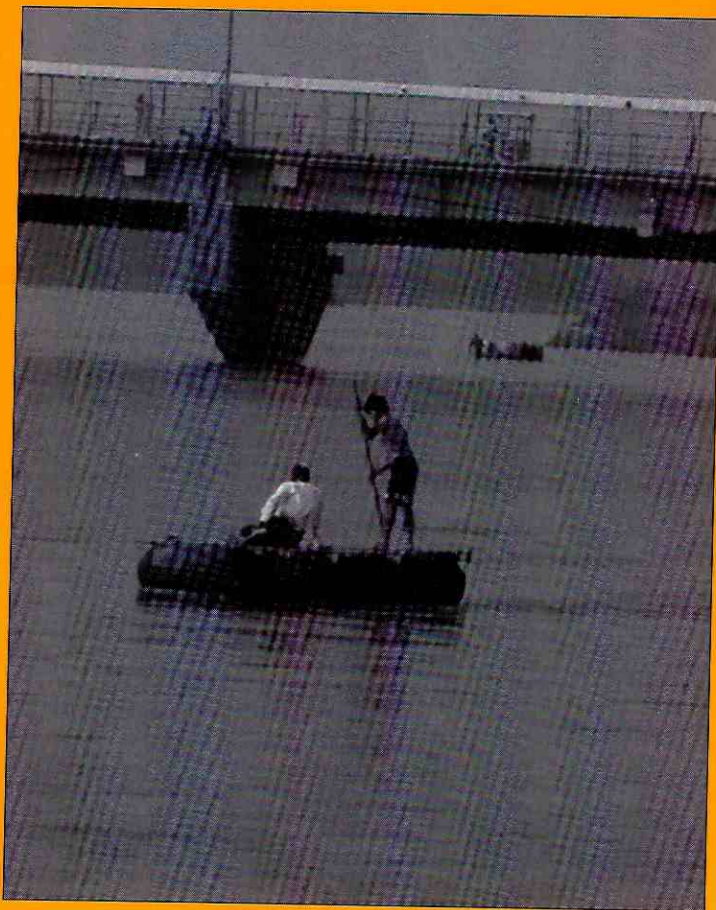


# THE JOURNAL OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Formerly known as The Journal of Latin American Anthropology



*The Journal of the Society for Latin American and  
Caribbean Anthropology*

VOLUME 17

NUMBER 1

MARCH 2012

**THE JOURNAL OF LATIN AMERICAN  
AND CARIBBEAN ANTHROPOLOGY**

*Formerly: The Journal of Latin American Anthropology*

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COVER IMAGE: Puente fronterizo en Tapachula: centroamericanos cruzando el río Suchiate.  
Border bridge at Tapachula: Central American people crossing the Suchiate river.  
Credit: Richard Cisneros

**THE JOURNAL OF LATIN AMERICAN AND  
CARIBBEAN ANTHROPOLOGY**

VOLUME 17

NUMBER 1

March 2012

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Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology (ISSN: 1935-4932) is published in March, July, and November on behalf of the American Anthropological Association by Wiley Subscription Services, Inc., a Wiley Company, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774.

**Mailing:** Journal is mailed Nonprofit, Standard Rate. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes to Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, Journal Customer Services, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA.

**Information for Subscribers:** Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology is published in three issues per year. Institutional subscription prices for 2012 are: Print & Online: US\$78 (US), US\$79 (Rest of World), €53 (Europe), £40 (UK). Prices are exclusive of tax. Australian GST, Canadian GST and European VAT will be applied at the appropriate rates. For more information on current tax rates, please go to [www.wileyonlinelibrary.com/tax-vat](http://www.wileyonlinelibrary.com/tax-vat). The institutional price includes online access to the current and all online back files to January 1st 2008, where available. For other pricing options, including access information and terms and conditions, please visit [www.wileyonlinelibrary.com/access](http://www.wileyonlinelibrary.com/access).

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**Print Information:** Printed in the United States of America by The Sheridan Press, Inc.

**Online Information:** This journal is available online at *Wiley Online Library*. Visit [www.wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://www.wileyonlinelibrary.com) to search the articles and register for table of contents e-mail alerts. Access to this journal is available free online within institutions in the developing world through the AGORA initiative with the FAO, the HINARI initiative with the WHO and the OARE initiative with UNEP. For information, visit [www.aginternetwork.org](http://www.aginternetwork.org), [www.healthinfernwork.org](http://www.healthinfernwork.org), and [www.oarescience.org](http://www.oarescience.org).

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ISSN 1935-4932 (Print)  
ISSN 1935-4940 (Online)

# Fronteras, Puentes y Movilidades

By

R. Aída Hernández Castillo y  
Francisca James Hernández

*Hay muchísimas fronteras que dividen a la gente,  
pero por cada frontera existe también un puente*

Gina Valdez (Poeta Chicana)

Los artículos reunidos en este número especial de JLCA, nos acercan a diversas realidades fronterizas en Europa y las Américas, desde perspectivas teóricas y espacios geopolíticos de enunciación muy distintos. La idea de armar este número especial surgió a partir de dos encuentros sobre Fronteras y Transnacionalismos: un panel en el Congreso Anual de la Asociación Americana de Antropología (AAA), y un Coloquio auspiciado por la fundación *Mellon* en el Departamento de Estudios Étnicos de la Universidad de California en Berkeley, ambos organizados por Francisca James Hernández en el 2008. Varias de las ponencias ahí presentadas fueron re-trabajadas como artículos y otras más se añadieron para ampliar las perspectivas teóricas y geográficas de esta colección.

Este número reúne académicas y académicos que estudian y habitan en distintas fronteras y cuyas reflexiones teóricas surgen no sólo de su larga experiencia estudiando los procesos transfronterizos, sino de sus propias vivencias como cruzadores de fronteras políticas y académicas, entre el Norte y el Sur. Así pues, esta selección tiene el propósito de construir puentes entre tradiciones intelectuales distintas, con la esperanza de poder ofrecer nuevos lentes para ver y pensar las fronteras y las movilidades transnacionales. Si consideramos que nuestros análisis de la sociedad contribuyen no sólo a representarla, sino también a construirla, podríamos afirmar que este esfuerzo colectivo contribuye a derribar las fronteras que separan a nuestros pueblos y a ámbitos académicos

Desde la frontera México-Estados Unidos, desde el Atlántico como puerta de entrada a la Unión Europea (UE) y desde la frontera México-Guatemala, los

*The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 1-5. ISSN 1935-4932, online ISSN 1935-4940. © 2012 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. DOI: 10.1111/j.1935-4940.2011.01187.x

autores de este número especial nos hablan de la manera en que los migrantes y los habitantes fronterizos desestabilizan con sus prácticas los límites estructurales y políticos que establecen los Estados-Nación. Rompiendo con lo que Robert Álvarez llama "una perspectiva Estado-céntrica" de las fronteras, los artículos aquí reunidos hacen énfasis en los procesos de movilidad social, y analizan la construcción de puentes entre las diversas identidades de los migrantes, así como los puentes que se tienden entre sus lugares de origen y lugares de destino.

Usando diferentes conceptos como los de fronterización, translocalidad, procesos transnacionales, ó conceptualizaciones en idiomas originarios como *desakota*, los cuatro autores abordan el análisis de la manera en que las relaciones sociales extienden los límites mismos de las fronteras. La frontera deja de ser una "línea en la arena" para convertirse en una experiencia de vida, a través de los testimonios de indígenas kichwas ecuatorianos en España, de migrantes mames guatemaltecos en el Soconusco chiapaneco y de campesinos mestizos mexicanos en los campos agrícolas de California. Sus voces, unidas a los de los autores, nos recuerdan el carácter contradictorio de este proceso de globalización, que a la vez que abre las fronteras al capital y a las mercancías, las cierra parcialmente o las militariza para controlar o impedir el paso de las personas.

Andrés Fábregas nos habla de la "fronterización de México" para referirse a la forma en que la experiencia de frontera, con su creatividad cultural, pero también con su violencia estructural, se extiende más allá de la zona limítrofe. "Todo México es Frontera" nos dice el autor y su análisis de las historias de los migrantes mames en el desierto de Sonora nos lo confirman. Adelantándose a las teorizaciones sobre el transnacionalismo que se pusieron en boga en la academia angloparlante a principio de la década de los noventa, el antropólogo chiapaneco escribía desde los años ochenta del siglo XX sobre la manera en que el desplazamiento de las fronteras, mediante la experiencia de los migrantes, rompía con los límites nacionales, reconfigurando las identidades culturales y vinculando a los lugares de origen con los lugares de destino.

