1. Transnational Life in Ethnographic Perspective

THREE VIGNETTES

There’s a time you can’t believe you’re here [in Ticuani]. You’re like, “Oh, it’s probably a dream down here.”... Since I have dreams that I’m over there and I wake up... But I’m like, “Oh, I really here.” And I have fun. And in the nights you can’t wait to leave your house at eight o’clock and go to the centro, and you see all the lights from the house.

LINDA, age fifteen

Linda’s wonder at actually being in the town I call Ticuani—a small municipio (county) of less than two thousand people in southern Puebla, in the Mixteca region of Mexico—is not just an enthusiastic teenager’s response to a favorite vacation spot; it attests to Ticuani’s central place in her social world. Although she says that she cannot visit her cousins in Manhattan because it is “mad far” from her apartment in Brooklyn and her parents will not let her go, they permit her to travel more than two thousand miles with her brother or cousins (but without her parents) to stay for several weeks in Ticuani during winter and summer vacation each year. While in Ticuani, Linda can stay out all night to dance, drink beer (with discretion), and walk around freely outside, whereas in New York she is a “lockdown” girl who must come straight home from school and await her parents’ return. In Ticuani she participates in the overnight Antorcha (torch run) for Padre Jesús and other religious rituals, which simultaneously give her freedom from her parents and a closer connection, as she practices traditions in which they have also participated. Such patterns transnationalize adolescent rituals for her and her second-generation immigrant friends and give Ticuani an enhanced place in their lives.

This book is for my wife, Maura, and our two sons, Owen and Liam. Words simply don’t serve. Maura’s love has centered my life for two decades. Owen and Liam have enriched our lives in ways I could not even imagine. I watch in wonder as four-year-old Liam sings his way into yhood and Owen sprints into his own at age seven. While writing a book fun, nothing compares to Liam’s forty-pound and Owen’s fifty-five-pound running hugs that knock me over at the start and end of each day, or Maura’s delighted smile and my own at all of us together.
Tomás Maestro got up at 5 A.M. on the morning of January 26, 2001, and went quickly to the zocalo, or town center, of Ticuani, wincing as he put pressure on the swollen leg that had kept him home from the Grand Dance the previous night. Normally, he would have spent the entire night at the dance, to which he had been looking forward all year. He had brought his wife and four children down to Ticuani from New York to enjoy such rituals with him. This year he went to the zocalo to keep an eye on his oldest son, Toño, as the dance ended. It was fortunate that he did. He arrived soon after Toño had screamed, “¡Pendeja!” (Asshole!) at his younger sister, Magda, when she refused to get out of a car with several youths he did not like, including some pandilleros, or gang members, from New York. One pandillero, thinking the insult was directed at him, got out of the car to confront Toño. Older relatives separated them, warning Toño what dangerous the pandilleros could be. Toño listened to Tomás, but the next morning Tomás got up early again, this time to hear his son angrily ordering his girlfriend, Julia, to go home despite her desire to stay in the zocalo and eat tacos with her friends.

These conflicts show how transnational life emerges and how gender figures into that process. Tomás, Toño, Julia, and Magda are all attempting to negotiate the different meanings of gender in New York and Ticuani. The relative autonomy of Mexican women in New York can be challenged by men in Mexico as they claim expanded masculine authority, often with support from local Ticuanenses. These assertions of authority, such as Toño’s “defending” Magda, are also assertions of masculine honor—of “heart”—because Toño stands up to pandilleros who inspire fear in both New York and Ticuani.

“The water pipes have come in!” Don Emiliano tells me and the members of the Ticuani Solidarity Committee with excitement. Months of work are paying off for Ticuani. Committee members explain to me again how the old one-inch pipes cannot handle the pressure needed to pump water to distant parts of the growing municipio, and how the committee and the municipal government are working together to install three-inch pipes. The committee members are going to inspect the new pipes, which they tell me are plastic and will not corrode like the old ones. “We will be able to shower at any time of day or night,” says one committee member, “and plant trees right in our backyard and water them without any trouble, too. It will make life better in Ticuani.”

This ordinary civic scene takes place not in Ticuani but on a Brooklyn street corner in 1993. We say goodbye to committee members headed to John F. Kennedy Airport in Queens. They will travel to Mexico City and then five hours overland to Ticuani for the weekend to consult with authorities and contractors on the work they are funding, returning the following Monday to their jobs in New York City. Moreover, the committee is the Ticuani Solidarity Committee of New York (hereafter the Committee), which has substantially funded most major Ticuani public works projects over three decades by soliciting donations from Ticuanenses in New York. For this, the largest Ticuani project ever, the Committee raised more than two-thirds of the $150,000 cost of the project, exceeding the Mexican federal, state, and local government contributions combined. The Committee has also become involved in Ticuani politics, helping to fashion a set of rules and practices for participating in transnational public life. Fundraising in New York by Ticuanenses has become increasingly important in Ticuani electoral politics. That fundraising in Brooklyn basements matters so much to the public life of a remote village some twenty-five hundred miles away points to how much life has been transnationalized in some places in the United States and Mexico.

This is a book about how the lives of many contemporary immigrants and their children are being lived transnationally. In each of these vignettes, the actors have adopted practices in use both in the United States and in Mexico and which are understood by means of social and moral maps encompassing both Ticuani and New York. Globalization and, to a lesser extent, transnationalization have become buzzwords describing how the “local becomes global,” how distant people are becoming linked through economic markets, communications, and cultural dissemination and homogenization. But what do these processes mean in people’s everyday lives? Why are increasing numbers of migrants so interested in maintaining relations with their home towns and countries? More compellingly, why are so many of their children also participating in these practices, and how does this participation change their experiences of assimilation in the United States? My book sets out to provide interesting answers to these questions, drawing on an extended case study of migrants and their children from Ticuani, in Puebla, Mexico, who migrate to New York.
The tremendous growth in Mexican migration to New York over the last fifteen years reflects a larger trend. While most Mexican migrants still settle in the Southwest of the United States, during the 1990s migration to the East Coast increased: today, for example, more than half a million people of Mexican origin live in New York State. Transnational life emerges from attempts by migrants and their children to live meaningful lives, to gain respect and recognition, within the context of the larger processes of migration from Mexico, on the one hand, and assimilation in the United States, on the other.

I trace the emergence and evolution of transnational life through fifteen years of ethnography in the Ticuanense community, focusing on the formation of political community by first-generation migrant men; on how gender structures transnational life; and on second-generation assimilation and participation in transnational life. Migration itself has changed with the closer economic integration of Mexico and the United States, along with other forms of globalization, which foster, limit, or otherwise affect transnational life. Similarly, settlement and assimilation pressures in New York urge Ticuanenses and their children toward transnational action but also constrain it. Studying both migration and assimilation helps explain why and how Ticuanense migrants and their children remain attached to Ticuani.

This attachment and the transnational life it supports are crucially affected by secondary processes affecting the lives of migrants and their children, such as adolescence and racialization. Finally, changes in communications and travel technology (including the postmodern concept of “time-space compression”), large-scale integration, and government intervention facilitate creation of transnational structures on the local level that are experienced differently than were earlier long-distance migrations and diasporas.

My analytical strategy is dialectic, emphasizing how local and larger forces, structures, and actors influence each other over time in a generative historical process. I explain how migrants and their children in New York and Puebla are affected by political or economic events both local and global; I show how their responses to these new situations help institutionalize transnational life. The contours of local-level transnational life emerge through the repetition of certain political, gender, and cultural practices, which gradually become normative and structural—“social facts,” external to and coercive of individuals, in the words of Émile Durkheim—but also continue to evolve through the actions of migrants and their children and outside forces.

My goal is more to tell how things came to be as they are today than to predict what they will be like in the future, though I also reflect on the direction I think transnational life will take.

The evolution of Ticuani transnational life reflects my own sustained engagement with Ticuanenses and their children. I first did research in Ticuani and its neighboring town, which I call El Ganado, during the summer of 1988, and I followed up this visit with five- or six-week trips from 1991 through 1993, while doing ongoing ethnography in New York. From 1990 through 1994 I worked especially closely with Ticuanense men on the Committee, but also with women and the second generation. From 1994 to 1997 I stayed in touch with Ticuanenses and began a second major project, on the school and work fates of their children in the United States. This second period of intensive fieldwork, from 1997 to 2002, gave me the chance to revisit Ticuani and Ticuanenses in New York and to apply gender and generation as important analytical lenses, focusing more explicitly on the experiences of the second generation and of women. In reworking transnational issues, I deepened old friendships. And after I had worked alone for ten years, grant funds enabled me to hire several excellent researchers, whose influence is also felt in this book.

My reentrying Ticuani life from 1997 to 2002 has made this a better book. Attending the Feast of Padre Jesús (Ticuani’s patron saint) in January 1999 for the first time since 1993, I was surprised not just by how warmly I was received but also by how deeply I was moved. Although I had participated in Ticuani life in Brooklyn in the interim, returning to Ticuani made me deeply happy—and also made possible new insights. I was able to see, for example, how age affected participation in transnational life: Some younger children who had not liked returning to Ticuani seven or even ten years earlier now embraced its rituals as adolescents, and some who had been adolescents in the early 1990s now participated less. At the same time I had been making my own journey from graduate student to professor, and from engagement to marriage to my wife, Maura, and the birth of my two children, Liam and Owen. Meeting my wife and children led Ticuanenses to see me as more real and gave us more in common. Finally, my reentry into Ticuani life led even my Ticuanense friends to ask when the book would be done, giving me more ganas (desires) to finish.

Transnational Life in Scholarly and Historical Contexts

The image of the “clean break” with the old country, embodied in the role of Oscar Handlin’s 1951 book The Uprooted, guided most research on immigration from the 1920s through the 1980s. A transnational perspective emerged in response to the failure of this and other dominant theories of
immigrant assimilation to explain the growing trend of close ties between migrants and their home countries, illustrated in the vignettes above. Whereas early work on transnational life saw it as wholly new, and newly discovered, recent work has detailed and compared its historical, contemporary, and theoretical contours. One study, for example, draws on random samples of migrant populations to gauge the frequency of transnational practices among them.11

In its most common version, derived from the work of Nina Glick-Schiller and her colleagues, transnational theory has several elements.12 First, it disputes the inevitability of severing ties to the old country, once assumed to be part of the inexorable transition from "immigrant" to "ethnic" to "native" in two or three generations. Rather, it argues, migrants and their children may remain linked to their home countries for long periods, in part to resist racial and other forms of inequality in the host country. Second, it argues that capitalism has created a set of global markets and processes that have increased migration and superseded the nation-state, creating a kind of global civil society that threatens the state's monopoly on politics. This change opens possibilities for subversive action, aided by new technology such as the Internet. Finally, some argue or imply that transnationalization creates a kind of "third way," or what the historian David Gutierrez has called a "Third Space," for immigrants, enabling them to somehow escape the grasp of the nation-state and the host and home societies.13 While all of these positions are correct to some extent, they fail to sufficiently consider factors limiting or extending the longevity of transnational life or to illuminate some of its dimensions, such as the role of adolescence and the life course in creating and shaping transnational life. They also sometimes err through what the anthropologist Sherry Ortner describes as an "ethnographic refusal"14 to investigate, for example, local conflicts and meanings, because the research is framed mainly in terms of resistance to domination by larger processes such as globalization.

I analyze transnational life or transnationalization by emphasizing lived experience and process, purposely avoiding the more common terms transnationalism and transmigrants. I also differentiate between transnational processes, which involve particular migrant populations and nation-states, and global ones, which involve economic, institutional, cultural, and other changes that reconfigure power on a planetary scale.15 As I use the term, transnational life includes those practices and relationships linking migrants and their children with the home country, where such practices have significant meaning and are regularly observed, as in the studies by the sociologist Alejandro Portes and his colleagues.16 But, for me, transnational life is also embodied in identities and social structures that help form the life world of immigrants and their children and is constructed in relations among people, institutions, and places. Transnational life usually involves travel between the home and host destination, but it can also include the experience of stay-at-homes in close relationships with travelers.17 Finally, I understand transnational life not as an all-encompassing identity, but as one of several that migrants can hold and exercise. Involvement in transnational life is generally stronger than that in purely associational forms of social life, such as political parties, but less strong than that envisioned in the primordial notion of "natural community"18 as formulated by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies or the American anthropologist Robert Redfield in the early to mid-1900s. I do not intend to fall on my theoretical sword in arguing for a transnational perspective. I point out ways in which transnational life seems strong and institutionalized and those in which it seems limited, and I reflect on factors that affect how long it endures and how it is experienced.

