

Mexican hometown associations in Los Angeles and Southern California:

Transnational practices and incorporation



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Resumé

Mexicanske immigrantforeninger (Hometown associations) i Californien: transnationale forhold og integration

I 1990'erne samt i de første år af det nye årtusind oplevede USA nogle af de voldsomste migrationsbølger i landets historie. Til forskel fra tidligere migrationsbølger kom disse immigranter hovedsageligt fra Mexico, USA's sydlige nabo. Ydermere viste det sig, at disse mexicanske immigranter primært bosatte sig i storbyen Los Angeles og i Southern Californien i særlige mexicanske samfund i de store byer..

Det specielle ved disse mexicanske immigranter er, at et hovedformål for deres migration er at sende penge (remitter) hjem til familien i Mexico eller til det lokalsamfund, de kommer fra i Mexico. De mexicanske immigranter ankomst til USA indebærer imidlertid en stor risiko for arbejdsløshed og diskrimination på det amerikanske arbejdsmarked. Disse risici kan immigranterne dog minimere ved enten i forvejen at have eller hurtigt skaffe sig et stærkt socialt netværk, som kan hjælpe dem med at få arbejde, en bolig og øvrige forhold på plads, som er nødvendige for at de kan klare sig i det amerikanske samfund. For at forbedre deres status og økonomiske situation i det nye samfund, samt at få et egentligt tilhørsforhold til ligesindede med samme kulturelle baggrund, melder mange mexicanske immigranter sig ind i immigrantforeninger, også kaldet Hometown Associations.

Disse foreninger har til formål både at forbedre levevilkår og udvikle de samfund, deres medlemmer oprindeligt kommer fra. Men Hometown Associations har også et andet formål, nemlig at fastholde de mexicanske immigranter i et transnationalt forhold til deres hjemland og bevare samt inkorporere hjemlandets traditioner i værtssamfundet. Altså skabe en fælles etnisk identitet for deres medlemmer. Som følge af, at mexicanske immigranter således bliver fastholdt i et etnisk tilhørsforhold i kraft af transnationale bindinger til Mexico, udebliver eller mindskes muligheden for deres assimilation i det amerikanske samfund.

Dette speciale har til formål at undersøge mexicanske Hometown Associations og deres rolle i forbindelse med mexicanske immigranter bosat in USA, nærmere bestemt Los Angeles og Southern California.

For at analysere immigrantforeningerne og deres rolle er det først nødvendigt at skabe et teoretisk fundament, hvorfra analysen kan tage sit udgangspunkt. Teorien, der er valgt til at forstå disse migrationsprocesser, er transnationalisme, samt identitetsteori nærmere etnisk identitetsteori. Disse teorier danner rammen for det analytiske arbejde, hvor der i den valgte sekundære empiri bliver lagt vægt på at beskrive disse Hometown Associations karakteristika, funktioner, medlemssammensætninger og udvikling i retning af øget politik bevidsthed i forhold til det amerikanske samfund.

Analysen søger at belyse nogle af de processer, immigranter oplever som tilhørende en etnisk minoritet og deres kamp for at opnå de i samfundet gældende rettigheder uden at afgive for meget af deres etniske identitet. Ydermere fokuseres på en immigrant-fagforening i Southern California, som ligeledes i høj grad gør brug af sociale netværk for at fremme immigranternes sociale status.

Ud fra den omfattende analyse af emnet er det muligt at drage følgende konklusion: De mexicanske immigranter benytter disse Hometown Association til at videreudvikle deres sociale netværk for at opnå højere social status i såvel oprindelses- som immigrantsamfundet. Ydermere hjælper Hometown Associations deres medlemmer til at bibeholde transnationale forhold til deres hjemland, samtidig med at de mexicanske immigranter også i et vist omfang integreres i det amerikanske samfund blandt som følge af immigrantforeningernes voksende politiske bevidsthed og deres ønske om politisk indflydelse i USA.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Motivation

In 1970, the number of foreign-born people living in the United States was just under 10 million people, 9.6 million to be exact, including all ethnic minority groups. This number doubled in the course of the next twenty years and in 1990 the number had reached 19.8 million. In the last 10 years these numbers continued to rise dramatically and by the end of the 20th century 31.1 million foreign-born people were living in the United States, which is an increase of 57 percent in a matter of ten years. (Passel and Suro 2005: 1). The largest group of immigrants in this time period came from Latin America and especially Mexico, just south of the American border. In 2005 the Latino population accounted for 14 percent of the total population in the United States, exceeding the Afro-American population which accounted for 13 percent. According to studies done by the PEW research center, the Hispanic population will reach an astonishing number and account for 29 percent of the total U.S. population in 2050, while the white population will drop to an all time low of 49 percent (Passel and Cohn 2008: 1). To think of the consequences this can have for the United States, politically, culturally and economically are some of the things that trigger this thesis.

The United States is in many ways entering a new era and it is impossible to predict how the American society will look in 50 year. As we cannot predict the future, we can look at the present and what has been going on in the American society in the past twenty years. Is the United States experiences any change and how are the many newcomers doing in the United States? How are the newcomers organizing and are they gaining any influence of any sort at all?

Immigrants from Mexico make the largest ethnic group within the Latino population in the United States and are potentially the group that can gain the most influence in the United States, if we look at sheer numbers. As Mexico shares borders with California, the largest group of Mexican immigrants in the United States live here. California was also the state, which lay

ground for the political battle of the infamous Proposition 187¹ in 1994. To some scholars, this proposition was one of the first and most important acts, which made the Latino community, react and made them be heard as a single and united voice against the proposition. Especially, in Los Angeles the Latino community took it to the streets and marched in one of the largest street demonstrations since the Vietnam War (Zabin and Escala 1998: 2). This act came to demonstrate the potential of the Latino community, if it was to be united and become political active.

In relation to Proposition 187 and the “up rise” of the Latino community in Los Angeles, hometown associations (HTAs) were another feature which made itself noticed. The Mexican HTAs of California were asked to become political active in ridding California of Proposition 187 and members were asked to participate in the demonstrations against the proposition. This was a success and the United States became aware of the existence and potential powers of these organizations (Zabin and Escala 1998: 25).

HTAs are not a new phenomenon or a special type of organizations. They have existed for a long time in the United States and especially in cities such as Los Angeles. The first known formal Mexican organization was established in the 1930s with help from the Mexican consul. The organization was called *Beneficencia Mexican* and its purpose was to help and assist Mexicans in the Depression era and the many Mexican deportations that followed (Goldring 2002A: 62). From there on, hometown associations, or hometown clubs, took a more community minded approach to Mexico and Mexicans. After the 1930s, churches and religious celebrations became the targets for financial aid from Mexicans abroad. This tradition of supporting the local community of one’s origin, later evolved into a broader and more localized effort towards community projects such as school buildings, medical clinics, community halls, sport fields, drilling wells, installing drinking-water systems, and paving roads to better local infra structure. From a more general perspective, these are activities, which improve the quality of life for everyone in the community. The activities once more evolved and later came to include cultural programs and legal aid for Mexicans in the United States. Truth of the matter is that many HTAs

¹ Proposition 187 was a 1994 ballot intended to deny illegal immigrants of any rights, such as social services, health care, and public education. The ballot was first passed with a 58.8 majority among the general public, but was later overturned by the federal court for being unconstitutional.

derive from sport teams and leagues in the United States, which has helped create the organizational foundation for these kinds of organizations (Goldring 2002A: 63).

The activities by hometown associations have never been given much attention until the 1990s, because of the relatively informal level these organizations operated under. Also, the number of members in the HTAs has been somewhat modest. The growing interest for HTAs and clubs began two decades ago with a serious campaign initiated by the Mexican government. The purpose for the Mexican state was to create fields of influence in the United States through organizations such as HTAs, but also to continue the Mexican “Diaspora”² within the boundaries of the United States by attempting to include Mexicans living abroad as members of the Mexican State. The Mexican government found that the easiest way to obtain this goal was by assisting the Mexicans living in the United States in the formation of new HTAs. Furthermore, Mexico opened up, on a legislative level, for dual citizenship for Mexicans living in the United States (Goldring 2002A: 56). This constitutional amendment and the Mexican consuls’ assistance to HTAs in the United States helped create the transnational social field of Mexican immigrants which is to be investigated more thorough in this thesis.

Research Field

The United States has always been considered as a special case, when thinking in terms of migration and the composition of the American population. One terminology, which has always been synonymous with the history of United States migration, is the “Melting Pot Theory”. This is the theory, which has been linked to the time of the modern era of American history and times of industrialization and massive migration waves coming from Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, we are well into a new century and the United States have, roughly for the past 25 years, been experiencing new large immigration waves entering the country. This

² Diaspora: “*Diaspora traditionally refer to groups who were forcibly expelled from their homelands and who remain socially marginal in the societies that receive them as they wait to return*”. (Levitt 2001: 202). However, Mexico have reused the expression and with its new Diaspora Mexico seeks to keep Mexican migrants in transnational relation with the country. Incorporate them into society even though they live abroad.

time, however, the immigrants are not coming from Europe, but from just south of the American border. More exact Mexico and the rest of Latin America. And yet another thing has changed. The official attitude towards newcomers are no longer as welcoming as before and at the same time the immigrants are, of various reasons, not integrated or assimilated into the American society, the same way as we have seen from previous immigration waves. Furthermore, the sheer purpose of immigrating to the United States has changed for the majority of the new immigrants. A great share of the immigrants come to the United States to work, earn money, and send them home to support their family and local community from which they came.

As mentioned earlier, the Mexican population in Los Angeles and Southern California forms the largest Latino immigrant group. In the beginning of the 1970's the United States began to experience a new trend in where immigrants were coming from in Latin America and during the 1990's the number of legal and illegal immigrants went through the roof and at the beginning of the turn of the century, there was an annually inflow of around 1.5 million immigrants coming from Latin America. This number, however, started to decline after 2002-2003, but not in any drastic way (Passel and Suro 2005: 1).

The immigration issue has been widely discussed all over the United States and what the public and the media turns special attention to, is "the apparent threat" of American values and ideals. With his book, *Who are We* (2004) and with articles such as *The Hispanic Challenge* (2004), Samuel P. Huntington has contributed to the much heated debate. Huntington stated that there was a clash among the generations of the Mexican-American and indicated that the huge Latino immigrant population would in some way threaten or change the "American Identity" (Huntington 2004: 12). Is it at all possible to talk of a *single American identity*?

This is a very interesting point when talking about immigrants' incorporation/assimilation into the American society. Has the Mexican immigrant population by any means obtained incorporation or assimilation? And is it relevant to talk about assimilation/incorporation of immigrants in a country like the United States at all?

Population numbers in itself is not a reliable indicator of any sort of influence, but if we start to look at how the Mexican-Americans are doing in terms of integration/assimilation, one can ask if they are becoming organized? If they are organized, how are they organized? Are the Mexican-

Americans politically active and so on? This is what will count in the end, when talking about influencing the American society.

Regarding the question of organization, all figures indicate that most Mexican immigrants have strong social networks and that many are involved with hometown association. Furthermore, it shows that these types of migrant civic organizations have become part of the Mexican immigrant community. It is therefore my intention to shed light on the civic organizational area of Mexican immigrants, centered on Mexican hometown associations located in Los Angeles and the Southern California, but also by drawing examples from other immigrant organizations in the same area.

Mexican hometown associations are an area of civic organizations, which has expanded widely up through the 1990's. The number of HTAs has increased dramatically and so has the interest of the Mexican State for these organizations. Hometown organizations are considered as a part of the New Mexican Diaspora. In general it is possible to ask the following questions in regard to the Mexican migrants and their relations to hometown associations: How does HTAs affect 1st generation Mexican immigrants living in the United States? The organizations are there to help the people "left behind" in the country of origin, but how do HTAs help Mexican immigrants to settle better and more natural in the host country? And what are the primary motive for Mexican immigrant to use and become members of hometown associations?