Robert Álvarez, retoma el concepto malayo de *desakota* que se refiere a la creación de espacios ambiguos que separan y a la vez unen localidades y experiencias distantes, regiones en donde se sintetiza lo rural y lo urbano, lo local y lo global. Tomando como ejemplo la industria del mango, el autor nos muestra como se construyen las conexiones entre productores, transportadores y consumidores en un entramado de relaciones de poder en donde el control del Estado nación se expande más allá de los límites fronterizos vinculando lugares y procesos a través de prácticas económicas e ideológicas.

Liliana Suárez-Navaz, nos lleva al otro lado océano, para mostrarnos como el ingreso de España a la Unión Europea, generó la creación de nuevas fronteras geopolíticas y culturales, hacia el sur con el Mediterráneo y hacia al este con el Atlántico. Fronteras donde la alteridad se construye como una manera de reforzar

la pertenencia al norte-europeo "desarrollado". Además, estas nuevas fronteras geopolíticas contribuyeron a formar otras fronteras interiores entre ciudadanos y extranjeros, mediante marcadores culturales de clase, raza y etnicidad, que han removido imaginarios coloniales en torno a los "indígenas" y a los "moros."

Los otrora migrantes españoles, son ahora los nuevos europeos que reciben en sus ciudades o en sus regiones agrícolas a los migrantes latinoamericanos y norafricanos, que se convierten en ilegales sin derechos ciudadanos o en ciudadanos de tercera que no acceden al "sueño europeo," el cual es cada vez más lejano para los propios ciudadanos españoles. Centrándose en el caso de los migrantes kichwas y mediante una rica etnografía multisituada, Suárez Navaz nos muestra como se construyen densas redes de relaciones familiares y comunitarias entre los lugares de origen y destino, que modifican las identidades tanto de quienes migran como de los que se quedan en Ecuador.

Desde otro espacio fronterizo, las voces de los indígenas mames dan cuenta de la manera en que las experiencias y prácticas de estos campesinos han reconstituido su sentido de comunidad más allá de las fronteras de un espacio territorial. Retomando el concepto de *translocalidad*, el artículo de Hernández Castillo se propone mostrar que la "metafísica del sedentarismo", no ha permitido a los estudiosos de las fronteras dar cuenta de la manera en que las experiencias de movilidad y las comunidades des-territorializadas han sido una parte medular de la historia de los pueblos indígenas en las Américas. Las identidades de los indígenas mames, al igual que las de los campesinos kichwas, son negociadas permanentemente en diálogos de poder en los que las diferencias de clase, género y generación, marcan las diferentes maneras de ser indígena en las fronteras.

Las identidades indígenas de las que nos habla Suárez-Navaz y las descritas por el artículo Hernández Castillo en este número especial, rompen con las perspectivas de las identidades indígenas que han tendido a enfatizar su integridad cultural, sus epistemologías alternativas, sus vínculos con la tierra y el territorio y su continuidad histórica. Las experiencias de los kichwas en España y los mames en las fronteras sur y norte de México, nos remiten a pensar en fronteras porosas, en procesos de desterritorialización, de fragmentación cultural y de discontinuidad histórica. A la vez los procesos organizativos de esta población han conllevado a la construcción de sentidos de pertenencia más amplios que van más allá de su comunidad de origen o de su grupo sociolingüístico, como indígenas, como migrantes, como trabajadores ilegales, o como latinoamericanos, dependiendo el contexto y el momento histórico. La migración de indígenas latinoamericanos a Estados Unidos y Europa, ha creado espacios de confluencia entre las luchas por el reconocimiento de los derechos culturales y las luchas por los derechos migratorios, redefiniendo las identidades indígenas desde contextos transnacionales.

Con estos estudios se pone una vez más en evidencia las falacias del paradigma de la modernización el cual analizaba a la migración desde una perspectiva bipolar

que enfatizaba la tendencia a la desvinculación de los migrantes de sus regiones de origen y su integración a la sociedad receptora. A pesar de la violencia física y simbólica que marca los cruces de fronteras, los migrantes mames y kishwas han logrado mantener los vínculos con sus familias, comunidades y tradiciones, más allá de los estados-nación a los que han migrado. Estos estudios de caso nos invitan a ampliar nuestras perspectivas de la *indigenidad* y de la comunidad y a romper con el vínculo entre identidad y territorio, para explorar la manera en que se construye un sentido de pertenencia desterritorializado, muchas veces mediante afiliaciones multilocales.

A pesar del énfasis que todos estos trabajos ponen en la creatividad cultural que se manifiesta en los procesos de fronterización y en los puentes que interconectan colectividades, no se trata de representaciones románticas de las experiencias fronterizas. Los trabajos nos hablan también de las desigualdades económicas y de poder que se construyen entre los que migran y sus familias, y quienes optan por permanecer en sus lugares de origen. La creación de nuevas jerarquías de clase y raza en la comunidad kishwa de la Comuna, son descritas por Liliana Suárez-Navaz, al hablarnos de la migración de afroecuatorianos que vienen a llenar el nicho laboral dejado por los hombres kishwas. A la vez que la "tradicción" y la "identidad kishwa" se vuelven trincheras de resistencia ante la violencia de la migración, son también estrategias de exclusión y aislamiento ante otros migrantes más pobres.

De igual manera la construcción de jerarquías y los procesos de racialización marcan la experiencia de los transportistas mexicanos en la frontera norte. Robert Alvarez nos describe como el debate en torno a los peligros de seguridad nacional que implicaba la entrada de transportistas mexicanos en la frontera México-Estados Unidos, contrasta con la apertura y las facilidades dadas a los transportistas canadienses. Las construcciones étnicas y raciales que se evidenciaron en este debate, nos hablan de la violencia simbólica que sigue existiendo en los cruces de fronteras.

En la frontera México-Guatemala, al igual que en la frontera México-EEUU, la violencia ha venido a cambiar la vida de los habitantes fronterizos y de quienes cruzan por estas tierras con rumbo hacia el norte. Andrés Fábregas escribe sobre "grupos multidelincuentes" que actúan a lo largo de toda la región haciendo de la frontera chiapaneca una zona de peligro. Estos mismos grupos tienen el control del tráfico de personas convirtiendo la migración hacia el norte en un historia de terror que afecta de manera especial a las mujeres como lo vemos en los testimonios de las mujeres mames, los cuales son analizados en el artículo de Hernández Castillo.

Los análisis que aquí presentamos nos recuerdan, que si bien es cierto que la producción cultural desde y sobre las fronteras apunta hacia espacios de resistencia a los poderes económicos y políticos que separan a los pueblos, no podemos subestimar la violencia física y simbólica ejercida sobre los cuerpos de hombres y

mujeres migrantes, muchas veces legitimada por leyes migratorias o comerciales que se endurecen en nombre de la "seguridad nacional." Sirvan estos trabajos para recordarnos que tanto las experiencias de solidaridad y la construcción de comunidades transnacionales y de puentes culturales, como los muros fronterizos, la militarización y la violencia, son parte integral de los procesos contradictorios que marcan los cruces de fronteras de los pueblos latinoamericanos.

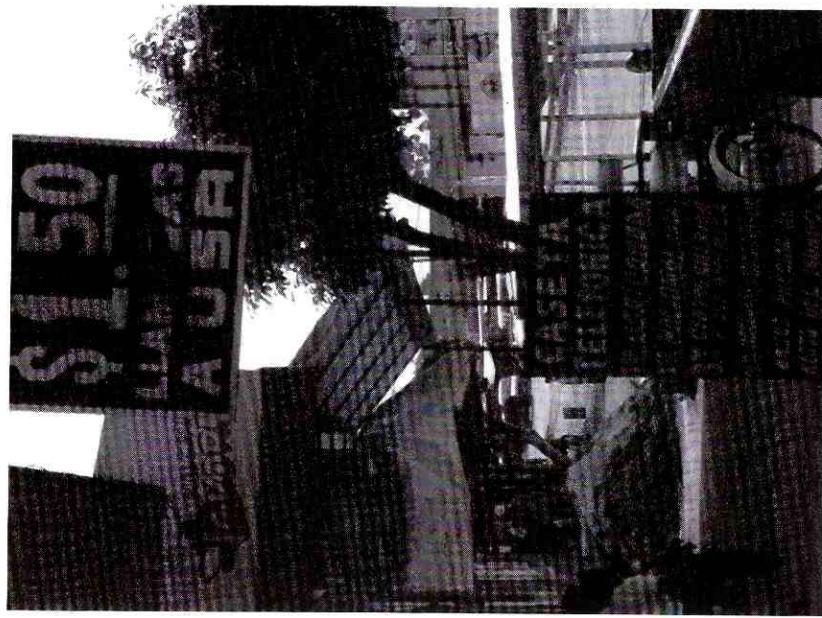


Figure 1 Connecting South and North: Publicity for international telephone services. Suchiate, Chiapas. Credit: Richard Cisneros.

