

TRACING NEOLIBERALISM IN MEXICO: HISTORICAL DISPLACEMENT AND  
SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR MIXTEC FAMILIES LIVING ON THE U.S.-  
MEXICO BORDER

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>__ Neoliberalism, Displacement and Making the Case for Ethnocide.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>__ Organization of the Paper .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>__ Anthropology on the U.S.-Mexico Border .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>__ Interest and Involvement with Indigenous Migrant Experiences .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>__ Methodology .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>__ Power &amp; Systems of Inequality.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>__ Who are the people from Mixteca? A note on terminology .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT: ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE DISCOURSE OF DETERRITORIALIZATION.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>__ Global-Systems and Structural Inequality .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>__ Global Impacts on Mobility .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>__ Networks, Transnationalism and Deterritorialization .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>__ Is the Nation-State really in crisis?.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>__ Displacement .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>__ The Politics of Deterritorialization.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: NEOLIBERALISM IN THE MEXICAN COUNTRYSIDE .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>__ History of Neoliberal Policies in Mexico .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>__ Social and Economic Impacts of Neoliberal Policies and NAFTA .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>__ Assault on Agriculture as a Way of Life.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>__ Neoliberalism and the Impacts of Migration.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: FINDING MEANING IN LA MIXTECA .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>__ No Hay Nada .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>__ The End of the Peasantry (again)? .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH SETTING: EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND VULNERABILITY.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>__ The Growth of Nogales, Sonora.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>__ A new kind of war: controlling U.S. borders.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>__ Hierarchies in Downtown.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>__ Colonias.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>__ Why aren't Mixtec migrants working in the maquila industry? .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>__ Discrimination on the Border .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>__ Working in Mexico's Informal Sector .....</b>	<b>85</b>

**TABLE OF CONTENTS--CONTINUED**

<b>CHAPTER 5: SURVIVING AS A DISPLACED COMMUNITY: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>__ Re-conceptualizing the Household .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>__ Negotiating Authenticity .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>__ Women in the Informal Sector: The expense of Autonomy.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>__ Changing Gender Roles and the Informal Economy.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>__ Children in the Informal Economy .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>__ Economic Strategies and new Forms of Differentiation.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>__ Spatial Strategies: Tourism on the border .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>__ The Contradictions of Community &amp; Solidarity .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>__ Mixtec Spaces .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>__ Language, Food and Maintaining Ties to Home.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>__ Conclusions and Future Directions .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>128</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1. Oaxaca, Sonora and Arizona .....	9
Figure 2. Profiles of Street-vending women .....	28

## **ABSTRACT**

Mexican neoliberalism has systematically undermined Mexico's rural and indigenous populations and created multiple forms of displacement in communities and individual lives. This thesis traces the impacts of displacement in the lives of Mixtec families living and working on the U.S.-Mexico border. As families encounter new circumstances of risk, violation and vulnerability, they develop material, spatial and social strategies to provide safe and meaningful lives, often through contradictory and uneven processes. Central to these processes are power relations and negotiations of class, ethnicity and gender, which both maintain community and continuity as well as further perpetuate systems of inequality and differentiation between groups, families and individuals. The focus on indigenous street-vending women fills important gaps in the literature of indigenous transnational migrants and the U.S-Mexico border, particularly in light of recent border policies, which are pushing more people to the Arizona-Sonora desert region.

How far I am from where I was born  
Longing overwhelms my thoughts  
When I see myself like a leaf in the wind  
I want to cry out and die of remembrance  
*Cancion Mixteca*<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Maria is a small woman in her sixties with graying hair that she keeps in two long braids that fall behind her back. Everyday this summer as I walked from the border crossing that separates Nogales, Arizona from Nogales, Sonora to various downtown plazas, I would see Maria sitting cross-legged on the ground in one of her “usual” spots. She sat on a torn piece of cardboard with her shoes off neatly laid next to her with one hand extended in front of her, palm up. In front of her rested a small basket woven together with palm leaves from her native village in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, sometimes filled with a few pesos but usually empty. Depending on the day, Maria would carry a cardboard box containing some variation of gum, painted wooden trinkets, threaded friendship bracelets and miniature chihuahua car ornaments to sell. Occasionally a child walking with his or her mother would stop to buy a pack of gum, but more often than not, people would walk by without even a look in her direction. After all, there would be another opportunity half a block later, where another indigenous woman and her children sit day after day, and the next block and the next one too.

The appearance of indigenous women sitting, begging and selling on the streets of Nogales has become a normalized feature of the downtown landscape. On nearly every

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<sup>1</sup> The lyrics for this song appeared in the documentary, *Invisible Indians: Mixtec Farmworkers in California*.

block of the streets that surround the central border crossing women wearing their traditional *traje* and their children sit begging for money or food, always hoping to avoid a confrontation with one of the local inspectors monitoring the streets. Many of these women are the “newcomers” who have recently arrived from their villages in southern Mexico. Most speak very little Spanish and have not yet made the political and social connections to local craft distributors or government officials that allow people to work in one of the more established and contained indigenous selling areas. In these areas you find indigenous women, men and children concentrated in alleyways and plazas, although many of them have abandoned wearing their traditional “ethnic markers.” They sit behind spreads of mass produced “Mexican” crafts, many of which are actually made in China and transported across the border. While these areas are part of a local government project to contain and manage indigenous vendors, they are considered a step up from sitting on sidewalks and/or roaming the streets. They know this all too well because nearly all of these vendors once too sat on the streets with their children begging, selling and hiding from local inspectors.

Although indigenous street beggars and street vendors are divided on the streets of Nogales, both these groups share a common history and continue to share many of the same daily struggles. Both groups are indigenous peoples displaced from their communities of origin in southern Mexico and have moved to the northern border in search of a better life. Most are from the Mixteca region in the state of Oaxaca and some are from the state of Toluca. These groups are representative of a larger historical trend

taking place throughout the Mexican countryside where people, many of them



**Figure 1. Oaxaca, Sonora and Arizona**

indigenous, are unable to maintain their livelihoods based on semi-subsistence agriculture and must move to urban centers, the U.S.-Mexico border region and into the United States in order to provide the most basic necessities for their families. Upon arrival to destinations like Nogales, indigenous groups encounter a new set of tensions and hardships tied to their social status, working conditions in the informal sector, and new living conditions. These hardships accompany new ethnic and gendered hierarchies that

have emerged in Nogales as it has become a major industrial and tourist destination in recent decades.

### **Neoliberalism, Displacement and Making the Case for Ethnocide**

The processes of displacement from the rural south to northern Mexico and the U.S. have been accelerated by Mexico's rapid economic restructuring and embrace of neoliberalism as a guiding ideology. The neoliberal policies of the past thirty years have systematically undermined Mexico's rural and indigenous populations. Therefore, neoliberalism in the Mexican context must be understood not as a neutral economic ideology, but intimately tied to cultural and social aspects of society. As Lisa Duggan states, "Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics" and "organizes material and political life in terms of race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion"(Duggan 2003: 3). Through investigating the cultural and social impacts of neoliberalism in Mexico *along with* its economic manifestations, it becomes clear how it unevenly impacts different sectors of society and is arguably the most important factor in a present-day ethnocide of Mexico's indigenous groups. Israel Charny has defined ethnocide as "processes that prohibit or interfere with the natural cycles of reproduction and continuity of a culture or nation" without necessarily including murderous oppression (cited in Stein:2004). In this way, the case can be made that Mexican neoliberalism creates the conditions for multiple ethnocides of Mexico's indigenous populations by systematically undermining their traditional communal lifeways and displacing entire communities.

The uneven social and cultural impacts of neoliberalism have created multiple forms of displacement in Mixtec communities and individual lives. The most obvious form of displacement is the actual geographical movement of entire communities from southern Mexico to the north. This movement is intimately tied to the general displacement of smallholder, collective and state-supported agriculture by capitalist agricultural systems and privatization. I also suggest that there exists a significant tension surrounding the displacement of more symbolic forms of community and individual identity. While people are going to great lengths to maintain continuity and ties to their homelands, the material, social and emotional burdens of living as discriminated and marginalized people seriously compromise their abilities to participate in traditional practices and maintain their collective identities. In addition, their status as racialized ethnic minorities and the pressure to give up “ethnic markers” conflicts with global tourist market demands of representing a cultural “authenticity.” Thus, by using the Mixtecs in Nogales as a case study, we can see the multiple ways indigenous peoples are continuing to be displaced as well as the ways they are struggling against these processes. Ultimately, I hope to provide a more concrete understanding of how structural economic and political processes intimately impact the lives of individuals.

### **Organization of the Paper**

This paper is organized thematically and will combine critiques of anthropological literature, historical material and concrete examples from my fieldwork. I begin with a theoretical discussion of recent trends in anthropology that address the

mobilities and migrations of people. I am skeptical of works that treat mobilization as a process of its own without making connections to the larger structures, processes and historical conditions that impact the decisions of individuals to leave their communities. I fear that discussions of transnationalism and globalization may overly romanticize or naturalize such processes and lack consideration of the conditions that set them into place as well as the difficulties and constraints people face when they are forced to move and settle in new areas.

In the first half of the thesis, I develop my argument that the Mixtecs are not simply deterritorialized or cultural hybrids or even migrants, but displaced peoples. By using the Mixtecs as a case study, we can see how their displacement has been aggravated by Mexican neoliberal policies during the past 30 years as well as by more specific local environmental and historical conditions. I pursue both points, first tracing the impacts of neoliberalism on the Mexican countryside and then analyzing the specific conditions of the Mixteca region in Oaxaca. This perspective provides a more complicated and historicized understanding of how conditions in rural Mexico have deteriorated due to a number of factors that span the environmental, political and economic realms. The recent surge of neoliberalism is not the sole cause of mobility, but representative of the current ideological and practical framework that severely undermine the welfare of the rural sector and indigenous groups in particular. In other words, struggles in the countryside did not begin with NAFTA or the change in Article 27 of the Constitution, but these changes have exacerbated already difficult conditions. Making explicit the connection between displacement and neoliberalism is one that is largely

lacking from the literature on transnational migrants from southern Mexico and from the larger literature in general. In a recent MIT publication, Catherine Elton notes the “surprising dearth of empirical work linking the so-called Washington Consensus policies and emigration flows” (Elton 2006: 1). This study intends to partially fill that gap.

The second half of the thesis turns to daily life of Mixtecs in Nogales. I will address some of the difficulties and struggles people face as well as the strategies people use to survive in the informal economy in Nogales as well as maintain continuity with lifeways and traditions in Oaxaca. My discussion is inspired by Carol Stack’s work on the adaptive strategies, resourcefulness and resilience of African American families and kin networks in the impoverished southern United States. I will consider the material, social and spatial strategies employed by Mixtec families as well as look at power relations and the subsequent contradictions that emerge from those strategies. I will also pay particular attention to how these strategies intersect with negotiations of class, ethnicity and gender and how they may actually reproduce systems of inequality. In doing so, I hope to address the tension between the constraints on peoples’ lives and how they manage within those constraints. The individuals in Nogales are neither passive subjects nor are they radical dissidents, but rather they are most concerned with how to provide the best lives for themselves and their families. These processes cannot be understood without addressing how power relations and negotiations of class, ethnicity and gender are central to both the constraints imposed upon migrants and their strategies to maintain continuity.

Implicit to these discussions is the need to address some key categories in anthropological theory. It became apparent to me that classic definitions of the community, peasantry and even the household no longer suffice to capture the processes, exchanges and characteristics of transregional and transnational Mixtec workers, families and communities. These categories do not represent bounded and equalizing entities, but must be understood as processual, fluid and often fractured. As communities are spread across thousands of miles, the internal logic of households change and people become increasingly dependent on cash economies, new forms of strategizing, community-making and differentiation emerge. These changes impact the ways that traditional indigenous institutions and practices, such as the *cargo* and *tequio* systems, operate. They also reflect new forms of differentiation as people have unequal access and ability to fulfill community obligations.

### **Anthropology on the U.S.-Mexico Border**

My relationship with the Mixtec families living in Nogales began in the summer of 2005 when I met Maria, who later introduced me to the extended network of Mixtec vendors. The first day I met Maria was in early July where she was seated in front of a souvenir store and a pharmacy on one of the busiest streets in downtown Nogales. We were sitting and talking about her life in Oaxaca when a young woman carrying a baby came up to talk with her in a language I did not understand. The young woman was dressed in contemporary jeans, a t-shirt and had dyed hair, different from the more traditional Oaxacan apron and shoes Maria wore. Maria then introduced the girl to me as

her daughter, Lucia. The baby, I later learned, was not Lucia's daughter, but rather her niece who she was looking after for the afternoon, and the language they spoke was a dialect of Mixteco spoken in their home village.

Soon after meeting Lucia, I was introduced to six of Maria's eight children, her extended family, friends, street vendors and other members of this community. Unlike Maria, who sits "illegally" each day and has had her items confiscated by local authorities time and time again, her children and the other community members have selling permits and are involved in a complex political, economic and social web that spans both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The majority of the people I interviewed are from the same village or nearby region in the Mixteca. In fact, they are from the same village that Michael Kearney (Kearney 1996; Kearney 2004a; Kearney 2004b; Kearney 1981; Nagengast 1990) has studied extensively in his work with the Mixtecs. For this reason, throughout the thesis I draw heavily on Kearney's work as both a guide and as a foil.

The literature on indigenous Mexican migrants flourished in the 1990's and continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While studies under the more general category of Mexico-U.S. migration remain strong, the focus has shifted to understanding migration as a fluid, transnational and multi-ethnic process comprised of different ethnic groups and different migration patterns and destinations. Migrants from Guerrero follow different routes than migrants from Oaxaca, and within these groups, the Zapotecs of Oaxaca have different migration experiences than the Mixtecs of Oaxaca. This thesis helps to fill in the scholarly gap on Mixtec migrants living on the Arizona-Sonora border, and specifically

the Mixtec community in Nogales. There is a significant amount of work done on the Mixtec *colonias* of Tijuana and this thesis will both compliment and complicate those findings. Ethnographic work that focuses on group-specific migrant experiences not only recognizes the ethnic and experiential diversity within Mexico, but allows us to understand how different groups negotiate and respond to local and national conditions, such as land issues related to agrarian reform or historical migration networks that began with the *Bracero* program<sup>2</sup>.

The 2004 volume edited by Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado entitled *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States* (Rivera-Salgado 2004) exemplifies this new focus in migration studies. Most of the essays trace Oaxacan migration to Baja California and California and pay particular attention to ethnic and community identity and organization in a bi-national context.<sup>3</sup> While there are many similar patterns that emerge between Mixtec communities in Tijuana and Nogales, there are also significant differences. The most apparent difference is the absence of formal organizations based on ethnic identity among Mixtecs in Nogales. While this topic is not the focus of the present paper, understanding the local conditions of the Nogales community will begin to answer why formal organizations have not (yet) developed. In particular, I will point to the different relation to ethnicity, citizenship, nature of employment, internal differentiation and history as factors in this difference. I hope to add to this literature by documenting the specific struggles and constraints they face in life along the Sonora-Arizona border.

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<sup>2</sup> The Bracero Program was implemented in 1942 and allowed Mexican males to work in the U.S. agricultural industry.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to essays on Oaxacalifornia, the volume includes essays on indigenous migration to Oregon, New York, Florida and the Midwest.

I conducted the bulk of my research in a period of six weeks between early July and mid-August and continued to make monthly trips to conduct follow-up research through the Fall and Winter 2005-2006. While conducting research I lived in the home of family member on the Nogales, Arizona side of the border and would travel each day to cross the border and meet the families at their work sites or at their homes. My living arrangements continued to be a source of dissonance in my mind throughout the fieldwork experience. At first I thought living on the U.S. side of the border would hinder my research because it would not allow me to get the full picture of what life was like for these families. It was also difficult to ignore the fact that at the end of each day, the families would pack up and take the bus to their homes in the impoverished living conditions of the Nogales shantytowns while I crossed back over to the U.S., where only a few miles away I always had plenty of hot running water and electricity and all the other things we so often take for granted in the U.S. While I might have gotten a better understanding of what life is like for the families, I now realize that my discomfort with the differentials between my informants and myself is something to recognize rather than something to minimize. During an interview, one of the women summed up to me: “Yeah, but you can cross and we can’t.” The “us” and “them,” “we” and “you,” “this side” and “*el otro lado*” were common themes during many of our conversations.

The actual act of crossing the border to and from Mexico each day continued to be a sobering experience and ultimately helped shape my understanding of *la frontera*. The material differences and unevenness on each side of the border has become naturalized in the dominant mode of thinking. The fact that the visible signs of poverty

and desperation increase dramatically once you cross from one side of the wall to the other has been reduced to a shrug; “it’s just the way it is.” The crossings also shaped my understanding of the politics of regulation and security at the border, who crosses and who does not, and the multiple layers of tension and power at work between the multitude of “subjects”: the border authority, the crying wife looking for her detained husband, the young Mexican male who is turned away, the elderly Arizonans toting prescription drugs, etc. In the physical space of the border crossing, the interstitial ties between individual subjects and the socio-economic and political processes of both sides of the border are magnified. It also led me to rethink much of the border literature produced about fluidity and hybridity of borderlands and the work on “post-nationalism.” At the border crossing, the boundary is palpable and the nation-state does persist.

### **Interest and Involvement with Indigenous Migrant Experiences**

My previous experiences working in Nogales, Sonora as a member of a bi-national environmental project during 2004-2005, and living in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca during 2002-2003 exposed me to issues specific to the Nogales border region as well as to indigenous rights and migration issues. In addition, when living in Tucson, Arizona, it is difficult not to pay attention to the U.S-Mexico border. The evening news and newspaper headlines often recount stories of deaths in the desert, drug smuggling, and the latest efforts to stop “illegal migrants.” More recently, U.S. immigration bills and widespread protests by immigrant rights’ groups have brought more attention to the region and the so-called border problem.

My interest in working with Mixtec migrants is rooted in relationships I developed with indigenous families in Oaxaca. While I was not living in a predominately Mixtec area in Oaxaca, I met several Zapotec families who have children living in the United States, mostly in California. Parents of migrants told me of the agony of having their children leave and the insecurity they confronted each day, not knowing if they were safe.

I visited the daughter of one family in Beverly Hills where she worked as a live-in maid for a wealthy family and was paid under the table. We sat on the family's plush couch and she asked me to tell her everything I did when I was in her village and what her mother cooked for me for dinner. As we sat and talked, many questions arose for me like, who was I to be eating her mother's cooking? How was it that I was showing her pictures of the home her parents are building with the very money she was making working in Beverly Hills? It pained me to know that I was capable of moving freely and sleeping in her bare Oaxacan bedroom while visiting with her family while she was not. Although it was her idea to pay two different coyotes to smuggle her in the trunks of cars across the Tijuana/San Diego border until she was able to meet family in Los Angeles, I knew that she left her village out of economic necessity and to improve life for her parents.

I was originally interested in talking to female migrants from southern Mexico, who I assumed were in Nogales for only a brief time before making "the jump" into the United States to reunite with their husbands and families that had migrated before them. The U.S.-Mexico migration literature abounds with stories of women who are either left

alone in Mexico or the more recent trends of female migration into the U.S. I guessed that most of the female street vendors in Nogales were part of this second transitory group. No doubt some of the women certainly do move on to the U.S., but what I found is that this particular social group is comprised not only of women and children in transit to the U.S., but also part of a fairly strong and established community of families from the Mixteca region of Oaxaca based in Nogales. I learned that their position in the informal sector is less a result of their inability to penetrate the maquila industry, but a result of a complex set of networks and strategies that the families have implemented in the past few decades.