Most transnationalists avoid the concept of assimilation, which they conceive of in its mid-twentieth-century form, positing conformity to an imagined set of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant norms. Yet while we should criticize this harsh Americanization project—for example, for its uncritically viewing differences in life chances as the result of inherent group traits (such as race)—we still face the fundamental question of how immigrants become part of the larger American society. Many scholars prefer the term incorporation to describe this process because it is free of the Americanization overtones of assimilation. Although I use both terms, I more often use assimilation because it more accurately describes what immigrants perceive to be a coercive process with often negative consequences for them and their children. I do not endorse this coercive dimension of immigrant experience, but I think we cannot get a good picture of the current reality without acknowledging it, especially among groups with lower levels of education and income.

Some scholars see assimilation overwhelming transnational life as the second and subsequent generations become largely monolingual English-speakers.19 Yet this is not always the case, and even if it were, the transnational relationship would persist among new waves of immigrants. The relationship between assimilation and transnational life is complex, changing across the life course, by generation, and by class. Indeed, assimilation pressures are refracted through transnational processes: just as assimilation can be "segmented" into upward and downward mobility (into either more schooling and better jobs, or leaving school without graduating and poorer
jobs), transnational life can extend such tendencies. Hence gang members on negative assimilation paths and students on positive ones in New York live out these experiences when they return to Ticuani. By so doing, they transnationalize both gangs and a culture of educational mobility, and this experience then affects assimilation and incorporation when they return to New York. Moreover, assimilation and transnationalization are not mutually exclusive processes: being more transnational does not necessarily mean being less assimilated. Indeed, leaders in migrant communities in the United States who engage in collective action there also tend to participate more in transnational life. Some evidence suggests that this was also the case in the past, as in the Swedish temperance or franchise-reform movements, which were pushed by the same adherents in both countries in the late 1880s and early 1900s. Hence, I think the biggest danger to positive assimilation is not transnationalization but negative assimilation pressures in the United States. Transnational life in fact has great potential to facilitate positive assimilation in the United States.

Transnationalization affects life differently in Mexico and New York. Life in Mexican sending villages like Ticuani (the communities from which migrants come to the United States) becomes oriented toward el norte, while life in New York is dominated by the daily struggles of surviving. Yet, among the more than 40 percent of Ticuaneños in New York and their children who become significantly involved in transnational life, it changes how they understand their own Mexican identity and their attitude toward various economic, racial, and ethnic assimilation pressures in New York. (I estimate that between 100 and 150 youths and 300 to 400 adults return to Ticuani each year, figures that represent at least 10 percent of all Ticuaneños in the United States and Mexico. Thus some 30 to 40 percent of all Ticuaneños return to Ticuani over the course of three years.) That transnational action does not directly involve all migrants does not detract from its pervasive influence. Indeed, a generation ago, the urban sociologist Gerald Suttles showed that, as with unions or political parties, the actions of leaders and a few active followers have disproportionate effects on collective life and on the less active members of a community.

Transnational life and reciprocal effects on assimilation and migration are not new, but they require a new theoretical lens to see them as such. Indeed, essays in “historical retrieval” are now documenting patterns of transnational action in immigration history that were not previously seen as such. Immigrants during the late 1800s and early 1900s engaged in many of the transnational practices described in this book, including involvement in local politics and religious movements in communities of both origin and destination. Migrant-sending countries also took many of the same measures in the past as they have done today, such as attempting to cultivate a closer relationship with their diaspora by establishing special programs for them, using their emigrants to lobby for national interests, and pursuing nationalist goals from abroad. Yet transnational life today is different from that of the past. These differences result in part from communications and travel technologies that enable migrants to participate in communities in both countries. A different regime of assimilation in the United States today also encourages ethnic identification and links with the home country rather than stressing Americanization. Moreover, today’s migrants are likely to come with an identity linked to their country of origin, whereas migrants a hundred years ago might have identified themselves more strongly with their home village. And the current international system exerts contradictory pressures on migration. It controls most potential migration through passport and other state controls—what the political scientist Ari Zolberg calls “remote control”—which did not exist during most of the last wave of migration, from the 1880s to the 1920s. But it also promotes economic and cultural globalization, which fosters migration. More than two hundred million people around the world are now migrants, the largest number in human history.

The conditions supporting transnational life will persist for the foreseeable future. With regard to transnationalization between Mexico and the United States, these conditions include globalization (ably analyzed by Saskia Sassen) and continuing labor market and migration pressures in Mexico. One-third of all Mexicans will travel to the United States during their lifetime, and half have a relative who has done so. Changes in U.S. immigration and other laws and closer integration with the United States have also led to quicker long-term settlement in the United States. U.S.-born children of Mexican migrants are the largest foreign-born group in Mexico outside Mexico City. More than twenty million people of Mexican origin live in the United States; Mexico’s population is now more than one hundred million. Without a major disruption of these conditions—on the scale of the Great Depression and World War II, which combined with restrictionism to end the last wave of migration—transnational life should continue to grow strongly in the future.

KEY SITES FOR ANALYZING TRANSNATIONAL LIFE

I analyze local-level transnational life at three of its key sites: in politics in the first generation, in gender relations in the first and second generations,
and in the assimilation experiences of teenage students and gang members. Analyzing these themes in this order traces the migration process and its partner, the assimilation process, through various steps from the causes of migration through the effect of continued attachment to Ticuani to the reasons for and links between positive and negative assimilation in New York and returning to Ticuani among the second generation. By focusing over an extended period on both the community of origin in Ticuani and the community of destination in New York, I document how politics, gender relations, and second-generation assimilation evolve within the context of transnational life. In contrast to many other researchers, I not only celebrate migration and transnationalization’s positive aspects—such as the democratic catalyzation of politics—but also depict their darker sides, such as extended, painful family separations and transnational gang formation, and I relate these elements to assimilation. Ticuani provides transnational theory with what the late Robert Merton calls a “strategic research site,” where the object of study presents itself with unusual clarity, thus permitting detailed examination.

Common to all three sites is the struggle for respect and recognition in difficult circumstances, what Doreen Massey calls “a sense of place.” The committee leaders want their efforts on behalf of Ticuani recognized, second-generation girls and boys want their Mexicanness and masculinity or femininity recognized, and gang members want respect from others. People’s attempts to create a place for themselves are simultaneously oriented toward particular geographical spaces, such as Ticuani’s zocalo or schools in New York; to social space, the myriad social locations formed in relation to gender, ethnic, and racial images and hierarchies in Mexico and the United States and social relations among Ticuanenses; and to “emergent” (temporary) spaces (such as Mexican DJ parties in clubs in New York), whereby masculinity, Mexicanness, and that social space are jointly constituted. Space is both a geographical place and an existential freedom to feel that one belongs fully amid difference. This analysis resonates with what the Latino studies scholars William Flores, Rena Benmayor, and Renato Rosaldo call “Latino cultural citizenship,” the right to feel at home in claiming space or rights despite one’s ethnic or racial difference from others in the community. While this notion of cultural citizenship usually theorizes a Latino right to belong and make claims within the dominant, white society, my analysis of claims to rights and existential belonging by Ticuanenses in New York is more often set within other kinds of unequal power relations. Returning migrants and their children negotiate with the local Ticuanense power elite; children of Ticuani immigrants in New York negotiate with Puerto Rican, Black, and white youth; and (first-generation) teenage migrants negotiate with U.S.-born children of Ticuani immigrants and other groups. I return to the meanings and function of geographic, social, and emergent, or constituted, space periodically.

I turn first to the formation of a transnational political community, by which I mean the formally and informally institutionalized patterns and practices of public life in Ticuani and in New York. The Mexican government—at the municipal, state, and federal levels—is crucial in creating transnational public life. The municipality is most involved in and affected by transnational public life because it cannot raise the money it needs for public works without the contributions of Ticuanenses in New York. But the governments of Mexico and of several Mexican states, including Puebla, have also created programs to strengthen their links with Mexicans abroad in order to do public works, to keep remittances flowing, and to control the transnational political participation of Mexicans in the United States, especially in Mexican electoral politics. The Mexican president Vicente Fox has credited migrants’ influence with helping him win the 2000 election, and migrants have become an integral part of what Benedict Anderson would call Mexico’s “imagined political community” during Fox’s presidency.

This participation of the state in creating and maintaining transnational life is at odds with the views of scholars such as the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, who sees the state as being “on its last legs,” transcended by migrant action. But the state matters in at least two ways. First, the territoriality of the state and its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in that territory enable the Mexican state, for example, to use force to stifle dissent. But migrants can leave Mexico to protest from the safety of the United States. Second, the state, especially at the municipal level, is key to creating a sense of community, belonging, and social closure (knowing where the community starts and stops), and to linking these concepts to certain places and practices, among both the first and the second generations. Being a Ticuanense is not a cosmopolitan, placeless identity but rather begins as its opposite, a local, deeply rooted traditional identity that is lived in two countries at once, and evolves into something transnational but still local. Because migrants and their U.S.-born children can return regularly to Ticuani, its traditions and ability to confer authenticity make it important to many second-generation youths for whom being Mexican in New York has negative connotations of victimization and difficulty in school. In this way, assimilation and transnationalization become intimately bound.

All this is not to imply that harmony, equality, and fraternity reign within the community or that all forms of transnational life fall under its
rubric. Ticuani public life is riven by political, factional, and class conflicts. But by negotiating such conflicts simultaneously in New York and Puebla, Ticuanenses create and reproduce a transnational political community, a Ticuaniense "we" that is understood in the zocalo in Ticuani as well as on the baseball and soccer fields of Brooklyn. Even if politicians use the rhetoric of community to advance their own aims, many Ticuanenses believe in a transnationally constituted Ticuani community and act on that belief, thus creating and sustaining communal goals, views, and practices. Moreover, the Mexican state and other groups treat Ticuanenses in New York and in Ticuani as members of the same community, thus reinforcing the Ticuaniense sense of community through what Suttles would term their "foreign relations" with migrants. Finally, a Ticuaniense identity can co-exist with others, such as Mexican American, Hispanic, or New Yorker; the Ticuani identity may not always be ascendant but can still be important. Focusing on the community level elucidates the developing logic of relationships among actors over time, illuminating the factors that affect the transnational sense and practice of community. This focus is precluded if one takes the individual as the key unit of analysis in transnational studies, as others have done.

My relational, long-term focus has enabled me both to see how transnational life depends on actors in both countries and to register the effects of changes inside and outside Ticuani. For example, it has become common for the Ticuani municipal president to visit New York seeking support for projects in Ticuani. Contributions by Ticuanenses living in New York are governed by conditions set by the Committee. Yet the Committee too must play by rules set by local leaders in Ticuani. Hence anyone who wishes to run for municipal president must return to Ticuani for at least one year. Such transnational practices acquire a normalcy—for Ticuanenses and researchers studying them—that becomes noticeable when it is upset by external forces. Thus when the then-dominant political party in Mexico, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), changed its rules for selecting local candidates for election, it occasioned a split in the PRI in Ticuani and among Ticuanenses in New York. This division ended the Committee's monopoly on representing those in New York and led to the defeat of the Ticuani political boss's candidate through financial and moral support from an insurgent political group in New York. Such twoway influence is testimony to the extent to which the town's political community is now transnational.

