

Transnational Migration from Oaxaca, the Agrarian Question and the Politics of Indigenous Peoples

Most migration from Mexico to the United States in the Twentieth Century flowed from the North Central region of the nation, especially from the states of Michoacán, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Nuevo León, and Queretaro.¹ Small numbers from Oaxaca and other states in Southern Mexico participated in the Bracero Program² of the 1950s and early 1960s, but another spontaneous and much larger migration from Oaxaca to the western U.S.-Mexico border area began in the late 1960s and continues today. Whereas the migrants of the Bracero Program were legal entrants into the United States, the more recent Oaxacan migrants to the United States have been largely »illegal« entrants.³ This more recent migration from Oaxaca also differs from the earlier phase in the much greater degree to which it has shaped the economy and society of Oaxacan communities, many of which are now truly transnational communities.⁴ Furthermore, contemporary northward migration from Oaxaca also differs from previous and contemporary migration from Northern Mexico in that the new migrants from the south are generally defined as indigenous peoples (*indígenas*), as compared with the northerners who are generally recognized as *mestizos*, i. e., biologically and culturally of mixed European and indigenous origins. On the basis of language, there are 16 different indigenous groups in Oaxaca. Of these the two largest are Zapotec and Mixtec.

Mestizo Mexicans from Northern Mexico began to migrate in large numbers to the United States and especially to California in the early Twentieth Century, mostly as a result of the chaos of the Mexican Revolution. Like other migrants to the U.S. west coast from the Pacific Basin that preceded them in the Nineteenth Century, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino migrants, they found employment primarily in agricultural field work and in railroad construction in California and elsewhere. The current migration of indigenous peoples from Southern Mexico is thus replicating basic features of a now well established pattern that links California agribusiness and other industries with distant »peasant« communities in the Pacific Basin⁵. In the last twenty years, largely because of Zapotec and Mixtec migration to the north, the architecture of much of rural Oaxaca has been transformed by returning migrants who have used their earnings to replace houses of adobe, palm, and wood with structures of cement block and reinforced concrete. These

and other material impacts of migration are correlates of deep changes in the economies, social organizations, politics, and cultures of the communities that have experienced them.⁶ These new patterns require conceptual and methodological innovations that are comparable in scope to the phenomena they seek to elucidate.⁷ In this essay I introduce and apply two such innovations: the significance of migration from Oaxaca for the agrarian question, and the re-examination of cultural politics of the indigenous migrants.

The agrarian question

The agrarian question, which has been one of the main issues in the anthropology of Mexico, centered on the class nature of the rural poor, their eventual historic destiny, and the forms of political organization that were best able to obtain their goals (see below). This particularly Mexican debate is a variant of a larger and older tension between Marxists who promoted a proletarian line and different currents of pro-peasant politics that in the 1970s and 1980s were mainly expressed as variants of Maoism.⁸ On one side were the *proletarianistas* who argued that most rural dwellers were either destined to become rural proletarians working for corporate agricultural firms or that they would be forced to migrate to cities and there become mostly industrial workers. In either case, proletarian political projects best suited their class interests. In contrast, the *campesinistas* argued that many if not most of poor rural Mexicans were destined to remain predominantly *campesinos* (small peasants), and that therefore their class interests were best served by political projects that would keep prices for their products high – a strategy that ran against the class interests of urban proletarian consumers.⁹ In contrast to these issues of class which are at the center of the agrarian question, the indigenous question raises issues having to do more with *cultural identity*.

By the late 1980s this debate between proletarianistas and campesinistas was almost exhausted and had virtually disappeared in the 1990s when concern with agrarian issues was revived and refocused on the impacts of changes to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution which in 1992 made it possible for members of Mexico's extensive collective farms, known as *ejidos*, and also for agrarian communes to sell and rent their land and to use it as collateral for loans. This major shift towards privatization of collective and communal lands is consistent with prevailing policies designed to promote neoliberal reforms in Mexico's national economy.¹⁰

The politics of indigenous peoples

Although not as intensely politicized as the agrarian question, debate over the basic nature and historic destiny of Mexico's indigenous peoples paralleled it. Whereas

the agrarian debate was polarized between proletarianistas and campesinistas who debated the essential class nature of rural peoples, the indigenous debate centered on the past, present, and especially the future identity of indigenous peoples. On one side were those who advanced the national policy of *indigenismo* which promoted the social and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples into national society and culture, and on the other were those who promoted the vitality and autonomy of indigenous communities.¹¹