As I became closer to the Mixtec families, they told me more about their lives before moving to Nogales and I became interested in understanding why they moved and if and how they maintained ties to their communities. Many of them worked in the agricultural fields of Sonora and Sinaloa, living in camps and picking squash and tomatoes. Others moved directly from Oaxaca because they were unable to tend to their land and feed their families. Nearly all of them still return to Oaxaca every few years to fulfill community obligations or participate in their town's annual fiesta. One man returns for the fiesta every September because he is a member of the village band. Out of the seventeen members of the band, none of them live in the Mixteca permanently. They are spread out between northern Mexico and the U.S. and return each year to play together in this important community celebration. As time went on, it became apparent to me that the Mixtecs in Nogales have a unique history grounded in both structural changes in Mexico as well as local conditions and traditions in both Oaxaca and Nogales.

## **Methodology**

The two primary methods used to conduct this research were participant observation and informal interviews. Most of the interviews occurred at the vendors' site of work in downtown Nogales and I would often sit with them, and occasionally help them sell, translate names or help pack-up their items at the end of the day. Because of the demanding attention that was required of the women to simultaneously work and care for their families, it was not generally possible for me to have private one-on-one interviews. Many of the interviews took place in small groups, or in between selling sprees or breastfeeding. Occasionally, I had the chance to be alone with people riding on the bus or buying something to drink or eat in the late afternoon. In these instances, we were able to delve more deeply into issues. In addition to observation and informal interviews in downtown, I was also invited to birthday parties or meals in the homes of some families and in these situations, people were generally more relaxed to talk about their experiences. I also visited family members living in Phoenix and camped out with several families during the Fiesta de Magdalena in early October.

I did not tape any interviews or take notes when I was conducting interviews. All of my informants knew that I was conducting research and would be writing up a report based upon my experience with them during the summer, but I felt that the writing and/or tape recording would compromise the exchange of information. I also did not want to generate any unnecessary fear or suspicion of my intentions. All the names of my informants have been changed to protect their identities.

Despite the presence of men also working in the informal sector, the majority of interviews and relationships I developed were with women, thus making women's experiences the focus of the paper, although I do include information collected from interviews with men as well. Because I only established relationships with some of the Mixtec families and deep relationships with only a handful, this thesis is in no way intended to be representative of the entire Mixtec street vending community in Nogales, nor does it claim any sort of objective truth about human behavior. In my view, the value of ethnographic research comes from learning the details and everyday experiences of peoples lives. It is in this way that we can understand the multiple ways in which processes affect people and in turn, how people negotiate their lives within these processes.

Part of my realization during the fieldwork was that the researcher is not simply collecting information, but involved in a human interaction, based on the exchange of information, and occasionally acts of reciprocity. This is not to deny the power dynamics between me, the privileged researcher, and my informants, but to recognize the process and interaction of our conversations. For as many questions as I asked them about their lives, they asked me equally probing questions about my personal life, family, schooling, and life in the United States in general. This relationship is something that cannot be achieved through survey, or one-way interviews- which I think can make people uncomfortable, and exacerbate power differentials.

The flipside to developing strong relationships with informants is that I inevitably became closer to some families and vendors than others. We are all political beings, and

the alliances and divisions within the street-vending community were established, and so when I made choices about my key informants, I knew that I was making political moves. I tried to minimize this as much as possible, but I undeniably caused some sort of friction between vendors by simply being there. I noticed women asking me how many times I had visited someone's home, or if I had already been to talk to so-and-so that day.

My involvement with the Mixtec families also included acts of reciprocity. Women would often buy me small gifts, such as a coca-cola or a taco. The next day, another woman would buy me something. On one day, about five different women gave me various pieces of jewelry. While I never intended to use "informant gifts" in my fieldwork, I too felt that I had to reciprocate in such small acts. Carol Stack talks about the rules of giving and reciprocity in fieldwork and how she became involved in their networks (Stack 1974). I tried to find ways besides buying things to reciprocate the generosity of the women, although I certainly did buy my fair share of *horchatas*. I often helped children with their homework, or taught them how to say certain phrases or words in English. In addition, I also helped some people in their economic strategizing by crossing their items across the border to distribute to their family members living in the U.S. While this is debatably an illegal act, I found it to be ethically sound.

### **Power & Systems of Inequality**

An underlying theme in this paper is a look at the multiple ways power plays out and intersects in peoples lives and how power relations are embedded in explicit and non-explicit forms of domination and inequality. In general, I am guided by a Gramscian

notion of hegemony as it shapes power relations and differentials in the lives of Mixtecs. Hegemony allows us to understand how local and/or individual Mixtec experiences are bound up with the dominant neoliberal ideology and how power relations continue to reinforce those processes as natural. I adopt Roseberry's understanding of hegemony as a framework rather than a shared ideology. He states:

What hegemony constructs, then, is not a shared ideology, but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination (Roseberry 1996: 80).

By using this interpretation, hegemony is not a fixed concept referring to ideological consensus, but made up of processes and acts that may involve resistance, confrontation or even accommodation (Roseberry 1996: 80). This understanding allows both ends of the structure/agency dichotomy to emerge, rejecting narratives of "helpless Indians" and opening the space to explore their strategies for survival and resistance within the hegemonic structure without minimizing the role that the larger policies and structures play in shaping their opportunities. Mixtecs living in Oaxaca and Nogales are encompassed in a hegemonic framework which privileges transnational capital and neoliberal ideals which, in turn, further institutionalize racism and governmental policies that neglect the poorest sectors of Mexican society. However, the question still remains; how do the Mixtecs in Nogales, as individual agents, understand their subordinated positions and how do they continue to work within such disadvantaged circumstances without genuine attempts at political organizing?

To answer this question, I turn to James C. Scott's distinction between thin and thick false consciousness. It may be useful in understanding how individual agents, such

as the Mixtecs, continue to work within their subordinated positions. Scott refers to thick false consciousness as the persuasion of “subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination” (Scott 1990: 72). Michael Kearney (Kearney 2004a) and I have both encountered cases where Mixtecs refer to themselves in self-deprecating ways. However, I believe it is more likely that Mixtecs view their situation and circumstances as inevitable. Scott explains that thin false consciousness “achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable” (Scott 1990: 72). While Scott eventually rejects both theories as applicable to entire social groups, they are useful in understanding the multiplicity of ways people may understand and/or construct their personal and more local experience. This false consciousness, however, is not incompatible with more everyday acts of resistance. In fact, while the Mixtecs in Nogales are not actively organized in demanding political rights, they are engaged in numerous strategies of survival, from the individual to the household and community levels.

Finally, I am guided by Denise Brennan’s point that “globalized hierarchies of race, class, gender, citizenship, and mobility create undeniable power differentials among the actors in these geographic spaces, which, in turn, give them unequal opportunities” (Brennan 2004: 16). For Mixtec street-vendors in Nogales, Sonora, power differentials operate on a number of levels. At one level, Mixtecs are exploited as Mexicans working on the border and tied to the border economy that is fueled by the uneven relationship between Mexico and the U.S. Mixtecs are exploited as informal economy workers and as the bearers of an “authentic” indigenous identity. Next, they are differentiated and

marginalized as “ethnically other” indigenous peoples by non-indigenous groups (both Mexican and American) in a country historically marked by assimilationist policies. At this level, power may work through structures of class, ethnic and national domination, as well as through more concrete forms of state and social power, such as surveillance by local authorities, encounters with border officials and street vending unions. Thirdly, within the Mixtec community there is significant internal differentiation between families, neighbors, husbands and wives. Factors such as having a passport, the ability to legally cross the border, time of arrival in Nogales, local connections to government officials, selling location and family networks impact local alliances and often increase competition. Finally, women are particularly exploited in the informal sector and in their dual roles as income earners and mothers. Thus, it is impossible to ignore the multiple ways class, ethnicity and gender all operate in their lives and largely constrain their opportunities.

### **Who are the people from Mixteca? A note on terminology**

In ethnographic works, once we move away from the individual level, the problem of labeling and social categorizing frequently arises. It seems that in anthropology, there is an obsession to organize and place our informants into neat social categories. While this task is no doubt crucial to analyses of class, gender and ethnic relations, social categories run the risk of failing to capture the heterogeneity within groups. In the case of my fieldwork, it was difficult for me to distinguish which category my informants were “the most of”: transnational migrants, wage laborers, craftspeople,

lumpenproletariat, proletarianizing, rural-urban peasants, postpeasants, street vendors, informal sector workers, Oaxacan, indigenous, Mixtec etc. I finally came to terms with the fact that they are all these things to some degree, and different individuals identify with some or all of these categories. Thus, I may apply these different categorizations as they appropriately apply to various topics.

Finally, I will integrate individual experiences and statements collected from my research throughout the paper. As I will not formally introduce each person, I have created a simple chart of my main informants.

Name	Age	Marital Status	# of children	Time in Nogales	Husband's occupation
Felipa	59	married	5	25 years	Carpenter, now in Oaxaca
Maria	60	married	8	17 years	Retired from vending in U.S.
Teresa	38	married	10	11 years (12 previously in Tijuana)	Handcrafts and sells bracelets/wants to go to U.S.
Luisa	35	married	5	10 years	Sells hats-travels a lot
Florencia	36	married	3	10 years	Carpenter
Adela	36	married	4	15 years	Street vendor
Carolina	38	married	5		Gardener
Eugenia	22	married	1	Lives in Puerto Penasco	Street-vendor-silver jewelry
Ofelia	26	unmarried			
Linda	19	unmarried			
Paula	20	married	1		Street vendor/wants to go to U.S.
Cristina	22	unmarried		8	
Julia	22	married	1		Makes handicrafts that she sells/street vendor
Diana	24	unmarried			
Lucia	24	unmarried		8	
Juana	25	unmarried		8	
Ines	18	unmarried		8	
Anita	21	married	1	4	Sells silver jewelry

**Figure 2. Profiles of Street-vending women**

## **CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT: ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE DISCOURSE OF DETERRITORIALIZATION**

### **Global-Systems and Structural Inequality**

The presence of indigenous groups such as the Mixtecs in border cities such as Nogales, Mexicali and Tijuana and in U.S. cities in Arizona, California and Oregon generate interesting anthropological questions concerning cultural ties to land, the reproduction or loss of “native roots” and the multiplicity of identities people create in different spaces. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the chronic mobility of the Mixtecs is their ability to reproduce their social order, traditions and networks with people spread thousands of miles apart. While these questions are certainly important to address in a world where people are increasingly mobile and displaced by natural disasters, violence, and/or political and economic factors, I argue that mobility must also be placed within a political economic and global context. The movement of Mixtecs is intertwined with complex processes of transnational capital, historical labor relations and more recently neoliberal policies. It is in response and defiance to these forces that the Mixtecs struggle to maintain cultural and territorial continuity in their new settings.

Classic migration theories have long been insufficient in explaining the structural causes of why people move. Mobility of people has come to be an accepted fact of globalization. Furthermore, the literature produced by government think tanks and development agencies rarely go beyond citing poverty and unemployment as causes for migration. I argue that migration is one outcome of a more complex series of global processes and policies, currently epitomized by neoliberal projects, and we must trace our

analyses back to these forces. The structural history is essential in explaining why people must do what they do. This is not to minimize the agency of individuals in these processes. Certainly, individuals, families and communities conduct their lives and make decisions in what they think will be the best for their livelihoods; however, it is essential to contextualize the constraints and limited opportunities many of these families are born into before discussing the strategies they implement to work within these constraints.

The purpose of this chapter is to review and critique some of the most important contributions to the scholarship on migration, transnationalism and deterritorialization and argue for a more historically engaged and global framework of mobility as well as a more concrete understanding of the U.S.-Mexico border. My central argument in the case of Mixtec families in Nogales is that they should be considered as displaced persons, not migrants. They, like many other indigenous and rural communities throughout Mexico, have been displaced by a combination of local and historical conditions as well as by structural constraints that are shaped by the ideological framework of neoliberalism. Their deterritorialization must be understood as connected to processes of capitalism, not as a process in itself (Nash 2005a: 178). Furthermore, it must not overlook the concrete forms of territory, such as the border, that still organize and regulate their lives. This different conceptualization has important political implications, especially in light of recent border policies and immigration debates in the United States.

My characterization of the Mixtecs as primarily displaced peoples instead of “migrants,” “economic migrants” or even “transnational migrants” is undeniably political and intentional. The Oxford English dictionary defines a displaced person as “one

removed from his home country by military or political pressure.” So-called “economic migrants” are differentiated from displaced peoples and refugees as people who are forced to move by economic pressures. Indeed, much of the literature on the causes of migration point to unemployment rates and other economic indicators as reasons to move. My contention is that in a globalizing world where economic policies and state politics are so intertwined, it seems impossible to distinguish between political and economic pressures. “Economic migrant” implies people are simply reacting to economic markets and flows without acknowledging how politics and economics are mutually constitutive. Especially in a country like Mexico, where economic neoliberalism plays such a central role in shaping state ideology and economic inequalities mirror nationwide political and social inequalities, the line between what is political and what is economic is extremely blurry. In addition to overlooking the political forces that shape economic conditions, the term “economic migrant” denies people as political beings with political demands and rights both in their countries of origin and abroad and how these rights change once they cross the border. It also masks the human-felt desperation that accompanies the choice to migrate and leave family members behind.

Finally, the term economic migrant ignores the social aspects that shape migration and settlement patterns. This is particularly important in the Mixtec migration experience which has historically displayed specific patterns of movement and settlement along the agricultural belts of Baja California and the western U.S. and in U.S-Mexico border towns. The Mixtecs have tended to move to areas where their family or community members have already become established, making their transition into the

social and job sectors slightly easier. Thus, the economic facet that drives and directs movement is only one aspect of a complex set of reasons that shape migration.

### **Global Impacts on Mobility**

Displacement and deterritorialization must be placed within a structural framework. As William Robinson observes, at the structural level, “natural” economies are disrupted by the penetration of capitalism, thus uprooting communities while labor shortages in more economically advanced areas attract displaced peoples (Robinson 2003: 271). Saskia Sassen argues that in order to understand why people migrate to the United States, we must look to the roles of the U.S. in the global economy and recognize the impacts of “U.S. efforts to open its own and other countries’ economies to the flow of capital, goods, services”(Sassen 1992: 14). She highlights the irony between theorists who argue that foreign investment and the support of export-oriented agriculture and manufacturing will deter emigration and encourage development in foreign countries. In reality, foreign investment in poor countries has resulted in the “massive displacement of small-scale agriculture and manufacturing enterprises”(Sassen 1992: 15). It is precisely this type of displacement that has swept through the Mexican countryside in the past 30 years. Mexican farmers and small to medium sized businesses have not been able to compete with foreign investment and the increase in U.S. exports to Mexico. My intention here is not to simplistically blame the economic policies of the United States, but raise awareness of the interconnectedness between U.S. foreign trade policies on other countries. Clearly, it is not only U.S. businesses that benefit, but Mexican

stakeholders and elites as well. While structural analyses are crucial to understanding the larger forces and pressures that encourage migration, it is important to not lose sight of the actors and cultural and social influences that shape decisions to move and decisions on where to settle.

### **Networks, Transnationalism and Deterritorialization**

Neo-classical economics and the push-pull theory of migration has long argued that people make the decision to migrate based on calculating “push” and “pull” factors against each other. People are pushed to migrate from sending countries by inadequate wages and opportunities and pulled to migrate by higher wages in the receiving country. While poverty and the lack of employment opportunities are certainly key to the reasons people migrate, this theory does not capture the complexity and diversity of reasons people around the globe are uprooted from their home communities and how they choose their destinations. This theory tends to emphasize the rationality of the individual as the source of migration and ignore larger political economic processes as well as social and cultural processes which may influence mobility.

More and more, scholars are looking beyond purely economic “push” and “pull” factors as well as purely structural explanations in describing why people choose to migrate. As Leo Chavez notes, migration is socially and culturally constructed, growing out of behaviors and interactions between individuals and families, and infused with meaning and significance for the persons involved (Chavez 1992: 21). Indeed, for the Mixtec community in Nogales, migration is closely bound up with the legacy of

migration from the Mixtec area, and the networks and economic opportunities created in receiving areas. As I discuss in more depth in chapter three, the Mixtec area has a long history of out-migration associated with both the agricultural and transborder tourist industries in northern Mexico and the western U.S., so much so that one woman explained to me that only “los viejos” (the old ones) stay behind. If one is able to work, he or she moves to the north to work in the agricultural fields, in the tourist industry or tries their luck in wage labor jobs across the border. Thus, for many of the families in Nogales, living along the border and away from Oaxaca has become normalized.

William Robinson joins Portes and Borocz in focusing on the importance of networks and network building that influence decisions to migrate. These networks have historically created microstructures which both provide contacts and incentive to migrate as well as explain the enduring quality of migrant flows (Robinson 2003: 271). This is certainly the case for the Mixtecs in Nogales. Felipa explained to me that about twenty years ago, her older cousin was the first person from her village to move to Nogales and she came soon after. They had decided that Nogales was a better choice than moving to Tijuana where so many other Mixtecs had settled because they wanted to take advantage of the tourist sector and Nogales had far less competition. Felipa said that after she moved, more and more people from her village and neighboring villages began to arrive. Today, there continues to be a steady flow of people into Nogales from the Mixteca area and other areas of rural Mexico. Of course, these new members are viewed with some ambivalence. On the one hand, people are willing to help new members, but on the other hand, new members mean more competition. Felipa was the most vocal informant in

stating her frustration with the increased presence of indigenous sellers in Nogales, who, in her view, are compromising her ability to sell.

In addition to social contact, network theory often cites histories of labor contracting as central to network formation and the subsequent dependence communities begin to have on that foreign capital. As I will address in more depth later, labor contractors have had an enormous impact on recruiting Mixtecs to agricultural centers on both sides of the border. In addition, the Bracero program that was established between 1940 and 1964 is a more large-scale example of the institutionalization of networks between Mexico and the U.S. The U.S. also has similar legacies with workers from China and Japan and continues to encourage labor from foreign countries, especially in high tech computer sectors.

In conjunction with migrant networks, recent trends in globalization have created de-nationalized transnational communities, which refer to migrant communities that maintain active ties to their communities of origin. Portes states that this back and forth traffic creates “complex social fields that straddle national borders” (Portes 2002: 279). Similarly, Robinson refers to this phenomenon as the “transnationalization of social structure” (Robinson 2003: 273). He argues,

These communities are not rooted in geographic space but in transnational social space, in that the social relations that develop are spatially diffuse and de-territorialized, constituting a structure of reference for positions and social status that shape daily life and identities in ways that transcend national societies” (Robinson 2003: 273).

While these authors are addressing the formation of communities across national boundaries, I see the same patterns occurring with Mixtecs in Nogales who are living

outside the immediate jurisdiction of their municipio or agencia, but still maintain strong ties and participate in the civil and religious obligations. Thus, the ties between Nogales and Oaxaca create just as complex social fields and mechanisms for maintaining continuity and meaning. Furthermore, the ties are not limited to two geographic locations, but operate between multiple locations. The Nogales Mixtec community is not only involved in social relations with their natal communities in Oaxaca, but with community members living in Tijuana, California, Arizona, and other border cities. Thus, the transnational community must be understood as occupying multiple sites, which are occupied by different people at different times of the year.