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## Cross-Border Mobility and Transnational Identities: New Border Crossings Amongst Mexican Mam People

By

Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo

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(CIESAS), MEXICO CITY

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### R E S U M E N

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Este artículo se propone abrir una ventana etnográfica para observar los nuevos cruces de fronteras que viven miles de indígenas en América Latina. Para examinar la complejidad y el potencial político de las identidades transnacionales y translocales, se partirá de un estudio de caso: la realidad de los indígenas mames de Chiapas, un pueblo maya del sureste de México. El pueblo mam ha experimentado distintos procesos migratorios y cruces de fronteras en búsqueda de alternativas de vida. Su experiencia histórica de continua movilidad a través de fronteras nacionales, regionales y religiosas, han influido en sus distintas concepciones de comunidad, sin que necesariamente trasciendan el territorio porque, como este artículo demostrará, las referencias al lugar están siempre presentes en sus narrativas de identidad. Pero podríamos afirmar que han mantenido nociones de espacio en un sentido complejo del “aquí” y el “allá”. [fronteras, identidades transnacionales, mames, México, migración, movilidades]

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### A B S T R A C T

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This article aims to open an ethnographic window to look at the new cross-border realities experienced by thousands of indigenous people from Latin America. To examine the complexities and political potential of transnational and translocal identities, it will consider one case study: the Mam from Chiapas, a Maya people from Mexico's south-eastern territory. The Mam people have undergone several migratory waves and border crossings in search of survival alternatives. This historical experience of continuous mobility across national, regional, and religious borders has influenced their

*The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 65–87. ISSN 1935-4932, online ISSN 1935-4940. © 2012 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. DOI: 10.1111/j.1935-4940.2012.01190.x

conceptions of community not necessarily by moving beyond territory because, as this article will show, the references to place are always present in their narratives of identity. But we can say that they are holding on to notions of place within a complex yet tangible sense of "here" and "there." [borders, Mam indigenous people, migration, movilities, transnational identities]

IN SPITE OF the fact that migratory experiences have been a fundamental part of the history of people around the world since the dawn of humanity, the current global economic setting and modern technological developments in communications allow contemporary migrants to maintain a tighter bond with their communities of origin than ever before. Consequently, their sense of belonging to a cultural community is not necessarily linked to a single territory. On the contrary, we are faced with the paradox that while 170 million people in the world live outside their countries of origin, and worldwide capitalism tends to standardize production and consumption trends, cultural identities of outcast citizens have become socially cohesive and politically mobilizing environments. This paradoxical situation has been a challenge for traditional anthropological perspectives of community, identity, and place, and since the early 1990s it has opened theoretical and methodological debates about how to reconceptualize the relationship between culture and territory in the new globalized world (see Appadurai 1990, 1996; Bhabha 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

This article will open an ethnographic window to look at the new cross-border realities experienced by thousands of indigenous people from Latin America. In order to examine the complexities and political potential of transnational and translocal identities it will consider one specific case study: the Mam, a Maya people from Mexico's southeastern territory. The Mam people have undergone several migratory waves and border crossings in search of survival alternatives. This historical experience of continuous mobility across national, regional, and religious borders has influenced their conceptions of community, not necessarily by moving beyond territory because, as this article will show, references to place are always present in their narratives of identity. It will be shown, here, that they are holding on to notions of place through a complex yet tangible sense of "here" and "there."<sup>1</sup>

Since the 19th century, when the first Mam settlements were established along the southern Mexican border, the nature of political territoriality has undergone important changes. The metaphor of a place of origin, "the Tacaná volcano," has been present in their historical memory has been fundamental for the construction of a sense of belonging to an *imagined community* (Anderson 1983).

Today, with the new migratory wave to the United States, and with the development of communication technology, we are witnessing a reconstitution of

Mam indigeneity in a process in which identity and place travel together. The development of communication technologies has created new linkages among Mam speakers on the East Coast of the United States, the Sierra Madre of Chiapas, and the Guatemalan Cuchumatanes. This article will analyze some of the challenges of these new migratory experiences in the construction of translocal Mam identities in the context of economic globalization and the transnational reconstitution of their sense of community.

### Transnational Identities and Translocal Experiences

Generally speaking, the literature dealing with mobility amongst indigenous populations deals with identity at least marginally if not directly. Although recent developments of indigenous migration have put into question lineal perspectives of identity, analyzing how the terms of self-definition change depending on the historical and geographic context (see Besserer 2002; Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004; Stephen 2007), concern about continuity and change seems to pervade.

For a number of scholars migration processes necessarily entail modernization and integration into the dominant culture in the new environment, which ultimately represents an identity transformation. For others, those who emphasize ethnic resistance processes, the transnational context tends to strengthen cultural ties between migrants that come from the same region. As James Clifford (1988) stated, indigenous people who immigrate are

trapped in the stories that could be told about them ... In fact only few basic stories are told over and over, about Native American and other tribal peoples. These societies are always dying or surviving, assimilating or resisting. Caught between a local past or a global future, they either hold on to their separateness or "enter the modern world." The latter enter—tragic or triumphant—is always a step toward a global future defined by technological progress, national and international cultural relations. Are there other possible stories? (342)

The dichotomy that underlies this linear perspective of history leaves no room for a consideration of identity as a discontinuous process.

However, an important theoretical development questions the link between culture and place. Under the influence of Arjun Appadurai's seminal work (1990, 1996) the concept of *translocality* has been developed to refer to various processes in which the *locatedness* or territorial anchors of identity and community are problematized by modes of practice that effectively reconstitute communities (and their politics) in locales beyond the boundaries of fixed territory.

The concept of translocality also pretends to break with the conceptual limitation imposed by the theoretically hegemonic local-global dichotomy. From these perspectives, the "translocal framework" prevents representations of the local as



static and unchanging forms anchored in a definite territory, by emphasizing the process of negotiation and/or appropriation of globalized discourses to develop culturally hybrid representations inscribed in the interstices of the global and the local (see Ayora-Díaz 2007).

Although the linkage of place and culture, and the local–global dichotomy, has been questioned by these critical theoretical developments, there is still a tendency to analyze even de-territorialized and multiple identities as continuous processes of self-definition. This work, on the other hand, seeks to approach the history of the Mam people by breaking away from these narratives because, in fact, Mexican Mam peasants have claimed their ethnic identity during certain historical contexts, while in others they have rejected it, by force or by will, in identifying themselves simply as peasants. Their identities, varying and contextual, have also overlapped with other identities, be they religious or national and, as was the case of the Mashpee people, under particular historical moments they have enunciated an identity defined as “indigenous”; at other times they have “integrated” themselves indistinctly amongst the Mexican peasantry (Hernández Castillo 2001:41–109). Their history “can be analyzed as a series of cultural and political tradeoffs, not as an all or nothing of assimilation or resistance” (Clifford 1988:342). As Clifford puts it when referring to the Mashpee, they “have lived and acted between cultures in a series of *ad hoc* relations.”

Essentialist discourses seeking the roots of indigenous identities in age-old cultures are not useful in terms of representing border realities such as those the Maya people have lived. Similarly, concepts in search of timeless traditions as grounds for legitimacy are ineffective as a means to analyze these border identities. Furthermore, building indigenous peoples’ political recognition upon primordial identities would eventually legitimize new forms of exclusion on behalf of “authenticity.”<sup>2</sup>

After relocating from the northern Mexican border—where I was born—to the southern border where I have worked for almost 20 years, the border has ceased to be a line dividing two countries, to become a place of identity, and a way of being, continuity, and change.