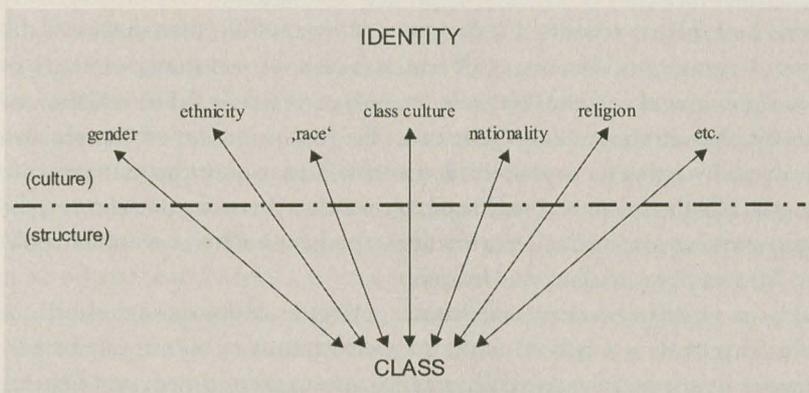
By the mid 1980s it appeared to many that the historical vision of official *indigenismo* was coming to pass, i. e., that indigenous communities and identities would be dissolved into the mainstream. But some of us noted exceptions to this apparent trend. In my case, I became aware of how Mixtec migrants from Oaxaca were becoming conscious of their indigenous identity and actively reconstructing it under the conditions of heavy migration to northwestern Mexico and to the United States.¹² Then on January 1, 1994 the now famous rebellion of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, or EZLN,¹³ exploded into national and international consciousness and further redefined indigenous politics within the context of the neoliberal structuring of the economy, of which the above mentioned changes in Article 27 of the national constitution were a major component.¹⁴ The rebellion of the EZLN took place in the state of Chiapas on the eastern border of Oaxaca and largely populated by indigenous peoples. It was timed to protest the inauguration of NAFTA – the North American Free Trade Agreement – between the Mexico, the United States, and Canada, and as a protest against other neoliberal economic policies that the Mexican government was invoking.

Thus, like the agrarian question, indigenous politics took unexpected directions in the 1990s. This essay is a reflection on these two trends as seen from the perspective of more than twenty years of observation of migration from rural Oaxaca to Northern Mexico and to the United States. In the Oaxacan case the two issues are intimately interwoven and this essay is an effort to sort them out and comprehend them at this moment in history.

Class and identity

My position with respect to class is that in its fundamental Marxist-structural sense it is the most important dimension of the social person. But when used more generally it is perhaps the most confusing and misleading term in the social sciences. Most of the confusion results from failing to adequately distinguish class from identity. Also, recently many anthropologists, political scientists, and other social scientists have given much less attention to class and class dynamics in favor of identity.¹⁵ Such a move typically involves a failure to take into account the fundamental ontological distinction between the referents of the two terms – class and identity – (see below). More often than not, when »class« is invoked, it is not used

in the deep structural sense proposed herein, viz., as a relationship of uneven value exchange between identities. Rather, attention is focused on what is better referred to as *class culture* or *class identity*, which pertains to the realm of culture, not structure (see Figure 1). Indeed, class as an experienced, lived condition is habitually embodied and expressed as distinctive and distinguishing cultural traits such as dialect, body language, aesthetic sensibilities, etc., but these traits are not to be confused with *class* as structure and process. The current trend to do so is consistent with the present fascination with postmodern theory, which gives more attention to cultural analysis than to the classic issues of political economy. It is true that much critical work in political economy on the agrarian question failed to take into account cultural factors. Indeed, both the proletarianistas and the campesinistas employed rather mechanical definitions of class that neglected the cultural dimensions of the person and of quotidian experiences that shape identity. However, a more holistic and global perspective is required of a robust anthropology.



As Marx was the first social theorist to understand, an incisive social analysis must penetrate beyond surface (cultural) appearances to underlying structural relations, of which the most important is the structuring of the uneven production, consumption, and exchange of forms of value among persons, i.e., class relationships. The main point that I wish to make here is that corresponding class positions must also be culturally differentiated into distinct identities. Were such cultural distinctions not constructed and organized in hierarchies and oppositions, there would be no basis for class differentiation among persons who all belong to a single species. Aside from sexual differences only superficial physical differences, which are not insignificant, would be the sole basis for social differentiation. But among humans, the cultural construction of contrasting *identities* is a potential basis for inequalities in the game of value (viz., *class* relationships) that far exceeds the potential of biological differences as the basis of inequality.

I therefore propose that some basic explicit contrasting definitions are necessary to preserve a conceptual distinction between these two terms. We can begin with *identity*, which is the easiest to define (see Fig. 1).¹⁶ It is first of all a cultural con-

struction of persons and of groups. In this sense, it is like architecture and labels, but it may also be experienced as intense sentiments that are usually felt in contrast to other collective identities that one does not share. In other words, identity is largely an *oppositional* cultural construction.

