared with his audience the purpose of his visit: a proposal to develop a Tlapaneco organization in New York, so the organization could participate in the 3 x 1 Program, a state law that enables migrants to finance the construction of public infrastructure directly.

I met with my countrymen around a year ago on a Thanksgiving morning and I spent two days with them. I arrived just yesterday and we are meeting today because tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day, so we wanted to have this meeting today. My intention with this trip is to greet them. One of the purposes of my government campaign was to come to the United States to visit my countrymen, to see how they are doing; and to talk about the possibility of organizing a Tlapaneco committee based in New York. And once we are all united, we can use this connection for several things: to issue birth certificates, to help our countrymen who are desamparados, or in a dire situation, and to see if we can put into practice the 3x1 Program, so they can make a minimum economic contribution alongside with the federal and the municipal government to do the work that needs to be done in Tlapa. I come specifically to talk with them. Unfortunately we are scattered in different parts of New York, but today we are going to present a video to show them what we are doing in Tlapa: the good and the bad things. In tonight’s meeting we hope to hear the good news from our countrymen. To organize a committee will help a lot.

Nostalgia and status can be a powerful instrument to force or persuade individuals and collectivities to act in one way or another. The memory of places, things and persons, fragments

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278 The history of the 3x1 Program goes back to the 1970s in the northern state of Zacatecas. Mexican Migrant organizations (clubes de oriundos) based on South California informally sent economic support to their origin communities in Mexico. According to García (2007) the support to individuals in disgrace or in dire need to cope with the economic cost to send to Mexico the body of a death relative or friend was transformed to provided economic support in creating or preserving public infrastructure. According to the author the period is known among Zacatecano migrants as the period “Zero x One” referring that the money provided was in its totality from Mexican migrant communities in the U.S. During the same decade was created an informal mechanism of participation based on a reciprocal participation both Mexican migrant organizations and Presidential Municipalities to create or sustain infrastructure in communities of origin in Mexico. These experiences led in 1992 to the creation of the institutional program Two x One. Through this program migrants contributed one dollar and the state and federal government two. Then in 1999, the program was transformed in Zacatecas as the 3x1 Program and the Municipal governments were incorporated by contributing one dollar. Three years later in 2002 the program was transformed into a national program.
of the individual or collective memory of a people are powerful instruments to achieve consent.

A screen prepared for the event began to project images of Tlapa’s everyday life: streets, places and people, places or streets probably not seen in decades among some of the people in the meeting. Then the municipal president began to show images and enumerate the public infrastructure recently built by the municipality.

Then a video was projected. It showed Tlapa’s streets, while at the same time Willy Reyes gave a description to his audience: “That street we paved is where Rufu’s house is located” [Rufus was present that night]. During the video, Reyes described the work done by the municipal government: “We are paving in the Tepeyac neighborhood. Here we are in the Zapata neighborhood where the church is, opposite is the Cerro de la Cruz. Here we are on the streets of Cuba. Here we are paving more streets. Here we are in the Lázaro Cárdenas neighborhood, where we are paving the entire ascent. Here in Vicente Guerrero Street we are making a bridge that will connect the Cuba and Lázaro Cárdenas neighborhoods. Here we are in Loma Bonita. Here we are in La Palma, back from Matamoros Street. This is Comonfort Street where the home of Luis Muñoz is. We are opening more streets in the Zapata and the Lázaro Cárdenas neighborhoods. This is the entrance of Tlapa, coming from Chilpancingo: it is not dusty anymore, and we have paved the entrance. We put the synthetic grass court in the football field, and we are constructing the tartan track. We have the first synthetic turf field in the entire state of Guerrero. The racetrack we are constructing will be open in two weeks and we have built a fronton court and also two squash courts.”

Immediately, someone asked: “Do people have to pay for using the football fields?” Willy Reyes did not answer. Instead he continued with his description. In the video Willy Reyes finished with a message summarizing the infrastructure work done by his government:
“To all of you on the other side of the line [the U.S.-Mexico border], to you who find yourself in those cold and recondite northern places of the continent, I come today from Tlapa, the Heart of the Mountain, to greet you, to tell you, that here in Tlapa there are your friends, your relatives, your countrymen, your experiences, your happy moments. I want to inform you, with much joy, countrymen and countrywomen that have to work almost every day for our country to send remittances, money and greetings for your families that the government that I have the honor to preside over since 2009 has taken a significant step in the transformation of Tlapa. I want to say to you that we are the first government in the history of our beloved town in achieving the biggest economic investment -- over 160 millions pesos of the 2010 budget. This investment has a great impact that you will see whenever you come to visit us. The investment is astronomical. We have the first football court of synthetic grass in the state of Guerrero. And soon we will build a professional racetrack. Today we have in Tlapa a different image. Today you will find lighting, water, and drainage in Tlapa. Today you may find an arch that welcomes all the countrymen that arrive on the road from Chilpancingo. Today we can walk from the Military College, from the bridge over the Xale River to the Bus Terminal. And we continued providing water, drainage, and paving of the street that runs from the corner of the Bus Terminal to the Church of San Diego. We are paving the largest road in Tlapa’s history. We have built the first twenty kilometers of drainage in Tlapa’s history and you may find many streets under construction as a result of the drainage reparations, which have not received maintenance in 40 years. Today, you may find around Tlapa the construction of public infrastructure a least once a year, and in some communities even two or three times a year. I want to tell the countrymen and countrywomen who must endure the winter here and are thinking about your family that in Tlapa is your family, your loved ones, your friends, your neighbors. I am as proudly Tlapaneco as you that work all day long. Wherever you are, we love and respect you. Without your work Tlapa would not be so important. Tlapa is a different city thanks to you. I want to tell you that I want people to get organized in the United States, and especially in the city, in New York. I hope we would be able to create an organization of Tlapanecos and together be able to help each other in times of emergency, or in times of crisis… I want to tell you, do not forget Tlapa there in the heart of the Montaña, don’t forget el Señor del Nicho, do not forget your beloved Tlapa. 279

“You have to be on the other side”

The video ended, and Willy Reyes addressed the people. He came to New York City as municipal president to tell his country fellows:

I fulfilled my dream. My dream was to be municipal president. I ask you my fellow countrymen to get organized. Many members of your families, your fathers, your mothers, are always remembering you. They remember their son or the daughters that are living over there [in the U.S.]. I’ve seen many of these people that say, ‘My son is in the United States. Willy, when you go to the United States, please say hello to him and please video record them. I have not seen many of you for 15 or 20 years. People from Michoacán, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Acapulco arrive to Tlapa, and they are making money. And I ask to myself, ‘Why do not my countrymen from Tlapa take advantage that Tlapa is the heart of the Mountain?’ Every day there are commercial transactions from 19 municipalities. Early on, Tlapa had 12 neighborhoods. Today we have about 60 neighborhoods and now only two out of 10 people living in Tlapa, are Tlapa born-natives, the others from the Montaña Alta, they are outsiders (fuereños) as we called them in Tlapa. Today those people living in Tlapa are people that you do not know, particularly for those of you who have been away 10 or 15 years. When you arrive you will find a different people in Tlapa. Today, everyone travels to Tlapa to buy and sell. Then in Tlapa there is a mixture of races, traditions and customs. Sometimes we thought, did God really pass through Mexico? Why are people more prosperous in the United States than in Mexico? The main difference is because people in the United Stated worked, they dared to make inventions, they were not lazy, and they did not criticize each other. Instead in Tlapa you cannot make any individual progress because everyone is going to say that you are involved in drug trafficking or because your sons are in the United States. I want to tell you as a president I am not here to make promises, because the one that makes a promise is deceiving the people. I am like you but I have to be on the other side of the Xale River in Tlapa and you have to be on this side, and this side is the United States. So, work hard, don’t give up.”

When Willy Reyes finished his talk, a small businessman took the microphone and spoke on behalf of the Tlapaneco community in New York. “Morelia,” a Tlapa’s small businessman, was the first one to speak to offer an award (a medal) to Willy Reyes “on behalf of the “Señor del Nicho” (Tlapa’s Patrón Saint). Then came “El Movido,” a small businessman from Tlapa, who presented a gift to Willy, an aerial photograph view of Tlapa (apparently replicating the image of the “Señor del Nicho”), while at the same time wishing to everyone that “may the day arrive when you could have “papeles” (a visa to travel back to Mexico) to travel back and forth from Tlapa to New York.” Then, the municipal president stood and thanked the small businessmen, the people, God, and the Señor del Nicho.
But how does punk contest the hard, dirty and heavy face of a regime that crosses the border “from above” to reach those who crossed “from below” like Don Armadillo? By being punk in New York City he keeps contesting and disputing the PRI regime in Mexico in different ways. Culturally, one of the languages Mexican migrants used to contest the PRI and Priísta politicians was the lyrics in punk music. But as the municipal president from the old regime tries to establish connections with the Mexican communities in New York, he may find different responses from members of the Mexican community. He can find collaboration or opposition within the same community as a result, on the one hand, of ongoing economic stratification within the migrant stream, and on the other hand, as a result of how individuals have contested the PRI local governments in Tlapa.

In Don Armadillo’s dialogue with Tlapa’s municipal president, the tensions within the Guerrerense community in New York City are manifested from the point of view of a local state representative and a migrant worker with a menial job in the city. Tlapa’s municipal president assumes that a Guerrerense migrant musician will sing Mexican folk songs conveying his national identity and leaving out any connections with the existing tensions in Montaña society (as the kind of songs sang by Subversión shown in Chapter 5). But it also shows the existing disputes among two members of Tlapa’s society about the meanings of the Guerrerense migration to New York. On the one hand, Don Armadillo views Tlapa’s migration as politically motivated by a set of class-driven decisions that made Mexicans and people from Tlapa into “a commodity of the North American Free Trade Agreement,” as he views himself, his mother and brothers and sisters. On the other hand, Willy Reyes believes in the idea of labor market complementarity, given Mexico’s economic comparative advantages as a labor supplier for the North American labor market (see Chapter 3) promoted by the top Mexican ruling class.
I have shown the extent to which the internal stratification within the Tlapa’s migrant community in New York may shape the individual and collective expectations of its members when a municipal president intends to institutionalize a Tlapaneco committee to encourage Tlapa’s migrants to finance the construction of public infrastructure in their hometown. The ongoing stratification and the diverse legal status within the migrant stream from Tlapa in New York shapes, and in some cases confronts, the expectations for organizing a committee in New York.

The fact of the existence of a diverse community consisting of small businessmen who can travel to Tlapa once or twice a year and undocumented workers in menial jobs makes it difficult to form a committee as intended by Tlapa’s municipal president to reclaim a sense of place and create a common identity and community. Their notions of political participation and their acceptance of using the institutionalized channels of migrant political participation (migrant votes or money transfers via 3x1 programs) are quite opposed. Some Tlapaneco small businessmen envision the illusory idea of advocating for a Priista municipal president as a way of paving their political path to become congressmen in Mexico and even presidents. Many migrant workers do not accept any form of institutionalized political participation and collaboration with a local government.

Class position within the migrant labor market in New York City counts, but so do the set of sentiments, beliefs, grievances, memories and sense of history. And these memories of the doings of local Priistas governments and their role in “the abandonment” of an indigenous region that became demographically depleted by the political decisions of Mexican technocrats count too. While Smith (2006) has questioned the effect of Mexican migrant money on Mexican democracy, I think we should also be critical about the extension of state institutional channels
promoting the democratic participation of Mexican migrants in the U.S. in the first place. It is true that Mexican migrants have been financing local governments in Mexico; however they do not have a meaningful political voice.

It is still uncertain what this kind of migrant participation can contribute to the democratization of Mexico. For a segment of the Mexican migrant workers in New York City, such options are not acceptable given their understandings of a democratic society. But also, in their own way of understanding the world they have tried to figure out other ways to imagine politics both in Mexico and in New York and to imagine new possibilities to form community and forge collective action. As Don Armadillo noted (Chapter 2), in his view “dignity means dignity in any language.” By rejecting the institutional channels of political participation, he is making a political and moral statement about what is acceptable and what is not.

Even though Don Armadillo has no response to oppose the doings of the “dinosaur” or to feasibly oppose the commodification of the history of his people through academically specialized institutions, it does not mean that he has consented to the abandonment produced by the state. His rejection of the Tlapaneco institutional politics in New York appeared also as a means of living with dignity on any side of the U.S.-Mexico border, i.e. to live outside of the maciza, grosera and pesada or the hard, dirty and heavy transnational politics of the PRI regime.