Despite the development of such transnational ties, it is important to not lose sight of the inequalities and implications for power that may also result from the migration of peoples. Robinson notes, “Global migration flows generate new social hierarchies and forms of inequality which are themselves transnational in ways that cannot be characterized by the traditional dichotomies of core and periphery or First and Third worlds” (Robinson 2003: 272). Indeed, the processes of mobility and settlement in Nogales have created new social hierarchies among the Mixtecs, both between them and other groups, as well as within their own communities. Furthermore, it remains to be seen if and how transnational communities will operate in future generations when community members are born and raised along the border or in the United States.

**Is the Nation-State really in crisis?**

The study of Mixtecs living in the U.S.-Mexico border region offers a unique example to interrogate conceptualizations of the nation-state. The development of transnational networks and communities has led some scholars to question the significance of the nation-state in questions of culture and identity. Akhil Gupta states, “The displacement of identity and culture from ‘the nation’ not only forces us to reevaluate our ideas about culture and identity but also enables us to denaturalize the nation as the hegemonic form of organizing space” (Gupta 2005: 332). Roger Rouse, who studied Aguilillans from Michoacan living in Redwood City, California, argues for the existence of what Fredric Jameson calls “postmodern hyperspace,” a new kind of social space reflective of transnational capitalism, where the modern imagery of nation-states and national languages are no longer adequate (Rouse 1996: 248). He says that part of their new socio-spatial arrangements is the fact that people are “often able to maintain these spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them to their neighbors” (Rouse 1996: 253). While to some degree communities are forming in transnational social spaces, they are often of a different quality (e.g. telephone vs. face to face interaction) and the nation is no less important in organizing peoples daily lives. For the Mixtecs in Nogales, the border is one of the most significant influence in how they organize their space and their economic, political and social decisions.

For Mixtecs in Nogales, the border represents a material and symbolic boundary that shapes their opportunities and choices in their daily lives. It divides two territories, with different opportunities, economic realities, rights, access to healthcare, and access to police and material surroundings. It divides families, so that a grandmother living in

Tijuana is not able to meet her own grandchildren in Phoenix. It causes fear, not only in the border crossing, but in daily life for migrants living and/or traveling in the United States. Moreover, the nation represents a significant point of differentiation within the Mixtec community. Those members with the necessary documents to cross have more opportunities than those who do not. While certainly advances in telecommunications, telephone and the Internet have made communication easier for some migrant families, this depiction overlooks the many people who experience significant heartache because they are unable to maintain regular ties or reunite with their family members due to political or economic constraints.

I have heard many stories, especially from mothers, of the difficulties and worries they experience when they have a child living in the U.S. whom they cannot visit, or even people who have parents still in Oaxaca who have never met their grandchildren because it is too expensive for them to transport the entire family. Teresa, who is happy living in Nogales, says the only reason she wants to go back to Oaxaca is to visit her mother, who has never met her youngest children. In this case, Teresa and her parents live within the same national boundaries, but are unable to reunite for economic reasons. When I visited Felipa's family in Phoenix, her daughter-in-law, Elena, told me that her parents who live in Tijuana have never met either of her daughters because none of them have the proper documents to cross. Her parents are too old to try and cross the border illegally, and Elena, who is living in the U.S. undocumented, does not want to risk her position in crossing over. In this example, we also see how different members of the Mixtec community have different opportunities and access to resources that enable or

constrict them from maintaining ties. It seems we must recognize the many changes that are occurring as a result of the increasing movements of people, money, goods and information, but do so without losing sight of the inequalities of these processes and the limited access and resources some people have in comparison to others. This is true in regards to many transnational processes, from using information technologies to transnational political organizing.

### **Displacement**

Studies of displacement and people-place identity seem increasingly important in light of the increased mobilization of peoples and globalization. Within this field, however, there exists a tension between the victimization and/or pathologization of displaced peoples as cultureless, uprooted, psychologically disturbed and/or immoral and the romanticization of displaced peoples as fluid, deterritorialized, transnational, cultural hybrids. I hope to bridge these two extremes by showing that the Mixtecs in Nogales are displaced from their home communities by political and economic structural forces, but within these circumstances have managed to construct some meaning and continuity in their lives. However, I suspect the tension between the demise and maintenance of collective ethnic identity will continue to be one of the greatest struggles for Mexico's displaced communities in the future.

The scholarly focus on displacement is often linked to romantic ideas of nativism and being "rooted." These constructions are of particular interest to internally displaced Mixtecs because they are both "uprooted" and indigenous in the context of the Mexican

nation. Thus, Mixtecs in their “natural” environment may be normalized as compared to displaced Mixtecs. Liisa Malkki argues that scholars and discourses often naturalize sedentary lifestyles and construct displaced refugees in pathological terms. She argues that sedentarism draws a link between identity, culture and place, thus people who are displaced are cultureless, and often constructed as morally inferior (Malkki 1992). These negative discourses may translate into discriminatory beliefs and practices and may explain some of the blatant discrimination the Mixtecs have encountered in Nogales. When indigenous groups such as the Mixtecs move outside their “proper” places in the countryside, in museums, as artisans, and as the bearers of authenticity, and into “modern” realms like urban Nogales or Mexico City, they become categorized as social ills, and segments of the population that need to be contained. Furthermore, women are more susceptible to suspicion and discrimination due to their absence from the home. Mainstream discourses in Mexico locate women in the home as their “natural domain,” thus extending sedentary constructions into the home. Mixtec migrant women work on the street as vendors, thus furthering them from their “proper” place. The women are thus displaced geographically, ethnically and according to their “proper” gendered roles.

While there is a danger in “incarcerating natives” to their homelands, there is no denying the fact that indigenous groups in Mexico have strong and deep connections to their land. The rupture in this connection may indeed impede on personal and communal ways of life. As Fullilove explains, “Because a person’s safety and security depend on this larger personal environment, a threat to that environment is best understood as a threat to the self” (Fullilove 1996: 1519), she goes on to say, “The appropriation of land,

like the appropriation of surplus value, may cause alienation”(Fullilove 1996: 1520). This alienation might be manifested in the individual, but also in a communal sense. For example, in many Mixtec communities, owning land and a home are important markers of family status and prestige in the community. The loss of land may directly impact their status and sense of community. This partially explains why they go to such great lengths to maintaining ties to their natal communities and invest in building homes that are left unoccupied for months at a time. However, when circumstances make it more difficult for people to maintain these ties, individual and collective identities and ultimately the existence of the community, in its present form, are at risk.

Understanding the efforts of indigenous groups to maintain ties to their homelands has been much of the focus in studies of transnationalism and transnational communities. These studies reject the notion of the cultureless migrant. Instead of ascribing to linear progress-oriented narratives where migrants move and assimilate into the receiving culture, transnational migrants are demonstrating their ability to resist and persist in their own cultural processes and traditions.

As Malkki states of contemporary times, “people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases-not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit” (Malkki 1992: 24). This active maintenance of cultural continuity defies theories that associate globalization with culture loss. June Nash states,

Despite the many signs of alienation from community or place in societies around the globe, it is also apparent that identification with locality

becomes increasingly important with globalization. People who are uprooted, forced to migrate in search of employment, or exiled for political reasons go to extraordinary lengths to retain their ties to home (Nash 2005b: 179).

The Mixtec experience in Nogales certainly displays the tension between alienation and the displacement of a collective identity with the struggles to transform new spaces and maintain community ties.

### **The Politics of Deterritorialization**

Deterritorialization is a concept that permeates much of the literature on transnationalism, globalization and border studies. It first appeared in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and more recently has gained popularity in postmodern discourses of “ethnoscapes,” where deterritorialized “scapes” are replacing sovereign bodies such as the nation (Appadurai 1996). John Tomlinson simplistically refers to deterritorialization as the “cultural condition of globalization”(Tomlinson 1999). Nestor Garcia Canclini defines it as “the loss of the “natural” relation of culture to geographical and social territories and, at the same time, certain relative, partial territorial relocalizations of old and new symbolic productions” (Garcia Canclini 1995:229). In reaction to the focus on the fluid, cultural hybridity that deterritorialization implies, scholars are now pointing to the more concrete and material processes of deterritorialization tied to systems of capitalism and power relations.

Discourses which romanticize or naturalize processes of deterritorialization blur the forces of power that are responsible for the actual displacement and forced mobility of peoples and communities. With respect to the U.S.-Mexico border region, Josiah

Heyman warns of mystifying the border with language that portrays it as an “interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject”(Heyman 1994: 47). Instead, he sees it as a fixed topographical site between two forces of power. Heyman sees deterritorialization as a process put into motion by elites in both Mexico and the U.S. to displace both people and resources (Heyman 1994:46).

June Nash argues that scholars cannot treat processes such as deterritorialization without tracing them to the penetration of capitalism. In her critique of the literature on deterritorialization, she says, “the terms of discourse- deterritorialization, creolization, hybridization, or fragmentation-often become reified as processes and cut off from the political and economic context in which the contradictions between capital and human communities are affected” (Nash 2005a: 178). She says some scholars have forgotten the “capitalist framework that propels mobility” and come to treat deterritorialization as a force in itself.” Instead, Nash argues that we must consider deterritorialization in the context of flexible global capitalism to promote a more dynamic view of how people respond to changes in place (Nash 2005:179). Similarly, Garcia Canclini says we must attend to both the cultural manifestations of deterritorialization along with more concrete changes related to socioeconomic and political power relations:

Therefore, the analysis of the advantages or inconveniences of deterritorialization should not be reduced to the movements of ideas or cultural codes, as is frequently the case in the bibliography on postmodernity. Their meaning is also constructed in connection with social and economic practices, in struggles for local power, and in the competition to benefit from alliances with external powers (Garcia Canclini 1995: 242).

In conclusion, discourses of deterritorialization can be valuable in pointing out the ways that people have been disconnected from their lands and/or how meanings of space and place have shifted as the result of historical processes, but they can also mask the political and economic dimensions of mobility. The Mixtecs in Nogales are not simply economic migrants, or hybridized transnational subjects, but displaced peoples caught in structures of domination and inequality. Through using more concrete examples of deterritorialization within a political economic framework, we can better understand the structures that force mobility, but also, to borrow from June Nash, the multiple ways in which people are “defying deterritorialization”(Nash 2005a).

## CHAPTER 2: NEOLIBERALISM IN THE MEXICAN COUNTRYSIDE

During the last ten years, the power of money has presented a new mask over its criminal face. Disregarding borders, with no importance given to races or colors, the Power of money humiliates dignities, insults honesties and assassinates hopes. Re-named as 'Neoliberalism', the historic crime in the concentration of privileges, wealth and impunities, democratizes misery and hopelessness

First Declaration of La Realidad for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, Subcomandante Marcos, January 1996

The massive exodus of Mixtecs from their homelands is tied to specific historical and environmental conditions, including unproductive lands, widespread poverty and a history of recruitment by agricultural labor contractors. However, these local conditions do not escape the larger processes that intimately affect the present and future of the Mexican countryside. The past thirty years have witnessed a series of neoliberal reforms and policies that have made profound impacts not only in the realms of industry, trade and development but in the daily lives of Mexico's rural populations. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005: 2). If neoliberalism truly is a theory about human well-being, then it is appropriate to examine how its more concrete manifestations, such as trade laws and policies and the socio-economic trends it propagates have affected the lives and well-being of individuals and communities. This chapter will trace the historical changes brought on by neoliberalism in Mexico and pay particular attention to how it has affected indigenous peoples in southern Mexico. As

John Gledhill notes, the specific logic of neoliberalism in Mexico is characterized by closer economic integration with the U.S. and can only exacerbate the polarization of the “light” North and “dark” South of the country (Gledhill 1996: 11). Further economic disparities mirror the cultural and social differences that distinguish northern and southern Mexico. Integral to this story, and to the power relations embedded in it are the ethnic dimensions of the country. Because Mexico’s south is largely composed of indigenous groups who live in rural areas, we cannot understand how power impacts the rural sector without also considering how power is implicated in the destruction of indigenous communities. As Lynn Stephen succinctly states, “...you can’t take the class and politics out of ethnicity or ethnicity out of class and politics” (Stephen 1996: 15). This chapter seeks to show how larger neoliberal policies fail to take into account the poorest sectors of Mexican society in rural areas, and how this spurs profound and devastating impacts on the lives of individuals, families, and entire communities. In effect, the neoliberal project acts as the latest phase of systematic ethnocide in Mexico as it continues to undermine the viability of indigenous communities.

Mexico’s dominant economic ideology has little to offer rural indigenous groups other than joining the urban and agro-export workforce (Rivera-Salgado 2004: 3). This is largely due to the decreasing role the state plays in managing the welfare of the country. Neoliberalism transfers social and economic responsibility from the state to private enterprises, civil society and individuals. William Robinson identifies three basic requirements for neoliberal states to perform: to adopt fiscal policies which assure macroeconomic stability, provide the necessary global economic infrastructure and

maintain social order, which may involve processes of coercion or ideological apparatuses (Robinson 2003: 46). These processes do not, however, privilege the interests of the nation in general or facilitate national unity or legitimacy, but rather often lead to severe restructuring and social fragmentation. He states,

Unable to resolve the contradictory problems of legitimacy and capital accumulation, local states opt simply for abandoning whole sectors of national populations. In many instances, they no longer even try to attain legitimacy among the marginalized and supernumeraries, who are isolated and contained in new ways, or subject to repressive social control measures (Robinson 2003: 46).

In Mexico, the groups most severely impacted and marginalized by neoliberal changes are women, migrants and indigenous peoples, groups that have historically been marginalized and impoverished in Mexico (Barry 1995). Neoliberalism is not the sole source of their marginalization, but it certainly exacerbates it. Because the logic of neoliberalism deems certain segments of the population as “unproductive” or “supernumeraries” (i.e. subsistence farmers), these populations must find alternative means for survival, such as migrating to the U.S. and/or entering the informal labor pool, as displayed by Mixtec street-vendors. Thus, we see how the “migration problem” will not be solved by building higher fences or putting people into jail, but must attend to the larger structural causes of systematic inequality and desperation.

### **History of Neoliberal Policies in Mexico**

In Mexico, neoliberalism accelerated after the global economic crisis of the 1970s in which Mexico’s foreign debt increased from \$6.9 billion in 1972 to \$58 billion in 1982 when Mexico declared bankruptcy. Faced with a financial crisis, President de la Madrid

was influenced by groups such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the US Treasury to begin implementing neoliberal reforms such as privatization, reorganizing financial systems for foreign interests, opening internal markets, lowering tariff barriers and constructing more flexible labor markets (Harvey 2005: 99-100). These reforms were exchanged for a loan from the World Bank in 1984, a watershed event that marked a new phase of Mexican dependence on foreign capital and history of economic integration.

Increased foreign investment in Mexico accelerated in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Foreign investors, rather than small-scale farmers were the main beneficiaries of Mexico's agricultural modernization program from the 1940s-1970s, the so called Golden Age. As a result, the food production industry became largely dependent on foreign capital, food imports rose and the country adopted U.S. consumption patterns, including more purchase of processed foods (Barry 1995). In 1986, President de la Madrid entered into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). GATT continued the trend toward encouraging foreign investment, liberalizing trade, reducing state regulatory controls and a compliance with the World Bank and IMF. Mexico leads the world in signing the most free trade agreements with other countries (Wise et al. 2003: 1-2). In the late 1980's and early 1990s, the Salinas administration's reform program continued to open up Mexico to further foreign investment and competition. Salinas reversed the 1982 nationalization of Mexican banks, solidified NAFTA negotiations and initiated a privatization program, as epitomized by the privatization of the telecommunications company, Telmex. Privatization of state-run organizations

worked hand in hand with increasing foreign investment. Finally, the development of the maquiladora program symbolizes the move away from state-owned enterprises and the resulting instability of the foreign-owned job sector as well as further dependence on foreign capital. The number of state-owned firms dropped from 1,100 in 1982 to 200 in 2000 (Harvey 2005: 101). Investment in Mexico's agroindustry continues to be U.S. dominated, and the two largest transnational corporations in Mexico, Unilever and Nestle, are European owned (Barry 1995: 64).

### **Social and Economic Impacts of Neoliberal Policies and NAFTA**

Since the early 1970's and Mexico's increasing incorporation into the global economy, the country has been plagued by a "deceleration of economic growth" marked by small-scale agricultural crises, unequitable trade agreements and exploitative labor markets and standards. As a result, the country has generally experienced a massive uprooting of the rural population, the feminization of industrial labor, environmental degradation, the penetration of globalized capitalism into rural areas and an even larger divide between the economic and material conditions for rural and urban Mexicans (Binford, 1996:71). During the economic collapse in the 1980's, there was an eighty percent increase in the number of people working in the informal sector, many of the new workers being women (Gledhill 1995: 9).

In the 1990s, proponents of NAFTA argued that the new trade policies would improve life for all Mexicans, but over a decade after its implementation scholars agree that the trade policies did more to hurt the poor and rural sectors of the economy than

help them (Wise, et al. 2003: 3). NAFTA was closely followed by the 1994 “December mistake” when Mexico was forced to devalue its currency. The devaluation led to further economic disparities between the rich and poor, and increased levels of poverty. Forty-two percent of the national income goes to the richest ten percent of the population while eleven percent of the national income goes to the poorest forty percent of the population (Wise, et al. 2003). From 1984 to 1996, the poverty rate grew from fifty-nine percent of the population to eighty percent. Nearly fifty percent of Mexicans lived in extreme poverty. In rural Mexico, the percentages were slightly higher, with eighty-two percent living in poverty and fifty-five percent living in extreme poverty (Wise, et al. 2003 3).

In addition, Mexico’s informal economy continued to grow as more and more workers, or as Robinson calls them, “supernumeraries” were displaced from their land and/or unable to locate stable employment. In the first two years after the implementation of NAFTA, over two million jobs were lost, small and medium-sized businesses could not compete with foreign corporations. In 1996, 25 million out of the 35 million economically active population maintained their living through informal activities without the benefits of a social safety net (Stephen 2002: 5). In 1998, the informal sector accounted for 64 percent of the total employment in the country and contributed 32 percent of Mexico’s Gross Domestic Profit (International Labour Office 2002).

The increase in the informal sector, where people are afforded nothing in the way of social security, healthcare or childcare benefits, comes at a time when the Mexican government is pulling out of the social sector. In 2005, the World Bank reported that the Mexican government is investing less and less in social protection programs and in the

social sector in general. They blame this on a limited tax base (which is becoming more limited as unemployment rates and the informal sector grow) and low fiscal revenues. Public resources for poverty reduction programs are extremely limited and the poor are less and less capable of coping with their increasing vulnerability and risk (Aguilar 2005). Programs that did seek to improve rural conditions, such as the National Solidarity Project (PRONASOL), ended up exacerbating wealth differences and local fragmentation (Nash 2001: 109).

A recent World Bank report (2003) documents other areas where NAFTA unequally impacted different sectors of Mexican society. It is clear that the more educated, wealthier and non-indigenous groups were better served by NAFTA than the poorer, indigenous and less educated social sectors. Some of the report's main findings include:

- The rise in wages of those with higher levels of education, relative to those with less that began with unilateral liberalization of the 1980s, largely remained after NAFTA.
- Northern and Central States grew faster across the 1990s modestly reducing income gaps with the Federal District, while poorer Southern States grew slower due to low levels of education, infrastructure and quality of local institutions.
- Large Mexican firms increased their access to northern capital markets as domestic credit dried up after the tequila crisis, while credit remained constrained for small and medium enterprises.