Compared to identity, *class* is conceptually a more abstract feature of the person and most importantly, it is entirely a *relational* dimension of a person vis-à-vis other persons. The basis of this class relationship is an uneven exchange of net value, and here I use value in the complex sense defined below.¹⁷ Among the most obvious cases of such class relations is that between workers and a capitalist, in which the workers produce surplus value beyond that which they receive as salary and other compensations, such that net value passes from worker to capitalist. However, comparable class relations also exist in many other social relationships that are based on the uneven exchange of net value, such as perhaps between spouses in which a wife delivers more value to the husband than vice versa. Usury is another example. Thus, whereas identity is a cultural construction of the person, class is based in the uneven exchange of forms of value. Just as any one class position exists in relationships of uneven exchange with other class positions, so does any particular identity exist in relationships to other identities. But the two kinds of relationships are ontologically distinct. Identities and relationships among them belong to the realm of culture. In contrast, class is a structural relationship and process that exists between persons and between groups differently positioned in fields of value, in all its forms, which are unequally produced, exchanged, and consumed. Furthermore, rather than forming clear lines of demarcation into distinct groups, class relationships are typically complex reticular patterns of value inequality within and between communities and even within and between families.¹⁸

Class, as defined above, as the uneven production, exchange, and consumption of forms of value by and between class positions is the most basic social and political issue. However, because of their cultural nature, identities are more apparent to ordinary cognition in contrast to the impersonal and often abstract nature of forms of value and their sociology. Identities, as cultural constructions, are thus more likely to enter into consciousness and to be experienced as reified features of the person and of groups. Thus, most people, including social scientists, are more cognizant of differences of cultural identity, than of corresponding differing class positions and the complex unequal flows of value between them, i. e., class relations. And yet even more occluded from ordinary consciousness is the realization that culturally constructed identities are necessary to symbolically differentiate persons into uneven class positions and relationships (see Figure 1).¹⁹

Comprehension of the interplay between class and identity requires an anthropology that is robust in two major dimensions. First, such an anthropology must give equal attention to both the infrastructural and the superstructural components of communities. I use these terms in the Marxian sense whereby infrastructure refers to the primarily material basis of a community, beginning with its physical and

biotic environment and the technology that it uses to accumulate energy and other resources from that environment and to transform them in ways that make life and community possible. Also, a part of the infrastructure is the division of labor whereby different persons are assigned different tasks, ranging from manual to mental work. Labor and other forms of creativity and social action that produce material forms of value, and the presence and social distribution of that value in its material forms is also part of the infrastructure. The superstructure includes culturally and socially constructed identities and the immaterial forms of value that adhere to them, and the symbolic and institutional contexts in which they are formed and reproduced, including popular culture and formal institutions such as those of government, law, education, religion, etc. As with material forms of value found in the infrastructure, the immaterial (symbolic) forms of value adhere unevenly to different persons and groups. As a first approximation, the components of the infrastructure are material, while those of the superstructure are social, symbolic, and cognitive. But the distinction between superstructure and infrastructure must not be seen as absolute, for indeed each is shaped by and continuous with the other.

The second requirement of a robust anthropology is that it must take into account changing dynamics between local and transnational conditions of a community and the relations between them. In the classic literature on the agrarian question that was pioneered by Marx, Kautsky, and Lenin there is an implicit assumption that the subjects – be they peasants, rural proletarians, or landlords – live and work in one local area. They do not migrate. However, in the last 20 years the study of the impact of migration from rural communities has reshaped our understanding of these dynamics. The main point here is that, as discussed below, dynamics of class and identity are profoundly altered in these larger contexts.²⁰ Attention to both infrastructural-superstructural and local-transnational dimensions of a community is an enormous challenge and full attention to them in today's context reshapes our understanding of rural and indigenous issues and our methods to study them.

Class and identity in transnational context

For our purposes here it is important to note that migration was not an issue in the agrarian debates of the 1970s and 1980s in Mexico and elsewhere. Now, however, in the early twenty-first century, Mexico is again the ideal context to revisit the agrarian question, but now reconsidered in a transnational context in which the profound importance of migration can be taken into consideration. Whereas *class* is the main issue in the agrarian question, the main issue in the debates about indigenous peoples center on their *identity*. In the early 1970s the indigenous question was not a significant political issue in Oaxaca. But in that decade, as increasing numbers of Mixtecs starting arriving in Tijuana and other Mexican border cities,

the media started to represent them and thus inscribe them in public consciousness as »*indígenas*,« and as »*Mixtecos*«. ²¹ A similar process was occurring among Zapotec migrants in Los Angeles. ²² As I have noted elsewhere, these terms were applied to the new migrants by mestizos of Northern Mexico before the migrants started to think of and to refer to themselves in this collective sense as »*indígenas*.« In Oaxaca, the primary sense of collective identity during most of the twentieth century was based in the local community and a larger sense of ethnic identity, viz. ethnicity, was not present. However, contrary to earlier thinking about how long-distance migration erodes a sense of collective ethnic identity, the opposite occurred in the case of the Oaxacans in the north. ²³ Initially two conditions were critical in this process. One was the appearance of Mixtec women street venders and beggars on the streets of Tijuana; ²⁴ the other was increasing public awareness of thousands of migrant Mixtec farm workers, working and living in abysmal conditions in Baja California, just south of the border between Mexico and California. ²⁵ Efforts to organize in each of these areas led by Mixtec leaders of associations and unions eventually began to coalesce and thus stimulate yet greater consciousness of a pan Mixtec identity.