As shown in the first two chapters, among the Mixtecos and people from Tlapa there is a long history of grievances that cannot be forgotten by individuals and collectivities even though they are far away from the Xale River. As Don Armadillo despised PRI politicians I was in some way unintentionally opening a wound of his recent past. Of course, Tlapa’s municipal president ignored this past when he addressed his paisanos. However, it was not the case of Don

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280 It is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but within the Mexican working class in New York City there are numerous forms of oppositional politics based on Trotskyites, Maoist and Anarchist ideologies, to unionism, community day laborer organization, party politics in the U.S, etcetera.
Armadillo, as the *Brigada Florés Magón* song played in Vigo’s room (see Chapter 5). For him there was no need to bury the memories, even more after he had crossed the border “from below” just to find 20 years later on a cold November night that a municipal president was still there demanding more sacrifices in the name of Tlapa.

That night when I left the meeting, I felt terribly sorry for Don Armadillo spending his youth in a restaurant where he works a night job while that same night Tlapa’s municipal president was too drunk to finish the meeting. When Don Armadillo stated that he continued singing songs against the PRI, he drew upon the memories of the grand father, the schoolteacher that could not do anything to stop peasant communities in the Montaña from losing their lands. However, as a punk, he still sings songs against the PRI.

If Guerrerense punk history is connected to Mexican political authoritarianism embodied in PRI rule, its history in New York is also related to the formation of a Mexican punk and rock community in the city, and a massive migration of youth population from Puebla, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Mexico City to New York City. The history of the Guerrerense punk in New York City is connected with a wide and more profound process of community formation beyond the regional and ethnic differences of the Mexican stream: the formation of a community acknowledged by its members both in Mexico and in New York City as “*la banda,*” a transnational community bonded not on the basis of sharing a community of origin in Mexico but by sharing a proletarian and semi-proletarian origin in Mexico.

The punk and rock made by Tlapanecos such as Don Armadillo and Santiago exists within the boundaries and contradictions of *la banda* itself as well as the political, economic and racial tensions of New York City. Punk and rock first allowed them to find their place as teenagers within Tlapa’s society, and to contest the social and political oppression of the
Mexican state apparatus through music. Later on as migrant workers in New York City, punk has helped them locate themselves within the racial tensions and the social inequalities they face.

*La Banda*

Rooted in Mexican proletarian neighborhoods, the conglomerate of young migrant Mexicans that identify themselves as *la banda* (literally translated as the band) are the proletarians and the sons of the proletarians south of the U.S.-Mexico border, as in the cases of Don Armadillo and Santiago. They share an affinity for rock but particularly for the rock produced and played at night in the outskirts of Mexican cities. *La banda* consists of proletarians bonded by rock affinity, but fundamentally they share this experience on the south side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Its past is rooted in the neighborhoods of Mexico’s cities or semi-rural towns where there is no sense of future for its young population. So, this community is called “*la banda.*”

As noted, rock affinity is an important shared element among its members, but not as important in shaping and informing their experience with social institutions in Mexico and Guerrero such as the family, the state, the church, the school, the army and the police. At one moment or another in the life of the majority of its members, rock and punk have become mediums to contest or challenge these social institutions.

*La banda* is a community that has no geographical limits in New York City and it is not organized by membership in any particular place of origin in Mexico. In the U.S. *la banda is* a community composed of thousands of young Mexican migrants in New York City and New Jersey from the Mexican states of Puebla, Estado de Mexico, Mexico City, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Morelos and Veracruz. No one knows exactly how many individuals are part of it, or what its geographical boundaries are. For example, in conversations it is common to hear Mexicans
acknowledging the existence of *la banda* in this or that place by saying: “Oh yes! there is *banda* in Yonkers, or “there is a fuck of hell of *banda* in New Brunswick.”

It is quite well known among its members that whenever someone raises the question “What is *la banda*?” the immediate answer will be the ontological and tautological contention: “*la banda es la banda,*” or the band is the band. Among *la banda, or* its members, *la banda* is self-explanatory. One does not need to explain what it is or who *la banda* is. But it is important to note is that *la banda* exists as a noun (an indefinite group of individuals), or as an adjective (a feature that defines a social group or an individual). So, being *la banda* is a social and moral attribute not given by place of origin.

If someone is acknowledged as *la banda* (“he or she is *la banda*”) there is no need to enumerate the moral attributes that make him or her to be *la banda;* its nature is contained in its own name, so does not require further explanation. Therefore, among its members, *la banda,* whether as noun (a community or social group) or as an adjective (a moral attribute) does not need to be explained because *la banda* exists in itself. Aragón, a Mexican migrant worker and rock musician in New York, sums up the social meaning of *la banda:* “*la banda* is to be protected, not harmed, to have a good time, to be respected. That is why you say, ‘I am going to have a good time with *la banda.* That is *la banda* to respect and be respected, to live together with the others as if they were your family. I think that is what *la banda* means.”

Solidarity and reciprocity, known as *a paro,* or the support given to any of its members without expecting anything in return is probably the most important moral attribute of *la banda.* *El paro* is, as Aragón acknowledges “the heart of *la banda.*” *A paro* can be expressed in different ways: such as lending money to a friend, sharing housing, helping someone find a job, sharing musical equipment for a gig, sharing the beer and the food with the thirsty and the
hungry, or fighting along with someone when an individual is challenged by a group or a gang. Last but not least *el paro* includes supporting morally or economically someone who is detained and is facing the threat of deportation to Mexico. In those dire cases, rock concerts are often organized to recruit *la banda* to help the detainees. However, as in any community, *la banda* is not free of contradictions and tensions. *La banda* as a community born in Mexico is deeply transformed and challenged by migration and the undocumented status of the majority of its members.

The (legal) status and the threat of deportation are among the most important bonds of *la banda*. The heart of *la banda, el paro*, is jeopardized by being undocumented in the United States. As Aragón notes, “*la banda* is the same in the United States and in Mexico. However, what changes in the U.S. is the result of your acts or the negative consequences result from the fact of *hacer el paro* [or to help] to some motherfucker (in this case to fight against someone else) and the *pedo* or the problem gets bigger and the *tira* or the police can get you. The [migratory] status can get you into problems. You can be deported, and you better don’t get in any *pedo*, or trouble. But inside of you, you are thinking of why did I not help this motherfucker? But you prefer not to get in any trouble. So, then the apple is rooted (the *paro* is jeopardized), because you want to help someone, *hacer el paro*, but at the same you are afraid because you could be detained and deported and because if you don’t do *el paro* or don’t help someone you are not *la banda* anymore.”

The undocumented status diminishes the solidarity of *la banda* embodied in *el paro*, or as the Aragón summed up, it “screws up its heart, *la banda* is not *la banda* anymore. So, the migratory status is dividing us.” The undocumented status of *la banda* breaks its bonds, its solidarity, and the possibilities of strength and sense of collectivity. Legal divisions produced
through the U.S. migratory system tend to classify the members of a community between legal or illegals, or documented versus undocumented but also internally tends to destroy the former bonds of reciprocity that gave them a sense of community or collectivity, so that la banda is not la banda anymore.

As also noted by Aragón, in the same way that the undocumented migratory status is seen as a “stigma that you will have until you change your legal condition in the U.S.” it also may undermine other expressions of collective action or solidarity in the social life of Mexican undocumented workers in New York City, as for example in the workplace: “We are still invisible and disposable workers. If someone comes asking for a job in your workplace and he can be paid a lower wage, you have to go. If you start demanding your rights, then you receive a warning or are dismissed.”

Besides undermining bonds of solidarity produced by illegality among its members, la banda also embodies the contradictions produced by the social and political institutions that many of its members despise in one way or another: the corruption of the Mexican state, the use of violence, and the economic exploitation of its citizens. The formation and expansion of la banda in New York City has brought within it the formation of new contradictions that embody all the things la banda rejects, including rock commodification. And then, it is within this community in tension that punk and others music genres produced by Mexican migrants exist. What are those inner tensions within la banda in which Guerrerense punks try to locate themselves as migrants and musicians? At the same time that the Mexican migrant stream has increasingly grown in the city, la banda including Mexican small businessman and Mexican community organizers have grown along with a transnational rock music market between Mexico and New York City.
In more than three decades, not only a transnational labor market of undocumented Mexican workers has been created, bringing to life a mass of disposable workers, as Aragón noted. As time passes by, new transnational markets have been created to satisfy the social needs of a growing Mexican population in New York City. A vast myriad of goods arrive to the neighborhoods of New York City where Mexicans live. And within that vast framework of goods there are also rock and roll and Mexican bands: a transnational market of Mexican rock bands that play for la banda.

How does this transnational market of rock bands between Mexico and New York work? Key in the formation of this transnational market and in the growing commodification of Mexican rock is the undocumented migratory status of the majority of persons that identify themselves as la banda. This status plays a key role in the way in which the system of affection and nostalgia for the place of origin, the nostalgia for el barrio (literally the neighborhood) and

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281 Those markets between Mexico and New York include soccer and baseball equipment for the many teams in Mexican Leagues in the city that annually buy in Mexico the necessary equipment for their players; these transnational markets allow the flow of any kind of commodities. Not only the gear for soccer teams travel all along North America from Puebla or Guerrero to be worn in the football parks in Brooklyn, Manhattan or Queens; nor even the baseball caps travel from Puebla to Brooklyn. Along with these commodities travel food, clothes, norteño hats, videos from local festivities in migrants’ community origin as well as saints and virgins to be worshiped by the Guadalupanos Committees.

282 This is not the first time that music follows the steps of Mexican migrant workers in their search for work and survival through North America. Lalo Guerrero, the Mexican-American songwriter followed the route of agricultural production and the route of Mexican migrant labor in U.S. Southwest. His tours followed the time of agriculture, the harvest. His music followed the steps of Mexican migrant workers in their search for that human activity that we call and know as work. He followed the Mexican proletarians through the U.S. agriculture fields, Lalo Guerrero was always behind Mexican migrants working in the onion crop in June and picking cotton in September. Lalo Guerrero used to play in the dance halls nearby the agriculture fields and attended by the Mexican and Mexican-American workers. The agriculture workers themselves informed to Lalo when the cut of the melon in Bakersfield will begin or when the pinch of the tomatoes will begin in Ventura or when they will travel to pick the plum up in the Sacramento Valley. Farm workers followed the harvest, and Lalo Guerrero followed them. The work in the agriculture fields was followed by the work of the music. During the dances of the San Joaquin Valley, Lalo Guerrero met a young man who attended every dance. The young man used to walk across the stage to speak with Lalo during the breaks. He was remembered by his intelligence but also because he used to provide information on the date and places where Guerrero could find activity in the agriculture fields. For many years he did not knew his name. Years later the musician found out that the young man who attended the dances to give him insight of the labor mobility of the Mexican workers was César Chávez. When in 1968 the grape pickers went on strike with the leadership of Chávez in the valleys of Sacramento, San Joaquin and Coachella, Lalo Guerrero supported the strikers with the Corrido de Delano (See Guerrero and Mecee 2002).
the impossibility of returning to Mexico to attend so called *tocadas* or *toquines* or gigs encourages rock promoters to create a flourishing market for rock bands from Mexico. Many of these Mexican small businessmen come not only from Puebla, but also from other southern and northern states of Mexico. They bring Mexican bands to New York and the United States for a concert for which the ticket can cost 100 dollars or more per ticket. Interestingly these are the same bands that use to play in proletarian neighborhoods in Mexico for 5 or 10 dollars a ticket. Nevertheless the expensive tickets are not a deterrent for Mexican migrants and each concert, no matter the price, is crowded month after month.

One of these small businessmen is known as the *Cacique del Pueblo*. He is repudiated by many local Mexican migrant bands because of the way he treats the bands. For instance, he asks them to play for free, or forces them to sell tickets for the concerts in order to be allowed to play. “He is a piece of shit,” the Mexicans said. The *Cacique del Pueblo* is also known as *Francismierda* (a game of words combining the first half of his name, Francisco, and the word shit). The Tin Man, My Boss Entertainment, and Willy Productions are among the other most important Mexican rock entrepreneurs. My Boss Entertainment, for example, is also the owner of one of the biggest nightclubs in the New York City. The small businessmen do not tend to see rock as a bond of national and community identity as *la banda*, but as a commodity that can be sold to satisfy the leisure needs of Mexicans. Therefore they organize musical events not only for *la banda* but also for a diverse audience within the Mexican stream and the so-called Latino population. In fact they become and tend to identify themselves as Latino entrepreneurs.

As noted by Aragón, Mexicans carry the stigma of being undocumented. And even though there are many Mexican entrepreneurs who are already legal residents in the U.S., they wash away any stigma by identifying themselves as Latino, “or successful” Latino businessmen.
As noted by the *Cacique del Pueblo* who assured me that the main reason he is in the rock business is “because I have to pay my bills.”