- In the countryside, the productivity of the irrigated lands increased, but non-export, non-irrigated agriculture didn't benefit (The World Bank 2003)

A decade after NAFTA and the devaluation, poverty rates still remain outrageously high. The Fox Administration, which took power in 2000 conceded to the persistence of poverty throughout the country, stating that over 40 million Mexicans, three out of five people, live in poverty and 25 million of them in extreme poverty (Gledhill 2004).

### **Assault on Agriculture as a Way of Life**

During the NAFTA debates, there were two major arguments concerning the future role of agriculture in Mexico. The first minimized the importance of agriculture and instead pointed to the imminent boom in the industrial and service sectors which would absorb the surplus labor displaced from the agricultural sector. The second argued that the amendment of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which would open collective lands to be privatized and end government land redistribution, would create a restructuring of the rural economy, replacing inefficient peasant farmers with more productive commercial farming operations. The hidden transcript here, of course, is that power will transfer from the rural peasantry into largely U.S. owned transnational agrichemical and biotech corporations (Gledhill 1995: 14) and that no matter what, the small-scale rural peasantry would be compromised. Both scenarios disregard the central importance of land and subsistence to indigenous communities. Furthermore, they increase insecurity within the rural sector, weaken the autonomy of traditional forms of governance and increase the dependence on wage labor and migration. Ultimately, it is

difficult to resolve the contradiction between such neoliberal policies and the centrality of land to indigenous ideologies and ways of life.

Without a doubt, one of the most significant policy changes during the term of Carlos Salinas de Gotari was the end of agrarian reform. In 1992, Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution was amended to end land distribution and open ejido lands to privatization and development. The Mexican government was no longer obligated to redistribute land in response to communal petitions, nor did it protect the inalienable rights of communally owned ejidos. This move put the rural sector and indigenous communities, particularly those in the south where communal lands are plentiful, at risk of loss of land and loss of subsistence agriculture. Article 27 was one of the hallmarks of the Constitution of 1917 and the Mexican Revolution. During the 1990s when it was amended, neoliberals argued that communal lands were inefficient and would be better utilized if privatized. These were the same arguments made by liberals in Mexico in the 1850s before the abolishment of Indian and Church corporate lands in the Constitution of 1857. This was also the same logic that underscored Porfirio Diaz's regime to liberalize trade, encourage development in the countryside and privatize communal landholdings (Hart 2000: 436) Thus, we see the historical roots of privatization and its origins in 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism and the pendulum swing between privatization and centralization that has marked the past hundred years of Mexican history.

The consequences of adjustment policies continue to be disastrous for rural areas where agriculture and small and medium sized industry dominate. The government virtually abandoned its role in many small-scale farming sectors such as corn and coffee

to the mercy of the world economy. For instance, the government cut subsidies and eliminated tariffs and price controls. Mexico's grain market was opened to U.S. exports while the U.S. fruit and vegetable market was opened to Mexican exports (Stephen 2002: 5). Price guarantees were eliminated and as a result, small scale farmers are now finding it difficult to compete with the subsidized U.S. agroindustry which "dumps" its surplus products such as corn and beans into Mexican markets (Nash 2003).

While neoliberal economic and political policies have had widespread effects on the Mexican countryside, some areas have felt them more strongly than others. For example, the two types of communal landholdings in Mexico were impacted differently with the 1992 change in Article 27. In legal terms, Mexican rural land can be either held by a group as an ejido, or a comunidad agraria (agrarian community), sometimes known as comunales (communal lands). Under the 1992 change, ejidos can be privatized, whereas comunidades agrarias cannot yet be privatized. However, the amendment allows them to be converted to an ejido and then be sold and privatized (Stephen 2002: 63). Thus, because Chiapas is comprised of more ejidos and less agrarian communities than Oaxaca, the change threatens more communities in Chiapas than it does in Oaxaca. For example, San Jeronimo, the town where many of the Mixtec families in Nogales come from is not an ejido, but a commune, meaning that the land is spread out among the various 250 households and cannot yet be privatized (Kearney 2004a: 284). San Jeronimo, like many other communal lands remains under control of the community.

The opening up of ejidos for private purchase and development has also led to land conflicts and internal differentiation within communities. For example, after the 1992 New Agrarian Legislation, land conflicts turned inwards within communities, as PRI supported indigenous leaders or caciques began to expropriate the land of other members in their communities (Nash 1995: 32). Nash explains how with the opening of land and commercialization of cash crops, a new class of entrepreneurs developed, many of whom are indigenous people taking advantage of the production of their own neighbors. She summarizes this phenomenon, “Ethnic identification fails to overcome the exploitative relations with other Indians, even those of the same community” (Nash 1995:54). Thus we see how neoliberal policies impact internal differentiation and produce new hierarchies within indigenous communities. I will explore a similar process of differentiation and competition among the Mixtec community in Nogales in Chapter 5.

### **Neoliberalism and the Impacts of Migration**

Closely connected to the failure of the countryside is the massive uprooting of the rural population. While seasonal migration has historically been a strategy for rural Mexicans, in recent years there has been an increase in people moving into urban centers, industrializing border towns and the United States. Unlike earlier times when only the men would leave in search of work, increasing numbers of women and entire families are being displaced. The logic of this mobility is that people will be able to improve their lives by being incorporated into higher paying urban and foreign economies. However, the results of this movement has yielded some contradictory results. A recent World Bank

report actually documents the decrease in extreme poverty between 2000 and 2004 in rural areas, but not in urban areas. In urban areas, poverty rates have not improved and the urban poor work harder, but earn less money; they work more hours, but earn less in 2003 than in 1991 before the devaluation (Aguilar 2005). How then can we explain why people move away from rural areas if life is getting better? The reason poverty is not declining in rural areas is largely due to an increase in “public and private transfers,” otherwise known as remittances, sent to rural areas by family members living in urban areas or in the United States. Thus, we see how mobility creates a vicious cycle where people are actually moving to poorer living conditions and working harder and not able to fully enjoy the benefits of their labor. Later we will see how many of the Mixtec family narratives display this pattern, yet how some of their reactions to these new arrangements are contradictory.

Whereas migration from Mexico and central America is designated as one of the largest national “problems” in the U.S., the economic implications and impacts it has on both the U.S. and the Mexican economy make it less of a problem and more of a necessity. Remittances have been touted by migrant-sending governments, the U.S. government, development organizations and multilateral banks as “the new development finance” and the ticket to “high human development” (Elton 2006: 1). However, these are the very groups that created the conditions for emigration in the first place. Furthermore, they exaggerate the potential that remittances may have on poverty reduction and mask some of their more deleterious effects such as disturbing local economies, exacerbating differentiation and letting governments “off the hook” for failing to provide basic service

infrastructure that fall in the realm of state responsibility (Elton 2006: 3). Employing migrants in the agricultural, service, industrial and informal sectors are central business strategies in the U.S. economy and help to keep prices low. In addition, remittances sent home to families in Mexico are crucial to the Mexican economy (not to mention U.S. banks that are making a fortune off them) as well as to the livelihoods of individual families. The Bank of Mexico estimates that in 2005, at least \$20 billion dollars were sent from the U.S. to Mexico in the form of remittances. This figure nearly doubles the earnings from the NAFTA sponsored vegetable export sector, casting a shadow of irony onto the agreement that promotes the free trade of products and not the free movement of humans. It also demonstrates the hegemonic grip of neoliberalism on the poorest sectors of Mexico. People are forced to move to foreign lands in order to support their families, and in doing so, they become the targets of discrimination and occupy the lowest sectors of society- both in the United States and in Mexican urban centers such as Nogales, while fueling both economies. The Mexican economy depends on remittances, and in fact led to President Fox's characterization of migrants as national heroes. This predicament casts a shadow of doubt on whether or not the U.S. or the Mexican governments truly seek viable alternatives to the uprooting of populations. Criminalizing migrants or building larger fences (as recent U.S. immigration bills propose) do little to address the root causes of migration and will likely have little effect on stopping the flow of people or improving people's lives.

In rural Mexico, particularly in the southern states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerro, indigenous groups continue to face ongoing economic, political and cultural

struggles. Neoliberalism has done little to help Mexico's impoverished peoples and only exacerbated the uprooting of rural communities, further increased the gap between the rich and poor and caused widespread environmental degradation. More than a decade after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, the Mexican government continues to push forward the neoliberal agenda in southern Mexico, with little regard for incorporating the needs or desires of the Indigenous groups who live on the land. The neoliberal ideology and discourse naturalizes processes of trade, industrialization and development. In initiatives such as the looming Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), development and industrialization programs are engulfed in the terminology of sustainable development and environmental conservation. Agreements such as NAFTA, CAFTA (signed in 2005) and the current negotiations on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), present neoliberal policies as the only solution to poverty eradication and economic development. Instead of learning from the uneven and negative impacts of NAFTA, neoliberalism in Mexico appears to be going strong. Ultimately, these policies continue the systematic undermining of Mexico's rural communities and ethnocide of Mexico's indigenous populations.

### CHAPTER 3: FINDING MEANING IN LA MIXTECA

“Cuando no hay lluvia, no hay trabajo y ahora, no hay lluvia”

“When there is no rain, there is no work, and right now there is no rain”

Florencia on why she left the Mixteca

#### **No Hay Nada**

Nearly all of the people I spoke with said that if they had a choice they would remain in their villages in Oaxaca, but are unable to because “no hay nada” (there is nothing). I heard this phrase repeatedly from people who stated that they had no choice but to leave Oaxaca because there was nothing for them; no work, no money, and not enough food to feed their families. Teresa told me how ashamed she was that she had to return to her mother’s village with her children just so they could get some chicken to eat. To understand the complexities of movement from the Mixteca in the past several decades, it is important to consider the region’s socio-political, ecological and historical circumstances. More importantly, it is necessary to understand how these process *work together* in creating the desperate circumstances that displace entire communities. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the historic specificity of movement from the Mixteca, and not confuse Mixtec patterns with other types of movement from other groups in Mexico. Mixtec migration routes have historically been and continue to be different from other ethnic and regional groups in Mexico. For example, the Mixtecs have tended to follow the agricultural belt from Baja California up to Oregon as well as settle in border cities, while the Zapotecs, also from Oaxaca, have tended to concentrate in the service sector in urban California locations. Furthermore, migration patterns vary

not only between different indigenous groups, but within them as well. This chapter will look at the case of the community of San Jeronimo, located in the Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca to understand the local and historical conditions that have contributed to the widespread movement of people to the north. Despite the regional particularity associated with patterns of movement and settlement, the overall constraints and struggles faced by people from San Jeronimo are shared by peasants throughout Mexico. In attempts to address the current assault on the rural sector and the subsequent displacement of communities, I end the chapter with a discussion on the fate of the peasantry in Mexico.

The movement of peoples from the Mixteca is not new. While neoliberal policies have certainly shaped and hastened movement, and created circumstances in which people cannot easily move back to their homelands, migration has been a part of life for Mixtecs for several centuries (Velasco Ortiz 2005: 34). Since the eighteenth century, common lands in the Mixteca region went through processes of privatization, leaving many people without land and forcing them to migrate (Velasco Ortiz 2005: 35). Since the nineteenth century, there have been three major periods of movement from the Mixteca. In the early 1900s many people migrated to Mexico City, Puebla and Veracruz and in the 1920s many Mixtecs went to work in the sugar cane fields on the Gulf coast (Kearney 2004a: 183). In the mid-1900s people migrated to Mexico City, Oaxaca City, Sinaloa, or participated in the Bracero Program beginning in the 1940s. The third period was during the 1970s when there was a massive flow of migrants to the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California Sur, Baja California, and the United States (Lopez 2004: 254). Mixtec migration is closely associated with *enganchadores*, or agricultural labor

contractors that were sent to states such as Sinaloa and Oaxaca to recruit workers (Lopez 2004: 255). Most of the families in Nogales moved as part of this third phase. During the 1970s and 1980s, Mixtec enclaves began to form in the border cities of Tijuana, Mexicali and Nogales. This development was closely tied to the labor market associated with transborder tourism and remains so today (Velasco Ortiz 2004: 105).

San Jeronimo is located in the Mixteca baja region of the state of Oaxaca (one of Mexico's largest) but also one with extremely rugged terrain. It is estimated that only 9% of land in Oaxaca is arable. This fact combined with regional ethnic and social differentiation, increasing poverty and widespread governmental neglect makes Oaxaca ripe for social unrest and displacement. In the 1950s, people from San Jeronimo started migrating to the agro-industrial tomato fields in Sinaloa to work as seasonal workers and then they moved into San Quintin valley in Baja California and into California (Kearney 1996: 16). The agricultural fields of Culiacan also became a popular destination for Mixtecs. The connection between the Mixteca and Culiacan gained notoriety in Angus Wright's (1990) exposure of the toxic pesticide ridden world of Mexico's agro-export industry and the deplorable and unsanitary conditions many Mixtecs lived in. In addition to agricultural destinations, Mixtecs started forming enclaves in Mexican border towns, primarily Tijuana and to lesser degrees Mexicali and Nogales. These enclaves function as an intermediate destination for family members who travel to the United States, but they have also become home to fairly large communities of Mixtecs who work in the informal sectors.

The inability of people to maintain livelihoods in San Jeronimo is the most immediate factor in their displacement. Like many other regions in Mexico, land is becoming more and more difficult to farm for small-scale farmers with no irrigation. Only 20 percent of San Jeronimo's population can be fed from the corn and beans produced in the village (Kearney 1996: 16). Household land holdings are small, much of it is located on eroding hillsides, and there is a gross inequality in holdings among the population; in 1980, 20 percent of the population owned 65 percent of the land and another 20 percent owned a mere 1 percent of the land (Kearney 1981: 5). The land surrounding San Jeronimo has been devastated by soil erosion from plow and oxen farming (Kearney 2004a: 288). The UN Food and Agriculture Organization determined that 70 percent of the potentially arable land in San Jeronimo can no longer grow crops, making it one of the most severely eroded landscapes on earth (Wright 1990: 95). In 1980, Kearney clarified that the Mixtec communities were not being economically developed, nor were they being displaced by commercial agriculture, as it occurs in other regions. Rather, the displacement of Mixtecs is more complicated. Instead of commercial agriculture farms coming to their lands, people are recruited out to work in farms throughout Mexico and now, in the U.S.

Land tensions and fragmentation has also been a major source of tension and difficulty for people in the Mixteca region. After the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent land grants, the Mixteca area was one of the areas that benefited the least in the state of Oaxaca, with a higher percentage of privatized lands compared with other regions (Velasco Ortiz 2005: 35). In 2001, there were nearly 700 agrarian conflicts

registered in the Mixteca lands of Oaxaca, Guerro and Puebla. Conflict leads to and is a result of regional differentiation and occasionally leads to violence and kidnappings (Burnham).

In addition to land tensions and poor agricultural conditions, there are few other money-making opportunities in San Jeronimo. There is no wage labor available in or around the village, and the only other source of cash comes from weaving hats from palm leaves, but the prices per hat are minimal. In 1981, the average weaver could make two hats per day and the average price was only \$0.11 per hat (Kearney 1981).

Some argue that population growth also contributes to high rates of out-migration, although this may simply be speculation. Nevertheless, the Mixteca has one of the highest population growth rates in Mexico and an equally high rate of out-migration to various locations throughout Mexico (Wright 1990: 89). In the early eighties, it was estimated that 85 percent of the men and 55 percent of the women from San Jeronimo had worked outside the community (Kearney 1981: 7). I am not aware of more recent statistics, but it seems that these numbers are surely increasing, with the movement of not only single men, but wives and children and parents are now moving to find work outside of San Jeronimo. As one woman from San Jeronimo explained to me, “solamente los viejos se quedan” (only the old ones stay).

### **The End of the Peasantry (again)?**

The case of the Mixteca, where high levels of out-migration has resulted in rows of empty houses and fallow plots, begs the question of the fate of the peasantry and

Mexico's indigenous groups. Of course, this question is not new, but one that has been the subject of significant debate in anthropology and history. Eric Hobsbawm calls the "death of the peasantry" the "most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century"(cited in Robinson 2003: 253). Will peasants eventually disappear within the capitalist context or will they persist in some form? This debate remains pertinent in the context of the displaced Mixtec community because people are displaying novel ways of staying connected to the rural countryside while increasingly participating in a cash economy. People are neither abandoning their lives in the countryside, nor are they wholly resisting the capitalist penetration. It remains to be seen, however, how long the community can maintain its collective identity while not physically present in Oaxaca.

The peasant has been a central social category in Latin American anthropology. In 1955, Eric Wolf defined the peasant as having three main criteria: they are primarily involved in agricultural production (as opposed to fishing, mining or keeping livestock), they "retain effective control of land," and they aim at subsistence rather than reinvestment (Wolf 2001: 195-196). It is this definition of the peasant, and its place within a functioning "closed corporate community" immune to outside forces that has come under scrutiny in recent years. As William Roseberry and Raymond Williams point out, we must consider the country and the city as well as the peasant and the proletariat as having ever-changing qualities which must be understood in the context of capitalist history (Roseberry 1994: 59).

Michael Kearney also deconstructs the social category of the peasant, and argues that this term, along with other traditional anthropological dualisms including rural-urban, peasant-proletarian and modern-primitive etc. are outdistanced by contemporary history. He says that while there may be some pockets of peasants left in Latin America and Asia, “peasants are mostly gone and that global conditions do not favor the perpetuation of those who remain” (Kearney 1996: 3). Kearney’s re-conceptualization of the peasantry and declaration of the postpeasantry does not reject Wolf’s notion, but rather revisits and extends it in the contemporary global context. In fact, while Wolf was defining the peasantry, he recognized its fragility and the need to understand it in relation to global institutions and processes. He comments on the rising importance of industry, trade and the large-scale agricultural enterprises that have begun to compete with the peasantry for resources and opportunities. He remarks on the “worldwide ‘crisis of the peasantry’ (Firth 1952: 12), related to the increasingly marginal role of the peasantry within the prevalent economic system”(Wolf 2001: 195). Unfortunately, Wolf’s hypothesis was correct and his characterization of competition is now emerging as Del Monte, Campbell and Green Giant have moved into Mexico’s agroindustrial sector and increasingly displace small-scale agriculture (Barry 1995: 85).

Not all scholars agree with Kearney’s somber prediction of the peasantry in Mexico. Scott Cook argues that while the peasantry is “vulnerable to the fads, foibles, and crises in Mexico’s political economy,” peasant agriculture still persists and can supplement other forms of cash-earning and commodity-producing strategies (Cook 2004:280, Appendini 2002). Furthermore, he argues that it is premature to proclaim the

end to the corporate agrarian community citing “popular struggle and negotiations between agrarian sectors and the Mexican state over constitutional issues regarding citizenship, property rights, and local rule” as proof of its existence (Cook 2004: 281). He also states that despite the impacts of migrant remittances on sending communities, “they are still sites of lived realities and are immersed in Mexican agrarian commodity culture” (Cook 2004: 281). For some people, this is true, and for others it is not. Cook points to the lived realities of people in the Mexican countryside as proof of the peasantry but he ironically ignores the lived realities of all the people who are not able to continue their agrarian based lives and/or do not have family members back home to send money to. Peasant communities are highly differentiated and while some people may be able to afford to have people stay home to care for their *milpas*, others do not have that choice. For the families in Nogales, investment into the community is not going into agriculture, but into constructing houses and into the civil religious ceremonies. The land might be worked when a male in the household is called for his year-long *servicio* term, but for many, this practice is done more out of necessity. In addition, livelihoods are no longer based on subsistence agriculture, but on the informal sectors in northern Mexico and the U.S., the occasional wage labor job, and a variety of household strategies.