A somewhat different, but parallel process of emergent ethnicity also took place in California where Mixtec migrants also encountered discrimination by and marginalization from Anglo-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and other Mexican migrants. ²⁶ As in Baja California, these experiences also stimulated the formation of popular organizations that were based on, defined, and indeed to a certain extent constructed Mixtec identity. ²⁷ The Oaxacans, by appearing in the North as *indígenas*, thus reintroduced the old political issue of *indigenismo*, but in a new guise. In certain basic ways the emergence of a sense of pan-Mixtec identity in the north in the 1980s and 1990s was a precursor of the tremendous impulse to the construction of indigenous identity in Mexico brought about by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* since 1994. Furthermore, as some of us have been predicting, Mayan indigenous peoples from Chiapas are now also appearing in increasing numbers in northern border cities and in California where they are coming into contact with the Oaxacans. They are also migrating in significant and growing numbers to North Carolina and neighboring states in the southeastern United States, ²⁸ where Mixtec migrants are now well established. As individuals and organizations of these groups interact it can be expected that the chemistry of migration and indigenous identity will become yet more salient and complex.

The Agrarian Question, as it was originally formulated in the classic literature and then debated in Mexico, assumed that the rural peasant community and agrarian capitalist enterprises such as plantations and haciendas were discreet local entities. As Rodolfo Stavenhagen ²⁹ was one of the first to note, until the 1970s most anthropology in Mexico focused on such small rural, geopolitically bounded communities not seen within their larger economic and political contexts. The proletarianista-campesinista debate of the 1970s and early 1980s also had a similarly limi-

ted perspective. But by the mid-1980s it was apparent that local rural communities could not be understood without taking into account how they were continuous with and affected by non-local conditions.

It was for this reason that Carole Nagengast and I proposed the model of the transnational community – TNC – which as the term implies, is a community that exists in and reproduces in two or more nations.³⁰ In our case, we became aware of such communities, as they had been created by Mixtec and Zapotec migrants to Northern Mexico and to California. Moreover, it was within the context of this kind of community that I was also forced to rethink the agrarian and indigenous questions, for these issues come together in new ways in the context of TNCs.

As I employ the concept of the TNC, it complies with the requirements of a robust Marxist anthropology, as defined above, in that it gives attention to both infra- and superstructural aspects of the community, as well as to its local and transnational features. The model of the TNC is based in part on Wolf's concept of the »Closed Corporate Peasant Community,« which is one of the most misunderstood concepts in modern anthropology.³¹ Indeed, it is often seen as a model of the presumed isolated local village of the earlier mainstream anthropology of Mesoamerica. But what Wolf means by »closed« refers to the efforts, customs, and beliefs of the members of peasant communities to protect themselves from the penetration of outside interests that extract economic value from the community. For, as Wolf shows, these communities are quite open and vulnerable to such exploitation by non-peasant interests. Indeed, Wolf's model could as easily have been called »the open corporate peasant community« for he is a pioneer in the examination of how value is extracted from such communities. But noticeably lacking in Wolf's model, as in the larger literature on the Agrarian and Indigenous Questions, is a concern with how migration affects such extraction and class and cultural differentiation.

Oaxacan TNCs typically owe their transnational status primarily to migration whereby high percentages of their members reproduce economically, socially, culturally, and biologically in two or more nations, and consequently have class positions and relations, and cultural identities and political projects that are shaped in this transnational context. The TNC is thus a social and cultural milieu that requires deep reconceptualization of the agrarian and indigenous questions. Thus, in the remainder of this essay I would like to present several concepts that have assisted me in rethinking class and identity in the Oaxacan TNCs that I know.

Class differentiation and identity in the TNC

As noted above, the basic issue in the agrarian question was the eventual class destiny of rural peoples, of campesinos. That is, were they destined to be proletarianized, or were they going to remain peasants? If the first scenario were going to come to pass, then, as the proletarianistas argued, it was appropriate for rural peoples to develop a proletarian political project that could combat the supposed inhe-

rently conservative politics of campesinos. But if, as the campesinistas argued, capitalism was incapable of completely proletarianizing rural people, then the class interests of campesinos were better served by political projects that strengthened their organizations. Here it is important to note two features of the debate. First, the basic social unit of analysis was implicitly assumed to be the individual, and second, the class nature of the individual was treated largely as unitary—in the sense that one was *either* a peasant *or* a proletarian. Thus, the implicit structure of this debate was that of a binary opposition governed by a logic of *either/or* in which the destiny of the rural individual was to express one of these two essential identities. As I have argued elsewhere,³² this binary, and largely cultural oppositional thinking was not capable of modeling the complex realities of subaltern class positions and identities.³³ The limitations of this *either/or* logic of class and identity became apparent in the case of migrants that move back and forth between campesino and proletarian existences. Because of their complex strategies of economic, social, and cultural reproduction a strictly campesino or a strictly proletarian politics was inappropriate for their political needs.