So, how do Mexican rock bands move across the U.S.–Mexico border? I have already noted that migratory status played a role in nostalgia and also in producing a need to listen to the old bands that the *banda* listened to in Mexico. But also, in the last two decades Mexican small businessman in New York City have created a system to supply the tri-state area with Mexican rock bands. Bands are hired or *compradas* (literally bought) to play in the United States. A band can be sold to as many small businessmen as possible and through this mechanism the first small businessman increases his profit. For example, a rock band such as *El Haragán* costs $15,000 dollars for a gig, but it can be hired or bought for a second one at the cost of $14,000. If it is bought for a third gig, this one going to cost $1,000 less and so on and so forth.

Then, for example, a band can be sold to play four gigs in a row in Queens, the Bronx, New Jersey and Staten Island, or even to play two gigs in the same night, first in Queens and then in New Jersey. In addition, the cost for “buying” a rock band depends on its popularity. For example bands such as *El TRI* costs about $40,000; *El Haragán* $15,000; *Banda Bostik* $4,000; and *Interpuesto* $4,000; Luzbel $400 to $800. This system is becoming known as “the old system” among small businessmen because as the market for Mexican rock in the United States grows, Mexican bands begin to hire their own agent to avoid intermediaries such as *the Cacique del Pueblo* and contact directly the promoters in each U.S. city.

There are also other strategies to make profit. Such practices are intermingled with the abuse and fraud. Business people take advantage of the beliefs and expectations of a mass of nameless migrant workers, cookers, dishwashers and delivery boys who seek in rock and to play in a rock band the opportunity to have a name. The small businessmen can take advantage of
these aspirations. For instance, when a rock band from Mexico is “bought” or hired to play in New York and one of its members does not have a visa, then the small businessman hires musicians from a local Mexican band and pays them a hundred dollars.

As a local musician notes, “they play because they want the fame. They want recognition. It is fucking great for la banda because you have the chance to get around with one of those motherfuckers dudes, you can be a part of history. To play with them gives you status. However, it’s a fraud because the small businessmen are making a profit and it is not what la banda expects. I want to vomit just by seeing that shit.”

Despite the fact that expectations of la banda to hear a Mexican band with its original line up are not fulfilled, there is no individual or collective response to contest these frauds and abuses -- not even when concerts are cancelled without a refund. In this situation it is again the migratory status that produces fear and uncertainty. As previously noted by Aragón, it is “the fear of what will happen, because if there is a brawl surely the police are going to arrive or someone is going to call the police.” This fear permeates every aspect of migrant social life, including the relationship with small businessmen. It is the fear that stops musicians from demanding their money back for a cancelled concert, the fear of confronting the security guards and the fear that someone could call the police.

As Aragón adds, “we are divided and nobody thinks that we are a collectivity. Nobody is united. But that indifference is a result of the collective fear and because there is the idea that no one wants to lose a day of work to go to the Court to demand payment from a boss. And if you do so they just reject it. So if you are humiliated, you just have to swallow your anger and keep going.”

Small businessmen abuse Mexican local bands in many different ways. For example,
concerts tend to last about five to six hours with the participation of local bands of Mexican migrants who have to play for free and sometimes even share their equipment for the gig. Also, in order to be allowed to play, they are asked to sell a quota of tickets for the concert. The long duration of the gigs has a very specific purpose from the point of view of small businessmen: to extend as much as they can the time of consumption of Mexican beer among la banda.

The majority of the places where Mexican immigrant rock bands play in New York City, particularly in Queens and the Bronx, very much resemble the so-called hoyos fonquis (See Chapter 5) although in a different historical context. These are places where young proletarians usually face police brutality, or the extortion and abuse of the Mexican small businessman. However, they differ from the hoyos in the sense that in New York the rock concerts’ racial tensions are constantly manifested through verbal and physical confrontation between la banda and the security guards, mainly Dominicans, African-Americans and/or retired New York Police Department officers hired to control these events. Yet, to contest the abuse by security guards is to open up the possibility of a brawl and bring the police into it.

In contrast, it is important to note is that collectively or individually la banda is not a docile social body: it was born in marginal proletarian neighborhoods, many of its members grew up as street fighters and have endured dire situations crossing the U.S-Mexico border, and in some cases have responded to gang violence in the migrant neighborhoods where they live. Then, and contrary to the docile image of Mexican undocumented migrants in mass media, la banda knows very well how to use its fists since it is maciza, grosera and pesada or hard, dirty and heavy to survive. However it can be docile when facing the abuse of security guards usually carried out with the consent of small businessmen. According to Aragón, the security guards are, “the manifestation of power. They push you and te agandallán or abuse you.”
In their body search for weapons at the entrance of the venue, almost any attendant is pushed, treated aggressively and with intimidating looks. Such interaction is an interesting window on where Mexican migrants are located within the racial structure of New York City and how they look at themselves and in relationship to other groups in the city. Firstly, they are a disposable people, “they can do with you whatever they please, while they are deferential with the white people. Because if you harm al pinche blanco or the fucking white he is going to respond to you: no me toques hijo de tu puta madre or ‘don’t dare to touch me motherfucker.’ What they do to us [the security guards], they don’t do it to a gabacho (a white U.S. citizen). Because as a Mexican you are classified as someone who does not have rights.”

However, in 2012, in a Queens concert organized by an small businessman from Mexico City’s outskirts, for the first time in the history of Mexican rock concerts in New York City, la banda responded collectively to the physical and verbal abuse. A drunken Mexican was beaten and physically abused by the security guards, which meant “they were abusing la banda.” La banda beat the security guards up. As long-time members of the community acknowledged, it was the first time for that kind of response: “We are becoming tired of this kind of shit. Before that event someone was abused and everybody was silent. So, this time a paisa or a countryman was abused and la banda got on fire. Not all of them, but a lot of them fought back. After so much shit you get tired.”

The cause of the Queens brawl was a Mexican small businessman who advertised and sold tickets for a show of a Mexican band that wasn’t touring in the United States. La banda did not accept submissively the cancellation without the return of their money. Instead, this time they responded violently. As Aragón sums up: “Fucking small businessmen, they just want to take advantage of the Mexican rock bands to attract the people. The only thing that they care is
making money, no matter if someone is killed. They are hurting rock and roll.”

As previously noted, Mexican small businessmen may see themselves as Latinos, which can be seen as a sign of status associated with social mobility, adaptation and assimilation in the city. Instead the Mexican working class, *la banda* rejects identifying itself as Latino. For example, they challenge sharing community with Dominicans based on the tensions of every day interaction with members of this Latino group. In rock concerts languages reveals racial prejudices produced by the abuse and every day tensions not only in the rock concerts but also in the neighborhoods and jobs where Mexicans live and work.

For example, Dominicans are called *Dominichangos* or *Dominimonos* a Mexican word to depict them as monkeys. In fact, *la banda* is a synonym for being Mexican. As I already noted, the sympathy for rock among *la banda* is a strong bond in the formation of a sense of communality that is created and re-created in workplaces, neighborhoods and fundamentally in rock concerts. The formation of a transnational market of Mexican rock and the rise of rock concerts for the Mexican working class have contributed in the formation of that sense of communality known as *la banda* among a broad segment of the Mexican working class in New York City.  

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Important to note is the extent to which this sense of communality is built up despite the fact its members are come from different regions in Mexico (Oaxaca, Guerrero or Mexico City), and not withstanding the city vs. rural origins tension. Residential dispersion of people across the five boroughs of the city, as well as their labor differentiation in terms of skills, jobs and wages (for example between a construction worker or a carpenter and a dishwasher or a delivery boy) are irrelevant in the formation of this community.

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283 Along with the soccer and baseball clubs, the celebrations of national and religious holydays as the Day of Mexican Independence on September 15th, or the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December the 12th.
In spite of all these differences \textit{la banda} continues recreating a sense of communality that already existed in proletarian or semi-urban neighborhoods in Mexico’s periphery. However if rock deeply informs this sense of communality, it also contributes to the fragmentation of Mexican working class, because the formation of \textit{la banda} and its strong sense of affinity based on rock and proletarian origins also hinders the formation of a sense of communality with other segments of the Mexican migrant workers in the city with different leisure life styles.

Whether \textit{la banda} will be able to make possible any form of collective action in transforming the social and political location of young Mexican migrant workers in the city transcending acts of solidarity in the cultural form of \textit{el paro} is still unclear and will be limited by the inner contradictions that have developed within it. In this chapter I have presented the portrait of a “family,” a form of Mexican community strongly related to class origin and culturally differentiated from the rest of the Mexican working class in New York City by its sympathy for rock. As I also noted the existence of \textit{la banda} is not free of contradictions.

One of the tensions that emerges is the commodification of Mexican rock in New York City through the formation of a Mexican transnational rock market controlled by Mexican small businessmen. However some Mexican punks like Don Armadillo who found in the punk Do it Yourself (DIY) statement a way to produce music outside the rock migrant circuits of the Mexican small businessmen and have rejected invitations to play in concerts organized by Mexican rock promoters as Francismierda.

Also, they found a way to locate socially and historically themselves and the Mexican workers as migrants in New York City. In the next following sections I outline a biography of a Mexican collective and the ways in which they connected rock music, self-education and political participation outside the circuits of the transnational market of rock music in New York
controlled by Mexican small businessmen.

"We are their eternal nuisance"

When discussing the common misconceptions about the Mexican workers in the United States, Gómez-Quiñonez and Arroyo (1978) argued in their classic essay on the Mexican working class in the United States that there is a traditional misconception that portrays Mexican undocumented migrants as passively tolerating poor working and living conditions, not interested in unionizing. Further they claimed that Mexican workers have a proclivity to act as strikebreakers and are incapable of organizing collectively. In sum, Gómez-Quiñonez and Arroyo characterize Mexican workers as being politically passive, and comprising a retrograde sector of the U.S. working-class.

The authors suggested that these misconceptions are reinforced by the idea that Mexicans belong to a backward cultural tradition. I discuss an experience of political organization in which young migrants from Tlapa, including Don Armadillo, have collectively joined with other migrants from Mexico and Guerrero. This experience contrasts with previous forms of working-class militancy among Mexican migrants in the U.S. discussed by Gómez-Quiñonez and Arroyo. These social and political practices are expressions of very unique individual trajectories connected to family histories of political progressive participation in Tlapa. The fact that some mestizos endured discrimination when they migrated to Mexico City led them to oppose racist practices perpetrated against Mexican indigenous people both in Guerrero and New York City. Besides, as previously noted some of them have participated as radio producers in a community radio station in Tlapa.

Once in New York, a mutual affinity for rock helped forged a sense of community among other migrants from different states, including Mexico City and its outskirts where a strong
proletarian working-class culture emerged from the 1980s. In the Mexico City periphery, younger generations have developed a strong working-class culture through punk, the influence of anarchism, and the rejection of electoral politics. Thus, the forms of collective action in New York City have been shaped by what Gilly has called the “underground river” of history.\textsuperscript{284}

In the next pages, I follow a group of people from different states of Mexico that consciously rejected political participation as migrants within the formal structures created by the Mexican state to institutionalize transnational collective action or through Mexican migrant organizations in New York City. These oppositional responses are the result of forms of membership that are not related to their Mexican community of origin. In fact, they are the product of political class traditions and languages, and the formation of class-consciousness that migrants have brought with them to New York City.

These class and political traditions in the individual and collective histories of Mexican migrants are leaving traces in the New York City landscape, showing to what extent Mexican migrant men and women have been able to “articulate the identity of their interest as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from… theirs.”\textsuperscript{285} In the history of la banda and the Montaña migration in New York City, processes of collective action connecting rock and different class traditions brought from Mexico can be observed.

In 2005, a group of young Mexican migrant workers founded the *Palabra Libre* zine in the city of New York and began publishing an autonomous zine edited from 2005 to 2014. With ten issues published so far, the zine has expressed the sentiments of solidarity and grievances, as well as the senses of justice and injustice that are part of the shared experience of life and work of undocumented Mexican migrant workers who see themselves as the new subjects of

\textsuperscript{284} Gilly 1980:214.
\textsuperscript{285} Thompson 1966:9.
neocolonial globalization. In its pages they express their desires to transform the present and the future of Mexican migrants in the city. Mexican migrant workers from different parts of Mexico have joined the colectivo, among them Don Armadillo and other Tlapanecos.

To some extent the colectivo has been a means of preserving and sharing with other Mexican migrant workers political experiences of horizontal self-education and self-organization. If neoliberal Mexico has meant endless violence and dispossession for hundreds of thousands of young Mexicans, it has also nurtured strong political reactions to the current Mexican political regime.