These are some of the thoughts and questions that lead me to the following research question:

Research Question

Why does membership of social networks and hometown associations play an important part in the lives of Mexican immigrants in the Mexican community in Los Angeles and Southern California? And how do Mexican hometown associations affect the transnational ties of Mexican immigrants?

Hypothesis

In order to answer the research question and examine the research field in a satisfying way I have outlined three hypotheses. These will be used in the analysis and later discussed more thoroughly in the discussion.

Hypothesis:

1. The stronger the social ties and networks an immigrant maintain with the country of origin and other immigrants from same community/region of origin, the more that immigrant will engage in transnational practices.
2. In the case of Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles and Southern California, transnationalism and incorporation in to society of reception have become two processes that can coexist, and in some cases, they mutually reinforce each other.
3. The more immigrants perceive his or her experience in the country of reception in negative terms the more that immigrant will engage in transnational practices. For Mexican immigrants, Proposition 187 became the pivotal event that made Mexicans HTAs preach political participation and citizenship.

Chapter 2 - Method of the Thesis

The purpose with this chapter is to clarify and discuss the most essential choices in the thesis. That is why, the chapter will both be a description of the approach used in the thesis and at the same time an examination of the considerations there have been in regards to the choice of literature and data used in the thesis.

The scientific and empirical approach of the thesis

The thesis has been constructed around a pool of literature concerning Mexican immigrants in the United States and Latin American immigrants in the US in general. This literature has therefore become the key focal point when answering the research question posed in the introduction.

The thesis uses only secondary empirical data and is primarily based on academic articles, reports, book publications and statistical material from widely accepted sources.

Quantitative empirical methods

In the use of quantitative empirical data it has been very important for me to base the statistical data on sources that are reliable and well acknowledged in connection with academic work. I have therefore decided to base my statistical data on the following sources:

Pew Hispanic Center will be used to illustrate the statistical development of immigrants coming to the United States from Latin America and primarily Mexico. Pew Hispanic Center bases much of the released material on statistical data on numbers coming from the American Census Bureau. This ensures the quality and a certain academic reliance of the material and will therefore be used in this thesis. The thesis will especially be using the report *Rise, Peaks and Decline: Trends*

in *U.S. Immigration 1992-2004* to illustrate the progress of Mexican immigrants in the United States. Another report released by the PEW Hispanic Center called *U.S. Populations projections* (2008) by Passel and Cohn is briefly used in the introduction of the thesis. However, the report contains an interesting prognosis for Mexican migrant in the United States.

Qualitative empirical methods

As mention earlier, the qualitative empirical data that will be used in this thesis is purely secondary material, books and academic articles composed by skilled and esteemed scholars each an expert in their field of expertise.

In the description of Mexican hometown associations situated in Los Angeles and Southern California, I will draw on the work done by Carol Zabin and Luis Escala Rabadán. This is a series of working papers for the California Nonprofit Research Program under the Aspen Institute from which the working paper: *Mexican Hometown Associations and Mexican Immigrant Political Empowerment in Los Angles* (1998) helps get a greater understanding for the importance of HTA's among the Mexican immigrant community and the creation of a common identity, as they also implies some more general theories on transnational subjects. The work by Zabin and Rabadán also give us a unique insight to how Mexican hometown associations are structured, which functions the associations commit to and in which way Mexican hometown associations binds members to the sending community by hosting social events of traditional characters.

In addition to the field of hometown associations and considerations of transmigrant organization I will use, among others, the work of Luin Goldring, and especially her article *The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations: Negotiating the Boundaries of Membership and Participation* (2002).

Peggy Levitt and her book *The Transnational Villagers* can be used as a comparative analysis. Her examples evolve around immigrants from the Dominican Republic, but it is possible to draw on her theories as parallels to Mexican immigrant community.

In the analysis I will use a case study about a labor union in Southern California, by Professor David Fitzgerald from University of California, San Diego. It is an ethnographic case study, conducted over a six month period back in 2001. The article is concerned with how Mexican immigrants organize themselves and illustrates some interesting organizational traits among Mexican immigrants in a labor union. The specific union is for construction workers and is located in Southern California. The majority of the members are of Mexican heritage and they were all living in the United States during the research period.

Professor Fitzgerald conducted fieldwork using participant-observation. He did interviews with both members and officials and members of the administrations. In relation to Unions in the rest of the United States, Local 123 is affiliated with the large umbrella organization, the AFL-CIO (The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations). Furthermore, all the staff, officers and politically active members are of Mexican origin. The Local 123 had a total membership number of around 3.500 people. The majority of the active members were born in Mexico, while the second largest group of active members consisted of Chicanos³ or Mexican-Americans. Another important fact about the Local 123 is that about 500 of the active members came from Guadalupe in the state of Michoacán in Mexico.

These are just some of the works I intend to use in the thesis and this qualitative empirical data, which I use in the thesis, will be sufficient to analyze, discuss and conclude on in relation to the above mentioned research field and research question.

The theoretical material of the thesis

Transnationalism should be considered the theoretical framework or domain of the thesis. Transnationalism will be used to give a theoretical overview of the processes, which are linked to the migration that the United States has been experiencing. Furthermore, it will explain the consequences that migration in today's globalized world can have for the single individual and through that what a sense of dual national citizenship can bring along.

³ Chicanos is a term used to describe Mexican-Americans (in the sense of native-born Americans with Mexican ancestry).

To illustrate the field of transnationalism, there will be drawn on the book *Transnationalism From Below* (1998) edited by Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, especially the chapter *Theoretical and Empirical Contributions Toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism* written by Sarah J. Mahler, and the chapter *The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields* by Luin Goldring.

However, it is also apparent to use some of the first theories developed on the subject of transnationalism. Therefore it is necessary to turn to the work of Nana Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. They were groundbreakers in the field of transnationalism and in their books *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (1992) and *Nations Unbound: Transnational Project, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (1994), we are introduced to original concept of transnationalism.

To elaborate on the theories of transnationalism, I use an academic article called *Immigrants Incorporation and Sociocultural Transnationalism* (2002) by José Itzigsohn and Silvia Giorguli Saucedo to analyze and understand transnational linkages and the connection between incorporation and transnationalism.

The article “*Global Cities and Survival Circuits*” 2003, by Saskia Sassen, partly deals with feminization of migration, but despite that I still find the article very relevant, because the theories she outline are deeply relevant when concerning labor force and the general conditions for migrant workers in the American labor market.

For the use of identity theory in the thesis, I have chosen two very distinguished theorists in the field. Richard Jenkins and his book *Social Identity* (2004) will be used to cover the basic understanding of identity theory, and identity formation. Furthermore, his will book be used to understand groups and categories in relation to ethnic identity.

Even though, the work of Stuart Hall is based on his personal experiences as a migrant coming to the United Kingdom from Jamaica in the 1970s and deals with a different time of migration trends, his theories in the article “*Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities*” from 1991 are still very much useful, when interpreting and analyzing the situation of present day Mexican

immigrants in the United States and their identification and identity in the American society. These will therefore also figure under the section of identity theory.

Limitations

A big part of the Mexican economy is dependent on the remittances that Mexicans immigrants send home, individually or through hometown associations ⁴(Bada 2003: 1). Actually, remittances are the third largest source income for the Mexican State. So Mexico obviously has an interest in maintaining the flow of remittances, and furthermore to make sure that the Mexican immigrants do not lose interest for their country of origin. But also, if taking in to account the number of Mexican immigrants present in the United States today, Mexico can, if properly organized, have a greater “voice”/influence in the United States through Mexicans living there. This would mean greater bargaining powers for Mexico, when dealing with the United States in an economical context such as NAFTA or other financial dealings. Therefore, the topic of remittances is closely linked to the field and functions of hometown associations, but in this thesis, remittances is not a key element and will therefore not be discussed more thoroughly, than contributing to the current picture of migration trends. However, the act of giving economic remittances will be considered.

Remittances are one of the most important purposes for hometown associations and the reason that these kinds of clubs exists in the first place. Social remittances play a role in forming the cultural identity of people, relatives and friends living in Mexico and this may in some degree influence first generation immigrants living in the United States, but it will not be relevant in this connection. What we will be looking at is the forming of identity and social networks in hometown associations and labor unions. And this naturally leads us further on to the sending country of immigrants, Mexico. The thesis will only be looking at case studies in California, but these studies naturally takes us to Mexico in connection with fields such as social networks of people involved with the clubs in question and the interaction between the leaderships of these clubs and the Mexican government. There will, however, not be any specific analysis of these

⁴ Private donations to family and relatives or collective donations to communities.

phenomenons in Mexico or of the possible impacts it has on Mexico, since it is not here the general focus of the research area lies.

In connection with hometown associations, it is important to keep in mind that this type of organization is not the only way for Mexicans to get involved with civic organizations in the United States. Labor unions, informal workers unions, community/neighborhood associations, religious groups, and various other types of organizations are oriented towards life of Mexican immigrants in the United States. These groups are also vital for the Mexican migrant life in the United States, but for immigrants trying to keep in touch with their country/community of origin and trying to create transmigrant social spaces in both Mexico and the United States, formal hometown associations have become the primary organizational method to do just this, which is why I place my focus of investigation on Mexican hometown associations. However, I will draw on examples of social networks and political participation from the immigrant union local 123 to do comparison to hometown associations.

In the case of demographic groups, I choose to focus my attention on Mexican immigrants, who have immigrated in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. I will not focus on 2nd and 3rd generation Mexican-American, nor will I distinguish between indigenous Mexicans or Mexicans in the thesis. I choose to consider Mexicans a one people and one nation; however, I do recognize the fact that Mexico too is a multicultural nation state. .

Organization of the thesis

The thesis will be divided into seven chapters, where chapter one and two illustrates the objectives of the thesis. Chapter three will introduce the theory used in the thesis, while chapter four explain the migration trends in the United States, which have created the situation being discussed in the thesis. Chapter five and six will provide the analysis of the empirical data as well as incorporate the theory of the thesis. Chapter seven will contain a discussion of the results presented in the analysis, while considering the research question posed in chapter 1 and finally conclude on the research question. Now for a more thorough review of the content of the thesis:

Chapter three will be an introduction to the most important theories concerning migration and identity. Transnationalism and the further development of transnational practices will be more thoroughly investigated in this chapter. So will the theories of identity and identity formations with special attention to ethnic identity.

Chapter four is on a more informative nature. This chapter will provide us with the necessary information of the current migration trends that the United States have experienced in the last 3-4 decades. The chapter will also connect the migrations trends with Mexico and seek to explain the significance of migration for Mexico as a nation state as well as the migrants themselves. The chapter will be based on statistical data.

Chapter five is part of the analysis and will draw on empirical data based on Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles and Southern California. Focus will be put on the importance of social networks and the use of Mexican hometown associations. The characteristics, functions, and activity span of Mexican hometown associations will also be examined in this chapter. This will provide us with a concrete frame for applying the theory of transnationalism, incorporation and identity theory, which has been reviewed in the chapter 3.

Chapter six is also part of the analysis. Here the issue hometown associations and political participation is further investigated. And by reviewing empirical work done on a union in Southern California, we gain further knowledge on the importance of social networks and political participation for Mexican immigrants. The context of political participation and the theories of transnationalism and incorporation will also be further examined.