In addition to examining transnational local politics, my second task in this book is to show how transnationalization and assimilation are affected by gender and the life course. The prevailing view of gender in migration studies emphasizes such phenomena as the "crisis of masculinity" and "liberating femininity," by which, for example, first-generation men, usually assumed to be undocumented, are seen to want to return home or to imagine themselves returning, whereas women want to settle or imagine themselves settling, because men lose status and power in the United States and women gain them. Although there is truth to these perceptions, many TicuanENSE men and women in New York create institutional and social settings affording men real power, and not just its symbolic form, which, as the sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo insightfully argues, compensates for diminished power. Ticuanense men exercise power in New York as community leaders and from New York as absent Ticuani leaders. Their wives enjoy enhanced status, derived in part from their husbands' power and in part from the opportunities for service and status display afforded by their own transnational activities.

The life course too affects transnational life in gendered ways. While many retired first-generation men become more involved in politics from New York, many retired women bring their third-generation grandchildren back to Mexico for vacations while their adult children remain in the United States working. In the second generation, men's and women's involvement in transnational life varies according to their divergent experiences of assimilation, adolescence, and school in New York. Some second-generation men attempt to reclaim the lost male privilege they imagine their fathers to have had in Mexico. These men are in many ways allowed to live that privileged life in Ticuani, whereas their second-generation girlfriends attempt to reclaim some aspects of their lost traditions while resisting pressure to surrender the autonomy they enjoy in New York.

Toño's case is instructive. In Ticuani, Toño attempts to renegotiate the "gender bargains" he has with his sisters and girlfriend. When Toño fails to assert masculine authority over his sister Magda, he angrily asserts it over his girlfriend, who accedes to his will. Although his girlfriend and sister move quite autonomously in New York, in Mexico—and especially in Ticuani where he feels everyone is watching—Toño feels he has not only the right but also the responsibility to watch out for the women in his life; if anything happens to them, it will be his fault. At the same time, Toño is showing everyone that he will tolerate no disrespect from his girlfriend, his sister, or even intimidating gang members. His family and girlfriend report that in Ticuani he gets into more fights with other men and attempts to control the behavior of women more than in New York. These renegotiations of the gender bargains in his family and with his girlfriend are part of transnational life for them.
My third approach to the study of transnational life is through the experiences of the second generation. This term is a conscious simplification: the transnational social world of Ticanense youth encompasses three other groups. The "1.5 generation" is composed of youth born in Mexico but raised from the age of about ten in the United States; the "2nd generation" was born in the United States but raised for several years in Mexico before returning to the United States; and there has been a large influx of first-generation teenage migrants who came to New York in the 1990s under family reunification policies accompanying the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. I usually include the first three groups within the category of "second generation" and treat teen migrants as a separate group to reflect their substantially different experiences of migration and assimilation. I make the cut at age ten because the younger children do not enter middle school or high school or go through puberty on arrival in the United States; they thus avoid a number of the challenges of urban adolescence imposed on teen migrants.  

For many second-generation Ticanenses, adolescence itself is practiced transnationally, even while it is engaged with migration and assimilation pressures. They use Tican’s communal rituals, such as feasts and dances, to negotiate their place in New York. Being transnational helps many in the second generation to differentiate themselves, as ethnic Mexicans, from Blacks and Puerto Ricans, other ethnic minorities with whom they feel they are often equated. And in contradistinction to the inherent danger perceived in adolescent rituals in New York, Tican offers the second generation a safe site for rituals and enables parents both to offer their children more freedom and to establish closer connections with them, a hard trick during adolescence.  

Economically or educationally successful second-generation returnees enter Tican at the top of its social hierarchy, in contrast to their often-diminished place in New York. Yet, unlike their parents, they are not always received as beloved hijos ausentes (absent sons and daughters). They are sometimes seen as presumidos, arrogant outsiders who flaunt their material wealth and New York styles and lack authentic Mexican values, customs, and language.  

Life course also affects second generation transnational life. Second-generation participation in transnational life alters with age. Typically, younger children take less interest in their connection with Tican; this takes on an urgent meaning and intensity as they reach adolescence and persists through the late teens and the early twenties. Later, permanent jobs, children, and other adult obligations leave less time for travel to Tican but also bring another set of rituals practiced in Tican: baptizing children, building or inheriting houses, and returning for family vacations.

The dual processes of migration and assimilation have disrupted the safe haven that returning second-generation youth once enjoyed in Tican. Family reunification under the 1986 amnesty caused a surge of emigration by children and adolescents who would otherwise have stayed in Mexico until their late teens or early twenties. Their difficult incorporation in New York and other factors caused a great increase in Mexican gangs in New York during the 1990s and the exportation from New York to Tican of associated social problems such as drug use and violence. As some teen migrants encountered legal or gang troubles in New York, they fled to Tican and took gang life there, virtually unchallenged by other youth or by an adult male population severely depleted by migration. This long-term ethnographic analysis of the transnationalization of adolescence and then of gangs illustrates the iterative process by which transnational life emerges, often including contestation over the meaning and possession of place.  

Despite its title, this book does not attempt to analyze the entire Mexican community in New York. It analyzes one case of local-level transnational life over an extended period. I cannot generalize my findings to a broader population, as can many statistical studies. However, I use the continuities and anomalies in the Ticanese case to gain deeper insight into both individual experience and the larger processes—national or global, or of gender or race or adolescence—shaping transnational life. Through ongoing engagement with my informants, with knowledge of the contexts within which their lives are set, and with theory, I develop what the sociologist Michael Burawoy calls an “extended case analysis.”  

Tican represents one of the strongest instances of local-level transnational life documented thus far, but it is not unique. Other cases in Oaxaca, Zacatecas, and elsewhere in Latin America show high levels of transnational life, which are likely to persist. Other communities in the Mixteca region seem to be following Tican northward. Migration has virtually emptied parts of the Mixteca, which lost more than 100,000 people to migration between 1985 and 2000, resulting in population losses ranging from 5 percent to more than 6 percent in some municipios over the last twenty years despite high birth rates (3 percent or more). Some 70 percent of these migrants go to New York, and the Mixteca region accounts for some two-thirds of Mexicans in New York. Such demographic changes have sustained transnational life and significantly affected local politics. All of the thirty-five municipios in the Mixteca region have hometown associations similar to the one studied in this book, and the current governor of Puebla has opened an office in New York to maintain links with poblanos there. Moreover, government officials told me that electoral outcomes were
changed profoundly by migrants in one-third of the Mixteca municipios in 1998, and that by 2002 migrants had affected electoral politics in more than 50 of the state’s 217 municipios. And the governor formed a special unit of the State Judicial Police during the late 1990s to deal with public security issues, including gangs, especially during periods of high return, such as the religious feasts.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 describes both how Ticuan has been transformed by migration and how Mexicans, including Ticuanenses, fit into New York’s economic, ethnic, and racial hierarchies. The remaining eight chapters work in pairs. Chapters 3 and 4 trace how cooperation and the negotiation of conflict in New York and Ticuan have institutionalized a transnational political community and how changes in Mexican national politics have affected local Ticuanense politics in Mexico and New York. Chapter 5 shows how democracy affects settlement, return, and transnational life among men and women in the first generation; Chapter 6 examines the same issues among the second generation. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the life course and transnational life.

The former analyzes the transnationalization of adolescence for second-generation U.S.-born Ticuanenses, showing how their participation in Ticuan rituals both distinguishes them, in their eyes, from native-born U.S. minorities and links them with their parents and their Mexican culture in positive ways. Chapter 8 charts how changes in the life course account for both the failed attempts of an earlier cohort of second-generation Ticuanenses to institutionalize transnational life and for the current cohort’s strong embrace of Ticuanense identity and rituals. Chapters 9 and 10 analyze the causes of the emergence and transnationalization of Mexican gangs in New York and rural Puebla during the 1990s and how gangs have changed the experience of Ticuan both for gang members and for the transnationalized adolescence of returning “regulars.” The conclusion considers conditions that will affect the durability and scope of transnational life and makes policy recommendations to address some issues raised in the book.

This demonstration of the effects of transnational life in the United States and Mexico should begin to allay Roger Waldinger’s frustrated but ultimately useful plea in 1997 for “transnationalists” to demonstrate how transnationalization has affected some social reality beyond identity. I hope this book helps to establish transnational life as a social reality in the minds of skeptics and to legitimize the transnational perspective as a useful lens for studying the twin processes of migration and assimilation.

Most Ticuanenses and their children asked me to use their real names in the book, saying they were “proud of the things they were doing” and wanted their stories told. However, to foster frankness and safeguard confidentiality, all names of persons in this book are pseudonyms, except for those of public persons, such as the governor of Puebla. Each pseudonym refers to the same person throughout the book. For example, the Tomás Maestro and Linda who appear in the opening paragraphs of this chapter are the same Tomás Maestro and Linda who appear throughout the book; thus I trace the same person through different spheres of Ticuan transnational life. Where public figures, such as politicians’ staff members, requested anonymity, I have not named them.

I have translated Spanish-language quotations into English but have left the two languages mixed where the speaker did so, translating Spanish words in brackets immediately following the quotation. This mixing of two languages, especially among the second generation, reflects the speaker’s engagement with two cultures. Sometimes one language expresses an idea better than the other, or does so in a way that seems more relevant to the speaker and his or her audience. I felt it was important to preserve this sense of ease in both languages.
2. Dual Contexts for Transnational Life

More than two hundred young men and women dressed in white sweatshirts adorned with the image of Tiguani’s patron saint, Padre Jesús, ran across the Manhattan Bridge on a frigid January morning to the Cathedral of Saint Bernard on Fourteenth Street, following their New York City Police escorts. This 1997 run from the heart of Brooklyn to downtown Manhattan—a distance of six or seven miles—was the first enactment in New York of a pilgrimage run, or Antorch, for Ticuanense youth, corresponding to the annual thirty-six-hour relay from the Cathedral of the Virgin in Mexico City to Ticuani. Older Ticuanenses spoke proudly of the devotion their young people showed toward “Padrecito” and their town’s customs, and they reminisced about their own Antorchas in Mexico. I ran with these young pilgrims in my dual role as an ethnographer and a founding member of the Mexican Athletic Club of New York; my job was to make sure no stragglers were lost en route. As we ran, they described how hard their lives were and how hard it was to run, but also the importance of this devotion in their lives.

During and after the event, Leobardo, the organizer, repeated several times how the police captain supervising the run had complimented him on the organization of the run and the evident devotion of the youths to Mexican customs: “I don’t want to take away from any other groups, but the captain said he had not seen any other groups in New York that had such devotion and culture,” he said. Others said that Blacks and Puerto Ricans lacked such a culture. Moreover, the adults argued that Padre Jesús protects Tiguani youths even in New York. In the 2004 Antorch in New York, the organizers emphasized at the beginning of the run that what they most wanted to demonstrate to New Yorkers was their educación—proper upbringing. As we ran through Brooklyn’s various neighborhoods, the cheers
went up—“¡Que vive [Long live] Padre Pico!” “¡Que vive los Mexicanos!” and, for the first time I can remember, “¡Que vive los Latinos!” So even as these U.S.-born youths embarked on the traditional Ticuani ritual of the Antorcha, transplanted into a new environment, they were also running and searching for their place within New York’s racial, economic, and educational hierarchies.

This event illustrates how engagement with New York’s racial, economic, and educational hierarchies creates a context for transnational life. It first provides a motivation for immigrants and their children to participate in transnational life. This motivation enables them to preserve positive meanings of being Mexican—to positively redefine, or at least escape briefly, the often-negative meanings of being Mexican in New York. Yet transnational life also serves as a locus in which the positive and negative trajectories of assimilation develop. Mexicans experiencing downward mobility and racialization in New York carry this experience with them as they return to Mexico; so too the upwardly mobile bring their perspective to Ticuani. Because I argue that transnational life emerges from the migration and assimilation processes, in this chapter I offer a detailed look at how each of these works among Ticuaneanos, linking these processes to larger changes in Mexico-U.S. migration, to economic, ethnic, and racial hierarchies in New York, and to transformations in Ticuani and the Mixteca resulting from migration.

MEXICAN MIGRATION TO AND SETTLEMENT IN NEW YORK

During the 1990s, various nicknames were coined to describe Mexicans’ place in, or between, New York and Mexico: “Puebla York,” “New Yorkti-tlan,” and “Manhattan.” One Ticuaneño made and sold T-shirts showing the silhouette of the New York skyline at night over the name “Ticuani City.” Each of these names juxtaposes the two places in which many Mexican immigrants make their lives. The nicknames suggest both the presence of Mexicans as a visible part of New York’s ethnic landscape and their close links with their country of origin.