Who were the young men and women who in 2005 met for the first time in a New York City deli to organize the colectivo? They were, as they stated in one of their first Manifiestos, “the shadows, the invisible ones that sweat under the labor exploitation, the reflection of the urban youth who migrate to this country,” and they added, “we are the culture that was subjected, we are the reflection of the new laws of legalized slavery in America. We are el barrio, (literally the neighborhood), we are the people, we are migrants, we are the same face with a different voice, we are the reaction to the oppression, we are many, we are their eternal nuisance.” We are ñeros and ñeras [or proletarian men and women], we are mothers, we are parents, we are indigenous peoples, we are painters, we are musicians, we are writers, we are dancers, we are Palabra Libre” (or Free Word).

What was the purpose of creating the zine? They insist it is necessary to create an instrument, a means to allow them, as they point out, to raise “the voice of young rebels who live in the shadows.” Their voice was the “low voice” of those migrant workers who crossed the

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286 When they say, “we are el barrio,” they are referring to a social and proletarian location rather than a geographical place. The expression “we are el barrio” may express we are the proletarians or we are the working class.

287 Palabra Libre. Manifiesto. No. 1
border. But it was also the “profound voice of those that die trying to cross [the U.S.- Mexican border].” The zine was also served a generational need to resist and to survive: “We resist because our grandparents and our elders taught us that we must resist because as children we were always excluded from luxury and comfort, because we live amidst the poverty growing with us. We feel and understand the need to resist because it is part of our daily lives. Our voice has a lot of truth, and the truth sooner or later defeats frustration.”

One of the underground rivers that gave strength and direction to the Colectivo was anarchism. To trace the beginning of its biography, we should travel back in time to 45 Morelos Street in Mexico City, where the Biblioteca Social Reconstruir was located. The Biblioteca was an anarchist library founded in 1978 by the Catalan anarchist Ricardo Mestre Ventura and the Mexican anarchist organizer Jorge Robles. The library was described to me by Tobi, a punk anarchist from Ecatepec and the current keeper of the library after Mestre’s death in the Tianguis del Chopo in Mexico City. The library remained open until Mestre’s death in the 1990s, and for more than two decades created a library collection that included the archives of old anarchists such as Benjamín Cano Ruíz, Eliseo Rojas, Marcos Alcón, Fidel Miró, and Ignacio Portilla, in addition to the papers of Mestre. The collection included anarchist newspapers and magazines from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The Biblioteca Social Reconstruir, located in downtown Mexico City, was for many years a social place for meeting, discussion and education on anarchism and libertarian ideas for many young people. Among them were many punks and anarchists from the outskirts of Mexico City, including Ecatepec, or Ecatepunk in the Estado de Mexico. Among them was Buenaventura, a punk teenager, son of workers, squatter in downtown Manhattan for several years, and later on one of the founders of the Colectivo Palabra Libre in New York City.

288 Palabra Libre. Editorial. No. 0
Between punk and the *Biblioteca Social Reconstruir*, Buenaventura began to be educated in libertarian thought based on the ideas of autonomy and self-management. Later, he brought these ideas to life in the *Colectivo* when he left Ecatepec to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Once in New York, Buenaventura advocated creating a *colectivo* based on a simple idea learned during those Mexican days in the *Biblioteca*, “doing the things for yourself, creating and making what we need collectively to get strength as a collective, as an individual and as a society,” as he recalled one June afternoon of 2011 in the Bronx.

These anarchist ideas were expressed in another way to understand politics and political practice in New York City, a political practice not connected to state institutions. Thus, in its early years, the *Colectivo* was defined as a collective of workers: “We are not college students looking for community leadership. We are not community or religious based organization desperately looking for cases to fill our records and get on TV, and to obtain positions of power within the existing political structure. Nor do we belong to religious, Marxists, communists, or other groups. We have neither a leader nor leaders, because we strongly believe that we do not need them because we do not like to obey. We believe in self-organization.”

What kind of politics did they advocate? “Our position,” they answered in 2006, “is not that of party politics, political organizations, or doctrinaires wanting to take power. Ours is the position of the workers, the indigenous, the immigrants.”

Over the years, and like millions of Mexicans in recent decades, Buenaventura migrated from Mexico to New York City. He recalled the reasons why he and many other Mexicans had to migrate to the United States: “We come here, but at the bottom of our hearts we would not want to come, but it is the fucking necessity. Sometimes your ideals do not feed you or help you

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289 Palabra Libre. A manera de editorial. No. 3.
290 Palabra Libre. Manifiesto. No. 2.
to change your future.” The son of workers, coming from violent urban environments and slums, he migrated to New York in search of a future: “We are the sons of workers and so we never have a future. The future of the workers’ sons is to go outside and take care of themselves because we don’t have the means to pursue an education.”

In the first issue of the zine, in 2006, he wrote, “in the eyes of modern Mexico, all of us the eternal children of the workers and peasants simply have to stand at the margins and oblivion. They [the Mexican ruling class] turn to see our neighborhoods when they want to take our sports courts in order to construct a mall, a subway line or a bank ‘to keep our savings.’ They turn to us when in need of labor for the construction of their roads.”291 The rebellious spirit is also a feature of that Mexican exile that we acknowledge as Mexican migration. The rebellious spirit as Buenaventura explains to me, is the product “of reading, seeing, feeling, and listening to each other. The rebel sentiment exists in many people. However, many times we do not see each other and sometimes we do not listen to each other.”

“We grew up the same way Mexico City did: the brave way. I come from a family that had its periods of extreme poverty. My mom was a single mother for a while, another time a beaten mother (madreada) and in some occasions a fucked up mother.” It is the voice of Carlos, better known among the members of the Colectivo as “el Charly,” one of its founders. Carlos lived in the East Harlem, el Barrio, the former Puerto Rican enclave in New York, when in 1994 the Zapatista Army of National Liberation emerged in southeast Mexico, waging war against the Mexican government. “I arrived to New York before the Zapatista movement emerged. I really identified myself with the student movement of 1968, but I came to New York very ignorant in many senses because I studied only to the primary school because I was expelled.”

The armed uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army triggered in New York a response of support and solidarity with the indigenous uprising in Chiapas and the formation of Mexican and U.S. organizations as *Amanecer Zapatista Unidos en la Lucha* (AZUL), a community-based organization ‘el Charly’ joined long before the existence of *Colectivo Palabra Libre*. During the early years of the Zapatista uprising AZUL held protests at the Mexican Consulate in midtown Manhattan and disseminated the Zapatista communiqués throughout the Mexican community.

“Zapatismo,” ‘el Charly’ pointed out, “had given me inspiration to what I wanted to do as a person, and the work I wanted to do as a painter. We come from the slums, many of our parents come from places with indigenous population and we do not acknowledge indigenous blood within us.” With this influence, in March 2001 ‘el Charly’ painted, with the help of other Mexicans, a Zapatista mural on Second Avenue and 117th Street in East Harlem. Explaining the story of the mural he recalled that “some Mexicans rented the place and I felt the confidence to approach them and ask for a chance to paint the mural.” In those days, far away from New York, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation was taking part in the March of the Color of the Earth from the southeast state of Chiapas to Mexico City demanding from the Mexican Congress the Constitutional recognition of the San Andrés Accords signed by the Mexican government and the indigenous rebels.

Carlos wanted to support the indigenous demands with a mural in one of the neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of Mexicans in the city, a mural about human “respect and tolerance for difference.” In 2009, when he restored the Zapatista mural he recalled his former expectations: “I wanted to make something you could see about that social movement born in Mexico.” The mural is still in the heart of the old Puerto Rican neighborhood, and
represents the testimony of the Zapatista influence among many Mexicans in New York, that same influence seen on the streets of New York in the spring of 2006, when millions of migrant workers took to the streets across the United States to demand a comprehensive immigration reform.

In April 2006, Víctor Toro, founder of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement) in Chile, former member of its Central Committee, tortured and exiled by the Pinochet regime, summed up while he was marching across the Brooklyn Bridge that the spring marches with the participation of millions of Mexicans, including some members of the Colectivo Palabra Libre represented for millions of migrant workers from Mexico and Latin America: “We are part of the struggle of the poor, the marginalized people throughout Latin America and worldwide. Therefore, all the people of the world, all the people of Latin America must understand that here, in the very guts of imperialism we are fighting for our rights, which are the rights of all workers in the world. [This] is a war for survival, for work and for our rights. We’ve carried out the fight; we have endured here for more than twenty years. So we will win, we will win.”

The Zapatista speeches claiming the rights of the indigenous people of Mexico emerged in the migrant protests of 2006 in New York City. The problem of Mexico, as noted to me by Domingo, an indigenous Nahua migrant from the Montaña region is “el mal gobierno,” or bad government. “El mal gobierno denies and squashes our rights. [In the Montaña] there are no schools, no teachers. Some have told us that we Mexicans are traga nopales (literally cactus

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292 According to Bada et. al (2006) the migrant mass mobilization of April 10 of 2006 in New York City with a participation of about 100,000 persons was among the 15 biggest mobilizations in the United States for the Spring of 2006. The biggest migrant mobilizations were in Chicago (400,000-750,000), Los Angeles (400,000-700,000) in May Day and Dallas (350,000-500,000) in April 9th of 2006. According to the authors, approximately 2,205,000 to 3,795,000 persons were mobilized in the 15 biggest marches in 14 cities. The total mobilized in the United States for 2006 were 3,324,256 to 5,058,806.

293 Author interview with Victor Toro. April 1 of 2006. New York, NY.
eaters). I am indigenous, I speak Nahuatl, and I am not ashamed of who I am. We’re not criminals, we come to work.” During the marches, there also emerged other Zapatista slogans: “¡Ya basta,” or Enough! “We the Colectivo Palabra Libre are fed up of being exploited workers on the construction sites, the factories, the kitchens, the marquetas (delis), and the bodegas. We suffer the abuse, the lack of rights, visas and all alternatives.”

The mass migrant mobilizations allowed Mexican workers to recover the social memory of the labor struggles in the United States. As recalled by Juan (a Mexican migrant, a construction worker, founding member of the Colectivo, and member of the Communist Party of the U.S.) in Union Square, “May Day is not celebrated in the United States, although it originated in Chicago. People believe that we have come out to the street to beg for the immigrants’ legalization. But we are not here to beg, we want rights.” What were those rights? An anonymous writer wrote in the zine on those days of 2006, “those rights give a fuck when you’re seen as a fucking illegal who doesn’t pay taxes, who does not have social security, who one day works in the fucking construction site because you are needed and the next day you get a kick in your ass because you don’t count… If you protest, they fire you, you have to live subjected, with your head bend, silent, enduring the worst wages, the worst living and working conditions.”

These were the old disputes between oppressors and oppressed, the old struggles led this time by the millions of migrant workers from all over the world, but mostly from Mexico and Latin America. Mexican migrant workers in the streets were castaways of neoliberal politics -- displaced from their country as authentic survivors of a national economy gradually dismantled and subservient to the U.S. geopolitical interests. Years later, the editorial of the number 6 of the

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294 Palabra Libre. No. 0.
295 Palabra Libre. Crónicas de mierda! No. 2. Pág. 8-9
zine, in the midst of the nativist and anti-Mexican hysteria unleashed in 2009 with the enactment of SB1070 in Arizona, and echoing the Zapatista communiqués, the Colectivo made the following statement: “We do not want either your forgiveness or your amnesty. Who the hell are you to grant us an amnesty? What reasons do you have? Is it because we did not stay in Mexico to starve? Is it because we did not stay to be sold in a sweatshop or in a Wal-Mart? Is it because we do not justify the country’s looting with our vote? Are we going to get an amnesty for being outlaws? Or because we do not forget the U.S. colonial war against Mexico in 1847? Because we do not forget we were plundered?”

Since the beginning in 2005, the Colectivo has held fundraisers to get the zine published. It should be noted that in its years of existence, the zines have always circulated for free. To do so, the Colectivo appealed to the solidarity of that Mexican community we know as “la banda.” The lack of a space to hold the events as well as the lack of a printer to produce the zines independently, made it difficult for the Colectivo to become economically self-sufficient. The Community Center on 6th Street in Manhattan constituted for several years the main venue for the Palabra Libre events. However, given the lack of economic resources the group had to find other spaces, among them the Brecht Forum, and the Peña del Bronx, a community space founded in the Bronx over 20 years ago by Víctor Toro and Nieves Ayres.

Solidarity through rock was a backbone supporting Palabra Libre, and the music performed by Mexicans migrant workers just like them. It is music that has come far down from the south rolling like a stone, crossing one of the most militarized borders in the world, from Ecatepec, Mexico City, Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Morelos, Michoacán, Querétaro, and the city of Tlapa in the Montaña. As time passed, Mexicans formed various bands of metal, black metal,

punk, ska, and rock that echoes the music affinity among the youth population in Mexico, and of those who have returned from New York, Chicago, or California to their places of origin.