Much progress was made beyond the *either/or* logic of the proletarianista-campesinista debate by the concept of the articulation of modes of production.³⁴ The articulation model started to dissolve the absolute and binary structure of the logic of the individual by reshaping it into the logic of *both-and*. Although it replaced the opposition between campesino and proletarian with the recognition of the frequent existence of persons who were *both* campesinos *and* proletarians, it was still concerned with only two class positions and their respective cultural identities. The logic of articulation was thus still binary and notably absent from it was recognition of other class positions and identities that migrants could move in and out of in addition to those of peasant and proletarian. The importance of such other economic and cultural spaces became apparent to me in collecting the migration and work histories of Mixtec and Zapotec migrants. Many of them who were establishing semi-permanent and permanent residence in the U.S.-Mexican border area were involved in the informal economy as street vendors, gardeners, smugglers, petty criminals, and so forth, and often combined these activities with peasant farming or wage labor.³⁵ Such contributions from the informal economy to the reproduction of migrant and non-migrant families were generally not taken into account in either the campesinista-proletarianista debate, nor in the articulation literature. But when they are factored in, then the differentiation of persons is seen as more complex than was previously imagined. The differentiation logic of *both-and* is then extended to a logic of *both-and-and-and ...*

The complexity of socio-economic differentiation of Oaxacans increases in the TNCs which display a broader range of class positions and identities than is the case with more local communities. Thus, due to the wide diversity of economic niches into which members of TNCs radiate they are highly differentiated among themselves, viz., *externally*. Furthermore, due to their complex itineraries that typically take them into a variety of economic niches, they are also highly differentiated *internally*, that is, each person is differentiated within himself/herself into various culturally constructed identities and structural class relationships (see below). To comprehend this greater differentiation it is important to go beyond the minimal unit of analysis employed in the agrarian and indigenous questions and in social theory generally, viz., the individual. As I have discussed at greater length elsewhere,³⁶ the individual as unit of analysis is inadequate for the complex multiple class positions and identities of most members of transnational and other contemporary communities. By definition, the individual is indivisible – that is, it is not divided into smaller class units and identities. But, as the migration and work histories of Oaxacan migrants reveal, they typically move in and out of multiple diverse economic and cultural niches. In terms of class positions, they thus experience a complex internal differentiation. I have referred to such internally differentiated person as *polybians*. I derive polybian from *amphibian*.³⁷ Amphibians are animals that spend one part of their lives in one environment and the rest of their lives in another environment and they have different forms in each one. Similarly, polybians are persons who at different time scales, be they years, months, days, or hours, move in and out of not just two different environments, but multiple socio-cultural spaces and among different class positions and class relations. Thus, with respect to their class positions and their cultural identities, they are internally differentiated. Whereas most class analyses examine how individuals are differentiated *among* themselves into, e. g., proletarians, capitalists, etc., a concern with polybians leads us to inquire how individuals are differentiated *within* themselves, such that they in their own person occupy multiple class positions vis-à-vis other persons, near and far. Indeed, given the complex food web-like nature of human class relations, we are all polybians.

Proletarian and peasant politics are based on the concept of the individual and organized on the basis of the logic of either/or. One had to be either a proletarian or a peasant. But the polybian typically occupies two or more distinct class positions at different times of the year or the day. Thus, the question of the kind of political organization that can represent their interests as subalterns is complex for they need an all inclusive overarching identity that coalesces all of their disparate sub-identities and that represents their complex class interests.

The polybian as a potential political subject complicates what we can refer to as the problem of the great cut, or PGC. Briefly, the PGC is basic to political projects

based on the mobilization of presumably one-dimensional identities such as ›peasant‹ or ›proletarian‹ or specific genders or ›races.« The problem in such projects is to determine where to draw the boundary around those identities that are to be mobilized, versus those that are perceived as antagonists. Given that polybians exist in complex reticula of cross-cutting and interwoven class relations that extend between and within the subject groups, there is rarely an objective plane of cleavage in the realm of identity that clearly demarcates an actual class divide between the members of the subject group, so defined by identity.

The politics of polybians

I, like David Harvey,³⁸ take exception to the proposition underlying much postmodern theory that a major historic break has recently occurred and that a new theoretical paradigm is necessary to comprehend it. My position is instead that the basic principles of political economy are still relevant, although it is necessary to adapt them to the changing historic conditions. It is true that those whom I call polybians have increasingly broader and shallower ranges of associations and correspondingly more complex identities with which the postmodernists are fascinated, but the same fundamentals of class differentiation still apply. A major problem with postmodern theory from the perspective of a robust anthropology is that its fascination with identity diverts attention away from corresponding dynamics of class.

Postmodernism's fascination with complex superstructural issues – especially identity and its simultaneous inattention to infrastructural and class considerations is a de facto politically conservative move. Nevertheless, postmodernism can be seen as a response to the growing complexity of identities in the present historic epoch. The basic issue, however, remains, and that is to relate this concern with complex identities to class, which is the enduring issue of the agrarian question and of social injustice in general, whether it be mediated by ethnicity, gender, ›race‹, religion, nationality, or some other identity.