As it seems Wolf’s landmark work on the peasantry may be less and less applicable for describing this social group, it remains important for several reasons. Not only does it help make palpable the historical shift of a social group that has been central to the Mexican nation in projects of Mexican nationalism and the Mexican revolution, but it documents a way of life that has become increasingly less possible for people to

maintain. The proletarianization of the peasant in Mexico is not a mark of progress or evolution in a developing state, but a symptom of displacement that seriously compromises what Guillermo Bonfil Batalla refers to as “Mexico profundo,” and the lifeways of many peoples and communities (Bonfil Batalla 1996 [1987]). My point here is not to make predictions about the fate of the peasantry, nor is it to romanticize a rural past, but to point out that its existence is still a point of struggle. What remains to be determined is how long communities can maintain transnational ties, especially as younger generations are born far from their ancestral lands. It also remains to be seen if the Mexican government can afford to lose its peasantry, or if there will be a return to the revolutionary ideals of agrarian reform and workers rights. Finally, we must ask the question: even if economic and political policies reverse to support small and medium sized farmers, will the land be able to support them?

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH SETTING: EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND VULNERABILITY**

If you are not Mexican, and can't pass as Tijuanaense, a local, the tough guys find you out. Salvadorans and Guatemalans are routinely beaten up and robbed. Sometimes they are disfigured. Indians---Chinantecas, Mixtecas, Guasaves, Zapotecas, Mayas--- are insulted and pushed around; often they are lucky- they are merely ignored. They use this to their advantage. Often they don't dream of crossing into the United States: a Mexican tribal person would never be able to blend in, and they know it. To them, the garbage dumps and street vending and begging in Tijuana are a vast improvement over their former lives (Urrea 1992: 13).

### **The Growth of Nogales, Sonora**

Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona were settled in 1880, two years before the installment of the railroad linking Guaymas, Sonora with Benson, Arizona (Arreola 2001: 46). In 1889 Nogales was designated as a town and in 1920 gained formal recognition as an official city. The railroad that runs through Nogales was intended to promote trade between Mexico and the United States, and over a century later, it remains an important point between U.S.-Mexico trade relations. Nogales is also home to about 90 maquiladoras which assemble mostly U.S.-made parts, and is one of the most important points of entry for agricultural products. Nearly 60% of the winter produce consumed in the U.S. and Canada passes through the Nogales border and is then processed in Nogales, Arizona (Consulate 2005). Most of this produce is grown in the agroindustrial farms of Sonora and Sinaloa, the same farms that attract many Mixtecs as wage laborers. Human smuggling has also increased near Nogales, especially in the past 10 years since the border patrol crackdowns in California and Texas. Arizona, with its lethal desert has become one of the areas of choice for people to cross into the United States.

### **A new kind of war: controlling U.S. borders**

1994 marked the beginning of a new series of initiatives implemented by the U.S. government intended to control the U.S.-Mexico border. Building walls, installing flood lights and increasing the numbers of border patrol agents were the primary tasks in Operation Gatekeeper in California, Operation Hold-the-Line in Texas and Operation Safeguard in Arizona. The wall that now stands separating Nogales, Sonora from Sonora, Arizona was built in 1999 and is made of leftover landing strip materials from the Persian Gulf War. Several of my informants remember when the wall was built, and also the times before the wall when crossing over to shop in the U.S. was relatively easy. Felipa remembers jumping over the wall with her daughter, just for the day, to see what life was like in the U.S. Now, her daughter, ten years older recounts stories she has heard of people dying in attempts to cross the desert with *coyotes* (smugglers). One such victim was a young man she befriended living in Nogales. “Que triste, que triste” (how sad, how sad) is all she could say while shaking her head.

In 1964 President Lopez Mateos implemented the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (PRONAF) which intended to promote tourism and international trade on the U.S.-Mexico border. In 1965 the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) was implemented and maquiladoras- Mexican factories which assembled U.S. made parts, and could be shipped back to the U.S. with no tax- sprung up along the border. At the time, the Mexican government argued that the BIP was intended to absorb members of the Bracero program, which ended in 1964, but in reality, most employees were not Mexican braceros, but

young women. Furthermore, the maquilas were a part of a larger plan to stimulate growth on the long-isolated northern border, while allowing U.S. capitalists to exploit Mexican workers (Kopinak 1996).

Along with maquilas, tourism also became a major priority in border cities beginning in the 1960's, and the streets of Nogales have witnessed significant changes in the past 20 years. Tourism is the blood-life of downtown Nogales. Parking lots quickly fill on the U.S. side of the border and family vacationers and fun-seeking, under 21-year-old college students rub shoulders with Mexicans carrying shopping bags and groceries while they pass through the turnstiles that mark the political and geographic border between Mexico and the United States. There is never a line crossing into Nogales, where the Mexican officials on duty occasionally look through a few bags, but normally stay seated in their tiny office chatting to each other. The office that houses Mexican officials is dwarfed by the large structure next door that houses its U.S. counterpart. These buildings are the present-day versions of the permanent border-monitoring stations that were first built in 1917, along with the first dividing fence, during the Mexican Revolution (Arreola 1993: 208). As people freely walk into Nogales, a long line is usually forming on the other side of a metal fence with people waiting to enter the building and to cross into the United States each hoping they won't be asked to step into one of the back offices for questioning. The long lines are unfailingly accompanied by street entertainers and beggars who day after day depend on donations from people entering the U.S. in their struggles to eek out a living.

Once leaving the border crossing, tourists enter a strikingly different setting where cheap commodities, prescription drugs, food and alcohol await them. Compared with Nogales, Arizona, Nogales, Sonora is louder and the streets are filled with traffic and people on the sidewalks. Estimates on the population of Nogales vary widely- some as low as 250,000 people and some as high as 450,000. The dynamic and mobile nature of much of the population as well as the rapid urbanization make official numbers difficult to come by.

Some of the most striking differences when crossing the border are the visual signs poverty. Driving on the I-19 from the north and coming around the final bend before entering Nogales, AZ, there is a clear view of both sides of the border and their dramatic differences. While Nogales, AZ is almost a sleepy town with older homes and few people on the streets outside of the small downtown area, Nogales, Sonora is bustling and filled with people, noise, traffic and houses precariously built on hillsides. During the monsoon rainstorms in late summer the hillsides of Nogales, Sonora turn into waterfalls and downtown streets become muddy rivers, reminding residents and visitors of the city's poor infrastructure.

### **Hierarchies in Downtown**

Downtown Nogales is set up in a grid-like manner and largely caters to tourists from the U.S. as well as serving as a commercial zone for local residents. The majority of souvenir shops, pharmacies and bars are clustered around the border crossing areas, while other shopping, food and services extend for miles beyond. In the downtown area, there

are several plazas and alleyways that feature crafts and collectibles from all over Mexico. To an outsider, each of these areas seem rather chaotic with vendors, store owners and local guides vying for attention; however, there is a specific logic to the spatial makeup of these areas and distinct gendered and ethnic hierarchies.

Perhaps the most obvious dimension of the ethnic and gendered hierarchy in the tourist sector of Nogales is the spatial differentiation among sellers. Downtown Nogales is spatially divided among ethnic, class and gendered lines and indigenous peoples are noticeably and actively “contained” in specific areas by local authorities. The store owners and store employees are nearly all non-indigenous men who operate out of store fronts and the adjacent sidewalks with stalls. These men ironically function as “experts” of authentic Mexican handicrafts, often providing books and articles on the techniques of indigenous artisans. Their abilities to speak English and freedom to leave their stores to accompany wandering tourists help them to sell. There also exist a group of non-indigenous street vendors who sell directly from their carts. In blatant contrast to these workers are the indigenous street-vendors who sit on the ground in several downtown plazas and alleyways, often behind large spreads of “Mexican” crafts, many of them actually produced in China. These people must obtain permits to sell their goods and thus must have the proper connections to local authorities to even obtain a permit. Vendors must apply for permits and pay a monthly fee of \$120 pesos or about \$12 dollars. In addition, the street vendors must pay local businesses to store their items overnight. This fee also comes out to about \$10 dollars per week.

Different locations receive varying numbers of tourists, thus creating prime selling locations. Thus, more established vendors have better locations than newcomers and those with kin members already established are more likely to join a prime location. Here, it is evident how the local government is able to manage indigenous subjects and relegate them to specific areas and control their abilities to sell. Nevertheless, to be able to sell legally on the streets is viewed as a positive improvement to illegal vending. Indeed, for some of the more established vendors, they have created a fairly lucrative, if unstable, niche in the tourist economy. In addition to the established indigenous groups and non-indigenous store employees, there are also those people who have just only arrived to Nogales, speak very little to no Spanish and have not yet made the social connections necessary to even obtain a selling location or purchase products to sell. These people, almost always women with several children, roam the streets to sell packs of gum and/or sit on the ground and beg for charity. Some of them, like Maria, have been there for over a decade. They occupy the lowest rung of the tourist economy and are the most penalized for their activities. Thus, from the highest point of male non-indigenous store employees down to the indigenous female beggars, it is clear that the hierarchy of the Nogales tourist economy is clearly divided on ethnic and gendered lines.

Working on the streets, as opposed to in stores or shops, comes with a variety of difficulties. The streets are often dirty with trash and smell of urine. Because Nogales is located in the Sonoran desert, vendors must work in dangerously hot summers and cold winters. The monsoon rains threaten to destroy their products and often compromise the time they can spend working. On more than one occasion this summer, I had to help

women furiously pack up their items when the rains began pouring and destroying their crafts. The weather was one of the most common complaints the women cited in regards to working in the streets. Working on the streets also offers little protection from thieves and/or verbal harassment.

The spatial politics between indigenous vendors and local store owners is one of the most palpable forms of tension in downtown Nogales. This tension stems from larger inequalities and racism targeted at indigenous peoples throughout Mexico, but is also specifically a result of the new presence they have in the political and economic landscape of Nogales. Elizabeth Colson notes that displaced peoples often encounter hostility and resistance from members of the receiving community. She says,

Those resettled as communities may find themselves in a hostile environment, for previous occupants of the area are rarely compensated for having to share local resources with the newcomers, and the community is seen as a rival political entity operating within the space formerly controlled by local political figures (Colson 2004: 108).

In the only other study conducted with street vendors in Nogales, Terri Place investigated the political tensions surrounding the 1997 “facelift” development program that was initiated to “clean up” downtown Nogales to make it more appealing for tourists. She explains the frustration shopkeepers felt in having to compete with street vendors and how this frustration resulted in verbal abuse as well as acts such as pouring buckets of urine on their work locations before the women arrived (Place 1999).

One of the greatest sources of marginalization in the Nogales tourist economy for Mixtec families (both established vendors and street beggars) is their inability to speak English. The vendors must compete with non-indigenous store employees who are able to

chat, joke and persuade dollar-carrying American tourists into their stores. Most Mixtec vendors speak very little English and the few phrases they do know tend to be met with more annoyance than interest by tourists. Walking through the tourist corridors, you hear the women calling out, “Hey lady, what you want? Good price. One dollar. One dollar.” Or “You like braids? Cheap price.” I spent several afternoons with the women writing and practicing different phrases to say to their English-speaking customers. The women generally agreed that having a better command of English was central to competing with non-indigenous store employees.

In addition to tensions between vendors and store employees, there are distinct divisions based on village and regional identity among indigenous vendors. For example, the women from Toluca occupy a different alleyway than the women from the Mixtec area. Furthermore, within each group there are divisions- women from the same village of origin tend to sit together when possible. The vendors explain this as being due to regional dialects. They often comment that they cannot understand people from other regions, and this is the reason they do not sit together or socialize. In some cases, as in the case of the people from San Jeronimo, who have some of the prime selling locations, their family members sell in other locations. This is also a social and economic strategy because one family has members located throughout the city, thus increasing the chances of selling and diversifying options.

## **Colonias**

In Oaxaca, it is fairly common to hear of people fighting for and demanding basic rights and necessities, such as potable water, paved streets and electricity. While Nogales is generally considered to be located in the developed and industrialized North, the same demands are being made by local residents. The living conditions for most of the Mixtec families living in the colonias are not significantly different than their homes in Oaxaca. The majority of Mixtec families live in several colonias on the southeast side of sprawling Nogales. The colonias include land that people have bought as well as squatter communities known as *invasiones* (invasions). In her survey of living conditions for maquilas workers in Nogales, Kopinak observes that home ownership actually increases when you move down the socioeconomic scale because the poorest people cannot afford to rent (Kopinak 1996). Rather, newcomers build makeshift shacks out of recycled tin, wood and car tires. More established residents buy small plots of land from the local government or landowners and family members join together to construct the homes. Several of the more established Mixtec families have been able to purchase land and construct their own homes. Of the houses I visited, several were only partially done. I also saw some plots of land which Mixtec families owned, but still had not pooled enough money together to start building. Still, other more established families have improved their living conditions significantly. For example, Ofelia, whose family was among the first of the Mixtec families to arrive, described to me the qualitative differences in her present-day home and in the home her family previously occupied. She described the “little wood house” that her father and brothers had built when they first arrived and how her whole family was packed into a small space. Since then, her father

has built a house made of concrete and the family income goes in large part to buying consumer items and electronics to fill the house. They have TV, microwave and running water- luxuries that most of the other families must live without.

The presence of running water, sewage, telephone service, paved roads and electricity varies among the different families, but in general, these amenities are not the norm. Out of these amenities, electricity seems to be the most common. Dishes are washed outside in buckets and scrap materials are put together to make doors and walls. During the course of my fieldwork, I was invited to visit four homes, and these were homes of the more established and affluent families. Even within these homes, the basic structures are unfinished, walls and floors are bare and some are littered with trash and dirt. Many of them are precariously built and car tires are used to keep the base of the structures from eroding. However, the living conditions of the less well-off families are far more deplorable. Homes are made out of sheet metal and earthen floors are ubiquitous in the hills surrounding the downtown area. These colonia areas stand in sharp contrast to the rows upon rows of maquila-employee home communities that are being built throughout Nogales. These material items also help reflect the internal differentiation among Mixtec families. While Kopinak noted that most people in Nogales cannot afford to rent, it appears that the newest Mixtec families do rent living quarters upon arrival, often from another Mixtec family. For example, because Ofelia's parents are currently in Oaxaca for one year to serve in the cargo system, they are renting out their back house to another family from the Mixtec area, although not from the same village.

### **Why aren't Mixtec migrants working in the maquila industry?**

When theorists comment on the rise in jobs in the northern border towns, they are usually referring to jobs in the maquila sector. In addition, nearly all of the anthropological literature on border towns focus on the this industry. Indeed, Nogales is a sprawling border town that largely depends on the maquilas to attract new residents from throughout Mexico. However, the focus on the maquila industry in border literature has overlooked other sectors where people are institutionally marginalized. When I first proposed research in Nogales, I hypothesized that the Mixtec street vendors were actively marginalized from working in the maquila industry and relegated to work in lower positions on the social hierarchy. While street work is afforded a lower social standing, I soon learned that the story is much more complicated. Indeed, language barriers and the inability to move up in the maquila job ladder are reasons for their lack of involvement in the industry; however, people provided me with quite different explanations for their desire to work as street vendors. Several of the Mixtec street vendors told me that they had previously worked in the *fabricas* (factories), but preferred to work on the streets. Working as street vendors, women have more flexibility to maneuver within their daily lives.

One of the primary reasons Mixtec women choose to leave the maquilas are the poor wages. In her important study of maquila conditions in Nogales, Sonora, Kopinak documents the low wages that workers receive, finding that the largest reason people leave their maquila jobs are for higher wages somewhere else. For example, in 1991, the

average monthly wages for transport-equipment workers was only \$184 dollars/month, less than \$50 dollars per week (Kopinak 1996). At the national level, real wages are falling and the wages in Nogales do not seem to be improving. When I spoke to non-indigenous maquila workers this summer, many said that they only earned an average of \$4.50-\$5.00 dollars a day, which works out to about \$25 dollars per week. The minimum wage in Sonora for 2006 is less than \$5.00 dollars per day.<sup>4</sup> Kopinak documents poor wages and working conditions as central aspects of the maquila industry, however, the lack of other employment opportunities in Nogales keeps workers in place (Kopinak 1996). This is one area in which the Mixtec community differs from other Nogales residents.

In addition to economic reasons, there are social reasons why the Mixtecs prefer to work in the informal sector rather than in the maquilas. Several of the women explained their preference for street work because they could keep their own hours and not be subjected to the control of factory managers who only allow short breaks. The women can be outside, visit with friends and family and take the day off if they need to. Working with relative autonomy on the street is also perceived as potentially more lucrative and full of opportunities not available in the daily monotony of the maquila. In addition, Mixtecs might have a more difficult time moving up the maquila job ladder, especially for people who do not have a strong command of the Spanish language. Working on the street where they are able to communicate in Mixteco might actually be more comfortable and safe than working in a factory, especially for the older generation.

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<sup>4</sup> 2006 wage information from [www.mexicanlaws.com](http://www.mexicanlaws.com)

As street vendors, they are connected to other Mixtecs, able to watch over their children and speak their native language. Many of the street vending locations have been transformed into “Mixtec spaces.. For these reasons, many of the women perceive that they make a better living as street vendors.

### **Discrimination on the Border**

While there have been significant studies on human rights violations for Mixtec migrants working in the agricultural sector and living in agricultural camps, less attention has been paid to the violations of Mixtec migrants working in the informal sector in more urban landscapes along the border (Nagengast 1990; Wright 1990).

Indigenous female street vending in urban Mexico is not a new phenomenon, and has historically been connected to Mexican state projects that systematically regulate these populations. Indigenous women have a long history of being seen as “social ills,” “dirty,” “backward” and contributing to social chaos. They have even acquired their own derogatory social category: “Las Marias.” As Inderpal Grewal notes, racial and gendered minorities are perceived as a danger to society, and thus become subject to various forms of state, community and self-regulation (Grewal 2005: 202). In Mexico, indigenous female street vendors have historically been subject to regulation. In 1971, the Departamento del Distrito Federal established the Centro de Capacitación para las “Marías” (Arzipe 1979: 24). This history has impacted the current situation for indigenous street vendors and continues to shape their socially constructed identities as well as their subjectification. Street vending women in Nogales are often referred to as

“las Marias,” “las Indias,” “los Oaxacas” and “las Oaxaquanitas.” They are often subjected to various forms of direct discrimination (in addition to structural racism and ethnocide) including verbal harassment, intimidation, aggression and confiscation of property. In the late 1990’s, the Nogales municipio tried to re-locate street-vending women into tented locations located far from the tourist center, but the women resisted and the development plan fell through. Instead, the city officials have effectively contained indigenous people into specified areas in downtown Nogales. Those who have connections and can afford to pay the monthly fee are relegated a particular measurement of space and must renew their permits monthly. Local inspectors circulate the downtown area to check in on their activities. There has been some initiative to regulate the clothing of these vendors, as has occurred in Tijuana, but these plans have yet to occur. Those vendors who cannot afford a permit must operate in a constant game of cat and mouse. They roam the streets carrying their goods and hope they do not run into an inspector, who will confiscate their items and even send them to jail.