In 2000 the Mexican-origin population in New York City, including both immigrants and native-born Mexican Americans, was 275,000 to 300,000, about half of whom were between the ages of twelve and twenty-four. This figure represents a remarkable increase from 40,000 Mexicans in 1980 and 100,000 in 1990. Moreover, “Little Mexico” has sprung up in
various neighborhoods in New York: Jackson Heights in Queens; El Barrio, or Spanish Harlem, in Manhattan; Sunset Park and Williamsburg in Brooklyn; in the south Bronx; and even on Staten Island. Reports by the New York City Board of Education show that the number of new Mexican immigrant students jumped from 996 in 1990 to 5,850 in 1993. It dropped to 5,140 in 1996 and leveled off at 4,389 in 1999 and 4,285 in 2000. Mexicans have also become a presence in Hudson Valley towns like Newburgh and in New Jersey cities like Paterson in the north and Bridgeton in the south. In 2000, there were about 420,000 Mexicans in New York State and 700,000 to 750,000 in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut combined. Moreover, new Mexican-origin populations have sprung up all over the East Coast, from Georgia and the Carolinas to Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. Census experts predict that Mexicans will soon become the largest Latino minority on the East Coast; in some of these places, they already are.

The Mexican population in New York has grown faster than any other major ethnic group in the city—witness the 232 percent increase in births to Mexican mothers between 1988 and 1996, as reported by the New York City Department of Health—and further growth is probable. For at least the next twenty years, new entrants to Mexico's labor market will far outstrip the number of available jobs. Migration to the United States is likely to increase from nontraditional sending regions, thereby initiating new migration chains. And there is a growing tendency for migrants to stay longer or to settle permanently in the United States. Because of the size of Mexico's population—100,000,000 people in 2000, compared with, for example, the Dominican Republic's 8,000,000—it also seems likely that Mexicans will continue to account for a larger percentage of New York's Latino population. The Puerto Rican population (down to about 750,000 in 2000) is now falling, and the Dominican population (about 650,000 in 2000) is growing more slowly.

We can divide migration from Mexico to New York over the past sixty years into four phases, each implicating different forces that push and pull migrants. The first two phases involve migration mainly from the Mixteca region, a cultural and ecological zone that includes the contiguous parts of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Guerrero. Map 1 shows the Mixteca's location in Mexico. In surveys done in 1992 and in 2001–2, the Mixteca accounted for two-thirds of Mexican migrants to New York, just under half of whom came from Puebla. The first phase of migration, from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, involved individuals from a few towns in southern Puebla who already had relatives in New York. Indeed, we can date the onset of migra-
tion from this region to July 6, 1943, when Don Pedro and his cousin and brother (all from Ticuani) crossed the border. In an interview several years before he died, Don Pedro told me he remembered the date because it was "two days after your Independence Day." They had been living in Mexico City and had been trying to bribe their way into a labor contract to go to the United States when they were introduced to a New Yorker named Montesinos, who was vacationing in Mexico City. He drove them back to New York, put them up in a hotel, and helped them get jobs, which Don Pedro said were easy to get "because of the war."

The second phase, from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s, still involved a small and tight network, but it encompassed increasing numbers of people, including the first appreciable number of women. The attractions in New York included much higher wages than in Puebla and modern conveniences that most people could not even imagine, given that Ticuani had no electricity until the mid-1960s. Many "pioneer" migrants from Puebla were
seeking to escape political violence: Don Pedro had fled to Mexico City to escape violence in Ticuani when he met Montesinos.

The third stage of migration was the explosion of the late 1980s to mid-1990s, which arose from several factors. First, by the late 1980s, Mexico’s “lost decade” (“lost” in the sense that the economy did not grow) seemed sure to continue into the 1990s. Puebla was among the states hardest hit, experiencing a net contraction of its economy from 1981 to 1985. The Mixteca was one of the worst-off regions in Mexico. Mexicans’ loss of faith in Mexico’s economy coincided with U.S. employers’ identification of Mexicans as plentiful and diligent workers. By linking up with non-Mexican immigrant employer networks, Mexican immigrants became a preferred labor source. Because New York’s Mexican population had reached a critical mass by the late 1980s, the social and economic costs of migration decreased: new migrants could draw on the support of friends and relatives already there. Arguably most important was the amnesty provision of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, or IRCA, which enabled certain undocumented immigrants to apply for temporary residence and eventually become eligible for permanent resident status. Many were surprised that Mexicans were the ethnic group accounting for the second highest number of amnesty applications in New York City—about nine thousand, behind roughly twelve thousand from Dominicans.

The amnesty program profoundly changed Mexicans’ relationship to their hometowns. After years of being unable to leave the United States, migrants could return home at will and bring family members from Mexico to join them. The Mexican sociologist Sergio Cortés Sánchez has documented how tens of thousands of wives and children left the Mixteca and moved to New York after 1986.

The last phase of migration, which began in the late 1990s, differs from previous phases in several respects. First, by the late 1990s, many towns in the Mixteca region were mature migrant communities: that is, most people who wanted to leave had already done so, and those remaining behind were unlikely to migrate soon. The number of settled Mexican migrants, both legal and undocumented, who planned to remain permanently in New York increased. Hence migration from the Mixteca has now reached a kind of consolidated stability, and fewer new migrants are leaving the Mixteca. Second, quicker long-term settlement is becoming more common as a result of changes in the political economy of migration; these have been analyzed by the sociologists Douglas Massey and Nolan Malone and the Mexican anthropologist Jorge Durand. Leigh Binford at the University of Puebla has documented “accelerated migration,” by which the time from
first migration to whole-town migration is reduced from two or more decades to less than one, especially in urban areas in Puebla with little previous history of migration. He attributes this boom in migration to the collapse of local industries, such as construction, in the wake of Mexico’s 1994–95 peso crisis. Many of these migrants left in what I have elsewhere called a “backdraft” migration, whereby rural migrants to Mexican cities travel to the United States through contacts in their own or their parents’ rural hometowns. Hence, migrants crossing illegally are now less likely to engage in circular migration, a pattern in which the family stays in Mexico and the migrant returns. This change is partly an ironic but predictable response to tightened U.S. border controls and partly due to the logic of family reunification fostered by the amnesty program. These changes have also increased the migration of unaccompanied adolescents, including some of the teen migrants I discuss later. Third, the origins and destinations of migrants have changed. The East Coast has become an important site of Mexican immigration. Areas such as the states of Tlaxcala, Tabasco, Morelos, and Mexico City and its neighboring conurbation in the state of Mexico, Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl (or “Neza,” as migrants call it), are sending an increasing number of migrants. Some 11 percent of the immigrants in New York City are from Mexico City, and its population of twenty million promises more to come. Migrants from Neza now say that they live in “Neza York.”

Bifurcated Prospects and “In-Between” Status

Ticuan transnational life reflects Mexicans’ bifurcated fates in New York and their constant engagement with the city’s economic, educational, and racial hierarchies. This dynamic of incorporation is embodied in the immigrant analogy, which poses the question: Why are descendants of Black slaves in the United States in so much worse shape, on average, than the descendants of white immigrants, if both faced discrimination in the United States? The formulation of the question mistakenly equates the historical experiences of Blacks and immigrants and leads to the facile answer that Blacks have failed through their own lack of effort and moral shortcomings, whereas immigrants have prospered because of their strong work ethic and moral virtue. My grandparents suffered when they came here, goes the refrain, but we prospered. Why can’t Blacks and their descendants do the same?

The intellectual roots of the immigrant analogy can be traced to W. E. B. DuBois, who observed in the 1930s that poor Southern whites got a “pub-
lic, psychological wage” from being white that enabled them to feel superior to Blacks despite living in similarly miserable material conditions. When Irish immigrants started coming to the United States in significant numbers in the 1830s, they had much in common with Blacks. Both groups did dirty work for wealthier whites, both had been victimized by systematic prejudice, and they often lived side by side in the poorest parts of town. David Roediger and others use DuBois’s insight to analyze how the “Irish became white.” The Irish learned that to be full members of American society, it did not suffice to be “not black”; one also had to be “anti-black.” This attitude was fostered by the Catholic Church and the Democratic party.20

The phenomenon recurs among recent nonwhite immigrants, such as the second-generation Caribbeans studied by the sociologist Mary Waters.21 Mexicans in New York are just one of many new immigrant groups who must negotiate New York’s and America’s social and racial hierarchies, but Mexicans deserve special attention for several reasons. First, they are a growing population on the East Coast. Second, Mexicans do not fit into any obvious place in social and racial hierarchies. That is, in the United States most conceptions of race are based in America’s “original sin” of slavery, with blackness historically signaling that a group is unfit and whiteness that it is fit for full membership in society. The darker your skin, the lower your place in the hierarchy. But this categorization is complicated in New York City—and increasingly in other places too—by the messy realities of race and class. Blacks in New York share the most stigmatized position at the bottom of the hierarchy with a Latino group, Puerto Ricans, and there are also stronger degrees of white ethnicity and racialization, due in part to the presence of white immigrants such as Greeks, Russians, and Italians, that introduce further complications into membership. Many Puerto Ricans appear “black” and experience consonant levels of racial segregation and discrimination, but they also speak Spanish and are identified as Latinos. Racial categorization is further complicated by class. A visible middle class is emerging among Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos, especially Latino immigrants with higher educational levels and incomes, and those, such as Colombians, who tend to have lighter skin. Hence, many Mexican parents and their New York–born children wonder whether their futures will look more like the hard lives they associate with Puerto Ricans and Blacks or the upwardly mobile lives they associate with white ethnic immigrants and more prosperous Latino immigrants. Will Mexicans in New York become a marginalized, racialized minority or an upwardly mobile, incorporated ethnic group?
Segmented assimilation theory, as developed by Alejandro Portes, Ruben Rumbaut, Min Zhou and their colleagues, posits three possible paths for second-generation immigrants. They can assimilate to the white middle class by surrendering their ethnicity, taking the path of upward mobility posited by classic assimilation theory. They can assimilate to an oppositional, inner-city culture that constitutes what Paul Willis called “doomed resistance” and which Herb Gans feared would contribute to “second-generation decline” for children of immigrants. Youths in this culture drop out of the schools and the labor market they see as oppressive. This resistance seals their fate and creates a “rainbow underclass” composed of oppositional youth from many races. Or, finally, second-generation immigrants and their communities can use their ethnicity to circumvent discrimination and define themselves as different from both the white mainstream and their less successful inner-city counterparts.

This theory powerfully describes the fears and perceptions of first-generation parents and the reality for many second-generation Mexicans in New York. But it also leaves out important possibilities, for example the minority culture of mobility posited by Kathryn Neckerman and her colleagues, by which minorities develop nonoppositional ways to negotiate racism while being upwardly mobile. In its first incarnation, segmented assimilation theory also failed to give enough attention to gender. But if we consider minority cultures of mobility, and carefully splice racialization and gender processes into the explanation, this theory can help us understand the contemporary immigrant and second-generation experience.

The prospects for Mexican immigrants in New York are divergent. On the one hand, the Mexican-origin population showed alarming signs of social distress in the 1990 census compared to 1980. For example, Mexicans in New York went from having one of the highest per capita incomes among Latinos in New York in 1980, nearly equivalent to that of Cubans, to among the lowest in 1990; incomes rose only slightly in 2000. The decline was particularly pronounced for those without a high school education: it dropped from $17,495 in 1980 to $13,537 in 1990, a net drop in unadjusted dollars of 22.6 percent, constituting a more than 50 percent drop in per capita income, adjusted for inflation, for this group. The per capita income in 2000 of Mexican workers increased nominally, to $15,631 for men and $13,731 for women, but this gain represented no real increase in buying power over their 1990 earnings. Indeed, it placed them at least $2,000 behind their nominal earnings of twenty years earlier! Not surprisingly, a cohort analysis shows that fully 81 percent of men and 70 percent of Mexican American women were not upwardly mobile in their occupations during the 1980s.
A further sign of social distress is that in 1990 and again in the 2000 census Mexicans had the highest rate of sixteen- to nineteen-year-olds who were not in high school and had not graduated: 47 percent, compared with the next-highest groups, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, with 22 percent each in 1990.27 Perhaps most disturbing, in 2000 school enrollment rates for Mexican boys and girls dropped from 95 percent and 96 percent at ten to fourteen years to 25 percent and 31 percent among those aged eighteen to nineteen.28 This confirms my ethnographic findings that Mexicans drop out of school in large numbers by the end of the sophomore year.