### Mam People and Their Historical Mobility

Since the late 1980s I have had the opportunity to live during different seasons—ranging from a month up to three successive years (from 1993 to 1996)—in peasant communities established along the southern Mexican border, with indigenous Mayas that identify themselves as Mam. Their experiences, marked by recurrent border crossings, led me to appreciate identities from a historical perspective, which contests the limitations of cultural essentialisms.

Mam peasants crossed national boundaries between Guatemala and Mexico at the end of the 19th century; when they reached Chiapas they colonized vacant land in the Sierra region near coffee production estates, rendering them accessible as cheap labor for the plantation economy. Later, during the 1960s, they crossed other borders: geographical borders, when they had to move from the Sierra to the jungle region in search of land for the new generations that could not benefit from agrarian reform; and religious borders, since they abandoned traditional Catholicism and embraced Liberation Theology, as well as Presbyterianism and Jehovah’s Witness’s creeds; finally, they crossed cultural borders, to adopt *mestizo* and Indian identities at different historical moments (see Hernández Castillo 2001). Their history closely associates territorial mobility and identity change.

Since colonial times the relationship between the Mam population and their territory has been very different to that of other Maya groups, because community identity was not imposed in the same way that it was imposed on other indigenous populations; for instance, they did not inhabit the “*Pueblos de Indios*”—the colonial settlements created by the Spaniards.<sup>3</sup> Since the 16th century, their settlements have been diasporic and diffuse. In colonial Chiapas, Mames became tributary workers of the cocoa plantations set up after 1526 on landed estates established at what was then the southern fringe of the *Audiencia de México*. The epidemics brought by the Spaniards, coupled with an exploitative labor system established in the area by colonial rule, killed almost all the indigenous Mam populations.<sup>4</sup> The few Mames that survived disappeared from the colonial records when they dispersed throughout the Sierra Madre, leaving no clear trace of how Mam identity was conceived during this time.

However, the great majority of the Mam population living in Chiapas today came to the area at the end of the 19th century, when the liberal Guatemalan government of Justo Rufino Barrios expropriated the communal lands of the indigenous people.<sup>5</sup> After México and Guatemala signed the Limit Treaties in 1882 and 1894, the Mam population was divided by a new political border.

The history of Mam processes of migration, as well the analysis of the relationship between the coffee plantations of the Chiapanec Coast and the Mam population of the Sierra Madre, call into question the conception of the “community” as the primary space of social and cultural reproduction of the indigenous people of Mesoamerica. It appears that Mam identity was reconstituted in the context of the *finca* (coffee plantations) and that the diasporic Mam experience challenges traditional conceptions of the link between identity and territory. Diasporic experiences and deterritorialization have been more common throughout the history of indigenous people than have been acknowledged. This blindness toward the historical experiences of mobility has been defined by Lisa Malkki (1997) as sedentary metaphysics, that is to say, the naturalization of the relationships that people have to places; it is taken for granted that sedentarism is “the

normal way of living." The historical experiences of mobility, especially among indigenous people, tended to be ignored by traditional ethnography, which for many decades was trapped by sedentary metaphysics and by the anthropological fiction of a harmonious precapitalist community threatened by capitalist development.

In the Mam area, the global economy has historically marked the way the local sense of community has been constructed; it could be said that Mam identities were translocal, even before the development of communication technologies. The development of the plantation economy has been significant in the historical memory of the Mam people and has created a space of encounter for Mam peasants of different regions:

My grandpa used to tell me that when he went to the plantation he found a lot of workers that spoke Mam. They came from Guatemala, but they did not see the difference then; they did not say you are Guatemalan or you are Mexican, they just said "We are Mames." That is what they used to say.<sup>6</sup>

The economic integration preceded integration into the nation. The national project arrived late to the southern Mexican border area, and for many Mames the idea of being "Mexican" was not even considered until the late 1930s. In 1884 the townships (municipios) of San Francisco Motozintla, San Martín Mazapa, and Amatenango, once part of the Guatemalan department of Cuilco, were incorporated by the District of Mariscal in Mexico. Under the liberal policies of the era, the territory was deemed "national land" open to appropriation by colonists. In the valley areas "national lands" were appropriated by the *finqueros* (large landowners), and in the highlands, by the Mam population. The signing of the Limit Treaties between Guatemala and Mexico brought an end to the uncertainty of land titles, facilitating more intense foreign investment in the coastal area of Soconusco and in the valleys of the District of Mariscal. The cultivation of coffee, initiated in Soconusco by 1872, intensified as the lowland area became the backbone of the Chiapanec economy; the highlands were established as the main source of agricultural workers. It was around this time that a long-lasting relationship between the highlands (Sierra) and the coast (Soconusco) was established—a relationship that has marked the economic life of the Mam population ever since.

The expansion of the coffee crops in the late 19th century strengthened the links between Soconusco and the national and international markets through the establishment of the plantation system in Chiapas. The introduction of capitalistic relations of production transformed the servile relationship characteristic of the traditional "hacienda" to that of hired labor. The Mam people from the Sierra became "free" workers to be hired during the coffee crop season. The Soconusco and the Sierra were still sparsely populated so it was necessary to "import" seasonal workers from Guatemala and from other parts of the state. In order to facilitate their access to a labor force, the landowners from Soconusco asked the government

to promote the colonization of the Sierra, so that workers would have a small piece of land nearby to cultivate when the plantations were not in need their work.

On December 15, 1883, the government of General Porfirio Díaz instituted the Colonization Law, which promoted the occupation of national lands in the vicinity of the recently created border. It was in the following years that the Kanjobal, Chuj, Jacalteco, and Mam populations from Guatemala established settlements in the border zone of Chiapas and became Mexican citizens. Since then, the history of the Mam people in Mexico has been marked by the necessity of economic migration, which has been sometimes seasonal and sometimes permanent. Mames reconstituted their identity in their migrations to the Sierra, and later to the coffee plantations, and also in terms of their interaction with indigenous populations who joined them from Guatemala and from other areas of the state.

It seems clear that the Mames of this region never had a sense of community that was linked to a single territory, or that capitalism destroyed it through proletarianization as some analysts have argued. The Mam experiences were transnational and translocal from the outset, and their collective identities were reconstituted as they engaged in the coffee economy.

### The National Project along the Southern Mexican Border

Mam identity was also redefined in the context of what is referred to here as the Mexican National Project. Through a combination of violently coercive and co-optative measures, the state "nationalized" the Mames, that is, they "Mexicanized" or integrated them into a national project, though at the margins of the nation. An examination of the marginal incorporation of the Mames into post-Revolutionary Mexico reveals the way in which this engagement changed the nature of Mam identity. During this process, it can be seen that the meaning of being Mam emerged from a dialectic in which the people simultaneously resisted and accommodated state impositions, and negotiated the ways in which Mames could be "Mexican."

It was only after the "economic integration" previously described that the Mames were marginally incorporated into the Mexican national project. This project, promoted by the Mexican Revolution of 1910, only arrived in Chiapas in the 1930s. It was characterized by agrarian reform and "Mexicanization," or integration campaigns, directed at the indigenous population. The nation was imposed in the Mam population through violence as well as through the granting of agrarian rights of citizenship. When the government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) promoted agrarian distribution, the first Mam *ejidos* were established in the Sierra Madre, mainly on national land.<sup>7</sup> Only later, during the government of Efraín Gutiérrez (1937–40), were the *fincas* affected by expropriation under agrarian reform; however, landowners were still able to resist agrarian reform policies by

distributing their properties among their kin, or by selling them to small-scale proprietors before they could become subject to the new law.

In addition to the economic connections created by the *ejido*, the integration policies of “Mexicanization” along the southern border reinforced the relationship between the Mam population and the State. Together with Chujes, Kanjobales, and Jacaltecos, the State considered Mames to be among ethnic groups of “Guatemalan” origin that it was considered necessary to “Mexicanize.” During his term as governor (1932–36), Victorico Grajales prohibited the Mames from wearing traditional indigenous dress or speaking the Mam language. Punitive measures were taken against those who disobeyed these new laws:

It was then, when the teachers came to the schools that our language was prohibited: if you spoke the *tokiol* [Mam language] the teacher would punish you. This is why we lost the Mam [language]. It has gone; only the old men still speak Mam. It was because of the government teachers that we put the Mam aside.<sup>8</sup>

In the social history of the Mam population, the construction of the Mexican nation became a space of struggle, resistance, and negotiation. Following the forceful imposition of the nation came a stage of negotiation by means of which the Mames have not been isolated from the “Imaginary Mexico” (Bonfil 1987); they have been incorporated into the nation in a marginal way, and many were affiliated with the postrevolutionary official party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the PRI). Through their membership of the PRI, they were able to obtain small concessions in exchange for their votes. It is in this sense that when speaking about the nation along the southern border of Mexico this process is referred to here as one of both conflict and negotiation. As a part of this new relationship between the Mames and the Mexican nation, State policies shifted from earlier strategies of violent assimilation to multicultural public policies that promoted the “recuperation” of Mam culture. The Mam population has generally supported these new programs promoted by federal government institutions.