Rock bands have contributed to every event organized by *Palabra Libre*. The money collected from the events through voluntary contributions financed the publication of the zine. Also, during its early years, the *Colectivo* was also supported by the dance group *Quetzalcoatl in Ixachitlan Nauchcampa Cetiliztli* or “Group of the Four Directions in the East side of the Continent, Land of the Red People.” The group was founded in 1999 by the Sisters Colorado, Mexican-American activists, also founders of New York Zapatista in the 1990s, a New York City-based support group of the EZLN. Cetiliztli was defined as, “a group of art and education… to achieve the liberation of La Raza. We do not recognize political boundaries imposed on us. We are a people of this continent, one land, one people.”

From a historical perspective of contemporary migration to New York City, the pages of *Palabra Libre* are outstanding testimony of the life experience of the young Mexican proletarians. Not only is there a description of racism, labor abuse and exploitation, the police abuse against Mexicans, or the corruption and political control exercised by Mexican organizations such as the Asociación Tepeyac, but also a radical critique of the everyday life conditions endured by Mexican migrant workers.

One of the goals of the *Colectivo* was to educate themselves within the libertarian ideals of Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón, highlighting the political significance of this movement to locate the contemporary living and working conditions of millions of Mexican undocumented migrants in New York City and the United States. Some examples of such intent are the essays published about the communalist tradition and anarchist texts originally published in the *Regeneración* newspaper, essays published by Mexican anarchist Librado Rivera in the

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early twentieth century, and a fictional interview with Mikhail Bakunin in Liberty Park during the Occupy Wall Street occupation in downtown Manhattan in 2011.

From Wall Street, the financial heart of the planet and a source of human misery and despair, in October, 2011 the Colectivo interviewed anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. According to the interview, and after having coffee and lunch in a deli nearby Liberty Plaza, they were said to have talked for more than three hours and Colectivo asked him about the question of freedom of undocumented Mexican migrants in the United States. Bakunin argued that “a man is truly free only if he coexists as such with other free men. The slavery of a man or a woman violates the equality of all. In the U.S. you cannot talk about the existence of freedom. I am truly free only when all men and women are too. And here you have more than 12 million undocumented migrants] who are not free.” “Where to begin?” Palabra Libre asked him. “Education is the first step,” he replied.298

Since 2005 the Colectivo has emphasized the practice of self-education. In the last years the group focused on the recollections of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (Liberal Mexican Party, or PLM) struggle in the United States, as a fundamental part of the history of struggle of the Mexicans in the U.S. Writing a biography is to discover the individual and collective origins, the experiences over time that shape that system of feelings of a group of individuals that meet and decide to “listen to each other.” Writing a biography is also an act of recollecting the past and the memories of the struggles with the tensions existing between possibilities and necessity. The biography of the Colectivo Palabra Libre is therefore a mirror of the history of Mexicans in the United States, the struggle of never accepting a life they did not choose. In Mexican anarchism, and in Zapatismo they found the necessary political traditions to build the life they wanted to live.

298 Palabra Libre. No. 9.
Punk Tlapaneco migration to New York

As many Tlapanecos migrated to New York, they sought out punk, metal, and hip hop to find answers to old questions in new situations. The historical experience of people coping with social oppression are portrayed in the lyrics of their songs. These songs are regularly written after the daily work in the restaurant. A couple of lines of a song will be written in the subway in their way home. Other lyrics are jotted in a napkin, or on a restaurant receipt taken from the job. In general, the lyrics of local Mexican bands are written with the intention of depicting the life and work of Mexican migrants in New York.

What can be found on those lyrics written by Mexican migrants? To what extent do lyrics produced by migrants inform us about broader processes of social exclusion on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and among this Mexican segment of the working class? Both the lyrics and the names of the bands tell us about the way in which Mexicans see themselves within the labor, racial and political structure of New York City as well as within a larger social and geographical structure both in Mexico and the United States. As noted in the previous chapter, Los Oprimidos, or the Oppressed, was the first Mexican rock band in New York. The name echoes other Mexican migrant’s self-representations of their individual and collective experience as workers, day laborers, indigenous workers or undocumented migrant workers.

“Oppressed, slaves, animals, people on its knees, abandoned, and cockroaches” are just a few ways in which Mexicans depict how they are often treated in the city. Similarly to the rock band, Los Oprimidos (see Chapter 5) of the Flores brothers in the 1990’s, a group of Mexican migrants from Tlapa, Mexico City’s outskirts, Oaxaca, and Queretaro formed a metal band known as Hurachudo, a term referring to the derogative name given to Mexican indigenous people and a reference to their leather sandals. Sarcasm was the way to respond to the
discrimination against Mexican indigenous populations within Mexican society. However, the racism and discrimination against Mixtecos and Nahuas of the Montaña are also manifested in New York City. For example, and as already noted, although mestizo workers from Alpojeca or Tlapa enter the same “hole” (see Chapter 4) of the migrant labor market alongside Nahuas and Mixtecos of Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca, the particular ethnic origins in Mexico play a role in social interaction, or labor competition among Mexicans (see Chapter 4).

For many Mexicans migrants, Indian is synonymous with a permanent backward mental condition that is even internalized and naturalized among some Mixteco migrants when they say, “estamos cerrados de nuestra mente,” or literally “we are close-minded.” In the theater of everyday interaction, the Mixtecos are “the fucking paisanitos,” the “paisa”, “paisanito,” or “Oaxaquita.” This old racism that verbally emerges among migrants reflects the extent to which the long-term tensions against indigenous people in Mexico survive on the other side of the U.S.-Mexico within the Mexican migrant stream.

The punk band Huarachudo, mocked this discrimination against the indigenous migrants. “The name was intended,” recalls Don Armadillo, “to mock our condition both as indigenous and as undocumented migrants.” With members from different states in Mexico, the band was in some way mirroring the map of the Mexican migration to New York. The group included Gallego (vocals), Artesano (guitar) Mariano (guitar), the Ajolote (keyboard), Buenaventura (bass), and Don Armadillo (drums). 299 Don Armadillo recalls that the band formed because “a compa (comrade) from Oaxaca wanted to have a band.” By that time, Don Armadillo had met Buenaventura in a concert and they agreed to form the band. Huarachudo had a short life, but as

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299 Later on Gallego and Buenavenura formed a Black Metal band with Mexican migrants from the state of Puebla.
testimony the band recorded a demo and played several gigs in some famous underground venues in the Bronx and Manhattan.

Two musical and political “traditions” from Central and South Mexico converged in the make-up of the band. On the one hand, the punk from Ecatepec was politically informed by the influence of Spanish anti-fascist punk, and on the other hand, the punk from Tlapa and Oaxaca was reflected in the visions of the social and political tensions of semi-rural and indigenous peasant deprivation. As an outcome, *Huarachudo* portrayed the character of Mexican indigenous peasants through a proletarian and urban musical genre as punk. Their songs, for example, reflected on the effects of political power on the indigenous peasantry in Mexico:

¿Dónde te escondes?
Si ya no te veo
Te miro y te busco y nunca te encuentro
Criminal que abusas de los pueblos
Criminal que abusas del poder
La historia te condena
La historia no te olvida
Guerrero, indígena y campesino
Guerrero de un pueblo ofendido
Derrocado, destruido, explotado
Dividido, sometido y violado

“Where are you hiding?
I look for you, I look for you and I never find you
You are a criminal that abuses the people
You are a criminal that abuses the power
History condemns you
History will not forget you
Warrior, indigenous, and peasant
Warrior of an offended people
Overthrown, destroyed, and exploited
Divided, subdued and raped”

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300 “*Donde te escondes.*” Huarachudo Demo.
But indigenous peasants contesting the power of the Mexican state are not the only characters in the music played by Mexican and Guerrerense migrants. Several Mexican rock bands have exalted the Mexican pre-Hispanic past as an element of Mexican identity formation. The mobilization of the pre-Hispanic indigenous past is embedded in every aspect of the social life of the Mexican migrants in the city, including political participation, as is the case of the numerous pre-Hispanic dance groups organized by first generation of male and female migrants as well as second generation Mexican migrants. The ideological use of the pre-Hispanic material is highly diffused among the Mexican migrants in the city. For example, it can be used to convey a political discourse about migrant labor rights and amnesty; to support insurrectional peasant indigenous movements such as the Zapatista National Liberation Army in Chiapas; or to establish an historical connection between peasant and proletarian twentieth century Mexican rebels such as Emiliano Zapata, or Francisco Villa. The latter features in songs such as “Sacred Ground” written and recorded by metal bands such as Tlacuilo, a band begun also by former punks in Tlapa:

Indios Zapatistas
Sangre sagrada
De la patria Mexicana
Hijos de Villa
Tesor de Zapata
Sangre Guerrera
De nuestra raza

Zapatistas Indians
Holy blood
From Mexican homeland
Sons of Villa
Zapata’s treasury
Warrior’s blood
Of our race

301 Tlacuilo Demo.
There are different and opposite representations of the Mexican indigenous peoples in the lyrics of the Mexican bands. On the one hand, *Huarachudo* depicts Mexican indigenous communities as fluid and historically changing, and on the other hand, there are rock bands that mobilize the pre-Hispanic indigenous past to construct an idea of Mexicanness. Mexican migrants, for instance, are depicted as heirs of a race of warriors, people struggling for their liberation from the European, and as migrants in a continuous struggle to survive and be freed from cultural oppression. The historical analogies are often used to depict the cultural transformation of the Mexican communities in New York.

For example, the loss of the Spanish language among the Mexican second generation is portrayed as a destruction of their cultural identity and a form of cultural oppression compared to the destruction of the Mexican indigenous languages during the Spanish Conquest. Though none of the members of the Mexican rock bands speak an indigenous language, they view themselves as descendants of the Mexican indigenous population. Similarly, the Mexican metal band Kill God begun by migrants from Tlapa and Oaxaca, uses the exaltation of the indigenous pre-Hispanic past and its cosmogony to endure the ongoing political oppression against the Mexican indigenous peoples:

Ah, beautiful Tlaltehkuhtlih
You are in our thoughts
You occupy our hearts
We feel your presence
We feel your courage
Do not let us down
And help us
To overcome our enemies.

302 "Tlaltehkuhtli." Kill God. The song is written in English.
The Huarachudo Indian

The small businessmen controlling the transnational Mexican rock market have been able to take economic advantage of the cultural tastes of Mexican migrants. However the Mexican punk and rock bands elaborating political responses through their lyrics and avoiding gigs organized by these Mexican businessmen have not been able to obtain any economic benefit. Therefore, what can be expected of a Tlapaneco mestizo mocking himself and calling himself a huarachudo? Can a Huarachudo pay his rent in New York City singing punk songs? No. A Huarachudo migrant from Guerrero in New York sings songs about the social and political production of abandonment and migration: “History condemns you; history will not forget you.”

After leaving the band Huarachudo, Don Armadillo began to name himself Huarachudo, a hip-hop songwriter and singer. However in New York, and similar to millions of Mexicans who crossed the U.S-Mexico border, he is a man who has no name, an “illegal” individual, just another “Mexican.” I think that is why changing his name again suggests that Don Armadillo is not only a migrant worker from the city of Tlapa but also stubbornly determined to develop his individual capacities as human being, the set of human capacities, abilities and expectations that were taken away from many members of his generation. “The man who has no name/Don Armadillo duality” reflects this contradiction, and also mirrors the history of a people transformed into a surplus labor population. Don Armadillo became another Mexican migrant “who has no name” in the transnational labor market of disposable workers from the Montaña. Don Armadillo’s songs can be read as historical documents of the experience of the people of the Montaña, or as cultural evidence of how Guerrerenses became proletarians in New York City. Like Don Armadillo, many were running away from the “misery,” as he sang in one of his songs:
Mira para arriba en la Montaña
Si miras fijamente ella no te engaña
Margina$ados, enfermos, indios patarra$ada
Despojados de la tierra, ahora no tienen nada

Chivos expiatorios de la tierra de narcos
Los que nunca tienen nada porque no son blancos
Huyes de la miseria, te vas a la ciudad
Cinturones de pobres creciendo más y más

Sube para arriba de la Montaña
Si miras fijamente ella no te engaña
Vigilados, enfermos y una guerra vieja
Un inocente muere y ya nunca regresa

Caminando distancias para ver un doctor
Los siglos han pasado y no acaba el dolor
Cruzando las fronteras, perdiendo hasta la vida
Estadística más de la democracia jodida.