Chapter seven will hold the primary discussion of the relations between Mexican immigrants, social networks, hometown associations and how these create, in a sense, the Mexican immigrant community in California. The relevant theories will also contribute to the discussion of incorporation of Mexicans into the American society. At the end a conclusion will be made on whether or not it is possible for Mexican immigrants to keep their transnational ties with Mexico through hometown association, while simultaneously being incorporated into the American society also with the help of social networks and hometown associations.

Chapter 3 - Theories of the Thesis

Transnationalism

Theories on transnationalism have surfaced in the past decades and have now become widely adopted by a range of various scholars such as, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and political scientists (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 3). The range of scholars has embraced the concept of transnationalism, because of the obvious link to the increased actions of globalization of the people inhabiting this planet. Transnationalism is therefore a direct outcome of the globalized world in which we live. The global capitalism consists of the exchange of currency, labor, ideas and images between two or more countries (Mahler 1998: 64).

Transnational studies have gone in a new direction and differ from the traditional concept of globalization by exposing the complexity and diversity of economic, social, cultural and demographic processes that occur within nation-states, but at the same time transcend national borders. This means that these processes of transnationalism are embedded in, and transcends one or more nation-states. Transnationalism differs with globalization by not elevating into a “global-space”, but stays on the ground, so to speak (Mahler 1998: 66; Kearney 1995: 550). Transnational studies have primarily been focusing on social processes related to specific migrant groups and nation-states, while globalization studies have been analyzing how economic, institutional and cultural changes have reconfigured or relocated power on a global level (Kearney 1995: 553).

Transnationalism is a relatively new theory and it could therefore be relevant to go back and use some of the earlier and more developed transnational definitions. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc define transnationalism in their book *Nations Unbound* (1994) as following:

‘We define “transnationalism” as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many

immigrants' today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders". (Basch, G. Schiller, S. Blanc 1994: 7)

This means that the transnational behavior of migrants depends on the sense of belonging to two or more nation-states. However, it is not just the dual sense of belonging, which defines transnational behavior. It all comes down to the actions of migrants in both "sending" and "host" countries⁵. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop identities that are based on networks of relationship and this bonds them simultaneously to two or more nation states (Basch, G. Schiller, S. Blanc 1994: 7).

To apply a more recent and wider use of terminology, the term: *transnational social field* could be used to simplify the above mentioned definition of transmigrant "behavior" (J. Mahler 1998: 76). According to Mahler, the mobility of migrants plays a key centerpiece in defining transnationalism, especially when it comes to Mexican and Caribbean immigrant mobility. Meaning, the *movement of bodies across spaces* (J. Mahler 1998: 76) or the physical movement of people between nation-states, also understood as boundaries. Mahler argues that this physical movement between state boundaries helps create identities on the basis of such experiences. This, however, ultimately makes it difficult to determine, which country the migrant "belongs" to because of the strong ties which are developed to each of the sending and receiving countries (J. Mahler 1998: 77). However, this argument depends on two important factors. Firstly, we have to recognize the right to travel across boundaries, meaning, whether or not the migrant have legal immigration status in the host country and the economical funds to make the trips back and forth (J. Mahler 1998: 77). Secondly, during the past ten years the United States have tightened the security along the US-Mexican border, which has made it more difficult for most Mexican immigrants to travel between the countries, of course this only affect Mexicans with out legal status in the United States.

⁵ Sending and host countries are terms, which are used to describe the immigrants' country of origin and country of immigration destination. Host country can recall some negative connotations, such as the immigrant is 'welcome' or a 'visitor', but will, however be used because it is incorporated in today's theories of transnationalism. The negative connotations should therefore be disregarded.

In other words, it is the nation states that determine the “role and the extent” of transmigration. This argument is not considered in the theorization of Mahler because of the political change in attitude towards immigrants of any nationality after the terror attack of 9/11.

In addition, remittances, social and economic remittances, understood as the flow of things such as presents, letters, money, and specialty foods should also be considered when debating what the transnational social field consist of (J. Mahler 1998: 77). It is also worth noting that this flow of goods can be bifocal and therefore the influence of both country of origin and host country are players in forming the identity of the immigrant.

Another factor which has helped develop and sustain transnational ties and therefore also has to be considered as a natural player in the creation of the transnational social fields is the development of modern technology in the realm of communication. The Internet shall, on the other hand, only be seen as a tool for immigrants to preserve transnational ties, not as an explanation to why transnational ties are being kept (Basch, G. Schiller and S. Blanc 1994: 24).

Transnationalism from above and below

Transnationalism can also be defined by other parameters according to Sarah J. Mahler. When considering transnationalism, we can either investigate it from a macro- or micro-level point of view. In regards to the macro-level or “transnationalism from above”, it should be understood as:

“multinational corporations, media, commoditization and other macro-level structures and processes that transcend two or more states are not produced and projected equally in all areas, but are controlled by powerful elites who seek, although do not necessarily find, political, economic, and social dominance in the world”. (J. Mahler 1998: 67)

In other words, (business) elites from western countries are, on a transnational or global scale, seeking influence and domination of lesser developed countries and cultures.

This should be seen in sharp contrast to the functions of “transnationalism from below”. According to Mahler, “transnationalism from below” produce multiple and counter-hegemonic powers among the non-elites (J. Mahler 1998: 67). These “powers” are found in the everyday life of people living in a new social space, which spans two or more nation-states. In other words, if we are to draw on the work of Nina Glick Schiller Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc, then “transnationalism from below” is based on migrants’ everyday lives, activities and social relationships. In the case of the argument of the “below”, Schiller and her co-writers find that these transnational migrants are predominately workers. Workers, who live complex lives, which constantly force them to confront, draw upon, and rework different identity constructions: national, ethnic and racial (Basch, G. Schiller, S. Blanc 1992: 5). It is the development within “new” immigrant communities that triggers these encounters between the individual, the global and national situations. The common immigrant is becoming aware of the dual identity and therefore feels the “choice availability” or social awareness and thereby shapes a transnational identity (Basch, G. Schiller, S. Blanc 1992: 5). Transnationalism is hindering assimilation and is strengthening potential ethnic identities, which do not fit into one nation-state identity. However, transnationalism do not hinder incorporation into the receiving country, this point will be elaborated later in this chapter. In general, it is now possible for immigrants to create hybrid identities for themselves, which oppose the local, the regional, the national, and the global “control”.

Transnational practices

As the academic debate on transnationalism evolves, scholars become more aware of the transnational practices carried out by immigrants and the more immigrant communities develop in host countries, we need to ask some specific questions in order for us to fully understand the nature and diversity of transnationalism. To perceive the impact of transnational practices and transnational immigrant communities;

We need to ask questions concerning how extensive have different transnational practices become, how involved are immigrants in these practices? In connection to transnationalism, what accounts for participation? And finally, how are the concepts of transnationalism and “the

incorporation of immigrants into the receiving country” related to each other? (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 768).

In order to understand transnational practices, according to Itzigsohn and Saucedo, we need to categorize the action itself. To some degree, transnational practices cover all social actions and can be divided into three more subcategories or fields of social action: Economic, political and sociocultural. The three transnational practices do not necessarily exclude each other and people can partake in all aspect at the same time, but the goals and motive for participating in these various fields of transnational life can vary.

The most interesting of these three social actions is the one of sociocultural dimensions (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 768). In order for us to better understand the meaning of sociocultural transnationalism I turn to an excellent description by Itzigsohn and Saucedo:

Sociocultural transnationalism refers to those transnational linkages that involve the recreation of a sense of community that encompasses migrants and people in the place of origin. (2002: 768)

This theorem is highly relevant for the functions of hometown associations and will be put into practice on later note in the thesis. Furthermore sociocultural transnationalism comprises the development of practices such as sociability, mutual help and public rituals and traditions going back to the country of origin. These practices give a sense of belonging and social obligations among immigrants. One can even say that these practices are the stamina of emergent immigrant communities in a host country (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 768). The aspect of sociocultural transnationalism is that it refers to more social practices of the migrant act and therefore is more affective oriented than instrumental compared to political and economic transnationalism.

To continue to the next level of transnational practices we need to look at the type of activities which can be carried out by individual migrants towards transnational institutions. Here it is possible to distinguish between three different levels, also known as the Faist⁶ classification: First, there are transnational kinship groups which are based on obligation between family

⁶ Thomas Faist. Professor of transnational relations and Development Sociology at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University and writer of *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000).

members and close family and friendship ties. Second, there are transnational circuits of business and trading networks (these falls under the category of transnational instrumental activities). Third and most importantly, we find transnational communities which encompass the emergence of public institutionalized practices such as mobilization and collective representation. Additionally, it should be understood as the emergence of *solidarity* based on ethnicity, religion, nationality, or place of origin (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002:769).

However, there are certain pitfalls when discussing the fields of transnational sociocultural practices and especially, when dealing with institutionalized practices of transnational communities. Immigrants who participate in these transnational institutions are not necessarily driven by common goals and motives. Some immigrants can be driven by motives of obtaining higher social status in both the immigrant community and community of origin. Others may simply be motivated by the will to give something back to the community from which they originate. The degree of involvement demanded from immigrants, depending on the range of transnational activities planned by institutions. Not only do these variations depend on the institutions themselves, but also the intensity of peoples' involvement in transnational practices. To understand this, we need to differentiate between *narrow* and *broad* transnationalism (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 770). The definition of narrow refers to institutionalized and continuous participation in transnational activities and organizations, while broad transnationalism relates to occasional and random participation in transnational linkages. We can use this distinction of the two concepts to understand how transnational linkages shape and condition peoples' lives.

The connection between the “old” and the “new”: transnationalism and incorporation.

In their work, Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002) also seek to relate transnationalism to the old theories of assimilation/acculturation. The assimilations theories refer to the experiences the United States and other countries had with the European immigrants dating back to the early 20th century. According to traditional assimilation theories, immigrants were expected to shed any “old” cultural practices and political loyalties and embrace a “new” set in the receiving country. The main hypothesis said that the longer an immigrant lived and socialized in the host country,

the greater the chances of being assimilated into society (Guarnizo; Portes; and Haller 2003: 1215).

Now, transnationalism broke with the assumptions of assimilation and tries instead to focus on both the process of incorporation and the emergence of transnational social fields. What the old theories of assimilation neglected to incorporate was the notion that an important part of immigrants' lives takes part across borders, across national boundaries. This has been explained previously in the thesis, but there is a reason for returning to the subject of incorporation of immigrants into a host society. Itzigsohn and Saucedo points out that even though scholars have identified transnational practices and linkages, it doesn't mean that incorporation of immigrants into the receiving society do not take place (2002: 770). They argue that the interest of transnational migrants often help the process of incorporation.

This argument poses two highly relevant questions: Are transnational participation and incorporation two opposing processes or two parallel processes? And does participation in transnational linkages diminish as immigrants incorporate into their receiving country? (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 770).

In accordance to theories of assimilation and incorporation most studies show that it is mostly 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants, who achieve some sort of incorporation into the receiving society, while 1st generation immigrants are only expected to cut their ties with the country of origin (Guarnizo; Portes; and Haller 2003: 1215). The relation between transnational practices and the process of incorporation has to do with the explanations referring to transnational linkages and practices and their determinants of participation. This theory poses three possible explanations to this correlation: Linear transnationalism, resource dependent transnationalism and reactive transnationalism.