The historical processes by which the multiple faces of Mam identity have been constructed demonstrate the importance of mobility and change as an integral part of their collective memory. When an inhabitant of this border region defines him or herself as a peasant, as a Mexican, or as a Mam, s/he makes evident a long process of conflict, resistance, imposition, and negotiation.

### Northbound: A New Border Crossing

Over the last ten years, the Sierra Madre border region, where the Mexican Mam live, has undergone rapid changes in its community dynamics as a result of the influence of neoliberal agricultural policies on the peasant economy.<sup>9</sup> *El Norte*

(the North)—a generic name given to both the northern region of Mexico and to the United States—has become a space of survival for thousands of peasants who refuse to live at the mercy of the international market fluctuations in coffee prices, or pending an agrarian reform that never takes place. This region, where 80 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty (134,108 people, according to the 2000 Census), has been affected in recent years by the international coffee crisis, torrential rains that destroyed almost 50 percent of agricultural production in 1998 and 2005, and the droughts of 1999, which devastated the corn crops.

This migration process, which was already taking place by the end of the 1980s, has now increased to the extent that it has transformed the border and highland villages into communities mostly made up of women, old men, and children. Since the 1980s, the Mexican Mam (frequently preceded by Guatemalan Mam) have been pioneers amongst the Chiapas peasantry in undertaking the road toward the North. However, the testimonies about these experiences were seen as sagas of courageous individuals who were more the exception than the rule. Foreseeing the dimensions that this social phenomenon could achieve, the Catholic Church began promoting the creation of organic agriculture cooperatives as a strategy to curb emigration and resist the agricultural development model based in agrochemicals (see Hernández and Nigh 1998).

Despite the fact that the agro-ecological alternative allowed many Mam peasants to access unconventional markets and Fair Trade schemes as a shield against the ferocity of the free market, many had no means to opt into these systems, while others lacked the land or the organizational resources to get involved or, for a number of reasons, had quit the agrarian struggle altogether. Amongst this group, there are increasing numbers of young people who prefer taking their chances working as illegal immigrants in the United States than trying to find a collective alternative for survival at home.

The rising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), on January 1 1994, represented an important historical moment for the indigenous people of this region. The rebels’ call and bargaining power aroused expectations among indigenous people and peasants over the possibility of achieving decent living conditions and greater social justice without having to leave the piece of land gained with such hardship by parents or grandparents (see Rus et al. 2003).

Seventeen years after the Zapatista uprising, the hopes for a rural utopia have begun to fade. The San Andres Accords, signed between representatives of the government and the EZLN (and translated into Mam by the Federal Government), have become a historical document symbolizing a stage of the struggle, rather than a token plan to reorganize the State presented by organized peasants from the region.<sup>10</sup>

The atmosphere of mobilization and political resistance that characterized the Mam region during the early years of Zapatism has been followed by a climate of mistrust and divisiveness among indigenous and peasant organizations. The resistance included the occupation of 44 farms in the Sierra and Soconusco regions, taking the towns of Siltepec and Bella Vista, blockading roads and, after 1997, the annexation of 66 communities to the Zapatista autonomous municipality known as *Tierra y Libertad* (Hernández Castillo 2003). The mistrust that followed these actions and events undermined Mam ability to exercise pressure and has allowed the State and federal governments to co-opt many of their leaders for their *neoindigenist* bureaucratic apparatus.

However, despite the critical situation of current organization levels in the Sierra Madre region, the new political imaginary and discursive processes opened by Zapatism, while restoring dignity to indigenous cultures and putting onto the national agenda the conditions of exclusion and racism against indigenous people, has had an impact on *Serrano* peasant cultural identities. Today, *Serranos* increasingly claim their Mam background and their historical roots in a specific place and territory: the Tacaná volcano:

My grandparents spoke the Mam language; they came from Guatemala. The origins of all the Mam people are in the Tacaná volcano. Over time, the Mam language stayed in this country [Mexico]; we are all Mam, even if some of us want to deny our roots.<sup>11</sup>

Although only 8,725 persons identified as Mam in the Population and Housing Census of 1990, the number had tripled to 23,632 by the 2010 census (an increase of 170 percent). This demographic change is specific to this border region; there is no other indigenous group in Chiapas whose population has increased at the same rate as that of the Mam. Their neighbors, the Tojolabales, for example, experienced a reduced population from 45,197 in the Population and Housing Census of 1990 to 37,986 in the 2010 Census; the Tzotziles, numerically the most significant indigenous group from Chiapas, have increased their population by only 29 percent from 229, 203 in 1990, to 297, 561 in 2010. While recognizing all the methodological problems that the national census collection has, these numbers can be considered to be representative of the processes of revalorization of indigenous identities that are taking place in transnational border spaces.

This new stage in the history of indigenous Mam border identity crossings is happening concurrently with a dynamic that, on the one hand, leads to thousands of Mam peasants abandoning their homelands and their communities in order to cross once again a national and political border—this time northbound; on the other, it has led them to claim their Mam cultural identity as a handhold to address the equalizing trend of globalization and reestablish cultural solidarity networks in the new transnational sphere.

## Revisiting the Sierra Roads

The Sierra landscape has changed considerably over the last ten years. The construction of new roads and improvement of existing ones was one of the direct consequences of the Zapatista uprising, which forced the State to invest to enable the rapid deployment of troops. Half-paved and gravel roads that used to join the communities of *El Porvenir* and *La Grandeza* with the town of *Motozintla* are now paved with asphalt; there is a public transport system of luxury vans owned by former landowners, which have made public transport a new form of economic power.<sup>12</sup>

These roads also allowed the armed forces to arrive and establish a well-provisioned military base on the outskirts of *Motozintla*, as well as checkpoints in various parts of the region. Their presence has also increased along minor roads and in places like *Niquivil*, *Toninacanake*, *Pavencul*, and *Buenos Aires*, between the municipalities of *Motozintla*, *Mazapa de Madero*, and *Comalapa*, by means of checkpoints that are erected daily; there are constant patrols from *Tapachula* up to *Angel Albino Corzo*, crossing the Sierra Madre of Chiapas. They patrol the area on the pretext of applying the “Federal Fire Arms and Explosives Act.”<sup>13</sup> Alongside the military presence, *Motozintla* has seen new low-income housing projects, which, coupled to those built after the floods in 1998, give the region a new physiognomy, closer to poor urban areas of the industrial belts than to the large towns that Aguirre Beltran termed *refuge regions* (see Aguirre Beltran 1967).

Only the beauty of the mountains that surround *Motozintla* and the absence of industry remind us that we are in the heart of the Sierra and not in some shantytown on the outskirts of Mexico City. In *Frontera Comalapa* there are travel agency signs announcing trips to the “North,” now an essential part of the social imaginary of the inhabitants of La Sierra. Traveling to Tijuana costs \$800 Mexican pesos (around US\$80.00) and trips are scheduled three times a week. Many internet shops and telephone booths have opened, thus reducing the apparent distance between the southern and northern borders.

Today, with only 7,500 inhabitants, in the municipality of *Frontera Comalapa* there are thirty money exchange posts, two banks, two post offices, and ten travel agencies. Signs announcing “travel to Tijuana,” or simply “Travel north,” are a constant presence all along the route throughout the region. Driving through the paths of La Sierra, in places like *El Porvenir*, there are small, ruined wooden shacks with big signs announcing the days and time at which the busses leave for the “North.” I hoped to find my old friends but most were gone, many “hooked up” by some Guatemalan “coyote,”<sup>14</sup> or by any of the multiple “travel agencies” that drive to the northern border. Others stayed at home to look after their grandchildren, while their young daughters left in groups, seeking a better future. But new border crossings tales are not always stories of success, and there is often much pain in these shared experiences.