It is not a tale of straight decline, however. In part, these distressing trends are artifacts of the high levels of Mexican immigration, especially teen immigration, during the 1980s and 1990s. The influx of young Mexican immigrants with low levels of education masks the progress of a significant minority of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, especially Mexican American women, in New York. Between 1980 and 1990, cohort analysis shows, Mexican Americans’ levels of education were improving steadily, though not dramatically. Nineteen percent of men and 31 percent of women were upwardly mobile in terms of occupational prestige and associated pay and conditions. An important path for mobility in the 1990s, especially for women, has been skilled secretarial and retail work. Indeed, some 34 percent of Mexican-heritage women (compared with 15 percent of Mexican-heritage men) worked in technical and administrative support positions, such as legal or medical secretary. This “pink-collar economy” of skilled support staff29 requires a high-school diploma and vocational training or an associate’s degree. Our informants and their immigrant parents see these jobs as real progress—“clean” jobs, “in an office,” with health insurance and paid vacations. Second-generation women were also nearly twice as likely as men to work in the professional and technical sector of the economy—17 percent versus 9 percent in the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

The contingency in Mexican prospects is linked to the way they enter New York’s labor market. Research on immigrants and labor markets indicates that the more “niched” an ethnic group is—the more highly concentrated in specific industries and jobs—the better for the group, because its members have greater access to job opportunities and training. Having a niche in a growing industry enables the group to advance itself. Even a niche in a shrinking industry allows at least some members of the group to use ethnic ties to move up or maintain their positions, especially if another ethnic group is leaving that industry.30 Mexicans in New York—like those in California—were among the least niched of all immigrants in 1990,31 and most niches in New York included only about 2 percent of the Mexican working population.
A wide dispersion across industries and jobs has negative long-term consequences for the group's advancement and development of human and social capital. Immigrant parents of Mexican Americans have few resources to help their children move up within their own industries, often being unable or reluctant to get them jobs in their own firms. In fact, many second-generation Mexicans we interviewed ended up getting their first jobs in the same industry as their parents, but often not in the same firm. When parents do help their children get jobs, they are the kinds of entry-level jobs that undocumented immigrants occupy.

Yet Mexicans were more niched in 1990 than they were in 1980, and some niche concentrations seem to have grown during the 1990s. In 1990, the census showed that 10 percent of Mexican men worked in restaurants,32 but this percentage has certainly grown, as can be shown by a quick glance into the kitchen of almost any New York restaurant. Ticuanenses have been established in the restaurant industry for a long time—some 25 percent of them worked in restaurants in 1993. Many Ticuanenses work in private dining clubs or hotels in midtown Manhattan and have advanced through the clubs' "internal labor market," gaining seniority and excellent salaries with benefits. As a result, they have gained a foothold in New York's middle class, enabling their children to graduate from high school and get some form of postsecondary education.

A larger niche for Ticuanenses has been work in Greek and other ethnic restaurants. In these cases, Ticuanense and other Mexican immigrants have been able to move from being busboys to cooks or waiters, with commensurate increases in pay, through what I call "fictive coethnicty"—an identification of employer and employees as fellow immigrants (and sometimes also as Christians), making them different from those born in the United States. The demand for Mexican instead of Greek (or Korean, or other group) labor stems from Greeks' (or Koreans') very high rates of self-employment in New York and the lack of cheap immigrant labor from these countries. Greek immigrants want to own restaurants, not work for others. During the 1990s, Greek employer networks sought Mexican employees, and Mexican immigrants became aware of this need, with the result that nearly every Greek restaurant now employs Mexicans. My research shows that Greek restaurants have offered Mexican immigrants an internal labor market—the chance to start with few skills and learn and advance on the job and in many cases to enjoy the "enclave effect," by which one earns more than one's educational level would predict.33 Such results do not show up in the census per capita income data because the earnings of the upwardly mobile segments of the Mexican community are outweighed by miserable wages of new workers.
The implication that the life chances of the second generation are partly determined by the economic niches entered by the first generation is borne out by comparing the restaurant and garment industries. My informants tell me that not only did workers make less money in garment factories, but the internal labor market there was also more constrained, offering fewer chances for advancement. Moreover, the garment industry is a shrinking industry and one in which other immigrant groups are already ahead of Mexicans in the queue to become the next owners. Roger Waldinger has shown that immigrant groups such as Koreans were able to advance to ownership despite a shrinking of the garment industry because of the massive exodus of Jewish and Italian owners during the 1970s and 1980s.34 But because Mexicans in the garment industry work for employers from different ethnic groups, they are easier to exploit. And because new groups such as Koreans are not leaving the industry, there are fewer opportunities to become business owners. The lower earnings among Mexicans in the garment than restaurant industry are also partly due to the fact that, among Mexicans, the former industry employs mainly women, while the latter employs mainly men. Hence, Mexicans whose networks direct them into the garment industry face a bleaker future than those who work in restaurants.

This quick evaluation of Mexicans’ economic prospects contradicts the predictions of much of the academic literature on immigrants. Many scholars approach immigrant economic life with the model of a primary labor market, in which some workers, usually in major companies, earn good salaries, benefits, and job security, while other workers, especially immigrants, women, and minorities, are channeled into the secondary labor market, with its poor wages, insecurity, and lack of benefits. Yet this two-part model reflects the labor market of the 1960s and 1970s more than today’s. Although most immigrants do start in the secondary labor market, a significant minority of immigrants and their children have been able to move beyond it. And there are intermediate markets, such as the pink-collar economy, that offer real opportunity to some children of immigrants. None of this denies that most children of Mexican immigrants will face a hard future; but it suggests that there are alternative routes to upward mobility.

The educational future of Mexicans and Mexican Americans appears bright for some and grim for many. The influx of younger migrants has made dropping out of school more common, in part because it has dramatically increased the size of the population at risk. Before the 1990s, young people generally stayed in Mexico until they were eighteen or twenty and then came to New York to work, not study. By this age they saw themselves as adults and were less likely to become involved in adolescent tribulations.
such as gangs. Today, Mexican youth encounter the schools, the sonidos (dance parties), and other youth arenas as adolescents and undergo a secondary socialization that can negatively affect their futures. Moreover, the dramatic influx of Mexicans into New York City’s schools has led to abuse from other groups. Teenage boys, especially, are likely to join gangs or negotiate a looser association known as “hangin’” with gangs, for their own protection. High dropout rates for Mexicans and Mexican Americans are at least partly attributable to these dynamics.

The presence of a growing percentage of urban migrants, especially from Mexico City, may have exacerbated these problems. While migrants from Mexico City tend to be more educated (with eight or nine years of education instead of five or six for rural immigrants) and more accustomed to an urban environment, they also seem more likely to come to New York without their parents and join less tightly organized communities in New York, with fewer resources and less adult supervision. Moreover, some teen migrants have prior experience in Mexico with drugs and gangs; some may even bring their gangs with them. The increase in gang activity among Mexican youths might also damage the public perception of Mexicans in New York as diligent workers and conscientious students, closing opportunities for them.

Mexicans’ ambiguous locations in New York’s racial and ethnic hierarchies make it possible to analyze the process of racialization as it is happening, when outcomes are still contingent, and see how it is linked to transnational life. These processes can be observed in urban social spaces, such as schools, parks, and neighborhoods, that Mexicans occupy along with other ethnic groups. Many are “emergent” spaces, constituted ephemerally, as when groups of Mexicans informally occupy a park on a Sunday for their basketball league or rent a club for a dance. Their occupation of that space makes it Mexican or Ticanense for that time, asserting what William Flores, René Benmayor, and Renato Resaldo might call Mexican (or Ticanense) “cultural citizenship.” This claim to space sometimes occasions ethnic antagonism from other groups, but more often there is ethnic accommodation, or coexistence. But even here, Mexicans sometimes attribute particular cultural meanings to their gathering. Cultural citizenship theory posits such claims of belonging as being made with respect to a dominant white society; here, they are usually made with respect to Blacks or other Latinos. They create a racialized meaning even in the absence of racial or ethnic confrontations. They also help create a context for transnational life because these same events are used to reinforce attachment to Tican and Padre Jesús.
New York City’s great diversity means that most immigrant groups or other groups, including Puerto Ricans, do not constitute a majority of the population, even in “their own” neighborhoods or in immigrant majority areas. So, although many Chinese, Dominicans, West Indians, or Puerto Ricans do make up a majority in their neighborhoods, most other groups—including Ecuadorans, Pakistanis, Indians, and Koreans—experience themselves as being both foreign and a minority among minorities. And many, if not most, Puerto Ricans, for example, live in neighborhoods where they are not a majority.

Mexican locations in social and ethnic hierarchies have been reinforced by Mexicans’ geographic dispersal in New York City, which was surprisingly high until the mid 1990s. Hence most Mexicans in New York experienced being Mexican as being a minority, usually among other minorities. The “Mexican” neighborhoods that began to emerge during the 1990s are not as fully “Mexican” in population as East Los Angeles or the Pilsen District in Chicago. Mexicans in Mexican neighborhoods in New York are usually not a majority of the population, although they may be the largest minority and have a strong public presence.

These points are illustrated by maps 2 and 3. Map 2a shows the numbers of Puerto Ricans per census tract in the year 2000. Map 2b shows the change from 1990 to 2000 in numbers of Mexicans per census tract. As can be seen, many of the census tracts and neighborhoods experiencing the largest influx of Mexicans during the 1990s had much larger numbers of Puerto Ricans. Map 3 shows the percentage change in Mexican population per census tract between 1990 and 2000. The map shows about twenty census tracts throughout the city that were more than 20 percent Mexican and a much larger number with lower percentages. If we focus on Sunset Park, an important, emerging Little Mexico in Brooklyn (which is just south and west of the two large white areas, a cemetery and a park, in the lower lefthand corner of map 3), the census tells us that within the neighborhood’s main zip code (11232), Mexicans constituted only 13 percent of the total population and 20 percent of the Latino population, while Puerto Ricans made up 22 percent of the total population and 38 percent of the Latino population. This settlement pattern has very frequently placed Mexicans in neighborhoods with large numbers of Puerto Ricans. Often, the Mexican immigrant experience has been that of newcomers in a neighborhood understood to be Puerto Rican.

Given this high degree of overlap in areas of settlement, Mexicans often seek energetically to differentiate their children’s futures from the social
distress of the Puerto Rican community they see around them. In this context, the immigrant analogy is not a theoretical lens but rather a ready explanation of the fate of Puerto Ricans in New York, and a reassurance to Mexican immigrants there that they and their children will not turn out as they believe Puerto Ricans have—too assimilated, too Americanized, ignorant of their culture, and dependent on welfare and crime. They fear the Puerto Rican present will become their Mexican future. I often hear the classic statement “Not all Puerto Ricans are like that—I have Puerto Rican
MAP 2b. Change in number of Mexicans in each census tract, New York City, 1990–2000. (Thanks to John Mollenkopf of CUNY’s Urban Research Center for producing and generously sharing these maps.)