Linear transnationalism deals with transnationalism as a continuation of the ties that connect immigrants to their family, friends and place of origin. Basically, migrants abroad maintain social ties and networks to family and friends still residing in the country or community of origin (Basch, G. Schiller, and S. Blanc 1994). In practical terms, it means the way migrants send remittances, travel home, and create ethnic institutions in the receiving country, in order for them to rebuild and keep social relations and their former way of life from the country of origin

(Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 771). *Resource dependent transnationalism* gives another explanation as to why the process of transnational linkages occurs and migrants try to reconstitute their linkages to their country of origin. However, this explanation is based upon the notion that 1st generation immigrants do not have the time or resources to create any kind of linkages to their country of origin. Meaning, that transnationalism, from this point of view, first occurs when the immigrant has accumulated enough capital and ventures into philanthropic or business projects in the country of origin. Further arguments are put forward that transnationalism is only tied in with those who are entrepreneurial immigrants and have opportunity or access to a certain degree of social mobility. In other words, this explanation argues that only those immigrants who are economically successful will engage in transnational practices (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 772). The third and final perspective of transnational practices is *reactive transnationalism*. This view is considered as a reaction to a negative experience in the process of incorporation. Immigrants will engage in transnational practices because of bad experiences and a lack of satisfaction with their life in the receiving country. This could be caused by an unfulfilled job career or maybe lack of social status in the country of reception. This can cause the immigrants to make monetary contributions, if capable, to families and communities in the country of origin in order for them to attain a higher level of social status and prestige in both sending and receiving country. Moreover, experiences of discrimination or negative perception of the receiving society can also contribute to such actions as transnational practices, so that the exposed immigrant can retain an identification with the country of origin (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002:772).

In order for us to understand the explanations of transnational practices in relation to the process of incorporation, we can have certain expectation to each one of them. In the case of linear transnationalism, we can anticipate for migrants to be incorporated into the receiving society and culture simply by letting time pass by. Without any implications the migrant will eventually diminish the linkages and obligations to the country/community of origin and the family and friends in it. Put in another way, as the process of incorporation steps up, the participation in transnational linkages will be reduced to a minimum. If this happens the overall theories of incorporation and assimilation will have been correct but just missed a few step of the process.

However, the two other explanations seem to confront and reject the theories of traditional immigration studies and total incorporation into the receiving society. Resource dependent transnationalism displays a sequence of events that can only be fueled by economic prosperity on the migrants behalf. We see the emergence of transnationalism parallels successful economic incorporation. Transnational practices will be motivated by the process of economic incorporation and social mobility and will on a later stage create transnational linkages. While, in the case of reaction transnationalism, transnational practices and identification is an outcome of a reaction to a negative process of incorporation. A process, where experiences of discrimination and unfulfilled dreams and self-realization are dismissed by the immigrant experience itself in the receiving country (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 773).

In the latter explanations, transnationalism and incorporation are intertwined and very complex, but they are able to give us the right set of tools for analyzing today's migration flows and migrant behavior. Therefore this theory will be given special attention in the analysis to come.

Identity theory

To touch upon the subject of identity in relation to the theory of transnationalism, we need to focus on some specific elements of identity theory. It is necessary to consider the notion of immigrants, cross-border relations and the “new” local community being created in the country of reception.

The individual and the collective

In order to understand the dilemma of being an immigrant in the United States and why nationalism exists in the United States, we need to look at some of the basic tools for identification. To begin with we need to make the distinction between the *individual* and the *collective*. The individual deals with the individual persons and their individual thoughts and the uniqueness of each individual, while the collective is a shared entity of a community, a group of people or a nation state. However, with respect to identification, both the individually unique and the collectively shared can be understood as similar in process, and these processes are often entangled with each other (Jenkins 2004: 15). The only way both the individual and the collective can come to be is by interaction, the interaction of human beings. In his work, Richard Jenkins (2004), tries to reason with the world and how it is constructed and experienced by human beings (ultimately how human beings identify themselves) by establishing three distinct “orders”: the individual order, the interaction order, and the institutional order. The individual order represents the human world with individuals and each of their unique thoughts. The interaction order is, not surprisingly, how the human world is constituted by relationships and interaction between individuals. Lastly, the institutional order signifies the human world of patterns and organization (Jenkins 2004:17). Through these observations it is possible to create a better understanding of identification. Furthermore it is important to understand that in identification the individual and the collective share the same space.

-These are the building blocks upon which we base most of the assumptions of identity, others identity and our own identity.

The collective: groups and Categories

Returning for a moment to the notion of the collective, it evokes imaginary feelings of people bound together by bonds of common goals or similarity. But as well as we can talk about similarity, we can also talk about differentiation. Belonging to a collective includes fulfilling certain criteria for obtaining membership of the collective, considering this, we need also to consider that boundaries are set to exclude other nonmembers. In order for a collective to define it-self, it needs to define the “Others”. For people to find common ground, they need to appoint the “Others”. The difference from the “Others” is their common ground (Jenkins 2004: 79). Meaning, that people collectively identify themselves and others, and they live their lives and create their identity in relation to those imposed identities. This leads to the creation and the notion of groups and categories. Groups are defined by the members of a group and are also only meaningful to these members, while categories are externally defined without any necessary recognition by its members. However, it is possible to get even closer to better definition. A group is something actually existing, a point of reference for its members, while a category is a classification of identity defined by a collective as part of local common knowledge (Jenkins 2004: 88).

It is also worth mentioning that collective identification is linked to social identity, which is the internalization of stereotypical identifications. Social identity theory focuses on the process, where categories become groups with a special center of attention on intergroup processes (Jenkins: 2004: 89). So group membership is related to the individual and leads to social identity and permits self-evaluation. The group membership can lead to an exaggerated thought of similarity to other members of the group, while the membership can make members discriminate, against “outgroup” (people outside of the group) members. While, the social categorization generates social identity projected upon people involuntarily. This can produce social comparison, thus producing positive or negative self-evaluation.

Ethnic Identity

The point of social identity theory is important, when turning to the question of individuals or groups with an inadequate or a “substandard” social identity, who actively seeks to restore or obtain a positive identification through factors, such as mobility, assimilation, creativity or competition (Jenkins 2004: 89).

With the concept of social identity theory in mind, I move on to the subject of ethnicity and identity or ethnic identification. On this subject, scholars have intensely discussion, whether or not social identity theory can actually be applied to today’s discussion of ethnic identity theory.

The development of identity in relation to ethnicity

Stuart Hall finds it necessary to review the concept of identity and talks about the fall or erosion of the great collective social identity of the West. This collective social identity was created and stabilized by the long-range historical process, which have led us to the modern society.

Industrialization and capitalism and all the things that are related to this way of society, the dominance of the nation state, the western modern world and the great collective social identity was stabilized by all this. Hall, however, believes that this era is history, “...*the great collective social identity has disappeared*” (Hall 1991:45), and points to the obvious change of the western society, where increasing social diversity and plurality, and the “technologies of the Self”⁷.

As the concept of identity, previously, was discussed from a philosophical and psychological point of view, where identity was seen as an outcome of the actions of the individual. Halls argumentation is based on psychoanalytical and feminist theories, where identity is conceived not as something absolute or final, but more as a process or a constant changing category.

⁷ *Technologies of the self* (also called care of the self or practice of the self) are methods and techniques, through which humans constitute themselves. Moreover, the theory argues that we as subjects are perpetually engaged in processes whereby we define and produce our own ethical self-understanding. Theorized by Michel Foucault.

Additionally, he points to the notion of class identity and national culture identities, which are part of this past he is talking about (Hall 1991: 46-47). But, as he quickly discovers, after losing one sense of identity another emerges. Put in another way, an identity does not die out; another simply takes its place. Hall argues that creating identities are an ongoing process, which keeps evolving. Identity is always in the process of formation (Hall 1991: 47). Furthermore, identity means the process of identification with others. He also claims that the sense of oneself and the others have in some sort been broken down. The “One” can’t describe itself without the “Other”, those who belong and those who do not. The boundaries between the two have been broken down and they have in some sense entered into symbiotic dependence.

This conclusion of pluralism and the ongoing process of identity formation is something Jenkins seems to agree on. According to Jenkins (2004:94), who bases much of his thoughts on this subject on the research and theories by the anthropologist Fredrik Barth, identification in relation to ethnic identity is part of an ongoing organization of interaction and everyday life and not to be understood as part of a superstructure of culture or something institutional (Jenkins 2004: 106). Moreover, collective identification and its boundaries are generated in transaction and interaction and the notions are constantly changing. It is a construction of social identities caused by interaction and across boundaries that people share with other identities (Jenkins 2004: 106-107).

Chapter 4 - Trends of Migration in the United States

Latin American immigration in the 1990s and early 2000s

The number of immigrants living in the United States has been increasing progressively since the 1970s. Immigration primarily from Latin America (especially Mexico) and Asia made the population of foreign-born grow from 9.6 million in 1970 to 19.8 million in 1990. In the last decade of the 20th century numbers increased again, but in a more dramatic way. The number of the foreign-born population grew by 57 percent to 31.1 million. The number from the 2000 census even suggests that it was especially in the second half of the 1990s that most of the growth took place (Passel and Suro 2005: 1). The peak of the immigration flow was in 1999-2000 at a staggering 1.5 million people a year. In general the migration flows steadily increased in the mid-1990s. In the end of 1990's the migration inflow grew very quickly, peaked for a couple of years and then fell to normal levels, as in the pre-90s times, after 2002 (Passel and Suro 2005: 4). Also the composition of legal and illegal immigrants changed considerable in the time period of the mid 1990's to 2000. The inflow of legal permanent immigrants increased only 3 percent compared to former levels, while inflows of illegal immigrants and legal temporarily immigrants increased annually at much higher rates. At the peak of the increase for illegal immigrants the United States experienced a 36 percent increase, and a 68 percent increase for legal non-immigrants, or temporary workers. In 1992, Nina Glick Schiller et al. described the immigrant working and resident situation in California to be of temporarily nature. Many Mexican immigrants were seasonal workers, who returned to Mexico after finishing the season end (G. Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992: 25).

However, after the continuation of a tougher political line towards immigration and illegal immigrants and the event of 9/11, there has been a dramatic increase in border security on the U.S. side. This has made life harder on many immigrants, especially illegal seasonal workers. They have found it much more difficult to return to Mexico and afterwards take even greater risks when crossing the border back into to the United States to work again. An immediate effect

has been that many temporary immigrant workers have engaged in long time immigration instead.

In the migrant flow of the 1990s and the beginning of the 00s, Mexico accounted for roughly a third of the total number migrants and the rest on Latin America accounted for roughly a fifth (Passel and Suro 2005: 6). Mexico is by far the largest source of immigrants to the United States today with 400.000 migrants each year. In the peak of the migration flow in 1999-2000 the level of migrants were at least 500.000 migrants annually. Some surveys even suggest that well over 650.000 Mexican migrants entered the United States annually, but the previously listed number are based on an average of several surveys and are therefore more trustworthy.

A possible explanation to the large-scale migration flow coming from Mexico in the 1990s could be explained by problems for the Mexican economy in 1994-1995. This claim is, according to Passel and Suro, backed by a one-year peak in migration from Mexico in 1995. Not a peak at same level as the one in 1999-2000, but still a much larger inflow considering the general tendency among the Latin American countries (2005: 8). California is known as the state containing the largest Mexican immigrant community. During the previously mentioned time period, California was in fact the state, which received the largest numbers of Mexican immigrants.

Migration from Mexico to the United States is, as I already have established, a century old phenomena, partly controlled by the performance of the U.S. economy. According to the report conducted by Pew Hispanic Center (2005) there is a clear pattern between the total immigration flows and the performance of the economy and the correlation is particularly strong with the migration flow from Mexico (Passel and Suro 2005: 11).