## Different Migratory Experiences

The Mam peasants, being habituated to border crossings, have risked once more crossing a national border—this time the southern U.S. border. The testimonies from those who departed during the first migratory waves of the 1980s mention that the trip was assisted by friends and other Guatemalan acquaintances, many of them Mam speakers. They followed the migratory routes to the American East Coast, especially to the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida.<sup>15</sup> Over time Guatemalan migrants exploited their knowledge, working as “coyotes”: eventually the cost to help Mexican peasants cross the border illegally into the north started to rise, from \$2,000 to \$4,000 dollars (field information for 2011).

According to testimonies gathered around the Sierra region there is a new type of *enganchador*, as people who smuggle illegal immigrants are called. The new ones hire workers for three months and illegally drive them by bus to the United States, stating or implying they have a commitment to return them at the end of the contract. There is no exact migration data from the Sierra region, but a preliminary study states that every 15 days around 400 people are transported out of the region toward the northern border, and an estimated 10,000 inhabitants from this region—which amounts to about 22 percent of the Economically Active Labor Force—have emigrated to Northern Mexico or the United States (see Villafuerte and Garcia Aguilar 2004:91–92).

News sources report that nearly 50,000 people from Chiapas migrate each year to the United States and send back home to their families around \$380 million dollars a year, which represents 45 percent of the gross domestic product.<sup>16</sup> No doubt these new economic and social dynamics have a significant impact on the everyday life of the inhabitants of La Sierra, and create a new transnational landscape in which men and women live the “American dream” in different ways.

## Migration in 1989: Don Gerardo and Solidarity Networks

The *ejido Horizontes* is one of the few remaining towns of the Mazapa de Madero municipality where Mam is still spoken. It is an isolated hamlet with no roads connecting it to the municipal seat. A two-hour uphill walk is required to reach the settlement from the border road that runs through Mazapa. I first came here in 1993 in search of Don Petronilo, a former member of the Mam Supreme Council, who is reputed in the region for his knowledge of ancient stories and traditions.

At his home there was a joyous atmosphere, because his nephew Gerardo had just returned from a year-long period of work in North Carolina. Everybody wanted to see the electronic devices he had brought from the “other side,” and to hear Don Gerardo’s adventures from the North. Thus, a long afternoon chat ensued in

which present day stories interspersed with memories from the past. Stories were told about times during the estate and “government acts,” when speaking the Mam language was forbidden and their indigenous clothing was burned, as recounted by Don Petronilo (Hernández Castillo 2001:41–68); these tales were intertwined with the voice of Don Gerardo talking about his experience on North Carolina farms.

With six children to look after and only two hectares of land, in 1988 Don Gerardo had decided he had to find another source of income outside the *ejido*. He first emigrated to Tecate, in Baja California, where he had a relative, but the wage differential was only slightly higher compared to what he could earn at the Soconusco and did not compensate for the heat, or being away from his family. He therefore decided to go further away and accepted the invitation of a “cousin” from Guatemala who invited him to the “States.”

In those days the bus stopped at Mexico City, from where one could catch a train up to Benjamin Hill, in Sonora, where the coyotes who helped with the desert crossing could be contacted. Don Gerardo proudly recounted the hazards he went through during the two-day walk on foot through the desert to San Miguel in Arizona, where another *chapin*<sup>17</sup>—who was also related to his cousin, connected him with an *enganchador*, who got him to North Carolina in a container. Much to his surprise, when he arrived at his destination, the Warsaw farm, he found himself surrounded by Mam speakers, all of them *chapines*, who after several years had become the main labor force for the vegetable farms in the region.

Friends and family networks have led this part of the Mam population far from the border and far away as well from the harassment of the *migra*. The \$5 an hour wages picking pumpkin, cabbage, cucumber, or tomato, might seem low for the United States, but they are quite high for people who were used to earning that amount for an eight-hour day on Chiapas estates.

Don Gerardo paused in describing his living conditions at the Warsaw farm; after all, it had nothing to do with Don Petronilo’s experiences at the Soconusco farms’ *galleras*. Over at “the other side,” each person has his own furnished room with sanitary facilities and electricity. Those who take their family with them can receive up to two rooms provided by the administrators. I was particularly enthralled by the atmosphere of solidarity he described among farm workers and by his self-recognition in terms of Mam identity in this new border crossing:

Since I arrived I was surprised to find so many *idiomistas* [the term used of those who speak indigenous languages]. All of them pure *chapin* bread from San Marcos and Huehue [departments of Guatemala], but over there we were all the same, there was no difference. They kindly explained to me where to buy food, and how to phone cheaper to Mexico, with a card that you buy for five dollars and talk for up to two hours. At first when they spoke among them in Mam I remained silent;

they thought I couldn't understand them. Truth is, I was ashamed I might not pronounce as well. But gradually I got bolder, and my grandfather's conversations started coming back to me, from the time I was a kid and we spoke in *tokiol* [another name for Mam]. What I failed to do with uncle Petronilo, I did on the other side, with my *chapin* friends. Now we chat and joke with them in *tokiol* and nobody asks who's from Guatemala or from Mexico, we are the same people and we lend each other a hand.<sup>18</sup>

He also told us about the things you could buy in the United States: the large malls, the tall buildings, the freeways where many cars sped away. The youngsters seemed to have endless questions, and they also commented on the stories and praised Don Gerardo for his courage. His accounts are success stories, confirmed by the new roof on his home and the CD player with woofer loudspeakers, which their children listen to. Almost two decades later, half of the *ejidatarios* of the *ejido Horizontes* are to be found in North Carolina.

#### Migration in 2004: Flori and the Human Trafficking Networks

Don Máximo and Doña Julia Perez's house formed a stop on my travels through the Sierra; they were my adoptive family over the years I lived in the area (from 1993 to 1996), and remain one of my affective ties to the region. Don Máximo was for several years a member of the Indigenous Supreme Council and is accredited as one of the men of knowledge in town. He is even consulted by the young indigenous teachers when they are preparing their exams to enter the bilingual education system.

There was an unusual silence at the house, in sharp contrast to the permanent bustle I remembered from when their seven children still lived in Mazapa. The old couple had stayed alone, caring for Dennis, a granddaughter they had adopted when the eldest of their daughters moved to the capital city to work as a maid. They related with sadness how their children had left, one by one, to seek their fortune in the cities. They shared their concerns about the future of the *milpa* and the coffee plants; Don Máximo is already 70 years old, and they worried about what would happen when he was no longer able to work the land.

Only the youngest daughter married and stayed; she now works as a bilingual teacher at the municipality. Four of the rest are in Cancun and one, the most daring, had been living in the United States for six months—this is the one her parents are most worried about, as she had always been the defiant one in the family. In a last act of rebellion she took the road north with three of her friends. The trip started out as an adventure but soon turned into a nightmare, as Doña Julia revealed, much to the surprise of Don Máximo, who until then was unaware of the plight of their daughter, as his wife had opted to keep silent in order not to

cause him more sorrow. But since the perils have now been overcome, she decided to share with us both the account that her daughter had given on the telephone, at the nearby phone booth.

Flori and her friends were smuggled by an unknown *enganchador* who was offering employment for young women who wanted to work as cooks; they were to cook for farm workers on an East Coast farm. Crossing the border with an offer of work in hand made it very tempting for these girls with high school education but no employment experience; they were reluctant to marry and follow in their mothers' footsteps.

Once in the United States, somewhere in the State of New York, the *enganchador* locked them in a house and attempted to sexually abuse them (Doña Julia suspects that he did, but her daughter denies it). After several days of confinement, one of them managed to escape and telephone a relative who worked in North Carolina. This man took two more days before reaching and releasing the other two girls. When confronted, the *enganchador* demanded \$1,000 as payment for each of them in order to let them go, threatening to call the migration authorities and have them all expelled from the United States if they did not meet his demands.

They managed to collect the ransom money among friends from *La Sierra* and "bought" the two girls back from the *enganchador*; the relative later took them to a safe place while they recovered from the shock. Flori would eventually get a job picking strawberries and remains in the United States, but her initial experience in New York will stay with her for life. Doña Julia says that even the tone of her voice has changed and that every time they speak on the telephone she is overcome by a strange sadness that she cannot describe. In general, Sunday telephone calls from her daughters and, more recently, e-mails over the Internet, have come to remind Doña Julia that they are still one family, only now their community has spread beyond national borders.