Look up on the Mountain
If you stare at her, she doesn’t deceive you
Marginalized, sick, patarrajada Indians
Dispossessed from the land, now they have nothing

Scapegoats in a land of drug dealers
Those who have never had anything because they aren’t white
You run away from misery, you go to the city
Slums growing more and more

Look up to the Mountain
If you stare at her, she doesn’t deceive you
People under surveillance, sick and living an old war
An innocent dies and he never returns

Walking great distances to see a doctor
Centuries have passed and the pain is not over
Crossing the borders, losing even the life
Just another statistic of a fucked democracy. 303

As the migration of undocumented workers has emerged from different states of the
Mexican territory, new Mexican punk bands in New York have emerged with young migrant

303 “La Montaña.” Huarachudo. Demo.
workers from the Montaña, Veracruz, Mexico City, Puebla, and Chalco in the Estado de Mexico, adding new voices to the punk performed by Mexican migrants. Those bands have also depicted the Mexican migrant labor experience in the United States, and in New York City, as the band Border Corpse in its song Bloody Frontiers sings:

\begin{verbatim}
Llegas a un lugar desconocido
Donde no eres bienvenido
Trabajas para conseguir
En el futuro un porvenir

Para todos no siempre es igual
Muchos nunca llegarán
Muertos en el desierto
¡Asesinados por las balas
De un Minuteman!
¡Malditas fronteras!
\end{verbatim}

You arrive to an unknown place
Where you are not welcome
You work to get what you need
A better future

But not everyone has the same chance
Many never arrive
They are dead in the desert
Murdered by the bullets
Of a Minuteman!
Damn borders!^{304}

The way in which the Mexican nationalism and the sense of being Mexican are differentially conveyed by Mexican rock bands in the city tell us about how Mexicans are incorporated into a multiethnic city as New York. On one hand, there are Mexican rock bands such as *Kill God* or *Tlacuilo* that connect Mexicaness to Mexican nationalism or pre-Hispanic indigenous pride. On the other hand, Mexican punk bands in the city have rejected mobilizing nationalistic references or symbols of the Mexican culture and history. Instead, they tend to

^{304} Border Corpse Demo.
represent themselves as “migrant workers” and identify themselves plainly as internationalist workers. Also, Mexican punks (and some metal bands) are in general more open to playing with groups of different national origins, including Latino and White U.S., bands. Pointing out the refusal of Mexican bands to play with bands that are not Mexican, Don Armadillo notes: “If they [Mexican bands] are not willing to accept the music and rock bands from other national origins and to socialize with them, then they should not come to the United States.” Such different attitudes among Mexican bands give us insight on how Mexican migrants are culturally interacting with other social groups in the city, and also inform us about the extent to which punk music is shaping the way Mexicans relate and build up their location within the racial and ethnic structure of New York City.

Punk has become a marginal movement in New York City and the Mexican and Guerrerense punks are also marginal in terms of their relationship with the rest of la banda that other segment of the Mexican working class not identified with either rock or punk. Curiously, the punk played by Mexicans is becoming more connected with Latino rather than with Mexican bands, and there is a growing Latino punk scene in the city shaped by Mexican and local bands, bands from Chicago and Los Angeles, and punk bands from Latin America. Just as interesting, Mexican and Guerrerense punks have not been able to disseminate punk and their political ideas among la banda and the urban Mexican working class, but instead they are part of a national and Latin American network self-defined as Latino Punk. As a matter of fact, Don Armadillo’s band is identified as a hardcore Latino band.

In the punk gigs with Mexican punk rock performances, the audience tends to be quite diverse, including white population from the city and suburban areas, Mexicans, and Latino migrants. However, the incorporation of Mexicans and Latinos into the New York City punk
rock scene has not been free of racial tensions. If the arrival of migrants to migrant neighborhoods of the city was shaped by violence and physical confrontation (as the tension between Mexicans and Puerto Rican and African Americans in East Harlem in the 1980s, for example), the resistance to the incursion of the Mexican punks into the moshpits of the New York City punk circuits was no exception.

O’Hara (1999) has commented about the prevailing racism, xenophobia, and homophobia in the punk rock scene in New York in the 1980s. About this aspect, Mexicans recall that in their incursion into the mosh pits of New York punk gigs, they had to endure the physical aggression of some white punks. Such physical challenge was endured through the *macizo* character of Mexican punks, but also by collectively protecting each other. This strategy helped them gain presence and respect within the punk circuit in the city. However in the 1990s this circuit became weaker and differentiated from the Mexican rock circuit controlled by Mexican small businessmen. Mexican punks like Don Armadillo tended to play in so-called “alternative” venues in Manhattan and Brooklyn that were non-profit and alcohol consumption was prohibited.

Mexican punks sought social interaction with other ethnic groups in New York, creating a sense of multicultural identity among its members who in some cases defined themselves as “multicultural individuals,” while at the same time maintaining a political sense of themselves as an oppressed group. Such attitude is also reflected in their interest in bringing into their lyrics a more ample class perspective rather than a nationally oriented one on issues related to migration in the U.S. (such as labor exploitation, migration enforcement, border violence, border crossing, migrant labor exploitation, etcetera). That has been the case of Huarachudo who dedicated one

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305 The mosh pit or slam-dancing consist on participants pushing or slamming into each other in hardcore punk or metal gigs. In some cases, the participants run around in circles pushing each other.
of his songs “not only to the place where I came from but to all indigenous communities in Latin
America that are lagging behind, forgotten as the product of globalization.”

In the same way, Border Corpse, a group formed by Mexican migrants from the Montaña
and the Mexico City periphery, performs in Spanish for an ethnic and racially diverse audience
and sings songs along the “traditional punk topics” such as “Many Enemies”:

*Llevamos mucho tiempo en la misma condición
Siempre explotados por el maldito patrón
Es hora de alzarse y forjar la unión
De todos los obreros de esta nación
Siempre hemos tenido muchos enemigos
Desde Wall Street hasta Los Pinos

Leyes xenófobas “SB1070”
Mientras que mi mano de obra siempre esta en reventa
Más tarde ni a las calles se podrá salir
Los racistas nuestro color de piel lo quieren prohibir

Mira los minuteman que están de cacería
Y la Border Patrol asesinando sin compasión
Yo no estoy rogando por una amnistía
No soy un criminal, no soy un ilegal ni pido perdón
Luchemos por plenos derechos de ciudadanía
Para todos los inmigrantes de esta y toda la nación

We have been for a long time in the same social condition
Always exploited by the damn boss
It's time to rise up and be united
All the workers of this nation
We have always had many enemies
From Wall Street to Los Pinos

Xenophobic laws as the “SB1070”
While my labor is always on sale
Later on we wont be able to get out in the streets
Racists want to ban our skin color

Look at the Minutemen, they are hunting
And the Border Patrol is killing without mercy
I'm not begging for an amnesty
I'm not a criminal, I’m not an illegal and I’m not asking forgiveness
Let us fight for full citizenship rights  
For all the immigrants nationwide\textsuperscript{306}

“If not for singing with my band I would die,” says Don Armadillo while he walks with difficulty as a result of leg and an arm injuries he suffered years ago when he worked in a kitchen in Queens. His knee was severely damaged and when the cold hits in the New York City winter, it aggravates his walking. Nonetheless he prefers to walk home and often stops by to drink coffee or to eat tacos at 5 AM. When he is really tired we take a taxi and very occasionally we take the train. But when we return by walking, particularly in the summer, then we have plenty of time to talk about music, including his refusal to commercialize his music.

As an anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic punk he is also someone who supports the Do it Yourself (DIY) punk ethic, and so he refuses to commercially distribute his music. It does not matter that at night, almost every night he sells his voice and his DJ’s abilities in the Ecuadorian restaurant where he works. Still, he is committed that his music should not enter the commodity market of music. Entering every night to the restaurant and selling his voice for $450 dollars a week singing for the Latino workers returning to their neighborhoods after a day of work, is the way he makes his living and the way he can keep alive his punk and hip hop music away from market commodification.

He has even considered performing as a clown at children’s parties, so in that way he could get a living without having to sell his music. So, he always returns at dawn to his apartment after have spending his night singing to Ecuadorians and Dominicans, but mainly to Mexican migrant workers from Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca. Workers have dinner, drink a beer, and listen or sing with him. Former peasants from Guerrero or Oaxaca, even former

\textsuperscript{306} Border Corpse Demo.
Mixteco soldiers who battled the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas or were sent to destroy drug production in Sinaloa join in. All of them are now among his clientele. Former Mixteco soldiers from Oaxaca who migrated and work now as cooks ask Don Armadillo to sing with them the Tigres del Norte song “La Jaula de Oro,” or the Golden Cage, a song that depicts the suffering of living in a different culture and faraway from home.

However, that does not mean he likes or enjoys what he sings “I do not like the modern Mexican ballads or Corridos because they have very self-destructive lyrics, and in the social environment where I perform I found young people who are deeply consumed by drugs, people who like that kind of music and have a very violent attitude. For me it’s too sad. For example, when they come to me and ask me for a song, they offer me marijuana or beer. It is really sad to see that, and also it’s sad to know that there are bands and record labels promoting such kinds of behavior. Instead, we [ punks] are accused because our music is pure noise, we are isolated. They have said that we are garbage, and that we contribute nothing to society. In my town [ Tlapa], this type of [ violent] culture is consuming young people who see on it an option, an answer. And this culture goes hand in hand with national chauvinism and Mexican pride.” And then as he refuses to commercialize his music, he must sing songs that reify or romanticize violence produced by drug traffic and production in Mexico.

But also he has to endure violence in the restaurant, in the workplace. One night at the restaurant, a drunk Ecuadorian refused to pay and began molesting one of the Mexican waitresses. Don Armadillo intended to stop him: “I got angry when he tried to abuse the waitresses.” The Ecuadorian tried to hit him but failed, so Don Armadillo hit him back in self-defense. The drunken customer abandoned the restaurant and later on returned with a police officer. Don Armadillo was given a court citation. Similar situations pop-up within the ranks of
drunken migrant customers who get into arguments when in the middle of a song someone shouts a “hurrah” to Sinaloa or to Puebla, starting a physical brawl or verbal altercation among the ranks of Mexican migrants. Migrant labor is decimated by work and alcohol.

*The darkest side is under the lamp*

If *Subversión* sang about starvation among the Mixteco people in the Montaña and day laborer migration to Sinaloa (see Chapter 5), in *Huarachudo’s* songs the cycle has come to an end. His songs are part of the B-side of a record about the fate of the migrant people from the Montaña. It is an account of the life of the Montaña people from their days picking tomatoes, to the days crossing the border, reaching California, and finally getting to the East Coast. The songs written by *Huarachudo* are among the first narratives written by the first generation of migrants from Tlapa to New York. His songs portray the feelings, ideas and grievances that are important in the formation of an “identity of interests as between themselves, and against their rulers and employers.”

Maybe such feelings about their past and present and those who have ruled them remain unheard, and buried by the shouts of the *enganchadores* that every year still haunt the Montaña in search of labor, buried by the voices of the Mexican elite proclaiming the virtues of labor migration to North America, and buried too by the voices of new municipal *Priista* presidents asking migrants to finance public infrastructure in Mexico. In the songs of *Huarachudo* we find out why he and his generation left the Montaña region “escaping from the past and that miserable life.”

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307 Thompson 166:1.
Como pasa el tiempo
Parece que fue ayer
Emprendimos el camino
De un nuevo amanecer

Nuevas inquietudes
Teníamos juventud
Caminando a no sé donde
Crecía nuestra inquietud

Éramos dos más que cruzaban la frontera
Huyendo del pasado
Y de esa vida perra
Dos mochilas viejas
Y dos tenis desgastados

La risa floreciente ya ha quedado atrás
Los años han pasado y mira
¿Dónde estás carnal?
¿Dónde estás carnal?

How time flies
It seem like yesterday
On the road
Of a new dawn

New dreams
We were young
Walking to nowhere
Our concern was growing

We were two more crossing the border
Escaping from the past
And that miserable life
Two old backpacks and
A pair of worn sneakers

The flourishing laugh stayed behind
The years have passed and look
Where are you brother?
Where are you brother?308

308 Huarachudo Demo.
Similarly, years before Vigo escaped from that same wretched life (see Chapter 5), he met Jorge Reyes in Tlapa, “the first fucking rock musician in Tlapa!” he had met. “I remember he signed a copy of his album for me. It had a white cover and he wrote on it: ‘the darkest place is under the lamp.’” So, maybe in order to find the answer, we must look backwards into the darkest places of the geography of the Montaña region. These locations are the abandoned places of the neoliberal imaginary of the Mexican ruling class; they are places located “under the lamp,” or in “Mexico Profundo.” These are the places where a group of young migrants from Tlapa began to bring to life Mexican rock as part of a migrant working-class culture in New York City.

Since the late 1980s, this culture has been fostered by a mass of young undocumented workers sharing their experiences of labor exploitation, discrimination, police abuse, illegality, and sharing as well their distaste for U.S imperialism and deep distrust of electoral and party politics. Many reject all formal institutions of political participation, including Mexican ethnic organizations and traditional working-class institutions such as unions.