MAP 3 (FACING PAGE). Mexicans as percentage of population, by census tract, New York City, 1990 and 2000. (Thanks to John Logan of Brown University for producing and generously sharing this map.)
friends who are good people—but many of them are like this.” This formula is not a simple repetition of the contemporary American custom of always making an individual exception to any disparaging ethnic or racial generalization. Rather, it reflects two dimensions of Mexican–Puerto Rican relations. While Mexicans fear that the Puerto Rican present could be their future, they also have had very positive experiences with Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in New York. They often feel indebted to Puerto Ricans who helped them when they came to New York, back when few Mexicans lived there. Many Mexicans have married Puerto Ricans or benefited from the extended family networks and social customs of Puerto Ricans. For example, Doña Selena recalled of a Puerto Rican neighbor: “Doña Silvia took care of our girls for years, we worked and she took care of them, she lived below us.” First-generation Mexicans tend to value the help of their Puerto Rican friends but to lament and fear the social distress Puerto Ricans as a group are thought to experience. In imagining a different future for their own children, Mexicans use the readily available American tool, the immigrant analogy, to posit a racialized difference between themselves and Puerto Ricans.

I observed this pattern of regular engagement and intermittent conflict with Puerto Ricans in several Brooklyn neighborhoods with many Ticanenses. In one neighborhood where a sizable Mexican group emerged during the 1990s, they lived among Bangladeshis—whom they called “Hindus”—and other Latinos, especially Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. I saw or heard of no serious conflict with the Bangladeshis, and little with the Dominicans, but the young Mexicans did talk about their victimization by Puerto Ricans. Another neighborhood included Italians, Hasidic Jews, and some Latinos, among them Puerto Ricans. Here again, I was never told of serious conflict with Italians or Hasidic Jews, but stories of Puerto Rican aggression were plentiful. A third neighborhood consisted mainly of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and African Americans, and here the dominant stories of conflict involved African American and Puerto Rican youth gangs, or crews, from the nearby housing projects. It seemed that the Bangladeshis and Hasidic Jews inhabited a kind of parallel universe in the same physical space as the Mexicans but had little to do with them, while the Puerto Rican and Mexican universes overlapped. For example, walking through these neighborhoods with Mexican immigrant or second-generation friends, I saw that they rarely greeted any of their neighbors or were acknowledged by them. Even second-generation store or restaurant owners did not seem to know those living on their immediate block; the public they served was a Mexican one that came from other parts of town to transact business.
Given how much Puerto Rican–Mexican conflict is discussed here, I should state that I do not think there is anything essential about being Mexican or Puerto Rican that makes these groups more susceptible to conflict, nor about being Italian, “Hindu,” Hasidic, or white that makes them less so. I think the higher apparent rates of conflict with Puerto Ricans arise from the sudden appearance of a large Mexican population settling in Puerto Rican areas of the city and attending the same schools, combined with perceived workforce competition and a common language other than English. If these conditions applied equally to other groups, I would expect similar conflicts. Howard Finderhughes documents how some of the Italian teens he talked to in the late 1980s and early 1990s purposely targeted Mexicans (as well as Blacks and Puerto Ricans) in an attempt to show their toughness to their peers and to make sure their neighborhoods stayed Italian. The two neighborhoods he worked in, Gravesend and Bensonhurst, were at the time getting small but more visible concentrations of Mexicans in areas where none had been before. My focus on Puerto Rican–Mexican conflict results from its frequent appearance in stories from my young informants and from my sense that this conflict in particular served a strategic function in Mexican narratives of migration and settlement in New York.

The second generation’s engagement with the immigrant analogy is more complex for a variety of reasons, including the fact that this group has grown up more immersed in New York’s racial hierarchies and in its public schools, parks, and other social spaces. They are likely to have Puerto Rican friends and to identify with Blacks and Puerto Ricans. Most Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks attend schools that are mostly Black or Latino. This tendency to identify with Blacks and Puerto Ricans as oppressed minorities—which fits with the concept of a rainbow underclass—competes with the tendency to adopt the immigrant-analogy position of their parents, in which Mexican is better.

The first and second generations also engage racialization and the immigrant analogy in different ways in the labor market. The first generation’s experience in the labor market usually engages racialization through what one can call “doubly bounded solidarity”—bounded on one side by not being white and on the other by not being Black. While many Korean, Greek, Italian, or native-born American employers explicitly or implicitly compare Mexican immigrants favorably with native-born Blacks and Puerto Ricans, they also see the Mexicans as immigrants like themselves (or their parents or grandparents). This comparison can lead an employer to identify strongly with the employee, emphasizing their common ground and their shared difference from native minorities. Even in the
most exploitative work relationships. Mexican immigrants’ willingness to work for lower wages is understood by both sides to be a mark of their stronger work ethic compared with U.S.-born minorities. Even when Mexican workers say they are exploited, unlike native-born employees they also point proudly to their desire to work hard.

The second generation’s experiences in the labor market are more diverse. Their conditions of incorporation yield both significant upward mobility and frustrated prospects. About a fifth of the second-generation boys and a third of the girls are upwardly mobile in terms of occupation and education; the rest are showing little progress, and a small number are slipping backward. These numbers are roughly consistent with the results of large-scale studies using the census in California. In highly racialized contexts such as New York, such a pattern of limited mobility often leads to pressures on young people to reject American institutions like school.

The growing minority of upwardly mobile second-generation workers has a less highly charged engagement with racialization than do their parents or other second-generation youth. For example, many second-generation college students hold decently paid part-time jobs in work-study or in retail companies like the Gap, Borders Books, and Bed, Bath and Beyond. These jobs offer what Victoria Malkin incisively describes as a “Benetton” context—one in which their ethnicity is cool and chic, not racialized and stigmatized. This is an especially important pathway for young men who can take advantage of it, because their alternatives lie in factories, restaurants, or other sectors of the service economy with limited prospects. Young women, who are more likely to work as professionals than their male counterparts, are also likely to experience their Mexicanness as having a positive or neutral effect on their status at work.

Yet most second-generation men and women are stuck in jobs offering similar pay and conditions to those of their parents. Some parents of second-generation children who do badly in school drag their children to work in garment factories beside them, to dissuade them from working young and dropping out of school. Although the children dislike the factory work, many end up following their parents into this type of job. Some even contrast their immigrant parents’ good jobs with their own limited chances. One young man, who dropped out of college and now works for a very low wage in the kitchen of a large institution, spoke with envy of his father’s job as a cook at a fancy restaurant. He said that his father could not help him get a job there, partly because they wanted to hire only immigrants, not U.S.-born workers. Thus, among the upwardly mobile segment of the second generation, Mexicanness is more likely to carry a positive connotation of
ethnicity in the labor market, whereas among those who are stuck or downwardly mobile, it often carries a stigmatized racial connotation.

The engagement with racialization can vary at different times of day and in different contexts. Consider a Mexican immigrant working in a factory that offers little chance to advance, whose Korean boss pays bad wages and yells at his Mexican workers, hiring them only because he can pay them one-third what he would have to pay Korean workers.45 Now imagine this immigrant’s home in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, where large numbers of new Mexican arrivals are seen as unfair competition and some are targeted by youth gangs. For maximum contrast, consider a second Mexican working in a much larger Greek restaurant in which he can expect to advance and where his employer sees the two of them as sharing the virtues of hardworking immigrants. Next, put him in a white Italian neighborhood with few Mexicans, who are seen as fellow immigrants and Catholics, struggling as their own grandparents did. The first immigrant is likely to be called “Mexico” as he walks on the street and to be or at least feel threatened, while the second is likely to go about his daily routine and be left alone. Being “Mexican” for the first one has a completely different meaning than for the second.

Similarly, second-generation youths born or raised in the United States experience their Mexicanness differently depending on where they live, hang out, and go to school. Imagine the son of the first immigrant above, living in a largely Puerto Rican neighborhood where youth gangs pick on Mexicans and attending a school where various youth gangs, especially other Mexican gangs, challenge him. Imagine the son of the second immigrant in the Italian or Greek neighborhood, and put him in a school that is academically stronger, where Mexicans have not become a target. The life chances of the second youth are better than the first, all other things being equal, and the meaning of Mexicanness for the two of them will be very different. (Of course, if the Mexicans begin to settle in large numbers in Italian or Greek areas and come to be seen as invaders or underbidding competitors, such positive scenarios will be harder to imagine.)

Mexicans encounter an in-between status, where they do not fit easily into any one category, in a somewhat different way within larger American institutions. For example, the American Catholic Church has been both slow and eager to embrace Mexicans. While some forward-thinking parish priests and administrators pushed to have a Jesuit brother, Joel Magallan, brought up to New York to organize Asociación Tepuyac—the first pan-New York Mexican religious organization—in 1997, my informants report that the larger Catholic Church has been slower to respond. When trying
to persuade archdiocesan officials of the importance of Tepeyac's mission in ministering to Mexican Catholics in New York. I have always been politely received. But there is a perception in the church, described to me by priests and laypersons alike, that Mexican parishioners' needs can be taken care of by "Mr. Rodriguez, who speaks Spanish." Mr. Rodriguez is usually a Puerto Rican layman with years of service in the parish. The perception behind this statement is that language is the only issue. The administrators fail to understand that, as predominantly U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans face different issues from the mainly undocumented Mexican members of the Church. This is one example of how Mexicans' in-between status complicates their position in New York.

For Mexicans in New York, engagement with racialization, the immigrant analogy, and segmented assimilation together provide a compelling impetus to participate in transnational life. A person's attitude toward and involvement in transnational life depend to some degree on how he or she is doing in the United States. An upwardly mobile person is likely to see the engagement with transnational life and return trips to Mexico as positive. Someone on a downward trajectory or struggling in New York is more likely to see transnational life as negative or mixed. Returning to Mexico, for instance, may represent a kind of exportation back to Mexico of the problems with assimilation in the United States. Hence assimilation, far from being incompatible with transnational life, greatly affects it. And immigrants' experiences in New York also shape and influence the transnational life of their hometowns in Mexico.

THE MIXTECA:
TRANSFORMED BY AND ANCHORING TRANSNATIONAL LIFE

"We build houses that nobody lives in," the workmen tell me. Like many poor Tucuanenses, these workmen toil in one of the few thriving industries in the Mixteca: building houses for migrants in New York who use the houses for a few weeks' vacation every year or two. Indeed, the construction of empty houses has been extensive, and the nearest available building sites to the center of town are now more than two miles down the main road. Land prices in the center of Tucani are said to be higher than in the city of Puebla. And these houses are not the old adobe houses that were common when I first went to Tucani in the late 1980s. They are huge, built of cinderblock, with two floors, large foyers and windows, a patio, and amenities
unimaginable to Ticutanense locals. Some even have American-style pitched roofs instead of the flat ones typical of the Mixteca. (Similar changes in housing construction were noted in Swedish and Italian sending communities during the last wave of migration.) Being in Ticutani during the Feast of Padre Jesús, when the migrants return, and afterward, when they have left, feels like being in two different towns: the first is a bustling town where young people dance late into the night, families eat and laugh together, and money flows, and the second is a nursery and nursing home where the young and old await the return of their relatives in New York.

Driving from the city of Puebla to Ticutani, one sees how the Mixteca region is both marginalized and transnationalized. Descending from the mountains that separate the Mixteca from the rest of Puebla, one finds that the roads are in worse repair, vegetation is sparser, and the mountains are covered with sere shrubs; yet, numerous travel agencies list prices for flights to New York, signs advertise videos and cell phones, and parabolic television antennas—which the locals call “metal flowers”—sprout from the roofs of the houses. Internet cafes have popped up, linking migrants and stay-at-homes by e-mail. As the Mixteca drives people north, technology moves in to keep them in touch with their relatives who stay behind.

The changes caused by migration have transformed Ticutani and the Mixteca and affected the dynamics of politics and generation in several ways. First, migration juxtaposes new and old forms of social organization, exacerbates inequalities, and creates new possibilities, including transnational ones, for political and social action. Second, the nature of transnational dynamics changes as the process of migration itself matures. Hence, these transnational ties are durable—meaning that they persist long enough to produce further identifiable social patterns that last at least a decade. But they are not necessarily permanent, and evidence suggests that some are attenuating. Relations between those in the sending communities and their relatives abroad go through three stages. In the “migration” phase, migration involves most of the town’s population. In the “settlement” phase, large numbers of migrants settle in the new country, and influence flows in both directions. In the “consolidation” phase, as local out-migration decreases and settlement in the United States increases, new kinds of relationships emerge. Ticutani is now entering the consolidation phase. It still evidences a great deal of transnational activity, despite a decrease in outmigration, because of the established links between those settled in New York and those in Ticutani. This three-phase approach draws on the work of Robert Ostergren and of Douglas Massey and his colleagues on how the migration process itself matures but goes beyond that analysis.
FIGURE 1. Two views of Ticuani. Top: view of the chapel on the hill, circa 1920; note the preponderance of adobe houses (photo by Adan Lazaro Fortoso). Bottom: the same view, 2004; note the two- and three-story houses (photo by author).
to examine the effects on transnational life—the relations between those in Mexico and in the United States. I begin with a brief history of the Mixteca and move through Ticuani’s demographic, social, and economic changes with the goal of conveying a palpable sense of the tensions and changes underpinning transnational life.