Experiences of discrimination and disrespect for indigenous street vendors must be understood within the context of Mexican ethnic politics. Mixtec migrants living on the U.S. Mexico border are racialized, in multiple ways. Racialization may be understood as the “historically and geographically specific meanings or practices that construct particular groups as racially inferior” (Castañeda 2003). Indeed, Mexico has a long history of racializing indigenous groups in negative ways and these processes are exacerbated when indigenous groups enter more “mestizo” settings, such as Nogales. As Leigh Binford notes, “It is clear that Mixtec migrants are subject to a double or as

Bourgois (1988) calls it, “conjugated” oppression; they are oppressed both as wage workers and as members of a discriminated ethnic minority” (Binford 1996: 66). This oppression and racialization forms the basis of much of the discrimination the Mixtecs encounter in public spaces.

Lynn Stephen has addressed “how dominant representations of the dangerous, the subversive, the worthless, the marginal, and the unimportant become linked to making particular groups of people susceptible to violent abuses that allow them to be treated with less than human respect and dignity” (Stephen 2000: 823). While her case focuses on “indigenous suspects” in southern Mexico, it can also be applied to indigenous groups that have now become more visible along the northern border. This is best illustrated in the social spaces indigenous groups in Nogales occupy on the streets and the acts of symbolic violence targeted at them. As Carol Nagengast posits:

Symbolic violence includes aggressive behavior, vehement conduct, infringement of property or dignity, the use of physical force, and the threat or dramatic portrayal of any of the above. State-sponsored political violence may involve direct physical violence but may also include ‘actions taken or not by the state or its agents with the express intent of realizing certain social, ethnic, economic, and political goals in the realm of public affairs, especially affairs of the state or even of social life in general (Nagengast 1994:114 cited in Stephen 2000: 823).

Nearly everyone I spoke to in Nogales experienced some form of symbolic violence, either in the form of verbal harassment, intimidation, aggression or confiscation of property.

While I never witnessed a physically abusive confrontation between a vendor and an inspector, on occasion while we would sit, the women would point them out to me patrolling across the plaza or street. In these instances, I could sense the discomfort and

anxiety the women felt and the intimidation the inspectors emanated. The inspectors threatened the livelihoods of the women, and if they were caught doing something illegal, such as letting their children sell, or occupying a space in which they did not have a permit, they were subject to confiscation and even jail time. Several of the women told me of past confrontations with inspectors. Before she was given a permit, Felipa constantly lived in fear of inspectors and actually spent several nights in jail during her first years in Nogales. When I spoke to the women about these encounters and how they felt about them, both encounters with inspectors and those with verbal abuse, nearly all said that things were better now. They said they encountered less discrimination than they did when they first arrived and that things in general had changed. This change may be the result of several things. With the larger presence of indigenous groups on the border and their more long term presence, the initial shock and aggression aimed toward by the larger society in general them may be lessening. This is also a result of the ways Mixtecs are “acculturating” through dress and language. Many Mixtecs have given up “markers” of their ethnicity are not identifiably indigenous. I also suspect, however, that things have changed more for the women and families who are working in the more established permitted selling zones. In these spaces, the inspectors can properly and more easily patrol and regulate what they do. They have found a sort of balance of power in these established spaces, and one in which the women actually might appreciate, because it offers relative safety. But for the women who have not attained such status, such as Maria, who still roam the streets, their lives are still plagued with uncertainty and subject to abuse. Just a month before I arrived in Nogales, Maria’s items were confiscated from

her on the street and taken to the local jail. In order to retrieve them, she was required to pay a fine. She never went.

Derogatory slurs or comments are one of the most common forms of discrimination targeted at Mixtec vendors. On numerous occasions women recounted instances when local residents and storeowners called by derogatory names. Lucia told me of recent occasion when she and her sisters went to the local grocery store to buy sodas and the storeowners started taunting them by calling them “Las Oaxacalitas.” She recounted stories of people making fun of them on the bus when her family spoke their native dialect. She says she doesn’t know why people continue to call them by derogatory names and simply shrugs them off as *personas malas*.

Other experiences of racialized discrimination were more apparent. Ines explained to me how her ethnicity was a constant source of discrimination for her in school. Ines came to Nogales when she was seven years old. She did not have the proper papers to enter school until she was eight years old and when she did enter, she spoke no Spanish and was immediately targeted by the other students. On one occasion an older student was hitting her, and she had no way of telling him to stop. When she was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, a boy spat on her. On another occasion, Ines and a male student were involved in a conflict over a stolen toy and had to have a parent-teacher conference. In the meeting, the mother of the other student told Ines and her father that they are just “Indios” and worthless. She says that in the end, the teacher ended up punishing her, even though she didn’t do anything. Through these memories, Ines has shown how her ethnicity was used against both her and her family. She says that because she is the youngest in her family and only

person still in school, she did not have siblings to protect her. Interestingly, Teresa commented to me that she is worried about her young daughter going to school precisely for the reason that her brothers are no longer in school to protect her. In fact, Teresa supports her daughter's choice to leave school and instead work with her on the streets. It seems that even in institutionalized school settings, children in the Mixtec community must form support systems.

In addition to such blatant forms of racism, as Urrea noted in Tijuana, indigenous groups in Nogales are also largely ignored and treated as if they don't exist. On numerous occasions I observed restaurant employees, tourists and nearby store owners actively ignore the women. They are bypassed on the streets without even a glance from passerbys. On several occasions when Felipa and I went out for our late afternoon taco, the waitresses would obviously avoid us. Tourists will haggle for prices just for fun and leave the women pleading. One day I encountered several teenagers screaming, "they are swarming us!" as they ran from several female beggars and their children. The characterization of the women as insects "swarming" people struck me as particularly offensive and epitomized how these women are so often treated as if they are not human, or at least not equally human. These small acts of disrespect might seem fairly harmless in their singularity, but they accumulate to forms of institutionalized racism that are deemed acceptable by society. Such acts characterize much of women's daily experiences to a point when they are no longer shocking, but normal.

### **Working in Mexico's Informal Sector**

Since the 1980s, the informal economy in Mexico has continued to grow, employing well over half the population (International Labour Office 2002). Informal sector jobs include street vending, street performing, domestic service and other types of home-based work. The informal sector is also one of the most vulnerable economic sectors for individuals to work. The informal sector offers no social security, no health benefits and no child care. These circumstances contribute to high rates of poverty among the elderly in Mexico which are higher than poverty rates for the general population, and much higher than in other Latin American countries such as Brazil, Chile or Columbia (Aguilar 2005).

Street vending in Mexico has a long historical tradition and more recently has become a site of conflict. During the 1950's and 1960's, street vending was repressed in Mexico city, and in the 1990's, there was again a move to ban vendors from occupying the streets (Cross 1998: 8). John Cross has conducted extensive fieldwork with street vendors in Mexico city in the 1990s. He states that the presence of street vendors provokes, "the immediate paradox between the economic reality of the country and the 'Modern Mexico' that state and cultural leaders would like to project" (Cross 1998: 8). Street vending is a particularly vulnerable and unstable sector of the informal economy. Street vendors encounter everyday risks which are institutionalized in power relations and structures in society. In 1995, representatives from street vendors associations, activists, lawyers and researchers met in Bellagio, Italy to form an international alliance, called StreetNet. The group drafted the "Bellagio International Declaration of Street

Vendors” which outlines the main difficulties and problems faced by street vendors around the world. These include:

- No Legal Status, No Right to Vend
- Lack of Space or Poor Location
- Restrictions on Licensing, Costs of Regulation
- Harassment, Bribes, Confiscation, and Evictions
- Lack of Services and Infrastructure
- Lack of Representation or Voice (International Labour Office 2002)

As documented earlier, Mixtec street vendors in Nogales are subject to each of these points. Many of the women told me of the fear they experience living and working in the downtown area and in Nogales in general. They spoke of fear of *rateros* (thieves) and drug addicts as well as fear of police and inspectors. Several of the women have had their items confiscated and spent time in the local jail for selling on the streets.

In addition, the Mixtecs are a politically vulnerable group in Nogales. They depend on tenuous relationships with city officials and union leaders to help them obtain the necessary permits and protection. As Colson notes “Often enough, displacement is associated with a radical reduction in economic and social resources and therefore with increased political vulnerability. Whether they are officially resettled or forced to fend for themselves, those displaced face new political environments even though they remain within their homelands” (Colson 2004: 108). This instability increases the need for the Mixtecs to form enclaves and support systems with one another, although there still

remains divisions within this community, and in particular, between “los ambulantes” (the women who roam the streets) and people with permitted selling locations.

Finally, the informal economy, especially one that is based on tourism is especially vulnerable to economic and political currents. For example, the tourist industry of Bali was devastated after the 2002 nightclub bombings as was the U.S. airline industry post-9/11. Street vendors who live off the border economy are equally vulnerable to discourses of fear that discourage tourists from crossing over to Mexico. In 2005, there was a travel warning issued in the U.S. to warn people of border towns as dangerous locations. Such events can seriously compromise the livelihoods of people dependent on tourist dollars and thus demonstrate their precarious economic position.

In summary, this chapter locates the Mixtec community in Nogales as a vulnerable group and one that is subject to multiple forms of discrimination, racialization and oppression as well as poor living and working conditions. Female street-vendors in particular are subject to various forms of regulation and their livelihoods are often dependent on precarious alliances with local officials. However, within these circumstances, they have managed to create relatively safe spaces and generally consider their collective experience as improved in comparison to their early days in Nogales.

## **CHAPTER 5: SURVIVING AS A DISPLACED COMMUNITY: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES**

The Mixtecs in Nogales have been historically displaced from their home communities and now live in impoverished urban conditions, experience everyday encounters with ethnic and class inequality, work in the unstable informal economy, and generally operate within a sense of insecurity on the U.S.-Mexico border. This section argues that within these circumstances and constraints, they have developed new—and reshaped old—strategies to provide safe and meaningful lives for themselves and their families. Migrant families living on the U.S.-Mexico border depend on the bi-national tourist economy as well as some “illegal” wage labor jobs on the U.S. side, thus tying them to transnational flows of goods, capital, people, ideologies and histories. These processes impact the ways gender and ethnic identities and relations are defined and negotiated within this community and are especially apparent in the lives of Mixtec street-vending women. At once their presence as indigenous women in the informal tourist economy triggers various forms of discrimination, while also attracting tourists who are in search of “authentic” Indian or Mexican crafts. While these strategies span the social, economic and political realms, they are conducted in the intimate daily spaces of the household, work arena and personal interactions. New strategies such as working in the informal sector and negotiating political ties with inspectors impact and reshape older strategies such as childcare and food preparation. In addition to these everyday strategies, people struggle to maintain ties to Oaxaca and participate in communal practices, such as the annual fiesta.

I came to understand Mixtec survival strategies as everyday forms of resistance. I draw on James C. Scott's work on peasant resistance, recognizing that the Mixtecs are more appropriately "postpeasants" than peasants and their everyday acts are likely to differ from those examples used in Scott's work. However, Scott's general focus on the ways in which marginalized groups act within their circumstances of domination is quite useful. He calls everyday resistance "the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them" (Scott 1985). In the Mixtec case, it is difficult to point the finger or pinpoint exactly who is responsible for their domination and who or what they are struggling against. In some cases it is explicit that the street vendors are engaged in struggles between themselves and store owners or inspectors, making the lines of power clear. However, these divisions are often blurred and in some cases they are struggling less against a person or institution and more against a process, such as assimilation or deterritorialization. Thus, we must also appropriate a more abstract view of power as it is dispersed in society and then understand how the Mixtecs are actively working to minimize their marginalization and exploitation. Scott warns scholars to not overly romanticize weapons of the weak, stating that "they are unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of exploitation that peasants confront," but also to not trivialize them, especially not accumulated acts, which may contribute to lessening the exploitation of the subordinated group. In a number of ways, the Mixtecs are working to lessen their exploitation and maintain the symbolic, social and material institutions important to their communities.

While the various strategies employed by the Mixtecs do lessen their immediate exploitation, they also generate contradictory and uneven processes. Central to these processes are power relations and negotiations of class, ethnicity and gender which both maintain community and continuity as well as further perpetuate systems of inequality and differentiation between groups, families and individuals. For example, individuals and families have differential access to and relationships with local officials and community members who have the power to enable and restrain certain activities. Thus, abilities to cross the border, obtain permits, purchase store goods and work in prime selling locations are largely dependent on these uneven social relationships. Furthermore, the ability to maintain ties to Oaxaca are also a point of struggle and differentiation as not all people have equal opportunities or financial abilities to maintain community ties and participate in communal activities such as the *cargo* and *tequio* systems. This fact raises questions about social standings and citizenship: how does one's village citizenship change if they are unable to return and financially support their ceremonial obligations?

### **Re-conceptualizing the Household**

Migration to the northern border signifies not only a geographical movement, but changes in lifestyle, work, everyday practices and spatial landscapes. In addition, it signifies a shift in traditional conceptualizations of household, community and livelihood. Literally living in a transnational context between southern Mexico, the U.S.-Mexico border region and the United States, Mixtec communities and even households are no longer bounded entities living in the same physical space, but defined through processes

and social bonds. Not unlike Benedict Anderson's notion of the national imagined community, many displaced Mixtecs display are exuding what may be understood as the "imagined household" or "transnational household" with family members often spread across thousands of miles but participating in common discourses, narratives, social and economic processes.

The concept of the "household" has been under scrutiny in much of the migration literature from the 1970s to the present. Earlier works that focused on "household strategies" (Pessar:1982; Selby and Murphy: 1982; Arzipe: 1978) were criticized for portraying the household as an undivided space of equality and collective reasoning. Later works offered more nuanced conceptualizations of the household as they related to international migration and women's new roles in the labor workforce (Rouse :1987; Beneria and Roldan:1987; Wolf:1990) (citations in Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 54). While these critiques point to the internal hierarchies and conflict within the household, it is important to recognize that the household is a critical site for the contestation of internal as well as external sources of power. In his work on Mexicano households in the Southwest, Carlos Vèlez-Ibàñez notes that "the poison of racism, cultural ideology, an exploitative economy, and political struggle" emerge within the household and simultaneously attempt to "control allegiances, cultural practices and expectations, and labor and energy" (Vèlez-Ibàñez 1996: 137). He cites the work of Eric Wolf who points to kin relations as the "battleground in which cultural contexts are fought out," the spaces where indigenous peoples "survive and cope in political and economic environments hostile to their continued identity" (cited inVèlez-Ibàñez 1996: 137). Thus, by paying

particular attention to everyday household strategies and constructions of space and culture, we can observe the specific ways Mixtecs maintain continuity and resist the dominant structures. For example, I later argue that childcare and food preparation are areas in which the Mixtecs exercise their culture and kin relations as strategies in cultural continuity.

Livelihood practices and kin relations also contribute to the changing logics of the household economy for Mixtecs in Nogales. Livelihoods do not derive solely from cash incomes, but from the daily support, exchanges and shared responsibilities between kin and community members. For example, everyday acts such as watching each other's children, providing car rides and keeping an eye on each other's merchandise in addition to more significant acts, such as filling someone else's cargo duties when unable to travel, are tactics used that do not directly contribute to cash incomes, but aid in livelihoods and maintaining positions and land in communities of origin. The central logic of the household has also changed as people move away from semi-subsistence lifestyles and become fully incorporated into cash-economies. As people become primarily cash income earners and incorporated into the consumer culture, money is spent more quickly in a "flow through" economy (Greenberg 2006).

The household must also be understood as a space that cannot be contained within the walls of a home. I argue that in the case of many Mixtec street vending families, household can be conceptualized as units, which may span across thousands of miles and political borders. Because many of the Mixtec families have historically been and continue to be highly mobile, it is difficult to place them in fixed households. For nearly

all my informants, their lives have always been spent between several locations. The older informants spent their teenage years working in the agricultural fields before having families and moving to Nogales. Many of the men have spent significant amounts of time working in the U.S. Most of the younger informants were born either in Oaxaca or in Nogales and have spent their lives in between both locations, many of them with hopes of moving to the U.S. to join family members. Several of these families own not one, but at least two physical houses which are occupied by different family members at different times. The household is not a fixed structure that remains in Oaxaca, nor is it simply transplanted to the U.S., but involves the constant coming and going of family members involved in economic, personal or social activities. This re-conceptualization challenges work that creates a dichotomy between the “sending” household and the “new household” as if they operate in autonomous spheres (Ghen 2004) . The household does not exist solely in Oaxaca, Nogales or Phoenix, but in all these places as they each represent and serve a different purpose in their overall strategies for survival. People are constantly moving between several geographic locations creating a fluid and diverse process that defy traditional notions of the household. Of course, this movement is differentiated within the community and people are not equally moving. Movement depends on several factors such as documentation to cross the border, cash income to pay for gas and subsidize days not working, access to vehicles (nearly always controlled by men), and the number of dependents that need support, either in cash form or in daily care.

In order to best illustrate these points, I will provide profiles of two Mixtec families who each are based in Nogales. Both families also have homes in Oaxaca, and some family members have spread out between northern Mexico and the U.S:

*Fernandez Family*

Felipa and her husband, Aurelio, were one of the first members from their village in Oaxaca to move to Nogales over twenty years ago. They met while working in the fields of Culiacan when she was 13 and he was 25, and had their first son two years later. After working in the fields, they moved back to Oaxaca for several years. In total, they have five children, three daughters and two sons. Their oldest daughter, Ofelia, remembers living in Oaxaca until she was five. She recalls her parents working on the milpa, growing beans and corn, but also remembers that they had no meat to eat and couldn't live off of just eating corn. They moved to Nogales when Ofelia was five years old. She remembers the "little wood house" they lived in when they first moved to Nogales, and how she would go downtown after school to meet her mother and help her sell on the streets. "We suffered very much" is something she continued to repeat. About ten years ago, her parents bought a new piece of land and built a new house in Nogales made of concrete.

Within the past several years, four out of the five children have moved to Phoenix. Both of their sons are now married with children and live in two separate homes in Phoenix. Felix, the oldest son works in a *carniceria* (butcher shop) and Jose makes wooden doors. The two youngest daughters are unmarried and live with Felix and his

wife. Margarita works as a hairdresser and Maria works in a “99 cents” store. For several months out of the year, both Ofelia and Felipa traveled at different times to stay with the family in Phoenix. Felipa was able to be there for the births of two grandchildren, and help in household activities such as childcare and food preparation.

The family still has their home in Oaxaca, which stays locked up most of the time. This year, however, Felipa and her husband are living in their home in Oaxaca so that Aurelio could serve in the cargo system. Actually, it was their son, Felix, who was called to serve, but as Ofelia explained, it is difficult and risky for him to leave his job, family and life in the U.S. to serve in the cargo system. The family decided it would make more sense for Aurelio to serve this term.

Ofelia is currently the only family member in their home in Nogales and she sends her earnings to her parents in Oaxaca. She says she wishes she could go to Oaxaca also, but she must work for them, because in Oaxaca there is little opportunity for them to make money.

### *Martinez Family*

Maria first came to Nogales about seventeen years ago. Her husband, Roberto, had already been working in the area- he crossed back and forth over the border to work, but like so many other families, he could not feed his family off the farm they had in Oaxaca. When Maria came to Nogales, she had a 1 ½ year old daughter who she left in Oaxaca under the care of her mother and her other older children. As Lucia explained to me, they could not afford to bring all their children with them to Nogales. It was not until

their grandmother passed away until the rest of the children moved to Nogales about 10 years ago.