Claims related to the economic, political, and economic tensions lying behind migration are formulated through punk as a “language of class.” They are also related to labor exploitation, indigenous dispossession, peasant oppression, the political oppression of the caciques, and the violence of the Mexican state. Yet, it is unclear to what extent this language will be incorporated into the life of la banda as well by the rest of the Mexican working-class in the city.
CONCLUSION

I have told some fragments of the history of the Montaña people in New York City, how they became proletarians and how a region in south Mexico was transformed into a labor supplier for the transnational migrant labor market of North America. This dissertation traces the life story of Othón and Don Armadillo and their reflection on how their people through different trajectories became disposable in a far away land. This dissertation told la historia de los pobres, or the history of poor people from the Montaña, as noted by Othón in when he sang El Corrido de Elsa Pineda. As I have tried to show, this dissertation narrates the recent history of the Montaña people, the victims of the neoliberalism bronco, the migrants from the new Barbarous Mexico, the objects of the sucias, pesadas, y macizas or the dirty, hard, and heavy politics of the authoritarian vision of modernization held by Mexico’s ruling class.

The proletarianization of the people of the Montaña via migration arises from a set of political decisions within the massive, class-driven state project implemented by a succession of Mexican neoliberal governments. The dismantling of state institutions that granted subsidies, credits, technical support and access to local markets for peasant agriculture producers pushed many over the financial edge. Even subsistence agriculture in the Montana since the 1980s has become impossible. The privatization of former ejido lands promoted private investment, land consolidation, and export-oriented agriculture. The flood of U.S.-subsidized maize imports under NAFTA destroyed the local livelihoods of Mixteco semi-proletarians as Othón. Poppy production and migration to agricultural export zones, and finally to the United States, became the only routes to survival.

The dissertation has followed this process through the language of the abandonment, unfolding and expressing the different rounds of proletarianization and permanent dispossession.
according to the particular (cultural) sense Mixtecos give to the word in reflecting a sense of no future: the experience of have been dispossessed, ‘abandoned.’ But today, both Mixtecos and mestizos from Tlapa share the same sense of no future, also expressed in the language of the ‘chemo days.’ This sense of no future at home lies at the origins of the working class migrants from the Montaña in New York City.

Today Mixtecos and mestizos from the city of Tlapa and the Montaña region are part of the new migrant proletarians in New York City, and as such they enter into the same hoyo, or the same hole, as Mexican migrant workers refer to the labor market in New York City, as noted by Don Armadillo. Mixtecos who worked as day laborers in Sinaloa, former proletarians from Mexico City’s periphery, and grown-up mestizo teenagers from Tlapa, find themselves in New York City with the same kinds of jobs. Within the city’s labor structure, their former ethnic differences, their previous history, and their labor trajectories are leveled at the work sites. In other words, there is very little racialization of the Mexican indigenous labor by Mexican mestizo workers, and no job slots ascribed as work for “indigenous Mexican people.” Instead it could be said that most Mexican migrant workers find themselves pulled into labor that is hard, often dangerous and poorly paid.

However, within the Mexican migrant stream, particularly between mestizos and Mexican indigenous people working in the same places, I found evidence showing that the ethnic hierarchies that alienated them in Mexico operate here as a noticeable source of tension in everyday life interaction. For instance, mestizos may address indigenous people using derogative terms such as paisanito. Rural and indigenous origins are a source of shame, and individuals seek to hide these backgrounds from other migrants. Furthermore, this observable hiding of the origins, as well as the denial of their linguistic and cultural heritage suggests that
the *desinidanización* of Mexico as a key ideological and political process that shaped the idea of a modern Mexico, has been re-territorialized among migrants in the United States. From this perspective, it is not that clear that the movement of Mexican indigenous migrants back and forth across the U.S.-Mexico border is allowing them to get rid of racial, class and ethnic distinctions as argued by Stephen (2007).

However, when the sun goes down, as it has been shown, these new proletarians (either mestizo or indigenous people) are not been able to satisfy their social needs through wages, and instead they very often find more instability and fewer labor and social rights north of the U.S.-Mexican border. In many cases, they live precarious lives consisting of moving from one job to another, as is the case with Othón and Don Armadillo. ‘Nomadic’, was the word used by Alfonso Fabila to depict the “absurd, heroically and tragic existence” of the Mexican migrants in the United States in the early twentieth century. Now, in a similarly tragic and absurd way, the new proletarians live a nomadic urban life constantly chasing low-paid jobs and living without labor stability. This instability is aggravated by the fact they are undocumented and vulnerable to deportation to their communities of origin where they have not lived for decades. As the oral narratives have shown, after years of working in the city, tragedy and absurdity are not alien for an entire generation of Mexicans working in the kitchens and construction sites. Quite the contrary, after years and years of being proletarians in New York City, both mestizo and indigenous people have developed a sense of being disposable people whose only function is to work, and as Don Armadillo notes in one of his songs, as time goes by… and their youth goes away, they have wasted their lives away.

In these pages, I defined the abandonment and the *chemo* days as two important social and historical threads in the biography of the Guerrerense working class in New York City. The
abandonment, or the historical dispossession of the indigenous Mexican population and the sense of no future embodied in the chemo days for the teenager migrants from Tlapa on the other, were key in revealing the social realms and the deep class inequality shaping their collective biography, and thus in making sense of the birth of this segment of the Mexican working class in New York City.

I have referred to the abandonment as a historical condition. So when does it begin? When can we locate the origin of the “criminal abandonment” of the indigenous population, as described by Moisés Sáenz in the first decades of the Mexican twentieth century? When exploring the New Spain in the early nineteenth century, Alexander von Humboldt described “the mass of Mexican Indians” as representing “the spectacle of misery” since this population “lived only to get their living.” 309 Mexico’s profound and extensive social inequality has been describe by foreign travelers and social observers of Mexican society in the past, as well as in the present. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Kenneth Turner (1910), a U.S. journalist from Oregon described Mexico as a place “without political freedom,” a place where the joy of happiness is denied for most of its inhabitants as a result of the brutal concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and the hard labor conditions imposed on Mexican indigenous workers. 310 “Pitiful misery” were the words he used to depict the labor and living conditions of those workers.

“Is it [the conferring of happiness] an attack against the homeland?” asked Alfonso Fabila three decades later, “I don’t think so,” he responded to himself. Half a century after him, Othón asked me: “Do you know why my songs are sad?” Because, he answered, “when I was a child I had a painful life in Sinaloa,” echoing with his words the images of “the spectacle of

309 Humboldt 1984:69.
miserable,” “the pitiful misery,” and the “criminal abandonment” of the indigenous population described by Humboldt, Turner, Moisés Sáenz and Alfonso Fabila. So, is then Mexican society in the 21st century able to bestow the joy of happiness to its inhabitants, particularly to Mexican indigenous peoples? No. As the Othón described it, “there was no other option” but migrating and becoming a disposable proletarian. From this perspective, Othon’s and the different life stories I presented here depict the history of the long-term operation of the racial, economic and political structures of dispossession in Mexico. They also show the extent to which the proletarianization of the Montaña people, and particularly of the Mixteco indigenous people, is driven by institutionalized national exclusion.

At the same time, the integrationist project carried on by Mexican anthropologists throughout the twentieth century that promised equality both for mestizos and Mexican indigenous peoples as noted by anthropologist Aguirre Beltrán, and Gamio has been annihilated. As I have shown, the indigenismo of Gamio, Aguirre Beltrán, Alfonso Caso, and Fabila, (and even an entire generation of anthropologist in the mid-1970s that contested integrationism) promoted the notions of fairness and equality, and encouraged state interventions to level social inequalities. However, when a neo-liberally oriented Mexican technocracy took state power in the late 1980s, the ideas of integration were displaced by a project to rationalize the displacement of millions of Mexicans, including the indigenous people, to the United States in terms of ‘economic complementarities,’ that is, to make of the country a labor supplier for the U.S labor market. So, if we interrogate the actual economic (labor) and regional integration of Mexico with the United States via this biography of the migrant people from the Montaña, with thousands of Mexican indigenous and mestizo people from the Montaña living as migrant
workers in New York City, it is clear that Mexico as a nation is still far from achieving the anthropologists’ ideals of a society characterized by fairness and equality.

I have also argued that contemporary Mexican indigenous migration be considered within the broad historical framework of territorial dispossession. In post-revolutionary Mexico, Aguirre Beltrán (1967) acknowledged that on the one hand, the settlement of the indigenous people in the so-called *regiones de refugio*, or regions of refuge, was the result of land dispossession and military plundering during colonization. But on the other hand, these regions reinforced the racial and spatial segregation of Indians and therefore, maintained them under conditions of exploitation and political and ideological subordination. As shown through oral narratives, the people from the Montaña have endured different forms of dispossession whether through direct labor exploitation or via the plunder of the natural resources in the region. Now their proletarianization via migration is another historical step connected to the long-term process of territorial displacement and dispossession of the indigenous peoples in Mexico’s history.

Last but not least, the narrative of this biography of proletarianization focused a significant yet unexplored side of this history of displacement and dispossession of the people of the Montaña: the workings of resistance through the formation of punk and rock first in the Montaña, and then in New York City. As shown, in the 1980s, the formation of punk and rock in the city of Tlapa both nurtured and embedded the ideas and interpretations of social and political life for a whole generation of teenagers. Once they migrated to the United States, some of these teenagers found in punk along with other Mexican proletarians a means to contest their social and political location as undocumented migrant workers in New York.

The punk and rock played by Guerrerense and Mexican migrants formulates and verbalizes claims related to labor exploitation, deportation, border militarization, discrimination,
and migratory enforcement, among others. And in doing so, it reveals the development of self-awareness and a class language that expresses the feelings and grievances of a segment of the Mexican working class in New York City. Among a segment of the migrant workers from the Montaña people, punk is providing a class instrument, a means to make sense in their own terms of the migration from Guerrero to New York City.

I found that even though the origins of punks and rock musicians between Guerrerense and Mexican migrants are both rural and urban, still they are fundamentally mestizos. There is a particular politics behind this interplay of geographic and ethnic and origins which is also worthy of note. Though many young Mexican migrant workers did not share indigenous peasant roots or speak an indigenous languages, punk and rock enabled them to purposely mobilize Mexican indigenous identities, and in so doing to renounce their loss of linguistic, cultural, social, and historical heritage through proletarianization. In other words, they use punk to claim keep being what they are, Mexicans. My people is “a people on its knees,” says the punk Don Armadillo when referring to both Mexican indigenous and mestizo people from the Montaña, and in his claim, punk thus subverts the solid system of ethnic hierarchies between Mexican indigenous and mestizo peoples produced by the Mexican state, at least through their songs.

On the other hand, as a working class language Mexican and Guerrerense punk and rock is relevant within the overall context of the Mexican community formation in New York City. Guerrerenses and Mexican migrants generally lacked organizations to develop a powerful working-class culture in the city. Overall, Mexican ethnic institutions are dominated by small businessman, and in spite of the ethnic diversity among Mexicans, these ethnic institutions share something in common: they locate their political agendas away from working class-based interests. Mexican organizations are more inclined to uphold the national and religious pride
through celebrations such as May 5, September 15, or the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Likewise, the use of ethnicity instead of working class agendas to promote the formation of a Mexican community has made it easier for Mexican local leaders to gain political positions with local state officials and the Mexican Consulate. As an example, none of the Mexican leaders in New York City mobilize their constituencies for working-class migrant mobilizations (May Day or Labor Day among others), and this in a city where a significant segment of the Mexican migrant workers are undocumented.

Within this context, Mexican punks and some rock musicians in the city remain among the few groups or communities of migrant workers that are producing a working-class culture within the Mexican stream and outside of the “webs of power” of Mexican ethnic institutions. Therefore, the New York case, and particularly the formation of a working-class culture by (punk and rock) migrant youths inform us about the necessity to open our scope and understand the Mexican community in New York not as a self-contained community primarily organized by the state, the community of origin in Mexico, or by ethnicity.

Guerrerense punks, as members of the Mexican working class in New York City, comprise an entire population forced to live by the terms of the Mexican ruling class as disposable migrants. Yet, through punk they are able to overcome the ethnic boundaries and hierarchies between mestizo and Mexican indigenous peoples, live beyond the Mexican state’s framed national and transnational political participation, and endure the labor dispossession as undocumented migrant workers in the United States.
EPILOGUE

August 2014

As the reader may remember, this story began with me sitting in a van with Othón and his friends traveling across New Jersey in our way to South Philadelphia. That day, after leaving behind the landscape of swamps and the abandoned factories surrounding New York City, Othón took me into a journey to the place where he was born. And with his memories he began to knit this story, the story of how his people, the indigenous Mixteco people from the Montaña, became proletarians. As he was narrating me how workers from abandoned rural towns in south Mexico arrived to Sinaloa as day laborers, the recollection of his past led us out of the joy and the excitement of being on the road that summer afternoon, and took us deeper and deeper into a different location. He took us into the abandonment, a place inhabited by darkness, sorrow, and despair, the place from where his own sadness comes from, and the same place that forced his people to spend their days and their lives as jornaleros.