After the economic recession of 1991 the American economy gradually began to gather momentum and the first impact of the push and pull factor between Mexican immigrants and the American economy could be seen in the American labor market. Immediately before the large increase in Mexican migration, the U.S employment rate increased by 1.59 million jobs in 1993. In the same year, the number of annual Mexican migrants went from 332.000 to 507.000. In 2000 the United States experienced a similar effect. The U.S. economy and the Mexican migration reached an extraordinary peak. In the year 2000, the U.S. economy expanded and

added nearly 3.4 million jobs, while the number of migrants coming from Mexico was estimated to be at 530.000 new arrivals this year.

To further illustrate the connection between the well-being of the American economy and the number of migrant arrivals from Mexico, I look at the previously mentioned period of decline in the beginning of the 00s. In 2002 the U.S. labor market lost roughly 415.000 jobs and this affected the Mexican migrants. In the same year, the number of Mexican migrants decreased to 378.000 (Passel and Suro 2005: 11). In their report, Passel and Suro (2005), point to the patterns of the macroeconomic indicators of both Mexico and the United States to determine whether the push or pull effect has caused this huge migration flow. They claim that even though the Mexican economy experienced a really hard setback in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 6.2 percent in 1995, this did not cause bigger than normal migration outflow of Mexico. However, when Mexico experienced a full-scale upswing in its economy with an increase of 6.6 percent in the GDP it didn't have any effect on the Mexican emigration flow. This was happening in the same period 1999-2000 where the United States saw its biggest inflow of Mexican immigrants (Passel and Suro 2005: 11).

It is possible to learn a lot from this information on the relationship between Mexico and the United States. The economies of the two countries are obviously linked together quite tightly, probably as a consequence of NAFTA⁸. The United States had a huge need for low-wage unskilled labor and the Mexican people were closest to meet the American needs as they have had many times before in history.

Another argument is presented in the work of Saskia Sassen (2003), which describes the development of the urban workforce and the creation of new jobs for immigrant workers. During the 1990s, the big metropolitan areas came into a development in need of cheap and unskilled labor for the manual labor sector, which meant an increase in demand for migrant workers. This is arguably a common development for urban areas in the United States, where the postindustrial economy created a demand for a highly educated professional workforce. This effect had an

⁸ The North American Free Trade Agreement. The agreement, implemented January 1, 1994, is based on the premise that removing as many tariffs as possible between these North American countries (Mexico, The United States and Canada) will increase trade within the region and benefit each country's economy (Skidmore and Smith 2001: 251).

impact on the urban economy, which created a demand for uneducated low-skilled workers. The demand for this type of workers generated a new low wage service sector, which created opportunities for many immigrants (Sassen 2003: 256).

Macro-economic trends do not alone determine the outfall of migration flows between Mexico and the US. When seeking to explain this phenomenon, I have to consider the large socio-economic difference of the two countries, combined with high demographic pressures in Mexico and the geographical relationship of the two countries. These factors help shape the decision making process, when people decide to migrate (Passel and Suro 2005: 11).

Furthermore, the economic policies conducted by Mexico have forced many Mexicans to consider migration as a mean of survival. Since 1940, Mexican governments have been seeking to develop the country through industrialization and urbanization (Skidmore and Smith 2001: 239). The move to industrialization did especially hit the rural areas hard in the south of Mexico, because of increased large-scale agriculture production in the north. As a an immediate effect of the development in the north, small scale farmers in the south could not compete and started migrating, first to Mexico City and later to the United States. As a continuation of such policies, NAFTA meant a liberalization of trade in the North American region including agricultural products, which added more pressure on the rural population of Mexico (Milkman 2000:137).

These facts about the Mexican immigrants give us not only a hint about the size of the Mexican immigrant community in California and the rest of the United States, but it also tells us something about the nature of this community. The size of the Mexican community itself indicates that there are strong social ties and networks among the Mexican immigrants. The Mexican newcomers have a huge advantage on arrival. They have a destination point, where they are not alienated on arrival and a job is potentially waiting around the corner. I have also established that Mexican immigrants make up the majority of ethnic groups in Los Angeles and Southern California. This makes them the dominating ethnic group in the area, which means better opportunities for dictating some sort of ethnic identity formation in the area. This assumption creates an excellent starting point for the creation of a strong Mexican immigrant community and collective identity.

At the same time, a new formation of social polarization was, according to Sassen, happening in global urban areas such as Los Angeles. The polarization occurred because of the low possibility of social upward mobility of low-wage, unskilled people working in the service sector. Moreover, the illegal immigrants working in this sector do not have any sort of legal rights or healthcare insurance because of their immigration status. This can furthermore lead to exploitation by employers in both the formal and informal/hidden service sector (Sassen 2003: 261). This gives an even stronger incentive for the Mexican immigrants to make use of their social ties and networks, and collective identity.

This is something that will need further investigation in the analysis and leads me on, to the significances of immigrant social networks in the city of Los Angeles and Southern California.

Mexican immigration and California

The historic bond between Mexico and the United States has had significant influence on the number of people originating from Mexico but living in the United States. Mexicans are by far the largest group of Hispanic immigrants living in the United States. In the year 2000 the Mexican population in the United States had reached 20.6 million and accounted for 58.5 percent of the combined Hispanic population in the United States. In the state of California, the Hispanic population made up 44.6 percent of the total population in the State (U.S. census 2001).

At the same time, illegal immigration coming from Mexico across the U.S.-Mexican border hit an all time high with some 105.000-350.000 people crossing the border annually during the 1990s. It was estimated, in 2000, that around 7 million illegal immigrants were living in the United States; further estimates concluded that 4.8 million undocumented Mexican immigrants made up 69 percent of this population (Huntington 2004: 4). However, the Mexicans who came to the United States had a tendency to geographically concentrate in specific regions of the United States. It is especially the Western and Southern parts of the country, which have received the largest number of immigrants from Latin American while the Midwest and Northeast have received fewer numbers. Hispanics accounted for 24.3 percent of the total population in West. The West was especially a preferred end station for most Mexican with a

total of 55.3 percent of all Mexicans ending up in the West. In 2000, California was the one state with the biggest concentration of Mexican immigrants reaching some 8.455.926 people accounting for around 25 percent of the total population in California. In Los Angeles County alone there were some 3 million Mexican residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). In reality, this means that nearly half of all Mexican immigrants are living in California and are mostly concentrated in the Los Angeles area and Southern California (Huntington 2004: 5).

The Mexican immigrant community and the significance of social networks in Los Angeles and Southern California.

Regarding the labor sector in California, it has become quite clear for scholars that the Latino working force in California is there to stay. The Latino workforce, and among them the Mexicans, are not occupying so-called white-collar jobs.⁹ The immigrants arriving are normally not well educated so they have especially been occupied in the agricultural and service sector and in later years in a higher degree to the manual sector (Lopez and Feliciano 2000: 26). In 2000, 70 percent of all manual workers in California were Latinos, most from Mexico and Central America. In the Agricultural sector, the Latino immigrants constituted more than half of the workers working in agricultural regions in the State of California. Moreover, it is, according to David Lopez et al. (2000) associated Professor at UCLA, estimated that Latinos will within thirty years comprise the majority of all semi- and unskilled workers in all of California (2000: 26).

To conclude on the given information it is clear that Mexicans immigrating to the United States have a tendency to move to regions or metropolitan areas already populated by other Mexican immigrants. Mexicans immigrate for one obvious reason, that being the job availability in especially California. However, getting the jobs can be a tiresome affair not to say an impossible quest, unless they know the right people.

⁹ White-collar worker is a term associated with professional and educated workers performing non-manual labor, while blue-collar worker refers to workers, skilled or unskilled, performing manual labor.

This is why social networks seems to be one of the more wholesome explanations to why Mexicans have a wish to migrate to regions or cities where they have an already established and functional social network. Studies show, people living in communities that have no history of migration or are the point of starting migrating has odds against them when planning to migrate. Potential migrants living in a “non-migrant” community generally have few friends and relatives who have been living abroad, meaning they have limited knowledge about job opportunities, housing and transportation to a possible destination site. In contrast, people living in communities with a long history and tradition of emigration, are more likely to be well socially connected with people who have been abroad or people residing abroad. This eventually implies that non-migrants living in such a community have more knowledge about conditions and resources at the destination point. In other terms, these non-migrants have greater access to valuable social capital that can ease and secure the success of their move (Massey; Goldring; and Durand 1994: 1494). This explains the value of strong social ties and networks for migrants, once they enter the United States. However, as I have just learned migration have a tendency to spread through social networks and create traditions of migration in some local communities in countries of origin, but these networks do often not evolve further but remain informal, social networks. They do not grow deeper or larger, or become more formal or institutionalized. And as time progresses, migrants become incorporated into their host countries. The migrants’ need for keeping up with traditions and news of the home country and local community can die out (Levitt 2001: 197). This can eventually slow down migration and initiate a process of assimilation of the exiting immigrants. On the other hand, if the flow of migrants continue, Peggy Levitt (2001) argues, we are more likely to experience:

“...a range of transnational practices or economic, political and socio-cultural occupations and activities that require regular long-term contacts across borders for their success” (Levitt 2001: 1997).

This kind of practice is exactly what Mexican immigrants have been displaying by the “rise, peak and decline” in Mexican migration flow previously established in the beginning of this section. Just the simple fact that so many Mexicans are willing to make the journey and leave family and friends behind indicates that people do not just migrate without a plan, destination or job prospects.

Furthermore, the relationship of migration between the United States and Mexico has to be put into a historical context in order to fully understand the motives and setting for the migration flow. The Mexican immigrants have been building up vast social networks in California and that is why the interest falls upon this part of the county. The density of Latinos and especially Mexican immigrants has no comparison in other regions of the United States and the job opportunities in the unskilled, low-wage sector seem to be vast for Mexican immigrants.

The maintenance of strong social ties and networks among Mexican immigrants with other migrants and non-migrants from the country/community of origin is a deliberate transnational practice or action. Upon arrival it is a natural “instinct” to display such actions, because of the implicit reasons for being there and to secure the future prospects of making a living in the United States. However, from a prospective of linear transnationalism, these social ties with the sending country will slowly fade away as the immigrant will start to adapt to the country of reception (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 771). This will happen despite the original strong social network, which properly helped the immigrant to get there in the first place.

However, as we have already learned, this is not the case for many Mexican immigrants living in the United States. Transnational practices have more or less become a normal practice for many immigrants on an individual level and for Mexican immigrant communities as groups. This kind of ethnic identification and the creation of a specific social identity of Mexican immigrants in the country of reception is a deliberate action, which could be linked to these strong social ties and networks (Hall 1991; Jenkins 2004).

Still there remain elements of incorporation, so in order for me to investigate any further, I need to keep in mind the two other classifications of transnational practices: resource dependent transnationalism and reactive transnationalism (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 771-2).

Before continuing with the analysis of transnational practices of the Mexican immigrants' community in California, it is important to establish the motive and result of the before mentioned increase in immigration.

The increased significance of economic remittances for Mexico and Mexicans abroad

For many migrants the act of sending home money is the primary goal of emigration. The importance of remittances is not new and was widely discussed among scholars in the 70s and 80s. The discussion went on whether or not remittances could be considered as contributing to local development. Scholars found common grounds on the fact that most remittances back then was spent as an additional income for food, education and other basic needs for the household. This left little of the remittances to so-called “productive investments” (Goldring 2004: 3). This assumingly closed the discussion on the importance of remittances briefly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, scholars ones again found new interest for the impacts of remittances and the relationship to development, when it was discovered that the ways of sending home remittances had changed. In the mid-90s the flow of money going out of the United States and down south had taken on significant new features. In the past, the money had been send home through informal family networks and was ending up immediately at families and relatives. The change came with the emergence of community-based, collective remittances or migrant organizations affiliated with such (De la Garza and Lowell 2002: 4-6). Furthermore, there was detected a change of attitude towards remittances from federal and state levels in Mexico.