I would argue that the recent resurgence of indigenous identities and of organizations that represent them in transnational spaces is a response to the increasing internal differentiation that they, as polybians, are experiencing. The advantage of the *indígena* as a collective identity is that it overarches all of the diverse sub-identities within and among communities of ›indigenous‹ polybians. But then after such a strategic decision has been made (consciously or otherwise) about what is to be the basic identity that is to enable social and political solidarity, the question arises, what is the proper political project of such organizations of indigenous polybians? In other words, what political issues and goals are basic to the complex class interests of most of the members of indigenous TNCs as they live complex lives in wage labor, subsistence farming, the informal economy, and as entrepreneurs, and with and without various nationalities and citizenships? It is now apparent that the sim-

ple alternatives of a proletarian versus a peasant class-identity of the agrarian question are inadequate for the political needs of such polybians who live in the highly deterritorialized transnational space popularly referred to as *Oaxacalifornia*.³⁹ Such political actors require novel political organizational forms and issues that can speak to their highly differentiated class conditions and geographic dispersion. We are now fortunate in having available two recent studies by Gaspar Rivera Salgado and Laura Velasco Ortiz that document the formation of indigenous popular organizations that are elaborating political projects among the Oaxacan TNCs.⁴⁰ Both of these studies record the growing importance of two major political objectives of the new organizations, namely protection of the environment and defense of human rights.⁴¹ As I have argued elsewhere,⁴² human rights and environmentalism are the two most appropriate projects for polybians. For no other political issues speak to the diverse and contradictory class needs that are present within their highly differentiated TNCs. Although not without contradictions, defense of the environment ultimately benefits everyone. And except for those who abuse human rights, we all benefit from their extension and protection.

As for identity, the ›*indígena*‹ is the most appropriate, pragmatic identity for the polybians of Oaxacalifornia at this moment in history. But as a surrogate for class politics, this project, which is based on indigenous identity, is obviously limited to a small section of the national population. Nevertheless, human rights and environmental issues are universal and hold out the possibility of generalization within a larger project. The *Oaxacalifornianos* and the *Zapatistas* are showing us the way forward in this direction.⁴³

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this paper appeared as *La comunidad rural oaxaqueña y migración: más allá de las políticas agraria e indígena*, in: Cuadernos Agrarios 19 (2000), 11-23. This present version was written while in residence at the University of California Humanities Research Institute, located on the Irvine campus of the University, to which I am most grateful.

² A binational agreement in which men from rural Mexico were contracted as temporary agricultural workers in the United States.

³ A 1994 survey – David Runsten and Michael Kearney, *A Survey of Oaxacan Village Networks in California Agriculture*, Davis, California 1994 – estimated that there were then about 40.000 Mixtecs in California. That number is now certainly much higher and thousands of Mixtecs migrants have also extended into the Southeastern United States, especially Florida and North Carolina.

⁴ Michael Kearney and Carole Nagengast, *Anthropological Perspectives on Transnational Communities in Rural California*. Working Group on Farm Labor and Rural Poverty, Working Paper No. 3, Institute for Rural Studies, Davis, California, 1989.

⁵ Carol Zabin and others, *Mixtec Migrants in California Agriculture*, Davis, California, 1993.

⁶ Cf. e.g. Federico Besserer Alatorre, Moisés Cruz: *Historia de un Transmigrante*, Culiacán, Me-

xico and Mexico City 1999; *ibid.*, *Estudios Transnacionales y Ciudadanía Transnacional*, in: Gail Mummert, ed., *Fronteras Fragmentadas*, Zamora, Mexico, 2000, 215-238; Everardo Garduño and others, *Mixtecos en Baja California. El caso de San Quintín*, Mexicali, Mexico 1989; Marije Hulshof, *Zapotec Moves: Networks and Remittance of U.S.-Bound Migrants from Oaxaca, Mexico*, Amsterdam 1991; Michael Kearney, *Integration of the Mixteca and the Western U.S.-Mexican Border Region via Migratory Wage Labor*, in: Ina Rosenthal Urey, ed., *Regional Impacts of U.S.-Mexican Relations*. Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, Monograph Series No. 16., University of California, San Diego 1986, 71-102; Jeannie Klaver, *From the Land of the Sun to the City of Angels. The Migration Process of Zapotec Indians from Oaxaca, Mexico to Los Angeles, California*. *Nederlandse Geografische Studies* No. 228, University of Amsterdam 1997; Gaspar Rivera Salgado, *Migration and Political Activism. Mexican Transnational Indigenous Communities in a Comparative Perspective*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz 1999; James Stuart and Michael Kearney, *Causes and Effects of Agricultural Labor Migration from the Mixteca of Oaxaca to California*, in: *Working Papers in U.S.-Mexico Studies*, No. 28, Program in United States-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981; Laura Velasco Ortiz, *Conciencia Étnica y Agencia Colectiva. La Comunidad Transnacional de Indígenas Migrantes en la Frontera de México y Estados Unidos*. Doctoral dissertation, El Colegio de México, Mexico City 1999; Carol Zabin and others, *Migrants*, see note 5. Also, there are two films that deal with Mixtec migration to California: Grieshop James and Stefano Varese, *Invisible Indians. Mixtec Farmworkers in California*. A film. Applied Behavioral Sciences, University of California at Davis 1993; Thrisha Ziff, *Oaxacalifornia*, a film, Citron Nueve Productions, 1993.