In his story happiness and nostalgia also inhabits the abandonment, the happiness and nostalgia of he being a child, hunting wild animals with his grandfather. And in this story, the abandonment is not only a place located in the past but is the actual place where his son, his father, and his mother currently live. Furthermore, for many Mixteco families, the present day is a place they must leave behind in order to survive. So, where is Othón nowadays? He continues to live in the Harlem and works in a deli preparing sandwiches. Sadly, he has failed to get reunited with his son in the Montaña as he told me he wanted to do when I was meeting him routinely over the course of my research. He is still short of money, and has not saved enough to pay the studio and record his first album. But, who knows, maybe one day he would get the money to record the Corrido of Elsa Pineda. He is no longer the animador and lead vocalist of
“the Mighty Group La Montaña;” he left the band to sing solo, and this gives him so much joy. As far as we know, the grave of little Elsa Pineda remains abandoned in north Mexico.

Don Armadillo, or “the man who has no name,” lives with his mother and they lovingly take care of each other. They may be evicted from his apartment but surely not without fighting the landlord in court. Don Armadillo takes care of my comics, graphic novels, books and records while I am away from New York City. In return, he often reminds me to bring him some tortas de pierna from Mexico. “Bring me a torta de pierna Rodolfo.” We still make harsh jokes about each other, eat cheap dumplings and drink coffee in Dominican bakeries and Chinese restaurants in the Lower East Side. By day, he still works in a Jewish deli in Upper Manhattan, and as DJ in the Ecuadorian restaurant at nights. He will lose his job in a couple of weeks though, as the restaurant is about to close.

He is still the vocalist of his hardcore-punk band and sings songs against the PRI. We keep filling our days talking about rock and Mexican rock in New York City. In one of our last conversations in the Spring of 2014, at his place and after we had finished the lunch prepared by his mother, he recalled the days when rock bands from Mexico began touring in New York City back in the 1990s. “I will show you my photographs of those concerts,” said Don Armadillo. He went to his bedroom and brought a box full of photographs. We were sitting at the table, but the old photographs of those glorious days portraying a teen from Tlapa attending the concerts of rock Mexican bands in New York for the first time, never showed up. He could not find them. What he found instead, were the pictures of a kid -- just a kid among other teens from Tlapa, just one as the many that one day began their journey from the Montaña to New York City so many years ago. That kid, now in his forties, sat in front of me fishing inside that little box, pulling out photos of his family that are mementos of their life north of the U.S.-Mexico border. There he
was, a teen dressed in black standing on the train platform in Walker Station, and a young Don Armadillo wearing a t-shirt of one of his favorites rock bands pops-up in other. He is surrounded by vinyl albums and laughing on his birthday in another. And then, he pulls out an image of his grandfather, the old schoolteacher that helped peasants from the Montaña to keep their lands. The photograph, says he, was taken in the last years of his life. And eventually of course, the photos of Vigo, Don Armadillo’s best friend, showed up.

At the distance, there is a sense of sadness when looking at those photos of Vigo and Don Armadillo. In them they are just kids having fun chasing the rock bands and gigs in New York City. After I finished my fieldwork in 2013, I returned to live in Mexico City to write this dissertation and to live with my mother after my father’s death. Vigo also returned to Mexico that year. After a while he finally left New York City after his home was destroyed by hurricane Sandy in 2012. Don Armadillo was wrong that Vigo would never return to Tlapa. He was so wrong; Vigo went back to where he once belonged. On a Sunday morning I received a call from Tlapa, from a mutual friend, “Vigo is in Mexico City and wants to see you but he doesn’t have your phone number.” I gave him my phone number and a few minutes later Vigo called me too. A few hours later, he was waiting a couple of blocks from where I live and then we took a bus to downtown Coyoacán, south of the city. We sat on a bench in the park and ate ice cream. We talked for hours about music, his family, and his desire to stay in Tlapa and work there as a plumber. It was a sunny day, and it seemed as if he had left the hard times behind. He was in Mexico City just for the weekend with his girlfriend, who had come to the city to be trained as a spinning instructor, and he came to pick up her and take the bus back to Tlapa. I gave him a bunch of rock magazines and then we said goodbye. That was the last time I saw him. Vigo looked happy: he had a job and a girlfriend taking care of him. He was no longer alone in Staten
Island. Sandy was far behind and she could not take away his home, his comics, his vinyls, his rock t-shirts and his brother’s robots ever again. Now everything looked very different.

However, the last time I returned to New York in 2014, and went to visit Don Armadillo, he gave me the news: “Vigo is in jail in Texas.” Vigo tried to return to New York City in January and was caught while crossing through Texas. He was deported to Mexico, and then he tried to cross again, just to be caught again. This time he was not deported but sent to a jail in Texas. Why did he decide to come back to New York City? Don Armadillo does not know. Vigo had called him when he was about to cross the border asking him for money to pay the coyote. Don Armadillo was short of money and could only lend him a hundred dollars. As I write these last pages, we still do not know anything more about Vigo, only that he’s in jail.

So, this is where part of this whole story ends, at least for now. I wish I would tell that at the end, they, the Guerrerenses of the Montaña are not, as Don Armadillo once said, ‘a people living on its knees,’ that there is no sadness, sorrow, or despair inside of them. But I cannot. Yet, in spite of the hard times they are living, notwithstanding the sadness, the sorrow, and the despair, they carry on, find some joy in life, and have the confidence that someday they will overcome. They keep going, through their songs, objecting to old and new rulers and working hard not to be a people on its knees in another land far away from the Montaña.
Appendix
Municipal Division of the Montaña Region

Map Nomenclature

01 Alcozauc de Guerrero
02 Alpoyeca
03 Atlajamalcingo del Monte
04 Atlixtac
05 Copanatoyac
06 Cualácn
07 Huamuxtitlán
08 Malinaltepec
09 Metlatónoc
10 Olinalá
11 Tlacoapa
12 Tlalixtaquilla de Maldonado
13 Tlapa de Comonfort
14 Xalpatláhuac
15 Xochihuehuehtlán
16 Zapotitlán Tablas
17 Acatepec
18 Cochoapa el Grande
19 Iliantenco
Table 1  
Land Tenure of the Production Units in the Montaña Region  
2007

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<th>State, Region and Municipality</th>
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<th>%</th>
<th>Communal</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Private</th>
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<th>Canon</th>
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Table 2
Total Land in *Ejidos* and Communities in the Montaña Region (Hectares)

2007

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Table 4
Use of land for agriculture, stockbreeding and forestry in Ejidos and Communities in the Montaña Region

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Table 5
Use of land for non-agriculture, stockbreeding and forestry activities
in Ejidos and Communities in the Montaña Region
2007

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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15,940</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4,585</td>
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<td>8,639</td>
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<td>1,680</td>
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<th>Ejidatarios and Comuneros</th>
<th>With individual plot</th>
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<td>Women</td>
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<td>239,822</td>
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<td>7,745</td>
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<td>Olinalá</td>
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<td>1,687</td>
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<td>3,461</td>
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<td>1,053</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>768</td>
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<td>1,448</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>7,158</td>
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<td>4,000</td>
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Table 8
Urban and Rural population in the Montaña Region
2005

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Rural Population</th>
<th>Urban Population</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>16,237</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpoyeca</td>
<td>5,848</td>
<td>5,848</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlajamalcingo del Monte</td>
<td>5,143</td>
<td>5,143</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlixtac</td>
<td>23,371</td>
<td>23,371</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copanatoyac</td>
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<td>17,337</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cualá</td>
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<td>6,816</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huamuxtitlán</td>
<td>13,806</td>
<td>13,806</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malinaltepec</td>
<td>26,613</td>
<td>26,613</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metlatónoc</td>
<td>17,398</td>
<td>17,398</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olinalá</td>
<td>22,437</td>
<td>22,437</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tlacoapa</td>
<td>8,733</td>
<td>8,733</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tlalixtaquilla de Maldonado</td>
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<td>6,534</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Acatepec</td>
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<td>28,525</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15,572</td>
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<td>Iliatenco</td>
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<td>10,039</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>281,418</td>
<td>37,975</td>
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</table>

Table 9  
Level of Social Gap by municipality in the Montaña Region  
2005

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Level of Social Gap</th>
<th>Ranking in the Country</th>
<th>Ranking in Guerrero</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cochoapa el Grande</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acatepec</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metlatónoc</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copanatoyoc</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlixtac</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapotitlán Tablas</td>
<td>Very High</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcozauca de Guerrero</td>
<td>Very High</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xalpatláhuac</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Very High</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Very High</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malinaltepec</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iliatenco</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
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<td>High</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>46</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>High</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td>Medium</td>
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<td>71</td>
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Table 10  
Population, Growth Domestic Product and Poverty in Mexico  
2003-2010

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<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>101,301</td>
<td>103,301</td>
<td>104,735</td>
<td>106,147</td>
<td>106,170</td>
<td>107,327</td>
<td>108,468</td>
<td>109,586</td>
<td>110,675</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>787,223.8</td>
<td>819,250.4</td>
<td>846,094.1</td>
<td>888,896.1</td>
<td>918,793.7</td>
<td>929,982.6</td>
<td>871,544.8</td>
<td>920,018.9</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>47.7</td>
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<td>51.3</td>
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<th>Health Index</th>
<th>Education Index</th>
<th>Income Index</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Guerrero</td>
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<td>0.3775</td>
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<td>National</td>
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<td>0.7352</td>
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Table 12
Human Index Development in the Montaña Region by Municipality
2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of the state’s population</th>
<th>Health Index</th>
<th>Education Index</th>
<th>Income Index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>0.6737</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iliatenco</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Food Poverty</th>
<th>Capability Poverty</th>
<th>Patrimony Poverty</th>
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<tr>
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<td>16,237</td>
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<td>81.8</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>47.9</td>
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</tr>
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<td>91.8</td>
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<td>Cualac</td>
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<td>76.3</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metlatonoc</td>
<td>17,398</td>
<td>77.5</td>
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<td>91.9</td>
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<td>Olinala</td>
<td>22,437</td>
<td>54.6</td>
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<td>Tlacoapa</td>
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Table 14
Percentage and Total Population in Poverty in the Montaña Region
2010

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### Table 15
Total Population in the Montaña Region
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2010

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Source: Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social. 2010
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Source: *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social*, 2010
Table 17
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Source: *Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas. Delegación Guerrero.*
Quoted by Ortiz: 2010.
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<td>México</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>37,144</td>
<td><strong>2006</strong></td>
<td>40,207</td>
<td><strong>2007</strong></td>
<td>39,948</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 19
Mexicans in New York City Boroughs
1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Mexican Total Population</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>12,431</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>35,497</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>19,934</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>60,887</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>11,026</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>31,059</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>13,278</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>52,218</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>1,741</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>7,598</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58,410</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>187,259</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bergard 2013.

### Table 20
Mexicans as % of all Latinos in New York City Boroughs
1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Mexicans as % of all Latinos</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bergard 2013.
Table 21
Mexicans by Occupational Categories
New York City
1990-2006
(in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management, Professional and Related</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Financial Operations</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical Science</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Engineering</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical and Social Science</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Service</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Training and Library</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical, Sales and Office</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Technician</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Technician</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Technician</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and Administrative</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Support</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Services</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and Serving</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Grounds Cleaning</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care and Service</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction, Extraction and Maintenance</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation, Maintenance and Repair</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, Transportation and Material Moving</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Material Moving</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Limonic 2009*
ACRONYMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

AZUL. Amanecer Zapatista Unidos en la Lucha.

BANRURAL. Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural.

BOM. Bases de Operaciones Mixtas.

CONEVAL. Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social.

EPR. Ejército Popular Revolucionario.

ENAH. Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

EZLN. Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional.

ICE. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

INEGI. Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática.

INI. Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

INMECAFE. Instituto Mexicano del Café.

MIR. Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria

NAFTA. North American Trade Agreement.

NYSE. New York Stock Exchange.

PAJA. Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas.

PAN. Partido Acción Nacional.

PCM. Partido Comunista Mexicano.

PLM. Partido Liberal Mexicano.

PND. Plan Nacional de Desarrollo.

PNUD. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo.

PRD. Partido de la Revolución Democrática.

PRI. Partido Revolucionario Institucional.
PROCEDE. Programa de Certificación de Ejidos.

PRT. Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores.

PSUM. Partido Socialista Unificado de México.

SEP. Secretaría de Educación Pública.

SNTE. Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación.

STUAG. Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero.

UNECLAC. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
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