The family is spread out throughout many of the tourist centers. The parents, three daughters and three sons live in Nogales. They have two homes on one piece of land and recently bought another plot of land but have not been able to afford building on it yet. There is one son who lives in Puerto Penasco and one daughter who lives in Ensenada. The women each have permanent selling locations in Nogales, but the men travel between the selling location households and the U.S. for occasional bouts in wage labor jobs.

In 2005, Roberto and Maria traveled to Oaxaca for the fiesta and stayed for several months in their home, partially because Maria became very ill. They are now both in Nogales. Their eldest son also went to help with the fiesta activities. Their youngest son and his wife went to Oaxaca in January to fulfill his servicio duties. There is some talk that the family wants to give up some of the land they have in Oaxaca because they cannot afford to maintain it and no family members are interested in living in Oaxaca permanently.

### **Negotiating Authenticity**

For Mixtec vendors, their livelihoods and daily activities are intimately bound up with the ways they express their indigeneity. Their indigeneity is the basis for their discrimination, but also serves as a source of solidarity and can help attract consumers in search of “authenticity.” Providing authentic indigenous products to U.S. tourists

crossing the border must be understood in relation to U.S. consumption practices and ideologies. Inderpal Grewal has written on the interconnections between consumer practices, the discourse of multiculturalism and the creation of neoliberal subjects and identities. For U.S. consumers, they can “practice” their multiculturalism through consuming products. The commodification of indigenous cultures has a long history in Mexico. It is related to the government project of Indigenismo, which sought to glorify a homogenous Indian culture through assimilationist and consumer-oriented policies. Anne Rubenstein explains how the government sought to make entrepreneurial enterprises through appropriating indigenous traditions and rituals. She states, “Long-standing localized methods of expression shaped themselves to the idiosyncratic demands of a global market for quaint or campy souvenirs, and for objects that somehow represented ‘Mexicanness’ or ‘nativeness’” (Rubenstein 2000: 638). The government continues to push this project through promoting commercial outlets in rural areas and tourist centers, such as Nogales. For the Nogales municipio, the marketing of “authentic” crafts is a key strategy for attracting tourist dollars and stimulating the economy. Unfortunately, government projects rarely consult with indigenous groups in how they are portrayed and often promote a commodified version of Indian culture.

Thus, the pressure to be authentically ethnic to appeal to global tourist market demands falls particularly in the hands of Mixtec women, as they are the most “visible” (in terms of numbers and appearances) and vocal participants in the tourist industry. In nearly all encounters with tourists, women make the transactions. In Tijuana, where the largest satellite community of Mixtecs reside, the mayor recently made it obligatory for

street vending women to wear “traditional” Mexican bright colored costumes on the streets. These costumes, which must be bought by the women, do not actually reflect their village traje, but blend together different Indian styles in order to showcase the city’s “melting pot” of Mexican cultures and allow tourists to “feel Mexico” (Spagat 2005). While this perspective uses a multicultural discourse, it pre-determines what is “ethnic” and privileges a static and timeless picture of indigenous people who are trapped in a museum or Disneyesque fantasy world. Furthermore, this type of cultural regulation is gendered and women’s and men’s bodies are seen as sites to be regulated and contained in different ways. Their bodies are literarily perceived as spaces to symbolize a false sense of cultural patrimony and multiculturalism.

To some degree, Mixtec street vendors use their ethnicity as a marketing strategy, although there is a very fine line between being authentic enough to sell to U.S. tourists and identifiably indigenous in a discriminatory Mexican context. In interactions with tourists, they often will claim that their crafts were made by their parents or family in Oaxaca, even though very few of the items even come from Oaxaca and nearly none of the items are handmade by the community. While most street vendors wear factory-made clothing, nearly all of them wear aprons that are commonly worn by street vendors and older women in Oaxaca. In fact, as one vendor relayed to me, “you cannot find the aprons here, but must bring them from Oaxaca,” thus demarcating her “authenticity” in comparison to women who wore less distinctive and mass produced aprons.

Despite some desire to represent themselves as authentic in order to sell, for the most part, there is a tendency to suppress or mask visual markers of their indigeneity and

not have their bodies become sites of indigeneity. This must be understood not as a rejection of their heritage, but as a survival strategy in a discriminatory setting. I had several conversations with women who talked about their rejection of wearing the traditional *traje* (costume) of their village as well as ambivalent feelings toward their heritage. One woman explained to me that she did not wear the *traje* because it did not look good on her because her skin was too dark. She said it looked better on people with white skin. On another occasion, two women told me that they felt ugly because they were too “*chaparrito*” (short) and they were fat and their skin was too dark. It is difficult to describe the irony of these comments, but they highlight several important points. Firstly, the first woman presented herself as not beautiful enough to wear the handmade Oaxacan clothing. Secondly, this clothing has been appropriated by non-indigenous peoples (indeed, I was wearing a blouse made in Oaxaca that very day). This is closely tied to the economic reality that it is too expensive for many indigenous peoples to wear this clothing and has become a sort of novelty for non-indigenous people. Finally, this statement demonstrates how the traditional *traje*, one of the most important symbols of collective identity, has been displaced in the lives of women. Mixtec women strike a fine balance between using their ethnicity and minimizing it. While on the one side, their street vending activities create solidarity between families, and self-assert an indigenous identity and certain image of authenticity to tourists- which is directly tied to material gain- it also works as the basis for discrimination and containment as “*las marias*” or “*las oaxaquenitas*” in the larger systems of repression and hierarchy.

### **Women in the Informal Sector: The expense of Autonomy**

Mixtec women are entering the industrial and informal labor forces as part of a global movement of people from rural to urban areas. One of the defining characteristics of the global movement is the feminization of the labor force, as well as new racial and gendered hierarchies, including the exploitation of immigrant communities (Robinson 2003; Sassen 1992). These insights allow us to see the multiple ways in which Mixtec migrants are implicated in such transnational processes as well as the ways they are structurally placed at the bottom of the economic and social ladder. In addition to shaping the life-course of Mixtec families, these processes also impact their day to day activities, relations and strategies. The case of Mixtec women blurs the boundary between “the home” and “the street,” a traditional dichotomy that has recently been challenged by feminist anthropologists searching more fluid socially constructed and locally specific definitions of such spatial boundaries (Hirsch 2003; Montoya et al. 2002). Activities normally restricted to the home, such as breastfeeding, childcare, homework, naptime, and mealtime are practiced in the public streets of Nogales. This transgression of boundaries does not however decrease the responsibility of women to fulfill both the productive and reproductive aspects of their work. Street vending might be considered more of an extension of women’s role in the home as opposed to a separate economic activity (Babb 1989: 54). In addition to the extra familial duties Mixtec women attend to, they also are more central to street vending activities such as social networking, bargaining and transporting items.

In addition to managing their identities, Mixtec women must also re-negotiate their gendered roles as they move into the informal sector. Street-vending becomes a rather contradictory space for women who are forced to take on multiple roles as mothers, wives, and in some cases, primary income earners. On the one hand, street vending offers them relative autonomy and the opportunity to participate in the economic realm of the household, often upsetting more traditional male-dominated hierarchies. Sassen has written on the gendered implications of rising informalization in urban economies and says they contain possibilities, albeit limited opportunities, for women's autonomy and empowerment (Sassen 2004: 173). Aida Hernandez Castillo argues that women's involvement with informal commerce has increased contact between women and initiated processes of organization and collective reflection (Hernandez 2002: 99). For indigenous women in Tijuana especially, the informal sector worked as a space for collective reflection and organization. Velasco Ortiz has written on the emergence of street vending organizations and unions in the Tijuana area and how they have served as important spaces for Mixtec women (Velasco Ortiz 2004). In Nogales, women are not organized in formal organizations, but are informally linked in their selling areas which serve as a safe reflective space. Several women commented on the fact that they like Nogales more than Oaxaca because in Nogales, "hay trabajo" (there is work) and they are able to contribute to the family income. In addition, younger women are waiting longer to get married and supporting themselves as opposed to relying solely on the incomes of their husbands.

Despite some benefits, many women, especially women with children, expressed to me that they would rather be at home than working on the streets. Women still remain largely dominated in the household and are often anguished by the pressures of maintaining their homes, children and competing for dollars on the street each day. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo points out that the informal sector actually reproduces inequalities between men and women and the place of women in Mexico's economy in general. She says, "The concentration of Mexican women-especially older, married women with children-in the informal sector both underscores that Mexico's pattern of development has not created sufficient employment for women, and testifies to the tenacity of patriarchal divisions of labor in the home, which mandate that mothers take primary responsibility for their home and their children" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Indeed, Mixtec women's new roles as income earners do not replace their roles as mothers and homemakers, but simply add to them. In some ways women gain more autonomy, but in others, these new roles simply reinforce gender inequalities in the household.

In addition, economic pressures affect women and gender dimensions in often detrimental ways. Linda Green demonstrates how the pressures to produce cloth and maintain households created much anxiety for Maya widows in Guatemala (Green 1999: 140). Like these widows, Mixtec mothers express a considerable amount of anxiety toward their roles both within and outside of the domestic sphere. Several of the women street vendors told me that they would much prefer to stay in their homes and not have to work on the street. In one interview, Florencia, romanticized about cooking for her

children and cleaning the house. The flip side to this feeling, is the anxiety felt when women are unable to sell. Because vending is competitive, they need to be on the streets as much as possible. On one occasion, I noticed that Teresa did not come down to sell for two days in a row, something rare for her. When she returned on the third day I asked her where she had been, and her husband answered, “She had too much to do at home like clean all the clothes.” They both lamented the housework she had to accomplish. Because women are incorporated into the cash economy, a day working at home may feel like a day wasted. At once the informal sector seems to be a space of flexibility and women can do what they please- indeed this is true to some degree and I can recount several instances when the women left work early to care for their sick children or for themselves, but this unstructured work atmosphere also creates internal pressures.

### **Changing Gender Roles and the Informal Economy**

One of the most striking findings I encountered in Nogales was the presence of men also working as street vendors along with their wives, sisters and daughters. The observation of both men and women working in the informal street vending economy confirms the work of Laura Velasco Ortiz who notes that in Tijuana approximately 69 percent of street vendors are women and 31 percent are men, and that one quarter of vendors are children (Velasco Ortiz 2005: 43). I noticed similar percentages in my own observations. Of the 11 married women I interviewed, five of their husbands also worked as street vendors. The presence of men seemed to contradict earlier work that focused on street vendors as solely the realm of females and children (Arzipe 1979; Kearney 2004a:

185). For example, Kearney notes that the women and children work in street activities are members of households where their husbands and fathers have crossed to the U.S. (Kearney 2004a: 185). Certainly some of the men have crossed in the past and some do plan to cross in the future, but I also found that several of the men leave their families behind not to work in the U.S., but to sell hats, bracelets, silver jewelry etc. in other tourist locations. Street vending has not just become a secondary source of income to supplement men's wage labor, but one of the primary economic activities that both men and women engage in. Because in general men are in control of trucks, they are also important to the transportation of goods and people between various selling sites. Street vending is often characterized as women simply selling gum and trinkets, but several of these families have built up impressive inventories of a wide range of crafts and other items, integrating them into the social, economic and political networks of Nogales.

In their new roles, women are also participating in traditionally considered male activities. For example, women who have passports are crossing the border to pursue economic strategies, work and visit family members. In the late 1980's, Kearney notes that for the most part, Mixtec men cross the border, but women and children generally do not (Kearney 2004: 293). This pattern has changed. Women like Felipa and Ofelia are able to cross the border and purchase cheap products to sell in Mexico. Several of the younger women are leaving street vending to cross the border and work in the service sectors in Tucson and Phoenix. In Phoenix, I met one single Mixtec woman who drove her own car, another activity traditionally associated with men.

Despite these changes, I do not want to imply that gender relations are equal. Mixtec men often joked with me about what defines a “proper” woman. “A woman is born to cook” and “women are not allowed to drink alcohol” are two comments that particularly resonated with me, not because they were so far-fetched, but because they appeared to be fairly accurate in the way Mixtec women operated in daily social situations. Consuming alcohol was something very looked down upon for younger woman, and only a senior woman with grown children could get away with it. Food preparation, childcare and cleaning also remains female dominated and is expected.

### **Children in the Informal Economy**

As in most other societies, Mixtec women are the primary caretakers of the children, however, the role is often shared between mothers and daughters or other family or friends. Carol Stack also observed such kin strategies in her work. She states, “domestic functions are carried out for urban Blacks by clusters of kin who do not necessarily live together, and that the basis of these units is the domestic cooperation of close adult females and the exchange of goods and services between male and female kin” (Stack 1974: 23). In Nogaels, childcare is also shared between kin members. For example, Florencia has both a 2-year-old daughter and a 19-year old daughter. Both Florencia and her eldest daughter have their own selling locations in different parts of the city, but they share the responsibility of the baby. The baby stays with Florencia to breastfeed but spends the majority of the day with her older sister. This is due, in part, because of Florencia’s location in one of the most popular and busy sections of the city,

where she must be on her feet to negotiate with tourists and she has a very limited amount of space. Eva, on the other hand, has her items located in a less popular plaza where she has room for a baby stroller. In addition, several of the women in the plaza with Eva have children and are more readily available to help watch over them. In this way, the women have formed a support network for watching over each other's children, although this varies depending on the interpersonal relationships between the group. For example, Teresa had created somewhat of a boundary between herself and some of the other women in her plaza, and she and her older children are primarily responsible for the care of her two youngest children. She does not rely on the other women to look after her children, and in fact, this causes her much anxiety.

The presence of children working with their parents on the street arose as one of the largest contradictions in my conversations with the Mixtecs and is connected to negative discourses of indigenous mothers. The construction of street vending women as "social problems" that need to be regulated must be understood in relation to constructions of proper gendered behavior and motherhood. Street vending women and beggars are often criticized for their "encouragement" of children to be in the streets with them. For many mothers faced with pressures to generate cash incomes in a public system lacking sufficient social support, they have no choice but to bring their children with them to work. Kamala Kempadoo argues that children are increasingly important members in household economic activities as lives are disrupted by processes of development, such as urbanization, social mobility, monetization, growth of the tourist industry etc. "The disruption that such development brings to the organization of production in developing

countries, draws children into marginal and servile occupations sometimes requiring parents to deploy the income-generating capacity of their children in order to ensure that the household survives” (Kempadoo 1998: 7).

Mothers who are forced to watch over their children on the streets with them are blamed as being bad mothers much in the same way welfare mothers in the U.S. are made at fault for their subordinated positions. Lisa Duggan notes that in relation to welfare reform project, “neoliberals have promoted ‘private’ competition, self-esteem, and independence as the roots of personal responsibility, and excoriated ‘public’ entitlement, dependency, and irresponsibility as the sources of social ills.” She goes on to link such neoliberal visions to cultural politics and the rearticulation of hierarchies based on race, gender and sexuality” (Duggan 2003: 14). Indeed, because many indigenous women cannot afford to stay in their “proper” positions in the home and the countryside (although many of them would prefer to) they are constructed in negative ways and remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy, even as they are generally moving toward more “modernized” lifestyles. In this case, blame is thus placed on the individual instead of the political-economic structures that have failed to provide sufficient social services and structures for its citizens, as is increasingly the case in Mexico.

In discussions with parents and young adults about the primary reasons for their decision to migrate, they often referred to the educational opportunities their children or they would have once in the north. In one interview with Felipa and her husband, Aurelio, he explained to me, “We don’t know anything, but thanks to God, Ofelia, Diana and Guadalupe were able to go to school. They don’t know much, but at least they know

something.” He told me that he never had the opportunities to go to school when he was a child in Oaxaca but instead looked after the farm animals of a wealthy landowner in San Jeronimo. Felipa also did not have much of a chance for education; she was married at the age of thirteen, had her first child when she was sixteen and they both worked in the fields of Cuilacan where they picked tomatoes. However, once families arrive in Nogales, the prospects for their children’s education seem to decrease. Many children choose to quit school at young ages to help with the household expenses. Lucia said that she went to school when she lived in Oaxaca, but when she and her siblings came to Nogales she could no longer go to school, but had to work on the streets. She was only 16 years-old. Her younger sister, Ines was able to go to school. As we saw in the case of Ines, school discrimination is another factor that may deter children from continuing. Ines did end up finishing secundaria (middle school), but is now happy to be working along side her sisters. She said she considered continuing her education, but her father was sick and the family needed money to pay his expenses. She also wanted to help contribute to the building of a new house. Other children do not continue school for different reasons. Teresa’s daughter recently dropped out of school at the age of 14. Teresa explained to me the fear she had of her daughter in school. She did not want her daughter to end up “like the other girls” meaning pregnant or involved with “men who will leave after one or two years.” Teresa is happy to have her daughter with her selling on the streets, even though this is technically illegal. Anita, a 21 year-old woman with a 2-year old son, told me that she wishes she could go to school. She says that if she went to school, she would learn English so that she could better communicate with tourists. This sentiment was repeated

by a number of the women. These statements show us that the desire for education is seen as an economic strategy to better maneuver within their present circumstances, not necessarily as a “way out” to other job opportunities

While children’s labor in the informal sector is a household strategy, it is technically illegal in Nogales. The women are not supposed to have their children working with them on the streets and if they are caught, their permits can be confiscated. Teresa explained to me one encounter she had with a city official who berated her for having five of her children with her, the oldest two who help her sell. The official told her that she had to put them into daycare or leave them at home. Teresa explained there is no one to watch them at home and she cannot afford to pay for daycare. In the end, she bargained with the inspector, who allows her children to be present at her site, but not sell. The line between selling and not selling is blurry, and her eldest daughter often takes items on her back to sell as she roams the streets. In this way, she can avoid compromising the work of her mother, but can still contribute to the household economy.

### **Economic Strategies and new Forms of Differentiation**

As earlier described by June Nash, the opening of the countryside has resulted in new types of differentiation within communities where indigenous peoples take advantage and exploit other indigenous peoples around them. These processes of differentiation and hierarchy are also prevalent in the indigenous presence in Nogales. Processes of differentiation work between street vendors and store owners, among street vendors, and even within the Mixtec street vending community. Processes such as

migration and arrival, spatial occupation, language communication, social alliances, access to authorities, and identifiers such as language, hometown and region all factor in to create divisions and alliances among this marginalized group in Nogales. Internal differentiation is perhaps the greatest barrier to formal organization on behalf of the Mixtecs in Nogales. Several vendors, such as Felipa expressed frustration over all the new vendors arriving in Nogales and the increase in competition they face. She reminisced of the days she first arrived in Nogales, nearly twenty years ago, and carried her daughter on her back and sold in the streets. She said those days were more difficult in terms of being hassled by police, but she could sell more. One day on a bus ride to her home, Felipa pointed out the window to all the puestos (stalls) lining the streets. She says the “streets are full” and it is very difficult to sell.