⁷ Some of these observations appear elsewhere: Michael Kearney, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry*. *Anthropology in Global Perspective*, Boulder, Colorado 1996; *ibid.*, *Fronteras Fragmentadas, Fronteras Reforzadas*, in: Gail Mummert, ed., *Fronteras Fragmentadas*, Zamora, Mexico 1999, 559-571.

⁸ Among basic references to the campesinista position cf. Armando Bartra, *La explotación del trabajo campesino por el capital*, Mexico City 1979; *ibid.*, *Los herederos de Zapata: movimientos campesinos postrevolucionarios en México, 1920-1980*, Mexico City 1985; Gustavo Esteva, *¿Y si los campesinos existen?* in: *Comercio Exterior* 28 (1978) June, 699-732; *ibid.*, *The Struggle for Rural Mexico*, South Hardy, Massachusetts 1983. For the proletarian perspective cf. Roger Bartra, *Estructura agraria y clases sociales en México*. Mexico City 1974; *ibid.*, *Si los campesinos se extinguen*, in: *Historia y Sociedad* 8 (1976) Winter, 71-83.

⁹ Campesino does not translate well into English as peasant, for in Mexico it can also refer to rural wage workers. But as used herein campesinos refers mainly to peasants in the sense of small scale agriculturalists who produces mainly for their own subsistence needs with simple technology.

¹⁰ Gerardo Otero, *Farewell to the Peasantry? Political Class Formation in Rural Mexico*, Boulder, Colorado 1999.

¹¹ The literature on the Indigenous Question is about as extensive as that on the Agrarian Question. For overviews cf. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Una Civilización Negada*, Mexico City 1987; Consuelo Sánchez, *Los Pueblos Indígenas. Del Indigenismo a la Autonomía*, Mexico City 1999.

¹² Michael Kearney, *Mixtec Political Consciousness. From Passive to Active Resistance*, in: Daniel Nugent, ed., *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*, 2nd ed., Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina 1998, 134-146; Carole Nagengast and *ibid.*, *Mixtec Ethnicity: Social Identity, Political Consciousness, and Political Activism*, in: *Latin American Research Review* 25 (1990) 2, 61-91.

¹³ The Zapatista Army of National Liberation – so named in honor of Emiliano Zapata, one of the major leaders of the Mexican Revolution.

- ¹⁴ Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion. The Struggle for Land and Democracy*. Durham, North Carolina 1998; June Nash, *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization*, New York 2001.
- ¹⁵ A notable exception is Stefano Varese, *¿Estrategias Étnicas o Estrategia de Clase? Indianidad y Descolonización en América Latina (Documentos de la Segunda Reunión de Barbados)*, Mexico City 1979.
- ¹⁶ A variant of this figure first appeared in Michael Kearney, *Class and Identity: The Jujitsu of Domination and Resistance in Oaxacalifornia*, in: Dorothee Holland and Jean Lave, eds., *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*, Santa Fe, New Mexico 2001, 247-280.
- ¹⁷ For discussion of this sense of value as the basis for defining class relations, see Kearney, *Reconceptualizing*, see note 7. In addition to the uneven exchange of value, this sense of class also includes the uneven production and consumption of forms of value. This theory of general value, which sees it as existing in material and immaterial forms, is comparable to, but more general than Bourdieu's theory of »forms of capital«: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, in: J. B. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York 1986, 241-258.
- ¹⁸ The concept of reticular relationships is discussed in Kearney, *Reconceptualizing*, see note 7. Basically they are complex web-like relationships of even and uneven value exchange between different facets of persons, near and far. These reticular structures and processes are the basic anatomy and physiology of class. Although not referring to *reticula per se*, Cook and Binford do describe some of their basic socioeconomic features: Scott Cook and Leigh Binford, *Obliging Need: Rural Petty Industry in Mexican Capitalism*. Austin, Texas 1990.
- ¹⁹ Recently many social theorists and popular activists have become disillusioned with class as a basis of organizing popular movements and have given their attention and energy to gender, ethnicity, »race,« neighborhood associations, religion, etc. as basis for the new social movements; cf. e.g. Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez, eds. *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, Boulder, Colorado 1992; Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig, *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*, Boulder, Colorado 1990; David Slater, ed., *New Social Movements and the State in Latin America*. Amsterdam 1985.
- ²⁰ See Michael Kearney, *The Local and the Global. The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism*, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 547-565.
- ²¹ Kearney, *Consciousness*, see note 12.
- ²² Hulshof, *Moves*, see note 6; Klaver, *Land*, see note 6; Rivera, *Migration*, see note 6.
- ²³ Nagengast and Kearney, *Ethnicity*, see note 12.
- ²⁴ Víctor Clark Alfaro, *Los Mixtecos en La Frontera (Tijuana), sus Mujeres y el Turismo*, Tijuana, Mexico 1991; Laura Velasco Ortiz, *La Conquista de la Frontera Norte: Vendedores Ambulantes Indígenas*, in: *Estudiar a la familia, Comprender a la Sociedad*. Universidad Autónoma de México, Azcapozalco 1996, 40-105.
- ²⁵ Angus Wright, *The Death of Ramon Gonzales: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma*. Austin, Texas 1990; Garduño and others, *Mixtecos*, see note 6; Kearney, *Integration*, see note 6.
- ²⁶ Michael Kearney, *The Effects of Transnational Culture, Economy, and Migration on Mixtec Identity in Oaxacalifornia*, in: Michael Peter Smith and Joe R. Feagin, eds. *The Bubbling Cauldron: Race, Ethnicity, and the Urban Crisis*, Minneapolis 1995, 226-243.
- ²⁷ The history of the formation of these organizations is well documented in Velasco Ortiz, *Conciencia*, see note 6; cf. also Rivera Salgado, *Migration*, see note 6.
- ²⁸ Personal communication from Jan Rus.
- ²⁹ Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Capitalism and the Peasantry in Mexico*, in: *Latin American Perspectives* 5 (1978) 3, 27-37.