The contrasting experiences of Don Gerardo and Flori are examples of how complex migration can be in *La Sierra*, where gender, generation, and social networks influence the way in which people access or fail to reach the "American dream." Both kinds of experiences can happen simultaneously, although it is becoming increasingly harder to complete the trip north relying only on friends and family networks, since the *enganchadores* have built a monopoly that has spread throughout the Sierra.

Illegal border crossing networks have become more complex in their organization and working strategies, akin to a human trafficking gang. According to the National Migration Institute (INM) they have acquired sophisticated tools and devices to forge documents, developing complex chains of command that make it hard to determine who controls and finances them. The same institute reported in 2004 the existence of 52 networks currently working in Chiapas territory alone.<sup>19</sup> A recent study prepared by the Mexican Congress and publicized by the press refers

to the existence of a transnational corporation known as the "Gringo Coyote Company," worth around \$8 billion a year. The same source indicates that this company is currently working in Chiapas as a dealer in illegal workers and contractors for U.S. agro-industrial companies.

It is difficult to find out through academic research whether a link exists between the narco-networks and the traffic of immigrant workers to the United States, but a human rights report presented by the Diocese of Saltillo, Coahuila, affirms that "the *municipios* of the southern Mexican border have been co-opted by organized crime, more specifically the *Zetas*. The federal, state, and municipal institutions are involved in crimes such as kidnapping, and the violence that the narco employs is affecting each day the poor immigrants who pass through the region."<sup>20</sup>

The presence of this drug dealing group, the *Zetas*, along the Chiapas-Guatemala border, was also mentioned in three diplomatic reports from the American Embassy in Guatemala; the information was leaked in the *WikiLeaks* saga, and published by the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* (Blanche Petrich, February 13, 2011). This report affirmed that since 2007 the *Zetas* have taken control of the border crossing zones between Guatemala and Mexico, and are trafficking drugs and illegal immigrants. This information suggests that the kidnapping of Flori, and other women from the Sierra Madre, could be related to the organized crime trafficking in the region.

In July 2007, the organization *End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography And Trafficking of children for sexual purposes* (ECPAT) mentioned the city of Tapachula as a center of operations for networks of child prostitution, and pointed out that 21,000 women work in bars and brothels in the city, which is the largest city near the Mam zone. According to this report, 98 percent of these women were between 15 and 17 years old (ENLACE 2010:45)

These human rights reports make it clear that the experiences of transnationalization should be framed in the broader processes of structural, physical, and symbolic violence that characterize the migratory flow from the "South" to the "North." These violent contexts are affecting indigenous women specifically and as such it is impossible to celebrate without criticism the reconfiguration of cultural identities and transnational landscape without noting the existence of these violent economic and political contexts.

### Chiapas Countryside Going Transnational

As with Don Máximo and his wife, migration is clearly changing the lives of those who stay behind, just as much as it changes the lives of those who leave. Today, women have been left with no choice but to become heads of household

and leave behind their socially accepted, traditional gender roles in the region. On the other hand, grandparents have once again returned to parenting as main caregivers for their grandchildren while their own offspring set out to *el norte*. Local indigenous and peasant organizations face diminished affiliate participation since many members have left for the United States. Even the Sierra landscape is changing: brick-made houses and cable antennas are now commonplace goods. What will come about from these changes in the long run, at the levels of politics, economics, and identity for the indigenous men and women of Chiapas, will remain a subject for social sciences for some time to come.<sup>21</sup>

Studies undertaken in other indigenous regions of Mexico, mainly among the Mixtec of Oaxaca (see Besserer 1999; Kearney 1996; Velazco 2005), have challenged the fallacies of the modernizing paradigm that sees migration from a bipolar perspective emphasizing the progressive detachment of emigrants from their homelands and their integration into the host society. Research into "transnational communities" (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992) has emphasized the ties that keep migrants close to their families, communities, and traditions, in spite of the appeal of the host nation states. The shift in the analytical perspective on migration, which mainly took place during the 1990s, creates an echo of the theoretical debates about *translocality* (Appadurai 1996). This new focus calls for a wider perception of community, breaking the link between identity and territory, in order to explore the way a transnational sense of belonging is built, frequently by multifocal affiliations; that is, it needs to be understood more fully that the sense of belonging is located in different landscapes (see Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Rouse 1992).<sup>22</sup>

With respect to the Mam of Chiapas, the usefulness of this methodological approach to multifocal affiliations is clearer than in other indigenous regions, because their cultural identities have been historically marked by the migratory experience: first from Guatemala to Mexico at the end of the 19th century, and then to different regions within Chiapas throughout the 20th century. The sense of belonging to an "imagined community" has been more closely related to the historical memory of different landscapes than to a specific territory. Thus, abandoning their own *ejidos* in *La Sierra* and moving to North Carolina farms becomes just another story to be told for building the narratives of belonging that are still being socialized in family gatherings, or in radio talk shows like *Palabra y Musica Mam*, which is broadcast weekly by the Voice of the Southern Border Station (see Gutiérrez Alfonso 1996).

Similarly, the kind of multifocal affiliations that Mam peasants develop by holding on to family and community ties in their homelands, by using new media technologies as a resource while building new communities in the workers' environment they share with *chapines* in the United States, can be traced back to previous multiple identities. In their recent history many of them were able to self identify interchangeably as peasants, Mam, or Jehovah's witnesses,

depending on the context. Perhaps technological communications developments will promote even stronger ties than before between the different settlements (Portes 1995; Smith and Guarnizo 1998) on both sides of the border: the Sierra Madre region in Chiapas and the Cuchumatanes in Guatemala. However, transnational communities are not a new experience for the indigenous Mam. Despite the Mexican State violence manifested as integrationist programs, their *imagined community* has always included *tokiol* speakers who stayed on the other side of the border.

Paradoxically, rather than nullifying their cultural identities, economic globalization processes have led them to reunite with their "*chapin* brothers" thousands of miles from their homeland communities. For some, this has meant repossessing their Mam identity and probing their memories for that mother language that the Mexican State integrative programs attempted to destroy.

The new multifocal ethnographies speak of how these new networks develop into "transnational communities" where people have double lives: "The participants are usually bilinguals and they move easily between different cultures, frequently they have houses in both countries maintaining political, cultural, and economic interests that require their presence in several communities" (Portes 1995:812).

It is not yet clear how long second and third generations of indigenous migrants from Chiapas can maintain these double lives, but what is already clear is that the cultural homogenization process heralded by the most apocalyptic perspectives of globalization does not seem like an imminent reality for these veterans "border crossers."

### Final Considerations

It is difficult to predict the future that Mam identities will have in the new transnational context, and in a broader sense, the future of the Pan-Maya identities that are springing up from Los Angeles to Guatemala, Chiapas, and Yucatan. Even if their sense of belonging to an *imagined community* is being reconstituted in the new transnational territoriality, the persistence of collective identities within the globalization process does not necessarily imply dissident or antiestablishment identities. Some authors, such as Zygmunt Bauman (2001), have argued that revitalized identities are part of the current phase of capital globalization, as a result of the exacerbated individualization that industrialized societies endure. Furthermore, he stresses the fact that these new identities are redefined within the globalization framework: they "[d]on't contradict the globalization trend, nor do they get in its way: they are a legitimate stem and a natural partner of globalization and far from stopping it, they oil its wheels" (Bauman 2001:174).

Yet other indigenous migration experiences suggest that these identities do not always "oil the capital's wheels." They often build barriers that hinder their profit-making facility and promotion of standardized consumption. The different experiences of transnational organizations of indigenous migrants, as described by Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004) picture of a fairly encouraging scenario in which the globalization of solidarity from below has helped indigenous people from different regions of Mexico and Central America in building a common front to demand labor rights, better working conditions, and migratory reforms to achieve full citizenship. These studies demonstrate that in the new transnational context, Mexican indigenous people are establishing alliances and coordinating actions with the Native American population and with migrants from various countries. They identify themselves as indigenous in certain contexts, as Mexican migrants in others, and as agricultural workers when they are mobilizing around labor demands.