As it is possible to detect a change in method used for distributing remittances in receiving countries, there is also a huge change in the amount of remittances being sent back. This is actually a development which is registered for most Latin American countries during the last three decades (De la Garza and Lowell 2002: 4). Of Latin American countries, Mexico is, not surprisingly, the country which receives the biggest amount of remittances.

Mexico is the best example to illustrate the dramatic development of remittances, which occurred from the 1980s up until today. To place Mexico on the world map of remittances, in 1999 it was one of top three of “developing country” recipients of remittances with India taking the first place. In 2001 the placement had shifted and Mexico now took the first winner price by receiving a staggering 9.920 million US Dollars in annual remittances. However this number is only impressive if I compare it to previous figures of Mexican remittances. In 1980 Mexico were receiving some 698 million US Dollars in remittances and in 1999 they had reportedly increased to 5.909 million USD (Goldring 2004: 801). These are all numbers that are related to the

migration flow, the rise and peak (previously elaborated in this chapter), it is even as important to see the development after the migration peak in 2001-02. The development of increase in remittances continues and in 2006 the figure from 2001 has more than doubled to a record 23.100 million US Dollars (Cañas, Coronado, and Orrenius 2007). This means that currently remittances ranks third in the total GDP of Mexico after oil and maquiladora¹⁰ exports.

The development and importance of remittances experienced during the last three to four decades in Mexico is unique and very much related to the trends of migration flow observed in late 80s, 90s and in the beginning of the 2000s. The drastic increase in remittances from the United States to Mexico could be explained by better organizational conditions and more wholesome initiatives, among formal Mexican immigrant organizations. The Mexican government and its very active policies regarding Mexicans abroad and the initiatives to work together with hometown associations and other organizations in the United States could also have contributed to the increase.

In relation to transnationalism it is possible to establish the fact that economic remittances constitute a big part of transnational practices. They keep immigrants in an active relationship with non migrants, family, relatives, friends, or the community of origin itself. Moreover, on an individual level, the act of sending remittances can also increase the social status of the sending party, which could lead to increased chances of social mobility (Goldring 2002: 183).

With this as a reference point, it is time to explore the development of HTA's as a natural evolution of the combination of strong social ties, networks and economic remittances based on local communities in Mexico.

¹⁰ The maquiladora industry in Mexico consist of factories situated in the North of Mexico that imports material and equipment on a duty-free and tariff-free basis for assembly and then re-exports the assembled goods to the originally intended market.

Chapter 5 - Mexican hometown associations in the United States

Organizing hometown associations

In the introduction to this thesis, I established how hometown associations began to exist in the United States, who started using these organizations, and why they began using and supporting them in the first place.

In today's American society, the nature and power of the associations have changed and evolved. To learn more about hometown associations and how they have positioned themselves in the American society, I must continue this investigative path. It is my intention to investigate the characteristics, functions, and member composition of Mexican hometown associations located in Los Angeles and the Southern California.

This chapter will also seek to lay open some of the transnational processes and transnational practices that takes places within hometown associations. Furthermore it is interesting to examine how hometown associations are affecting their surroundings in Los Angeles and Southern California. As hometown associations have gained more members and apparently become more influential, it is equally interesting to learn what interest countries/nation states can have in cooperating with hometown associations.

Hometown associations have until the 1990's been keeping a low profile and been considered with a relatively small interest from both the American and the Mexican State. This changed in the 1990's because of the large immigrant waves, which started flowing into the United States in this time period. As mentioned earlier, Mexican hometown associations have a long history in the United States. It is especially in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, Southern California and Chicago, these types of organizations have undergone an increasing development.

To understand the composition of hometown associations, we need to understand the composition of the Mexican immigrants in California. The majority of the resident Mexican immigrant population's place of origin is centered on six Mexican states: Guerrero, Jalisco,

Guanajuato, Michoacán, Zacatecas, and Mexico City, D.F (Bada 2003: 3). The big exporting states of Mexican immigrants vary depending on which American metropolitan area I choose to look at,

In Los Angeles, it is especially states such as Jalisco (29 percent), Michoacán (15 percent), Zacatecas (10 percent) and Guanajuato (5 percent), which are the biggest contributors of Mexican immigrants (Zabin and Escala 1998: 9). However, the number of hometown associations representing one state in the United State is not necessarily in cohesion with the number of Mexican immigrants in one metropolitan area. The case of Los Angeles is a fine example of that the number of HTAs is not proportional with the representation in the community. In Los Angeles, immigrants from Zacatecas only make out for 10 percent of the combined Mexican population in L.A. However, the people from Zacatecas are represented by no more than 51 hometown associations, while there are only 49 HTAs representing Jalisco, which is the biggest exporter of Mexican immigrants to the Los Angeles area (Zabin and Escala 1998: 9). One possible explanation could be that from a historical point of view, the Mexicans of the state of Zacatecas have a much longer history and tradition in regards to the creation and use of hometown associations. Zacatecas was the first state to have its own federation of hometown associations (Zabin and Escala 1998: 8).

The internal organizing of hometown associations: characteristics and functions of Mexican hometown associations

The Mexican hometown associations are normally based on local communities situated in the above mentioned Mexican states: These states have been subjected to massive immigration to the United States. The general characteristic of these states are poverty, largely rural areas or other unskilled, low-wage working regions.

The simplest types of associations formed in the U.S. are the informal migrant village networks. These village-based social networks are put in place to help migrants journey to the United States and to ease their adaptation to their new community by finding housing and employment, and other needs they may have in order to adjust to and construct new lives (Zabin and Escala

1998: 7). These informal social networks are not just of a family or kinship nature, but are at the same time based on a common social identity of the village of origin. These types of social networks are maintained in the host country by villagers seeing each other in relation to social events. This could be any types of social event, such as baptisms, religious celebrations and other traditional events. These interactions often lead to other and more informal types of activities. Hometown soccer teams and other sports teams are created to play the sports of their country of origin. These are all activities happening on a pure informal level. The next step of the organizational development is the creation of a more formal leadership. Leadership committees are created to organize and represent the “daughter” community in a more effective manner (Zabin and Escala 1998: 7). A meeting is called through word of mouth and at this meeting the creation and election of officers to lead the association or club is conducted. This happens almost the same way it would do in the sending community. Sometimes associations are even formed on the request of the sending community to have some formal representation of the migrant/daughter community in future dealings (Zabin and Escala 1998: 7). There are thousands of associations like this in the United States and they do not evolve or grow any bigger than extensions of the villages. They remain like this without any formal contact with larger federations in the U.S. or the Mexican state. However the Mexican Consulate initiated a program in the early 1990’s, which actively encouraged the formation of hometown associations in Los Angeles. This was done in accordance with the New Mexican Diaspora; to make the Mexican immigrants keep their sense of Mexican national belonging and to remember their home country (Goldring 2002: 63).

The next stage of organizational efforts among the Mexican population is the creation of federations among Mexican hometown associations. The federations consist normally of associations or clubs from the same state in Mexico. The oldest example of such a federation is the ‘Federation of Clubs’ of Zacatecas. The federation was formed in 1972 and has about 51 member associations. There is also another large federation from Jalisco, which consists of 49 member associations, but not all Mexican states have been successful in creating such federations. Hometown associations from Oaxaca have made futile attempts and have not been able to keep unity among the HTAs and today there are 3 smaller federations of associations from Oaxaca. The split has come because of differences in regional needs and religion (Zabin and Escala 1998: 8).

Another reason that some states are not represented by federation of hometown associations is because of political differences. Regions or states with a strong opposition to the Mexican government have, according to Zabin and Escala (1998) had a lower tendency to form hometown associations. This could be caused by low support from the Mexican Consulate in the creation of HTAs that potentially will stand in opposition to the government or support critical voices against it. A good example could be the State of Michoacán. This state has the second largest representation of Mexican immigrants in the Los Angeles community (15 percent) and its population in L.A. is only represented by 11 hometown associations and no federation. According to Zabin and Escala (1998) the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles has had some “conflictive relations” with immigrants from the state of Michoacán, because of their affiliation with the leftist opposition party, the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution). This could be an expression of the power the Mexican government has over the Mexican immigrant community in the United States and the impact it has on shaping the Mexican community in Los Angeles.

The member composition of hometown associations

In order to understand hometown associations and the value HTAs can have for its member, it is important to know who joins them and how they use them. Studies indicate that it is almost only rural communities in Mexico, which have them while cities or urban “barrios”¹¹ don’t have these types of associations or clubs. It is therefore compelling to draw the conclusion that people from rural areas in their country of origin, join these kinds of associations. The people from urban areas do not have the same need to gather with other immigrants from their old urban barrio. However it’s common for urban-born immigrants to belong to the same associations and clubs as their parents do, assuming the parents came from a rural area in Mexico (Zabin and Escala 1998: 10).

The management of the hometown associations is normally left to long-term immigrants, who are either conceived as natural community leaders or people who have reached a certain level of

¹¹ *Barrio* is the Spanish expression for *neighborhood*.

economic security. HTA leaders can be anything from owners of small businesses, such as insurance agencies, Mexican restaurants or other businesses which tends to the needs of the community, to professionals making a living as lawyers, social workers and government officials. A common denominator for many of these community leaders made their own success. Just as the vast majority of Mexican immigrant community has to. It is also worth mentioning, that most HTA leaders are male, while only a few women take this position (Zabin and Escala 1998: 10; Goldring 2002:71-72).

The motive for joining hometown associations can be different, depending on which kind of transnational practice that labels the individual immigrant. If we consider the notion of social status of the individual in a community (of origin and reception) context it is once again possible to apply some part of the transnational theory discussed earlier in theory chapter in the thesis.

We can exclude linear transnationalism, because of the fact that a hometown association in its existence itself is an argument against this kind of transnationalism. Hometown associations keep their members in a constant contact with their roots in Mexico and at the same time serves as a building block for the local community in Los Angeles and Southern California. So the focus falls upon resource dependent and reactive transnational practices set in motion by the members. Meaning, members have different motives and economic backgrounds for being in such an organization. Despite a shared collective identity and a collective wish for improvement in the home community, a wish for higher social status can also be a motivating factor for many members (Goldring 1998: 180). In accordance with resource dependent transnationalism, many migrants seek to improve their social status and influence on the community by taking active part in setting or enacting the agenda for the hometown association. These immigrants are often those who do well economically, and therefore I have to look to the leadership of transmigrant organizations (Goldring 1998: 184-5).

Regular members may fall under the category of reactive transnationalism. They react to the society of reception, maybe because of certain negative experiences, advice from people in their social network or in the search of higher social status or more social capital (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002:772).

It is not hard to see that there are many overlapping aspect of these two understandings of transnationalism and the motives that set the ground for engaging community and organizational life among the immigrants. The overlapping aspects will grow even more complex when discussing the increasing political activities of hometown associations. This subject will also involve the incorporation of Mexican immigrants into Los Angeles and Southern California however this will come at a later stage in the analysis. However, despite motives, the transnational actions are clear and will be further illustrated in the following part of the analysis.

Hometown association activities

The functions of today's hometown associations are clear set. Firstly, they have to generate donations in order for them to finance development projects in their community of origin. The fundraising happens through a series of dinners, picnics, dances, beauty pageants and other cultural events, which takes place throughout the year. Secondly, it is the purpose of the HTAs to encourage a sense of community by strengthening the social ties among the members (Goldring 2002: 64).