Introduction to the Mixteca

During my first visit to the Mixteca, in 1988, I stared in awe from the bus window at the cactuses standing taller than telephone poles. The Mixteca is hot, mountainous, dry, and poor. The population has lower levels of education than the rest of Puebla, and a higher percentage live at or near subsistence level. Agriculture, the main livelihood, is singularly unsuited to the Mixteca’s dry climate and has spurred outmigration, first to Puebla, Veracruz, and Mexico City, and since then to the United States. According to Don Andrés, a former municipal president and teacher in Ticuani, “Farming did not give you enough to live on, never mind to live decently, and from that surges the necessity to...go to the United States.” Indigenous industries in the Mixteca, such as the weaving of palm mats, have declined since the 1960s. Raising livestock, especially goats suited to the terrain, can be profitable but requires significant wealth to purchase the animals. The marginalization of the Mixteca both contributes to outmigration and is exacerbated by it.

Socially and politically, the Mixteca is syncretic and local, and these conditions have affected the emergence of transnational life. By syncretic, I mean that some old forms of organization persist even while new ones are superimposed on them. The Mixteca shows a fascinating mix of pre-Columbian and pre-Mexican indigenous practices and modern ones, arising from attempts by first the Spanish and then the Mexican government to “modernize the Indians.” Thus two primary forms of local governance coexist: the cacique system and what Eric Wolf has called the “closed corporate peasant community system,” also known as the council of elders system. Caciquismo as a form of political organization emerged in steps in the Mixteca, first as the Spanish imposed it on more collective, indigenous forms of social organization and then as the Mexican state and the PRI, the long-dominant political party, used the caciques as building blocks. Caciques are local political bosses who derive their power from brokering relations between the community and the outside world and by controlling both the use of force and access to outside resources. In the closed corporate peasant community, authority and honor derive from participating in the rotating system of religious-political office holding (called the cargo
system, in which all honorable men must take their turn at leadership, overseeing such events as the feast of the patron saint. The closed corporate peasant community survived the destruction of higher-level, pre-Columbian forms of political and social organization to coexist to various degrees in Mexico, especially in areas in Puebla, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, with a significant indigenous population. The cacique system and the closed corporate community often reinforce each other, but they come into conflict in Ticiani transnational politics.

The Mixteca's localism is manifest in rivalries between neighboring villages. Competition between Ticiani and El Ganado has at times been particularly fierce. Local lore, an academic history of Spanish settlements in the 1500s, and outside observers tell the same story. Ticiani was a point of passage for indigenous peoples, including Chinantecs, Olmecs, and Mixtecs. The Spanish strategically built a new settlement adjacent to it, in El Ganado, in order to impose Spanish religion and governance. This new, artificially created community caused friction and resentment. The enduring rivalry between El Ganado and Ticiani comes out in Ticianinenses' referring to Ganadenses as "immigrants," "more white-skinned," "Spanish," and "rich," while they describe themselves as "more indigenous, more authentic," with more "pure blood." Ganadenses say that Ticianinenses speak Spanish with odd indigenous intonations. Differences in the economy and customs of the towns were also described in 1958 by Denise O'Brien, who noted, among other observations, how few bicycles Ticiani had. Recalling those years, Leobardo told me he and his friends used to run after the man with the first bicycle in the town, so arid were they by it. O'Brien noted that everyone in Ticiani made their living by farming, whereas El Ganado had many merchants. Ganadenses were lighter-skinned, had European names like Blanca Rosa (white rose), and had disposable incomes sufficient to buy things like bicycles, which Ticianinenses did not have. Such historical differences shed some light on why Ticiani transnational life is more collectively oriented, whereas those at the center of El Ganado transnational life tend to be successful businessmen in New York (who still attempt to use communal practices to raise funds).

This rivalry is reflected in how Ticianinenses explain the meaning of the Dance of the Tecuanis, which is practiced throughout the Mixteca region, though local interpretations and variations are myriad. Tecuanis, also spelled Tecuan, means "tiger" in Nahuatl, an indigenous language that until recent years was widely used as a first language in the Mixteca region. According to state anthropological museums, the consistent theme in the dance is that the peasants, represented by dancing youths dressed in masks and traditional hats, seek and after several tries kill the tiger or jaguar that
has been killing their farm animals. In Ticuani, there is another interpretation, which is that the peasants are, according to Leobardo, "making fun of the Spaniards . . . by dressing in old, torn clothes and really big coats." Hence, by dressing like Spanish dandies, but in worn-out clothes, the Ticuanenses are making fun of those with power. Moreover, the jaguar (who is now also joined by a wolf, la loba) is no longer a threat to the Ticuanenses but rather protects the town against outward menaces, be they thieves, other animals, or Spaniards. This inversion of the story speaks to the rivalry between Ticuani and El Ganado and the use of images of authentic, indigenous people versus immigrant Spaniards.

The Mixteca's syncretism and localism underpin transnational life. They provide compelling communal practices that migrate with its migrants. These include religious and cultural events for Ticuani migrants and their children; especially important for the second generation are the Antorcha and the Dance of the Tecuanis. They also include political practices, such as collecting funds in New York for Ticuani communal projects. At the same time, the local power of the cacique often conflicts with the "external" power exerted by migrants in the United States, who feel they have earned authority, according to the logic of the closed corporate peasant community, by their sacrifice and communal labor. Juxtaposing these two forms of governance and honor creates a dynamic tension that alters the possibilities for thought and action in Ticuani politics, helping to create a transnational political community.

Migration and Durable Transnational Life

How profoundly Ticuani had changed by the mid-1990s can be gauged by how its main coyote—a smuggler of undocumented immigrants to the United States—responded to my asking him how business was. Was he bringing many people north? He laughed: What people? Everyone in Ticuani had already left. He was expanding his markets in Oaxaca and Guerrero. As we stood in the zocalo after the Feast was over, his point was clear. Around us were old men and women and young children, some with their mothers, but almost no one of working age. The extensive social, economic and demographic changes, and the decrease in the number of new migrants, make Ticuani a mature migrant community, subject to conflicts and inequalities that are played out transnationally.

Migration from the Mixteca over the last twenty years has reached levels comparable to those in classic sending states such as Zacatecas, which have had high levels of migration for more than sixty years, with similar changes in social structure and transnational life. Ticuani's population
dropped from about 4,000 in 1958 and 4,600 in 1970 to about 3,800 in 1980, 2,500 in 1990, and 1,800 or fewer in 2000. Ticuani lost 38 percent of its population during the 1980s, and 28 percent of that already depleted population left during the 1990s. Don Andrés, speaking of all Ticuanenses, whether in Ticuani or New York (including New York–born children) told me in 2000 that “we who live here permanently are like 45 percent or 40 percent—and 60 percent live outside the town.” A survey I conducted in February 1992 showed that 47 percent of all Ticuanenses (U.S.- or Mexico-born) resided in New York City and 48 percent in Ticuani itself. That Ticuani only lost about 700 migrants during the 1990s, compared with about 1,300 during the 1980s, suggests that its potential migrant population was virtually exhausted.

Telephone records from Ticuani also indicate its orientation toward New York. Before the mid-1990s, when direct dialing service was installed, all calls had to be routed through an operator using a switchboard. International calls involved waiting hours for an operator in Mexico City. For me, this meant that my wife and I could talk for twenty minutes a week after waiting three hours for the call to go through. The silver lining for me was that these calls were logged by hand in the local telephone operators’ notebook, so that I was able to count how many calls went to which area codes and draw inferences about migrant destinations. During a typical month in 1992, there were roughly ten times as many calls placed to the United States as to all long-distance destinations in Mexico—288 versus 28. Of these, 209 were to New York City and 36 to other parts of the New York metropolitan area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut).

The 1986 Amnesty

The amnesty provision of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) facilitated the conduct of transnational life by making it cheaper, faster, and easier to travel between Ticuani and New York. Undocumented immigrants could legalize their status if they met certain conditions, and many Ticuanenses did. Table 1, opposite, shows the legal status of migrants on their first and their most recent trip to the United States. Whereas 66 percent of these migrants report being undocumented on their first trip back to Mexico, only 16.3 percent were undocumented on their most recent trip. A further 23.5 percent used a tourist visa on their first trip to the United States; assuming that most of these overstayed their visas, roughly 89.6 percent of the sample were either undocumented or likely to become so on their first trip. Of the migrants with legal status, 41.8 percent
TABLE 1. Migrants’ U.S. Immigration Status on First Trip and Most Recent Trip to Ticuani

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<th>First Trip</th>
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<th>Most Recent Trip</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documented</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourist visa</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. citizen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covered by 1986 amnesty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>115</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
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had legalized their status through amnesty. Another 36.7 percent did so through other means, yielding a return migrant population that was 78.5 percent documented and 18.5 percent undocumented.

The legal status afforded by IRCA allowed migrants to travel between Mexico and the United States without paying a coyote or running the risks of an illegal crossing. They could plan visits without risking losing their jobs in New York if they were caught reentering the United States or if they stayed in Ticuani longer than planned because of the uncertainty of when they would next be able to return. “Having papers” has also changed the psychological orientation of both migrants and stay-at-homes. The mother of one Committee member told me, with a smile, that having papers now gave her son no excuse for not visiting her. Her son said that with his papers, he would return more often, and that it made sense to “invest in a video camera” with which he could tape the Feast and watch the tapes in New York with his Ticuanense friends.

Yet amnesty has spurred outmigration that in the long run weakens local transnational life. The single biggest jump in outmigration from Ticuani came during the amnesty program,\(^57\) much of it because children of migrants were able to join their parents in the United States. Ticuani’s middle school opened in 1981 with 139 students, all of them born in Ticuani. By January 2000, 63 percent of the school’s students came from outside Ticuani—6 percent born in the United States, 57 percent born in other towns in the Mixteca. The exodus from Ticuani means that its middle-
school enrollment numbers must be maintained by bringing children in from elsewhere. School records indicate that during the peak years of student outmigration, between 1993 and 1998, 24 percent of the students left in the middle of the year—almost all, according to teachers, to join their parents in New York. More students left to rejoin their parents during the summer, after the school year had ended. And 84 of 96 students surveyed in 2000 had family members in the United States, making them also likely to migrate. The director of Ticuani’s secondary and high schools told me that one of his classes lost 25 of 60 students one summer during the amnesty program. Their departure triggered an investigation by state educational officials in the capital of Puebla, who suspected that school leaders had been stealing funds allotted for students who did not exist. Yet the same story of family reunification was repeated all throughout the Mixteca during the late 1980s to mid-1990s.

This surge in youth migration, including teen migration, to New York is apparent in the increasing numbers of young Mexicans coming legally to New York in the 1990s compared with the 1980s, as measured by Joe Salvo of the New York City Department of City Planning, using Office of Immigration Statistics data. These statistics enumerate only those Mexicans coming as legal immigrants to New York (not as tourists), and hence do not accurately reflect the magnitude of the increase in this population, which by some measures is more than 90 percent undocumented. But these numbers are useful because my ethnographic work indicates that many youths who saw their friends and relatives going legally to New York followed them without benefit of legal status. The exodus of spouses and children from the Mixteca after amnesty was both legal and undocumented, with the latter, larger flow driven in part by the former. Hence, we can take the changes in these relatively small numbers of legal entrants as proxies for what was happening in the larger population. During the 1980s, an average of 394 Mexicans came legally to New York each year (a total of 3,938), and 75 were age twenty-five or under. During the 1990s, an average of 772 per year (a total of 7,718) were legally admitted each year, and 387 were age twenty-five or under. Hence the percentage of legally admitted immigrants under age twenty-five increased from 19 percent in the 1980s to 50 percent in the 1990s.