- ³⁰ Kearney and Nagengast, Perspectives, see note 4.
- ³¹ Eric R. Wolf, Closed Corporate Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java, in: *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13 (1957) 1, 1–18.
- ³² Kearney, Reconceptualizing, see note 7.
- ³³ Cf. Otero, Farewell, see note 10.
- ³⁴ The major source of articulation theory in anthropology is Claude Meillassoux's work on peasant-workers migrating between West Africa and France: Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money. Capitalism and the Domestic Economy*, Cambridge 1981; cf. Kearney, Reconceptualizing, see note 7.
- ³⁵ Some migrants and non-migrants do not have such complex lives, but if they do not, they are likely to be members of households and extended families that depend on such occupational diversity among their members
- ³⁶ Cf. Kearney, Reconceptualizing, see note 7.
- ³⁷ Cf. Kearney, Reconceptualizing, see note 7.
- ³⁸ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1989.
- ³⁹ Oaxacalifornia refers to the transnational social, cultural, and political space that subsumes both Oaxaca and California, and points in between, in which tens of thousands of Oaxacans now live and work Cf. Kearney, Effects, see note 26; Gasper Rivera Salgado, Welcome to Oaxacalifornia, in: *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 23 (1999) 1, 59–61; *ibid.*, Mixtec Activism in Oaxacalifornia. Transborder Grassroots Political Strategies, in: *American Behavioral Scientist* 42 (1999) 9, 1439–1458.
- ⁴⁰ Rivera Salgado, Migration, see note 6; Velasco Ortiz, Conciencia, see note 6.
- ⁴¹ Michael Kearney, Desde el Indigenismo a los Derechos Humanos. Etnicidad y Política más allá de la Mixteca, in: *Nueva Antropología* 14 (1994) 46, 49–67; Alison Brysk, Turning Weakness into Strength: The Internationalization of Indian Rights, in: *Latin American Perspectives* 23 (1996) 2, 38–58; *ibid.*, From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America, Stanford, California 2000.
- ⁴² Kearney, Reconceptualizing, see note 7.
- ⁴³ A prime illustration of the evolution of the agrarian and indigenous questions in Mexico into the universal discourse and defense of human rights that I have outlined here is seen in the career of Rodolfo Stavenhagen who has been a central figure in all three debates. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Las clases sociales en las sociedades agrarias*, Mexico City 1969; *ibid.*, *Capitalism*, see note 29; Sergio Osorio Reyes and others, *Estructura agraria y desarrollo agrícola en México*, Mexico City 1974; Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Movimientos Étnicos Indígenas y los Estados Nacionales en América Latina*, in: *Civilización* (1983) n. 2; *ibid.*, *Cultura y Sociedad en América Latina. Una Revaloración*, in: *Estudios Sociológicos*, 4 (1986) n. 12; *ibid.*, *Derechos Humanos y Derechos de los Pueblos. La Questión de Las Minorías*, in: *Revista IIDH (Instituto Interamericano de Derechos)* (1987) 4; *ibid.*, *Derecho Indígena y Derechos Humanos en América Latina*. Mexico City 1988; *ibid.*, *Derechos Humanos de los pueblos Indígenas*, Mexico City 2000; Nagengast, Carole and others, *Human Rights and Indigenous Workers: The Mixtecs in Mexico and the United States*. San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, Current Issue Brief 4, University of California, San Diego, 1992. And in a similar manner, others, such as Gustavo Esteva, who was also a major figure in the agrarian debate, have since moved on to environmental issues within Indigenous communities. Esteva, *Campesinos*, see note 8; Esteva, *Struggle*, see note 8; Gustavo Esteva, with the collaboration of David Barkin, *La batalla en el México rural*, Mexico City 1980; Gustavo Esteva and others, *Etnicidad, Democracia y Chiapas*. Mexico City and San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico 1995.