So naturally, the fundraisers are where the HTA leaders put the most of their time. The whole foundations and survival of the HTAs are based and revolves around these fundraising events. The best example and the most common type of fundraiser are the beauty pageants. They are perceived to be the main large-scale event for many Los Angeles based hometown associations. In both the Jalisco and Zacatecan federations, there are internal beauty pageants where each HTA chooses its beauty queen and in a final event the beauty queen of the federations is elected. The contestants are all members or daughters of members and the winner is not only elected on her looks, but also her ability to raise money in support of the home town. She has to sell tickets to other events organized by the HTA and through that raise money (Zabin and Escala 1998: 11). It is especially the federations of Jalisco and Zacatecas, which uses these competitions for promotion and fundraising and they have become very successful with these events.

The events of beauty pageants are very serious and there is a lot to win for those, who participate in these beauty pageant events. As in most well known beauty pageants, the winner will receive a

prize and the appertaining fame. In the case of Jalisco, the winner becomes the prevailing year's official representative of the specific immigrant community. As a representative the winner get invitations to the yearly festival of Guadalajara, the state capital of Jalisco. Here she will be the representative of the Jalisco, Los Angeles community. And in the wake of the "coronation" there will be many other invitations to events as the one just mentioned.

It is easy to spot the dual purpose of social events orchestrated by the HTAs. The primary aim is to generate as many donations as possible, while at the same time to strengthen the social ties of the immigrant community. Individuals sharing the same interest, the same home town and a common faith in the United States, are brought together. All generations attend these events and bonds between compatriots are created, restored or kept alive. An exchange of information about the respective communities in Mexico and Los Angeles takes place and the collective identity and ties are reinforced.

The social events of hometown associations help members to construct identities, which are "up-to-date" in their community in the country of reception, new identities that transcend national barriers. When applying the theory that I have described previously, we have to regard these specific actions as social actions in relation to transnational practices. I need to review the sub categorizes of the fields of social actions (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002). In the case of hometown associations it would be relevant to categorize these as sociocultural actions. As transnational linkages that involve a recreation of a sense of community that includes migrants and people in the place of origin. Thus meaning, an emergence of mutual help, sociability, and public rituals rooted in the culture of place of origin. The public rituals also contribute to a cultural understanding and belonging, and collective social obligation of immigrants (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 768).

This collective tie to the community of origin and the Los Angeles community is also used by the individual members for their personal gain. The gain is not of an economical nature, but rather a gain of social capital and an expansion of social networks.

By being in such a network, it is possible for Mexican immigrants to get information from other people in the network on how to deal with the American system in a better and more efficient way. For instance, they can gain valuable information on how to obtain citizenship, or get their

children enrolled in a school. Furthermore the HTAs are also a forum, where the members can discuss current matters, politics and how to make things better for their specific community and Mexican immigrants in general (Zabin and Escala 1998: 11-12).

Another important aspect is the socialization of the 1st generation of U.S. born children of Mexican immigrant. The HTAs takes on the function to socially educate the younger people. They teach them about the traditions and values of their home country and provide events and social activities where they can meet other young people with a similar background. And the young people learn about the benefits of close family and community loyalties (Zabin and Escala 1998: 11).

Chapter 6 - Political participation of immigrant organizations

Hometown associations and other immigrant organizations

When talking about transnationalism and transnational practices it is equally as interesting to know the kind of political influence hometown association and their federations have gained in Mexico, in other words, the degree of transnational political actions carried out in Mexico by immigrant organizations.

One subject, which seems to one of the most discussed topics in academic circles, is political participation among the Latino immigrants living in the United States. Some Latino groups, such as the Cubans, have established themselves as force to be reckoned in the political game. The Mexican minority have not yet displayed any real political influence on the national level. State level and local communities is another matter. To investigate political participation in Mexican immigrants' hometown associations and other immigrant organizations, I need to take a closer look at some of the current trends within the local immigrant community, especially in the Los Angeles area and southern California.

A journalist, Ginger Thompson, from the New York Times was quoted by Rivera-Salgado et al. of saying:

“Southern California is the capital of the Mexican Diaspora and a hotbed of Mexican politics, led by the Federation of Zacatecan Clubs... The federation meets in drab gray buildings in the City Terrace section of East Los Angeles (and) nearly everybody who wants to be anybody in Zacatecan politics has walked through its doors. Presidential agreements have been signed here. Political campaigns have been started. The federation proclaims that it is apolitical. But it is precisely its close ties to the government of the Zacatecas that have helped it grow out of its members garages into one of the most successful migrant fund-raising groups in the United States”. (Salgado, Bada, and Rabadán 2005: 13)

As previously mentioned, Proposition 187 was the first example where America opened its eyes to a new power factor in the United States, the Latino community. It was the organizational character of the Latino communities in California that made their voice heard. Through hometown associations Mexican immigrants were urged to become political active and speak their mind through collective action (Zabin and Saucedo 1998: 23). The protest took different kinds of shapes, such as the “Taxpayers against Prop. 187” and ended up in the massive public protest march, October 1994. It was a demonstration with a size not seen in California since the Vietnam War. Mexican hometown associations showed their potential, the day their members walked the streets of Los Angeles. It was an impressive display of political potential of the Mexican immigrant community residing in California (Zabin and Saucedo 1998: 23).

From community development to political participation

The previous half of this analysis, have been focused on Sociocultural and economic aspects of transnationalism in regards to Mexican hometown associations. This part will focus on some of transnational practices within the field of political transnationalism.

When considering the traditional activities of Mexican hometown associations, they have always been associated with community and hometown development and this side of HTAs have received much attention in the last three decades. However, the fact is that far less attention have been given to the political aspect of these organizations and the transnational elements that are embedded in political engagement of immigrant civic organizations in immigrant communities in the United States. There have been build strong social and economic ties between communities of origin in Mexico and the communities of reception in United States. HTAs have been able to establish strong ties to various levels of the Mexican government in order to do development work more efficiently in their communities of origin, but the ties to the political and formal community aspects in the United States have been very limited (Salgado, Bada, and Rabadán 2005: 21). However, during the 1990s it is possible to detect a shift within these types of associations towards a more active role in the community. Associations became increasingly

engaged in civic and political issues, and especially the subject of right for citizenship in the United States received attention. According to Salgado, Bada and Rabadán (2005), the shift can be explained by the inflow of immigrants in 1990s and of those, the large number of illegal immigrants. Salgado et al. also point to the low rate of naturalization among Mexican immigrants, actually the lowest by 20.3 percent (2005: 21) and since the majority of Mexican immigrants were living in the State of California, this became the frontline. With these disturbing figures and a tightening of immigrant rights (Prop. 187) and a climate of anti-immigration, immigrant hometown associations began to engage in the political community. Mexican HTAs began working closer together with other immigrant organizations on human rights (Salgado, Bada, and Rabadán 2005: 23).

This was a huge step, a new organizational line pushing the members towards a more incorporative approach to the community in Los Angeles and the Southern California. Salgado et al. (2005) actually argues that the Mexican hometown associations redefined their collective identity and this led to a new range of HTA activities targeted toward the community of reception, created to help the situation of members in the United States. Hometown associations had in some sense taken on a new formal dimension acting domestically. Since the case of Proposition 187 many other human and immigrant rights cases have been getting the attention from Mexican hometown association (Salgado, Bada, and Rabadán 2005: 23).

HTA leaders also began promoting citizenship and incorporation into the United States among their members (Zabin and Saucedo 1998: 25), as a way for them to secure the rights of their members, but also to gain more political influence (Zabin and Saucedo 1998: 26).

Local 123 – an immigrant union

As mentioned earlier the Mexican HTAs began cooperating with other types of organizations. One of them was immigrant unions of Southern California. Zabin and Saucedo have in their work revealed active ties between Mexican hometown associations in California and a Mexican-American dominated local union located in Southern California (Laborers' International Union of North American 652) (1998:30-2).

Both types of organizations had the same focus on human rights and citizenship, and therefore it is interesting to illustrate the similarities of the two. In this example, of the local 123, we see a similar use of social networks and transnational political actions, which are vital for many immigrant organizations. It is an example of hometown politics played out in an immigrant union in the United States. Furthermore, it is an illustration of division among Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.

In his research, Professor Fitzgerald found several interesting observations, which are highly relevant when defining the transnational behaviors of not only members, but also union employees and union administration. In a transnational perspective, what is interesting is what hometown ties and networks have to say about the well being of a Mexican immigrant in an US labor union with a majority of Mexican immigrants. In the sense that if a Mexican immigrant, member of this specific union, has the right hometown ties, e.g. family, relatives, friends, or even belongs to a specific geographical area in Mexico, this could be helpful when applying for a job.

In Fitzgerald's own words: "Mexican hometown networks dominate Local 123" (Fitzgerald, 2003: 231). Furthermore, the Fitzgerald case, also illustrates how local community leaders and upcoming community leaders use these hometown ties and networks to consolidate or achieve union appointments and other political results.

To understand how the hometown network functions and is being used is key when understanding how this specific union works. How people are appointed and get jobs within the union and also how the unemployed union members get jobs in the hiring hall.

The case of business manager Refugio of local 123

During his fieldwork, Professor Fitzgerald, got a firsthand look at how a hometown network functions. The example of the newly appointed business manager Refugio is a clear cut example of how hometown networks and ties are used, when "campaigning" for the position. Also symbols of Mexican leadership and revolutionary icons are used in the election campaign. It is

clear from Fitzgerald's study of Local 123 that union leaders draw on hometown and family networks in organizing, internal election campaigns and citizenship drives¹².

Business manager Refugio used her network among the Guadalupanos members of the union to win the 2000 election as business manager. It was estimated that around 90 percent of her votes came from Guadalupanos (Fitzgerald, 2003: 237). Refugio, herself, is not from Guadalupe, but from the state of Jalisco. Her son, however, was married to a Guadalupana and this secured her a direct access to the Guadalupanos votes. Furthermore, Refugio had on several occasions visited the region both on business and in family relations. So one can say she had created a healthy network in Guadalupe. This network secured her the election along with the fact there was not a huge voter turnout among the non-Guadalupanos union members.

This also points to the important fact, that when the Guadalupe network was "activated" in order for Refugio to win, the Guadalupe union members were explicitly encouraged to become involved with the union and participate in her campaign. Guadalupanos residing in California became more involved with the work of the union through hometown networks.

Another important aspect of the hometown network and family ties is of course that the benefits go both ways. By helping Refugio becoming business manager, the Guadalupe local community in the South City benefited giving her their vote. Some of the candidates for seats as delegates were from Guadalupe and some had family relations to Guadalupanos. Fitzgerald also learned the fact that if a person had an ability to get more votes for the business manager, there would be a serious chance of getting a job as staff member at the union.

¹² Citizenship drives, meaning efforts done by the union for a naturalization of their members. Ultimately, making them apply for citizenship so that they can register and vote.

The members of local 123

The above mentioned effect and use of hometown networks and ties also spread to the hiring hall. Professor Fitzgerald noted on several occasions out of work non-Guadalupanos complaining about losing their jobs to Guadalupanos because of the power distribution in the union.

Another issue related to that of hometown network and the member relations with family and friends in Mexico, Fitzgerald made another interesting observation. Among the members of the union was a share idea that there existed a clear division between Mexicans and “Chicanos” and of who was benefiting from Refugio’s position as business manager. One Chicano member of the union said straight up: “You don’t vote for her, you don’t have a job... We don’t have any representation” (Fitzgerald, 2003: 241). And he blamed his limited social and family network for not being properly represented in the union. Since he was third generation Mexican-American most of this network, known from first generation Mexican immigrants, was gone.