Amnesty also plays a causal role in an argument developed in this book that the increase in Mexican youth immigration, especially teen migrants, increased anti-Mexican sentiment and supported Mexican gang formation, especially during the mid-1990s. The numbers of Mexican youths under age twenty-five coming into New York each year increased from an aver-
age of 183 for 1990–91 to 567 for 1992–94, precisely the time when my informants told me that teen migrants were coming in large numbers to New York and affecting intra-Mexican relations and their relations with other ethnic groups. The numbers fell to just under 400 per year between 1995 and 1999. Much of this bump can be traced to those youths admitted through the amnesty programs, whose numbers went from zero in 1990 and 1991 to an average of 256 for 1992–94, and back to zero or one for 1995–99. These statistics tend to confirm the impressions of my informants that many undocumented youths followed their legally admitted friends and relatives north.

Transnational Life and Changes in Ticuani

As a mature migrant community, Ticuani has moved from the migration phase through settlement to the consolidation phase, which supports transnational life in several ways. First, productive labor in New York, where people earn money, is separated from “reproductive” labor, in Ticuani, where babies are born and raised until they are reunited with parents or migrate on their own. Don Andrés described this division of labor this way: Ticuani consists of those who are “less than fifteen years of age and older than fifty years of age,” while Ticuanenses between the “ages of fifteen and fifty years go to the U.S. . . . The majority of the youths in their productive years, those who are strong and healthy and ambitious to make their life a better life, they go to the United States. The few that are here, we who are between twenty and fifty years old, well, we are ones who in one way or another have a profession that enables us to survive here, in this pueblo, no?” In 1993, children aged one to fourteen accounted for only 4.5 percent of the population in New York but for 33.6 percent of the Ticuani population. Similarly, the elderly accounted for only 2.7 percent of Ticuanenses in New York but for 15.6 percent of those in Ticuani. On the other hand, among Ticuanenses in New York, 45.0 percent of the total population are in the 25–40 age group, and 27.0 percent in the 41–60 age group. Among those in Ticuani, only 19.5 percent of the population are in the 25–40 age group, and another 16.4 percent are in the 41–60 age group.

Migration has also altered the previous class structure beyond recognition. Whereas every family in Ticuani in the 1950s was linked to agriculture, Ticuani in the mid-1990s showed roughly equal percentages of campesinos—13.4 percent—and professionals—11.8 percent, the result of the outmigration of the former and the strong demand for the latter. Of the rest, 67.7 percent of the population was in either the “homemaker” or “stu-
dent or pre-school age" occupational category (as compared with 21.7 percent in New York). Remittances from the United States pay for the teachers and doctors for the young and elderly who remain behind. Among the local professionals, Ticuani even has its own "transnational architect" who flies to New York to sketch out new house designs at kitchen tables, charging upwards of US$60,000 for design and construction of a Ticuani house. He himself is the result of another migration-induced pattern, wherein younger brothers remaining in Mexico are supported in their professional studies by their migrant elder brothers.

Teachers have been affected especially strongly. Teaching has traditionally provided stable, professional employment in rural areas, and teachers have played central roles in organizing social, cultural, and political life, often countering the political power of the local caciques. Few teachers migrated from the Mixteca before the 1980s, but many have left since, as their buying power has been eroded so much that they cannot afford modest luxuries, such as meat or a car. Teachers have experienced this erosion while watching their former students, whose education seldom extends beyond the sixth grade, return from the United States flush with money to supervise the building and lavish furnishing of their new houses. Many teachers have followed their students north, first as "target earners" intending to return once they have earned a certain sum of money (for example, enough for a house), but later becoming long-term migrants. State teachers' union officials told me that in the Mixteca in the early 1990s, 20 percent of the teachers in the whole region and 100 percent of those in small ranchos had migrated to the United States, as opposed to about 5 percent in the state of Puebla as a whole. This meant that 50 to 80 percent of ranch schools were closed at some time during the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, a black market in teaching posts emerged as migrant teachers sold their jobs for limited terms for about seven hundred dollars in the early 1990s, sometimes to unqualified people who could not get a position otherwise. By the late 1990s, the state of Puebla stopped renewing "migrant leaves" for teachers, forcing many living in the United States to decide whether to stay permanently or return to Puebla.

These changes have affected Ticuani transnational life in two ways. First, they have cemented a natural partnership between the teachers in Ticuani and the Committee in New York, because a number of the teachers have had direct contact with the Committee. Both groups must negotiate with the cacique and his elite. The teachers do this as middle-class Ticuani leaders, and the Committee does it as an alternative, transnational power structure. For example, the teacher who defeated the cacique's candidate in
the 1998 municipal election had previously taken leave to earn money in New York, working with the Committee and developing close relations with other Ticuanense leaders in New York whose support was crucial to his campaign. Second, several teachers who had taken leave decided to stay in New York. Tomás Maestro told me, “The union [in Mexico] told me, ‘No more, you come back or you stay there, but we will not give you any more leave.’” With his employer in New York offering to sponsor his application for U.S. residency, he decided to stay. From New York, Tomás has become a central player in Ticuani’s public life, hosting Ticuani’s priest and municipal president when they visited New York for Ticuani meetings and advising the Committee on a strategy for negotiations with the municipio. The migration-induced changes that pushed the teachers north, and the teachers’ presence in New York, have in turn spurred further transnational activity and conflict.

The Transnationalization of Ticuani’s Economy

That once economically secure teachers have begun migrating in large numbers is one sign that a remittance economy has emerged in Ticuani and the Mixteca. Remittances are the largest source of income in the region, exceeding even the state funds allocated for the area, according to local politicians. Indeed, almost every peso spent in the Mixteca can be linked to someone washing dishes in New York. Corn vendors make change from thick wads of bills composed of both multicolored pesos and greenbacks. Using postal money orders as a base, I estimated that US$3 million to US$5 million came into Ticuani each year in the early 1990s, an average of more than $500 per local resident. Local dollar changers estimate the figure at more than $1,300 per person. Their estimate seems plausible considering remittances accounted for more than US$11 billion in foreign exchange for Mexico in 2002, second only to oil, and for more than 10 percent of gross domestic product in Mexico during the 1990s. Don Andrés believes that “the pueblo could not live without the economic help [from remittances]. Why? Because . . . half of the family is there and half is here. Or sometimes it's entire families that are there, no? And those that stay here are grandparents or children, they depend on the people in their productive years, who are working.” This dependence can be seen in how much household income is reported by Ticuanenses as coming from remittances. In my 1993 survey, some 32.5 percent of Ticuanenses in my sample reported that their households in Ticuani received 99 percent or more of their income from remittances from the United States, and another 18.7 percent
reported that 90 percent of their income came this way, yielding a total of 51.2 percent of the households in Ticuani receiving 90 percent or more of their income from U.S. remittances. Households that did not report receiving any of their income from this source accounted for only 36.1 percent of the total, and many of this group lived in absolute poverty.

A remittance economy exacerbates inequalities by “dollarizing” the local economy, inflating prices as migrant families pay for goods with dollars, and widening class differences in Mexico, which become defined by whether one has relatives in the United States and how much they earn and remit. This produces both a “remittance bourgeoisie,” who live more comfortably because of the flow of dollars, and a “transnational underclass,” who receive no remittances. This underclass includes the very poor, who cannot afford to migrate and must earn locally in pesos but pay for goods in the dollarized local economy, and the elderly, who have no income at all. Don Cuahuatemoc, Ticuani’s president in 1999, described this class structure as Ticuani’s “two economies,” in which families with a migrant remitting money can live reasonably comfortably but “the ones that don’t have family here . . . go to the level of just surviving . . . because there in the Mixteca, you have seen it, life is more expensive” because of migration. He estimated that about 20 percent of Ticuanenses live in abject poverty and have no one sending money, and more than half of Ticuanenses have unmet economic needs. Demand for food aid in the town was so great, he said, that they had to rotate which of the 335 eligible families (over half of Ticuani’s population of 600 families) received help boxes from the municipal government through an antipoverty program. As more migrants settle and raise their families in New York, they have less money to remit, and more people in Ticuani need government assistance.

Ticuani’s “two economies” contribute to the emergence of and tensions within transnational life. First, dependence on remittances has made it impossible for the municipal authorities to raise the needed funds for municipal projects, so they rely on migrant cooperation. Second, the two economies also exacerbate class tensions, marginalizing those left behind and rendering young men vulnerable to the pressures of returning gang members. If these marginalized teens in turn emigrate, they are more likely to experience negative assimilation in the United States, while their wealthier, better-connected peers are more likely to experience positive assimilation. The dual economy has also created a labor shortage in the town that has occasioned an influx of indigenous migrants from the state of Oaxaca, who build houses for returning Ticuanenses in New York. Finally, those able to locate themselves strategically in this remittance economy

have profited from those unable to do so. For example, with no banks or other financial institutions to compete with, the cacique and his friends had a virtual monopoly on currency exchange in the late 1990s, setting rates advantageous to themselves. Moreover, because the cacique owned the franchise for the state dry-goods store, he also had a monopoly on most of the building materials in the town during the twenty-five-year building boom driven by migrant dollars and dreams of home ownership. However, this exploitation of the transnational economy did not go unnoticed; it was later used effectively by the teachers in challenging the cacique’s stranglehold on municipal elections.

CONCLUSION

Transnational life is anchored simultaneously in the assimilation of Ticuanense migrants and their children in New York and in the transformation of Ticuani and the Mixteca by migration. In New York, assimilation does not preclude involvement in transnational life. Rather, it provides a context that makes transnational attachments valuable for immigrants and their children. Ticuanenses and their children experience New York as minorities among other minorities, especially among Puerto Ricans, and this experience is one motivation for their transnational attachment.

Migration has changed demographic, population, and social structures in Ticuani in ways that have helped generate and structure a durable transnational life, affecting politics and second-generation experiences. Although Ticuani is a mature migrant community in the consolidation phase of migration, its transnational life is ongoing because of its economic dependence on and other links with Ticuanenses in New York. For example, migration has profoundly changed social class structure in Ticuani in ways that have contributed to an increase in both migration and involvement in transnational politics for its teachers, and to the emergence of gangs. The maintenance of Ticuani as effectively a nursery and nursing home for the young and aged and as a vacation spot for those in their working years also promotes a durable transnational life.
3. “Los Ausentes Siempre Presentes”

Making a Local-Level Transnational Political Community

The phrase *los ausentes siempre presentes* (the absent ones always present) beautifully evokes different dimensions of transnational life. As part of the New York Committee seal, stamped onto documents such as receipts for contributions to the water project, it expresses the Committee’s imagined presence in Ticuani and the joint authority it exercises with the *municipio*. Yet when a municipal president says, “Los ausentes siempre presentes—sounds like a threat, no?” it represents an unwelcome external vigilance and imposition. In these different contexts the expression illustrates the dance of assertion, recognition, and resistance between the Committee and the *municipio*. The Committee wants to assert its place in Ticuani public life and shares power with the *municipio*, but the municipal authorities can always redefine their relationship by withholding recognition, thus trying to constrain the power of the Committee.

Tracing the cooperation and power struggles of the Committee and the municipal authorities over the last thirty years shows how a local-level transnational political community is formed. Not only has the Committee become the institution through which Ticuanenses living in New York participate in Ticuani public life, it has also become their advocate with the elected authorities in Ticuani, who are often perceived to work in the interests of Ticuani’s locate elites and to treat migrants as second-class citizens. Yet as the Committee has funded more and more of Ticuani’s public works—providing two-thirds of the funding for the town’s largest project ever, the potable water system—it has demanded a greater say in Ticuani politics. These two structures of power—the Committee in New York and the cacique and municipal authorities in Ticuani—have pounded out a political settlement governing the ways those in New York can participate in Ticuani politics. Understanding the dynamics of membership in Ticuani