Facing human trafficking experiences, and sexual and domestic violence, indigenous migrant women have begun to build their own collective spaces and to reflect on their specific rights as women and as indigenous women. This is a battle that must be fought on many fronts since, on top of American society's sexism and racism, women must consider machismo and the conditions of exclusion they are living with in their own organizations, neighborhoods, and transnational communities (see Artia 2008; Maldonado and Artia 2004; Stephen 2007; Velásquez 2004). Cases such as Flori's are happening today, especially with the presence of human trafficking and drugs gangs like the *Zetas*, but these forms of violence, which to date have been wrapped in silence, are starting to erupt in publications,<sup>23</sup> radio shows,<sup>24</sup> and the building of transnational indigenous women's networks that foster and promote the rights of women within the context of the rights of their people (see Blackwell 2006).

The constructions of what is *indigenous*, and what it means to be part of an indigenous people as elaborated in discourses of power, have been responded to in diverse and contradictory ways by Mam transnational identities. The *emancipatory* or *regulatory* capacity that Mam identities might take in the transnational context will very much depend on the previous organizational experience that migrants have, and on the social fabric that prevails in their regions of origin and destination.

A hopeful view of the process of redefining cultural identities in the transnational context would mean that this is not just a "new gear in the capital's wheels" but rather that the long history of indigenous and peasant struggle is part of the cultural assets that migrant Mam are taking with them to the American East Coast, which will help them rebuild their collective solidarity in the global village.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The classification of people as Mam antedates colonial rule, even though the meaning of this category has changed dramatically over time. The *Popol Vuh*, the *Memorial of Atitlan*, and other indigenous chronicles, refer to the Mames and locate the Mam capital in Zaculeu (in the department of Huehuetenango in today's Guatemala). A discussion of how those communities were imagined, and the relationship they have with the concept of nation in the modern sense, is beyond the scope of this article. Here, I am concerned with Mam identity as it exists now, as the result of several historical processes that have reconstituted and reinvented it. For a detailed analysis of these experiences of national, ethnic, and religious border crossings by the Mam people from Chiapas, see Hernández Castillo 2001. The Mam peoples from Guatemala have passed through a different historical experience marked by the violence of a counterinsurgent state. For references about Mames from Guatemala, see Hawkins 1984 and Watanabe 1992.

<sup>2</sup>For the political limitations of ethnic essentialisms in the Mexican context (see Hernández Castillo et al. 2004).

<sup>3</sup>The so-called *Pueblos de Indios* (Indian towns) or villages were settlements established during the Spanish colonization of America. They were encouraged by the Spanish authorities in the second half of the 16th century, after the royal decree of 1545. They were created for a more efficient collection of taxes, to increase control and acculturation of the subject population, and to create concentrations of available labor. The *Pueblos de Indios* were known in law as the basic administrative organization, the *Indian Republic*, which was a sort of Indian municipality.

<sup>4</sup>Between 1525 and 1526, part of the population was relocated to the town of Huehuetán and its surrounding villages. By 1563, colonial documents show that the indigenous population of this zone was only 1,600, which implies a reduction of almost 95 percent. Many of the survivors escaped to the highlands of Sierra Madre (Medina 1973).

<sup>5</sup>This liberal project initiated in 1873 supported the production of agro-export crops and the privatization of communal lands, leaving many Mayan peasants without land and forcing them, through a "Law against vagrancy," to work on coffee plantations. As a result of this policy, the Mam population migrated to the so-called "despoblados" (uninhabited places) of the Sierra Madre in Chiapas (see Gutiérrez Alfonso and Hernández Castillo 2000).

<sup>6</sup>Testimony of J. M. Municipio of El Porvenir, May 1990. He was then a 60-year-old man, so his father was probably working on the plantation around the turn of the century.

<sup>7</sup>The ejidal system was established by the Constitution of 1917 for distribution of the land confiscated from large estates. The ejidos were constituted by communal lands divided into small lots and given to the peasants for their individual use. These lots cannot be sold or mortgaged; they can be inherited, but cannot be subdivided; if a peasant moves away, his land remains with the communal governing body. The ejido lands were privatized by the Salinas de Gortari's government at the beginning of 1992.

<sup>8</sup>Testimony of G. C. Ejido Horizontes, May 1993.

<sup>9</sup>Ever since the NAFTA agreement was instated in 1994, the market value of staple grains has plummeted while the price of basic goods has risen by 257 percent. During the Fox administration, Mexico imported close to 3.725 million tons of corn without collecting due taxes. As a result, the country lost US\$429.782 million, thus diminishing the earnings of 3 million corn growers. Overall, 40 percent of imports are now made up of food items, leaving a smaller share of the market to domestic agricultural products.

<sup>10</sup>On February 16, 1996, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and the Mexican Federal Government signed the first phase of the San Andres Accords. These initial accords were the direct result of the dialogue process between the Mexican Federal Government and the EZLN—specifically the talks

that began in January 1996 to discuss the subject of indigenous rights and culture. The main topics included: basic respect for the diversity of the indigenous population of Chiapas; the conservation of the natural resources within the territories used and occupied by indigenous peoples; a greater participation of indigenous communities in the decisions and control of public expenditures; the participation of indigenous communities in determining their own development plans, as well as having control over their own administrative and judicial affairs; the autonomy of indigenous communities and their right of free determination in the framework of the State. These subjects were discussed and approved by representatives of all the indigenous communities of Mexico, and translated into ten indigenous languages. President Ernesto Zedillo publicly rejected the agreements that their representatives had signed and instead increased the militarization of Chiapas. The details of the San Andres agreements and the limitations of the legal reforms regarding indigenous rights are discussed in Hernández Castillo et al. 2004.

<sup>11</sup>Testimony of E. M. Municipio of El Porvenir, May 2008.

<sup>12</sup>Several estates that had been seized by peasants from the Sierra and Costa regions were paid to landowners by the State as compensation at a higher than market price—somewhere close to 5,900 pesos per hectare (see "Chiapas al Día" bulletin, 290 CIEPAC, May 15, 2002). The money was reinvested in transport by the landowners.

<sup>13</sup>See "Chiapas al Día" bulletin, 254, CIEPAC; August 10, 2001. The Federal Fire Arms and Explosives Act is a federal law that sets the regulations for the use of weapons and explosives in México. It was established on January 11, 1972; among other things the law determines that the possession of any firearm should be registered with the Ministry of Defense, and that high caliber firearms are for the exclusive use of the army, navy, and air force.

<sup>14</sup>"Coyote" is the local term for smugglers who facilitate the migration of people.

<sup>15</sup>Mam migrant to North Carolina, interviewed at the *Ejido Horizontes*, municipality of Mazapa de Madero in 1990.

<sup>16</sup>"Cuarto Poder" 24–12–2003.

<sup>17</sup>*Chapin* is the local term used to refer to people of Guatemala origin.

<sup>18</sup>Testimony of G. C. *Ejido Horizontes*, May 1993.

<sup>19</sup>*Chiapas Al Día* Bulletin 406, CIEPAC, April 20, 2004.

<sup>20</sup>Diocese of Saltillo. *Sexto Informe sobre la Situación de los Derechos Humanos de las Personas Migrantes en Tránsito por México*, 2010. Pp. 68

<sup>21</sup>See preliminary papers by Villafuerte and García 2004, 2006; see also Salvador Guzman Lopez's personal account of the Tzotzil Indian experience in California, written with Jan Rus (Rus and Guzman Lopez 1996); an unpublished book by Rus and Rus (2007); and the work of Verónica Ruiz Lagier (2007a, 2007b) on La Gloria, a Kanjobal community in the border region. From the human rights perspective, see the recent report of ALOP and ENLACE (2010).

<sup>22</sup>Smith and Guarnizo (1998) consider that there is convergence between scholars of Cultural Studies who theorize *translocality* (Appadurai, Hommi Bahbha, and Hannerz) and the theorists of transnationalism and transmigration (Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Bash, Michael Kearney, Roger Rouse, and Alejandro Portes, among others), because they see a tendency to conceive of transnationalism as something to celebrate, as an expression of a subversive popular resistance "from below." "Cultural hybridity, multipositional identities, border-crossing by marginal 'others,' and transnational business practices by migrant entrepreneurs are depicted as conscious and successful efforts by ordinary people to escape control and domination 'from above' by capital and the state" (p. 5).

<sup>23</sup>See *Latina, Laotian, Hmong and Mixtec Women: One Story*, Voice of the Valley news feature 2003.

<sup>24</sup>Several Indian radio stations have opened up broadcasting time to programs on women's issues. For a complete list of radio stations with airtime for indigenous migrants, or those conducted by indigenous migrants, see [http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/Eng/yellow/radio\\_orgs.htm](http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/Eng/yellow/radio_orgs.htm).

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