Fitzgerald also points to another polarization within the union among the Chicanos members. Apparently they were split in two groups. The first groups consisted of Chicanos, who recognized a common ancestral origin with Mexicans, but sees a difference in the cultural traditions between the two groups. Secondly, there are those Chicanos accused of literally hating Mexican immigrants and displaying racist conduct while in power. Another important aspect was that some Chicanos did not think that the Mexican members were committed to the struggles and courses of the union. Another way of saying that they did not care about their local community in the United States and if conditions were improved for American workers.

So what Professor Fitzgerald discovered was various identity groupings counterworking each other inside the union walls. This, taking place in order to secure power, land jobs for one’s own group as well as being able to provide for relatives and family in hometowns.

It is clear that there are many similarities between immigrant unions and hometown associations, especially the significance of social networks and social capital. They are key elements for leaders as well as members to progress and experience social upward mobility. Also the

promotion of incorporation by attaining citizenship is a share trade. However, on the matter of collective identity there is a clear distinction between the two sorts of organizations. In case of local 123, the members were divided into specific identities categorized mostly by geographical boundaries. But again, we see the importance of strong social networks to non migrants in Mexico and the transnational political practices are clearly important for the union structure and leadership, even though it is situated in Southern California. The example of local 123, also demonstrates the complexity of transnational practices and of total cross-border activities.

Chapter 7 - Discussion and conclusion

The application of transnationalism and ethnic identity

The concept of transnationalism has been widely adopted by scholars to describe and analyze migration in the light of globalization. Immigrant transnationalism, presented by Basch, G. Schiller, and S. Blanc (1992), emerged as an explanation to transnational social fields that linked specific sending and host countries and thereby broke with traditional migration theories. Transmigrants maintain, build and reinforce an array of linkages with their countries of origins. In other words, transnationalism established the social connections between the sending and the receiving countries (Basch, G. Schiller, and S. Blanc 1992: 7). Moreover, the theories of transnationalism have continued to be developed and conceptualized, while terms and ideas of transnational practices imply a sort of continuum, an evolving process across borders. Transnationalism becomes even more complex when we consider aspects of incorporation into the country of reception.

As the distinctions of transnationalism are put into context with the Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles and Southern California, certain parts of identity theory are applied to explain the motivation and actions of Mexican immigrants. Collective identification and interaction and the shared feeling of ethnicity are primary motivators for immigrant behavior in the United States.

But as we have learned in both fields of theory, transnationalism and identity/ethnic identity theory, these disputes continue to circle among scholars as nation states continue to experience increased numbers of immigrants. Distances of sending and receiving countries grow constantly smaller in the sense that communication technologies keep on evolving and have become public property. This evolution is never ending and therefore it is only possible to get a glimpse of a short lived present.

In the realm of identity formation and more specific ethnic identity, we see a similar pattern unfolding. The identity of ethnic groups and individuals seems to be an elusive and constantly

progressing concept. Similar to the break with traditional migration theories, theorists like Stuart Hall breaks with the notion of a *great collective social identity* (Hall 1991:45). Instead, the argument of social diversity and plurality in today's Western societies are constantly evolving.

However, there are points of discussion which are relevant to emphasize in regards to the use of transnationalism and identity formation in this thesis. In immigrant communities abroad, social relations are of great importance for all, both non-migrants and migrants. Everybody have an interest in keeping relations and social ties, networks alive and strong. But it is inevitable that these social relations change as time progresses. Immigrants in a new context out of the country of origin are bond to change in order to cope to the social pressure from the host society. Social transnational ties will in some sense come to be of a more symbolic nature, rather than face-to-face relations. Also social networks and their original dynamics are threatened by the change of time. However, if we consider the argument that transnationalism and incorporation are two processes that actually can occur simultaneously; we are back to a continuous process.

Transnationalism is the primary process that advocates for the possibility of a dual localism for migrants and that the receiving country consists of a multicultural society and not a mono-cultural, where immigrants need to assimilate in order for them to function in society. As we have discovered, the culture in Western countries are in fact multicultural and the migrant can therefore, quite naturally, not submit to one culture or the dominating culture, if there exists one more similar to the one the migrant came from. However, the culture in the country of origin also presumable is that of a multicultural society and is exactly what we see in the analysis in the previous chapter. Migrants are dependent on social relations to those with a shared collective identity. For the Mexican migrants in the United States this seems to be the reality expressed through the use of social ties and networks. Mexican migrants' dependence on social networks is also expressed in the way Mexican migrants choose to get organized once they are in the United States. On one hand, the social networks are used for the act of immigration in itself and on the other hand, social networks are used for achieving a job, a home, and at a later stage social status. Moreover, the Mexican immigrants are, once they are settled, introduced to new range of more or less formal networks in the shape of civic organizations.

Among Mexican immigrants, hometown associations are the organizational method, which have been most successful. The Mexican government has been extremely helpful towards these

organizations, via the Mexican Consulate located in Los Angeles, because they have spotted an opportunity through which they have the possibility of spreading the Mexican Diaspora through these organization and there members. Thereby, Mexico is intentionally keeping their “expatriates” or emigrant abroad, in a constant transnational relationship with their country of origin.

This is also the intent of the hometown associations. The intent is to keep their members and the organization in a transnational relation to village or community of origin in order to continue to develop and help their “hometown”. At the same time, the members continue to develop social relations and expand their network through the numerous social events arranged by the hometown association, social events, such as dances and beauty pageants that are based on traditional festivities from the community from which they originate.

Already, it is possible to detect a conflict of interest. While the community in the sending country develops their internal network, another is expanded in the United States. One network that has two general motives for existing. The first motive is the members’ common background in village/community of origin. And the second motive is the members’ common circumstances in the receiving country. Thus meaning, the social networks generated by the hometown association in California are used by members to gain social capital, to better their chances of success in their new society, to better understand the American system and society.

This actually means that the hometown association, just by bringing members together in the “new” community, has initiated a process of incorporation of their members into the receiving society. This is a process that reconciles with the intentions of the Mexican members and their purpose of their stay/life in the United States. If we go back to the rate of success for the individual immigrant, social networks both in and out of hometown associations seem to be one of the key components in order for immigrants to experience any sort of upward mobility. Moreover, the success of members within the hometown association is naturally in the interest of the organization itself, because it is dependent on donations from its members, in order to continue to send remittances home.

In the case of union local 123, social networks are regarded with just as much importance as for hometown associations. Social networks influence whether or not members will have a job/work

the following day. They determine the way this specific local union division is going to be run until the next election of the union leaders and officers. However local 123 do differentiate itself from hometown association one critical and vital point: The union members do not share a common background as immigrants from the same local point of origin. Thus meaning the union does not have one collective identity in the community but only a common goal to insure the members' rights as workers in the American society. Therefore we see obvious conflicts of interest and a geographical determined minority of Guadalupanos gaining power because they have the strongest collective identity of the minorities within the local. At the same time, they are better organized in terms of having a strong transnational social network. The Guadalupanos are an "ethnic" and socially connected group reacting to the environment, and in order for the groups to advance in society and make a better living for group (Guadalupanos) members, they unite and take advantage of their transnational relations. All together, we see a process of incorporations, where Mexican immigrants have joined a union in order to gain access to workers rights in the United States, while simultaneously initiating transnational activities for the collective to experience upward mobility in the American society. It is almost like a reversed process of what we have learned from Mexican hometown associations. However, union local 123 and the Mexican hometown associations have one thing in common.

The fact that members/Mexican immigrants face incorporation into a society where the tone of immigrant policies has become increasingly stricter during the last twenty years and where Mexicans in an even higher degree are experiencing harassment from both employers and elements of the American society.

Is political participation a natural next step for hometown associations?

When an individual or a group with a collective identity is subjected to a negative experience in connection with the process of incorporations, it will be wise to expect a response. In the case of the Mexican immigrant community and Proposition 187 in 1994 a response should also have been expected. The response came in the form of political active hometown associations that encouraged their members to protest against the diminution of immigrant rights. This event

opened up a new front and a new chapter for the transnational adventures of hometown associations in Los Angeles and Southern California. In the form of a federation, certain hometown associations and federations have become rather influential in some Mexican states, in the sense that some associations had experience with political matters in Mexico also showed an understanding for transnational political actions. However, there was no real tradition of political activity among the associations and their federations. Political experience with the American society was not a commodity anybody within the hometown association possessed, so some associations initiated joint ventures with other immigrant organizations.

Again the Mexican hometown associations are torn between the obvious: A focus on the transnational and original purpose of the associations or a venture into defending the rights of their members, and a chance of bettering the conditions of Mexican immigrants. In other words, the act itself is favoring incorporation of members into the host society, while directing the time and focus of the associations away from the original intend of hometown association.

A part of this political action is to encourage members to acquire citizenship in the United States in order for them to gain the basic civil rights, as well as the right to vote. However, members are confused of their sense of belonging and what citizenship will do to the national identity they have towards Mexico. Is this the last step towards total assimilation? This is their initial fear. Hometown association officials and leaders have to insure members that they will be able to keep their “ethnic” identity as Mexicans despite becoming American citizens and holding American passports.

Future generations

A well known fact from previous generations of migration and earlier migration theories is that later generations of immigrants will inevitable undergo a process of more drastic incorporation into the American society and distance themselves to the traditions of their parents’ or grandparents’ home country. These are the experiences of previous generations of Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles, Southern California and the rest of the country. We see the conflict of Chicanos and Mexican immigrants in local 123. However, one argument that can lead

us to say that this will not happen this time around could be based on the work of hometown association in the Mexican immigrant community. As we have learned, hometown associations put a great effort into the incorporation of young people and children of HTA members into the association. Through the hometown associations the future generations are taught transnational practices by being brought to events based on tradition festivities originating back in Mexico and the community of origin. Even though, the next generations are in a higher degree incorporated into the American society these younger generations will still have one foot inside the door, a transnational linkage to their country of origin.

Conclusion

The central focus of this thesis was to explore the transnational practices of Mexican hometown association in the country of reception. Furthermore, it was to investigate the complexity of transnationalism and the fine line between isolation and incorporation for the Mexican immigrant community in Los Angeles and Southern California. On the basis of the analysis and the following discussion it is possible to reach to the conclusion that it is possible for Mexican immigrants to enact both processes of transnationalism and incorporation. In this thesis it has been argued that the motives (social capital, social status, and collective identity) of Mexican immigrants can explain the pursuit of strong social networks often in a transnational linkage. Hometown associations are the tool of which Mexican immigrants can optimize their chances for achieving all their goals. This could also explain why immigrants choose to take on longer lasting transnational ties. First, the importance of maintaining and expanding the social networks may be a result of the options that are apparent by being part of such networks. It seems that Mexican immigrants obtain advancement in the labor market by using their networks and especially in the case of immigrants in Los Angeles and Southern California. Second, hometown associations and context of origin may be an instrument through which Mexican immigrants can pursue a sense of social status in the migrant community. However, this option seems to be restricted for immigration of economical success. Third, the context of the receiving society, policies and social discriminatory elements can cause Mexican immigrants to seek out a collective identity through hometown associations, thereby engaging in an orientation towards

the community of origin, while the Mexican immigrant community is strengthened internally by the existence of migrants or ethnic identity. This includes the new approach of hometown associations towards political participation.

Together these three motives may explain the use and significance of hometown associations and the transnational and incorporative behavior that Mexican immigrants are displaying in Los Angeles and Southern California. The arguments presented in this thesis indicate that the two processes of transnationalism and incorporation can actually complement and reinforce each other. However, concerning the question of maintaining transnational linkage to the country of origin for future generations of descendants of Mexican HTA members: there exists a definite possibility: As Mexican hometown associations become more oriented towards the community in Los Angeles and Southern California and play a more positive role in that context, a foundation have been created for continuing cultural traditions originating from communities in Mexico.

Appendix

Map of Southern California and Mexico



(Internet: Google map)

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