Differentiation and competition are also expressed in the passport system between Mexico and the U.S. Linda Whiteford has argued that the U.S.-Mexico border is an extended community where people, goods and services on both sides cross back and forth, for varying reasons and strategies (Whiteford 1979). Indeed, several Mixtec families use their position on the border for economic strategizing; however, it is important to realize that for Mixtec migrants, this is a differentiated process. This differentiation is represented by the three-day passport that allows border residents to cross for shopping activities. To obtain a passport, people must prove that they are permanent residents of Nogales and are employed. The process to obtain a passport is difficult, and several people have told me that you need a “connection” to help get your papers through properly. For example, out of Maria’s four daughters, only one of them

has a passport. She was able to get one through her previous employer who verified her employment status. Thus, the process is anything but transparent and requires considerable bureaucratic proficiency and/or social ties. For Mixtecs in Nogales, having a passport holds symbolic and material weight in their lives. As Colson notes, “The passport and the identity card emerged as definitions of personhood in the twentieth century” (Colson 2004: 118). In its most immediate function, the passport allows people to cross the border for up to three days at a time for non-labor purposes, but many of Mixtecs take advantage of this restriction and use it to spend more time, sometimes weeks or even months visiting with family or working. The passport is also a document of prestige for many migrants because it proves their legitimacy to some extent and the hard work they have put in to be recognized as residents in Nogales, distinguishing them from the new arrivals from the south.

This differentiation also has implications for the material strategies of street vending families. For passport-holding vendors who have family members in the U.S., they often take advantage of their ability to cross the border to “smuggle” their items little by little across the line to store on the other side. They develop relationships with store employees on both sides who hold the items until they have accumulated enough to transfer to other family members living and working in Tucson or Phoenix in the swap meets. The passport also allows vendors to take advantage of the goods sold cheaply on the U.S. side of the border. People shop for personal items, such as clothing, but also in cheap products made in china to re-sell to tourists on the Mexican side. One of the more popular items that the Mixtec women sell are colorful mini wood guitars, which appear to

be very “Mexican,” in their variety of bright colors. They are especially popular with families with young children and the vendors often sell them for about \$10 dollars. These guitars are actually bought just across the border on the U.S. side for \$5 dollars.

One of the contradictions regarding the economic livelihoods of Mixtec migrants is where their incomes and profits are actually being spent. Are they being used to invest in the land and work toward maintaining sustainable livelihoods back in Oaxaca, or are they being recycled into the capitalist system? In his MA report on a rural community in Guatemala, Eric Pavri argues that the “migrant generations” of the town can no longer be called farmers, but “a new class of transnational workers, no longer invested (or investing) in the rich black soil that sustained their fathers and mothers” (Pavri 2005: 88)

Several authors have shown that much of remittance money is spent on building more American style homes or buying trucks (Hirsch 2003; Pavri 2005). In villages with high levels of out-migration and remittances, there seems to be a new focus on accumulation. Indeed, much of the income from the Mixtec families in Nogales is spent on consumer items such as trucks, electronics and kitchen accessories, as well as on building homes in Oaxaca and in Nogales. Nearly all the families in Nogales still have homes in Oaxaca that stay empty for the majority of the year with fallow plots of land. For families with all the members living in “el Norte,” there is no one to care for the land. On one occasion, Juana’s husband explained to me that his father was considering selling their land. He said when they were young, they had many animals and crops on the land, but now, there is nothing. Money made in Nogales is also spent on paying for transportation to and from Oaxaca for familial visits or for the annual ceremonial or civic duties. Ofelia explained to

me that she had to work extra hard to support her parents while they were in Oaxaca for the year-long servicio term. She said that because her family has no source of income in Oaxaca, the money she makes in Nogales goes directly to sustaining their daily livelihood.

For many Mixtecs in Nogales, selling on the street is not viewed as a temporary or dispensable job, but as an investment. While some of the members of the younger generation do have hopes of one day going to the United States, it does not appear that migrating is a first priority. In fact, several of the younger women are making significant investments in their product inventory. On one visit to Felipa's home, she showed me two rooms that were filled with bone carvings, ceramic plates and jewelry. She was proud to tell me that these were her daughter's savings. Luisa also had a similar room filled with items to sell. While at once, building an inventory of goods either bought with cash or credit from distributors is a strategy, it is not without risk. Their ability to sell and pay back distributors depends largely on the vagaries of the market and in some sense on tourist whims. For less "timeless" products such as spiderman masks or ninja turtle hats, a large investment may result in the loss of capital. Thus, the ability of some members to build an inventory distinguishes them from others who have none, but it certainly does not put them on an equal playing field with individuals who have actual bank accounts and cash savings.

### **Spatial Strategies: Tourism on the border**

The idea that the Mixtecs are displaced by larger forces does not negate the fact that their mobility and search for a cash income is the result of specific household and community-based strategies. While the general narrative of Mixtec migration focuses on migration patterns on the migratory agricultural belt, the Mixtec experience in Nogales offers a view into multiple ways people earn their incomes and take advantage of different economies. The choice to come to Nogales is strategic in several senses. Firstly, the families chose Nogales over Tijuana because there is less relative competition from other indigenous street-vending families. Secondly, it is an intermediate destination for families who support members who go to work in Arizona as day wage laborers. It is often mothers and wives who stay in Nogales to maintain the household and sell while their husbands travel to sell or try to earn wage labor across the border. Some young single women are also crossing the border to work.

Families living in Nogales are still intimately connected to the U.S. economy in many ways, but are able to benefit from it without necessarily making the jump into the U.S. illegally. Many people chose to wait until they are able to secure papers to obtain a temporary passport before crossing the border. This method allows a peace of mind in the actual crossing of the border, although those who are traveling to Tucson or Phoenix often fear the various checkpoints, and are always in hope that they will not be running at the time they cross. This method also eliminates the costs of hiring a coyote to lead them across the desert. Despite the numerous incentives to stay in Nogales, many of the Mixtecs in Nogales do dream of one day moving to the U.S. and several have one or two family members already living in Arizona.

Participating in the tourist sector in U.S.-Mexico border towns and nearby resort towns such as Ensenada and Puerto Penasco is another survival strategy for Mixtec families. It also reflects the growing integration and articulation between the Mixteca and border area (Kearney 2004a: 185). Money made in Nogales tourist activities directly connects Mixtecs to the U.S. economy and the Mixteca economy, where much of their money is spent (not to mention Asian economies where many of the commodities they sell are produced). On numerous occasions members of the Mixtec community would comment to me on their gratefulness to American tourists. “Gracias a ellos, podemos estarnos aqui” (thanks to them, we are able to be here) is one phrase which particularly struck me. I was unable to resolve the contradiction between the structural inequality between the street vendors and the tourists, in their class, ethnic and national dimensions and the dependence the vendors have on the tourists for their livelihoods. To understand the irony, we must look at the nature of tourism and specifically understand the interpenetration of U.S.-Mexican economic relations, particularly on the border. Robinson says of tourism, “The viability of tourism is tied to the reproduction of global inequalities. Tourism takes for granted the division between the rich and the poor, the ‘right’ of the wealthy to be pampered and waited on by the poor. One person’s leisure is another person’s work and these relations are not reciprocal” (Robinson 2003: 302).

In addition to travel and maintaining ties between Nogales and Oaxaca, the Mixtec families are highly mobile throughout the year, following market demands for cheap commodities at festivals and swap meets and visiting with distant family members. Especially in the “off” seasons, when tourists in Nogales are few and far between, the

Mixtecs seek out other destinations to take their products and sell. Of course, the departure of some vendors in Nogales means more business for those who stay. Thus, families will often have some people go and some people stay to maximize their presence in the various selling locations.

Several times a year, the families pack up and move, in an almost nomadic existence, to literally camp out and live on the streets or in a park for regional fiestas and celebrations, such as the October pilgrimage and Fiesta de Magdalena and the Christmas bazaars in Hermosillo. There are two explicit purposes for these selling trips. The first is obviously to maximize profits and take advantage of the consumer culture that permeates such events. The second stems from the fact that these regional fiestas have become epicenters for Mixtecs who live throughout the border region. Thus, by attending, people are able to not only sell, but visit with family and hometown community members they otherwise have little chance to see.

In October 2005 I was able to travel to Magdalena for the annual pilgrimage and stay with several members of the Nogales Mixtec community and observe the many dimensions of the fiesta. Indigenous and non-indigenous informal market vendors from various areas of the border region set up their in a maze like fashion spiraling out from the church. The Mixtec vendors had specific areas in which they dominated and were usually set up close to other people from their village. Teresa's husband explained to me that they need permits to sell and they managed to get a prime location this year because of their connections to the fiesta authorities. The stalls were filled with items they had transported from Nogales, and underneath the tables and behind the stalls were blankets

and pots and pans that they used to sleep and eat during several weeks. During the main days of the fiesta, families were busy selling, but on the days after, they had more down time to visit with relatives and catch up on the latest village news. Events such as the Fiesta de Magdalena demonstrate strategies Mixtecs use to take advantage of economic opportunities while simultaneously creating “Mixtec spaces” in regions far from their hometowns. Of course, events such as these also reveal differentiation within the community, for not all families have the material means or social connections to make such trips worthwhile.

### **The Contradictions of Community & Solidarity**

As previously demonstrated, for Mixtecs working in the informal sector, kinship and community alliances are indispensable in offering safety and emotional and economic support. The creation of strong family units and communities may be characterized as everyday forms of resistance to the potentially homogenizing and disorienting forces of displacement which threaten the collective nature of increasingly dispersed Mixtec communities. These strategies work not only to maintain life in San Jeronimo, but allow them to cope and survive in the new constraints and difficulties they face on the border.

### **“Mixtec Spaces”**

While the Mixtec’s “containment” on the streets and sidewalks is a reflection of their subordinated position in the spatial hierarchy of selling locations, it is also a source

of social and economic security. They have transformed the street into a de facto “Mixtec” area, where they dominate much of the economic activity. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá argues that “place-making is a cultural activity that all of us ‘do’ in order to locate ourselves meaningfully in the environment we interact with” (Riaño-Alcalá 2002: 280). Day after day, the Mixtec vendors occupy the same locations while selling their goods, surrounded by family members and other members of their hometown community. They watch over each other’s children and share afternoon meals. Older sons and daughters watch over their siblings, occasionally bringing them to their mother’s to breastfeed. Babies sleep in strollers or cardboard boxes situated close to the stalls, often with a blanket overhead to protect them. Vendors speak to each other in their native dialect, a strategy to both maintaining continuity and assist each other when consulting prices or other advice in the presence of Spanish or English speakers. Thus, several downtown marketplaces have become Mixtec spaces, where tourists and locals alike know where to find them. On several occasions, I observed tourists commenting to each other or to the vendors that they always come to this specific location to buy souvenirs. Kearney documents the formation of ethnic enclaves in Tijuana as a response to discrimination and violence. Kearney argues that Mixtec political activism is a reaction to the discrimination and deplorable living conditions faced by Mixtecs in the cities of Tijuana, Mexicali, Tecate, Ensenada and Nogales. In these urban contexts, Mixtecs form enclaves where they protect one another from outside dangers of crime, violence, labor exploitation and police extortion and harassment. In addition to these dangers, Mixtecs

are discriminated against for their ethnicity, their status as “indios” in previously ethnically homogenous border towns (Kearney 2004:246).

### **Language, Food and Maintaining Ties to Home**

Language and food are two of the most prominent areas in which Mixtecs maintain bonds with each other and continuity to their lives in Oaxaca. Mixteco is the primary language spoken among Mixtec adults and some children. While many women expressed to me the negative reactions they sometimes encounter when speaking Mixteco in the presence of Spanish-only speakers, many still prefer to speak Mixteco with one another, and often use it as a street vending strategy. This use of language is comparable to Harald Eidheim’s investigation of how language is both a source of stigmatization and ethnic expression. Eidheim considers the use of language in the public and private spheres of Coastal Laaps in Norway, where Laaps are looked down upon and Laapish identity and language is considered inferior and regarded as a social stigma. Eidheim argues that in the public realm, interactions between Laaps and Norwegians, there is a general agreement between the two groups, and Norwegian is always used. He says that in the private sphere, among Laap kin and neighborhood relations, Laapish language is the code of interaction and it is looked down upon if it is not used, thus being the space for ethnic expression (Eidheim 1969: 49). Like the Laaps, Mixtecs express their ethnicity and village identities through language.

Food also plays an important role in the lives of the Mixtec community in Nogales and its preparation and consumption is one area where people can maintain

continuity to their lifeways in Oaxaca . The state of Oaxaca is known for its culinary masterpieces, the land of seven moles, one for each of its regions, the birthplace of the tamale, memela and tlayuda. Corn tortillas and black beans are staples of the Oaxacan diet and tied to the history of small farmer agriculture. In Nogales, food preparation and consumption is often a topic of discussion, especially among women. It is a daily activity that everyone participates in, and often accompanies a space where community and family come together in the late afternoon. It is common for Mixtec women to prepare moles or tamales or other food unique to their homes in southern Mexico. Family members carry special chiles, tortillas and breads with them when they return to Nogales from trips to Oaxaca. On the streets, women often share blue corn tortillas called totopos or tamales with one another. In a visit to Felipa's son's home in Phoenix, she prepared a traditional mole for me, using the recipe and roasting techniques her mother used. She told me everything was the same, except for the gas burner and blender that were much appreciated luxuries of her son's home. The way Felipa phrased it; she had the best of both worlds.

While food is an area to express continuity, I am weary to over-romanticize its role in people's lives. Food preparation is also a source of anxiety for women who do not have the time to prepare meals for their families. Much of the food consumed on the streets of Nogales is not healthy and/or traditional, but sodas, chips and the occasional taco. Many of the children are being raised on diets comprised of processed junk food. In addition to the health costs of eating such foods, there are economic repercussions. Much of the daily income women are making goes directly into the purchase of coca-colas,

chips and candy. Purchasing food at liquor stores and street vendors is at once a strategy for women who do not have the time to cook, but also reduces the amount of money they bring home at the end of the day.

In addition to the bonds Mixtecs maintain with each other in Nogales, there are institutionalized processes and systems that contribute to the maintenance of community solidarity and ties to hometowns in Oaxaca. The Mixtecs in Nogales actively participate in such communal practices, blending new strategies of survival on the border with their “traditional peasant” strategies which place great emphasis on the community. These processes include both the civic and religious ceremonial obligations, otherwise known as the *cargo* system and *tequio* system required of all men under the age of 60. In Nogales, these practices are referred to as “el servicio” y “la fiesta,” labels given to more formal structures of communal work, civic governance and ceremonial traditions. These systems allow individuals and collectivities to express their membership in the town, find common points of bonding, and relay descriptions and narratives of their customs and shared history. With massive amounts of out-migration, these communal obligations are being required of community members who no longer live in the Mixteca. For the village band of San Jeronimo (one of the most important aspects of the fiesta), nearly all of the band members live either in northern Mexico or the United States and travel each year to play together during the week of the fiesta.

The annual fiesta and religious ceremonies are one of the most important events in many Mixtec towns and serve an important function in defining village identity. Villages typically have their town saints and town fiestas, which are comprised of 2 days

of festivities, and weeks of planning and socializing. For villages like San Jeronimo, where a large percentage of the population lives in northern Mexico or the United States, the fiesta offers a time when people can return to visit family, meet friends, and even scope out potential spouses. The fiesta is an important event not only for the older generations, but younger generations as well. On one visit to the home of a Mixtec family in Nogales, they had a homemade videotape of the fiesta celebrations and everyone joined around the television to watch it. In my observation of who was able to return for the fiesta this past year, it appeared that only the more established families could afford to return and in general men, older adults with grown children or young adults with no children could make the trip. Mothers with young children generally cannot make the trip for the fiesta and are responsible for solely maintaining the household in Nogales.

However, as lifeways for peasants and indigenous groups change, new tensions arise around traditional institutions. The traditional logics and institutions of semi-subsistence agriculture and the closed-corporate community are becoming ever more difficult to maintain in a world increasingly incorporated into a cash economy. For example, Jim Greenberg notes that religious cargo systems have largely disappeared in Mesoamerica as closed-corporate systems are opened to capitalist economies (Greenberg 1981). In the case of Mixtec communities in Nogales, the traditional cargo and tequio systems have not disappeared, but have significantly changed in recent decades as people have left their natal communities. Because men are now summoned from abroad to fulfill their duties, if they fail to return, or find someone to take their place, they risk

losing citizenship rights and their homes and property. In theory, the civil-religious system is intended to level out wealth differences in communities as people rotate paying for and participating in various ceremonial obligations. While there is significant debate as to whether these systems in their traditional form do in fact level out or just legitimize inequalities (see Greenberg 1981), this becomes even more of an issue as communities are displaced. In cash economies, money is quickly circulated through the household, what may be known as a “flow through economy”(Greenberg 2006). Mixtec families are finding it increasingly difficult to afford their return homes to Oaxaca as well as survive for up to year on little to no income. Many of them must depend on other family members to support them. During my fieldwork, I spoke to families who were able to strategize and send members home, but also heard stories of community members who were not able to and lost their homes. Here we see how an institution intended to level out wealth differences in communities now serves as a mechanism of differentiation.

On one hand, Mixtecs express respect and a sense of responsibility to the maintenance of collective governance and on the other hand, they express deep frustration and anxiety over the forced requirements of returning to Oaxaca with no monetary support. Couples comment on the material burdens of traveling to Oaxaca and surviving without a source of income. It is common for couples to work extra hard and save their money before a trip. In some cases, couples have their children stay in the north to send temporary remittances to them while they are in Oaxaca. For longer cargo terms, not only do the men have to go, but wives often accompany their husbands. When

I asked one woman whose husband was recently called to serve, she responded, “who will cook for him and wash his clothes? I have to go.”

Why do Mixtec migrants continue to participate in practices that place such a material and emotional burden on their lives? The economic and time commitments to maintain ties to home communities may seem outrageous for people who are struggling in their day to day lives to keep their families healthy. In my own discussions with Mixtecs, they provided more material answers. Most said that they had to go or their homes and land would be taken away from them. Some scholars have written on the importance of civic and religious institutions in processes of defining community identity and community membership and rights to land (Kearney 2004b; Wolf 1957). Laura Velasco Ortiz, who works with Mixtec communities in Tijuana, argues that migrants are willing to go to such great lengths to maintain networks because of their ethnic identity and historical socialization in the community. Ultimately, it remains to be seen how long transnational communities can be sustained and if future generations of Mixtecs who are born in border towns or in the United States continue to maintain ties to lifeways in Oaxaca.

### **Conclusions and Future Directions**

In this thesis, I combine analyses of political economic transnational processes and policies and the daily lives of Mixtec families living in Nogales. I show that Mixtecs are displaced by global and local conditions of neoliberalism that systematically undermine indigenous communities. This perspective allows us to complicate migration

literature that is either devoid of human interactions and cultural processes, ignores structural and historical causes for mobility and/or romanticizes transnational processes. Secondly, I argue that life on the U.S.-Mexico border presents its own sets of challenges, constraints and hierarchies of inequality. It is within these new constraints that Mixtecs develop strategies for survival and for continuity in their lives and with their communities of origin.

While the Mixtecs in Nogales have been able to use strategies to carve out a niche in the tourist market, their position remains precarious and subject to insecurities of the market and local politics. Several women expressed anxiety or fear of one day not being able to make a living selling due to the increase in sellers and competition. The streets are indeed full with people trying to eek out a living along the border, and selling is becoming increasingly difficult. In addition, as neoliberalism pushes forward are more communities are displaced, questions arise concerning the future of transnational communities and indigenous communities in general.

Will the Mixtecs will be able to maintain their transnational lives living between Oaxaca, Nogales and the U.S., and if so, to what cost, and with what further adjustments? For example, how will communities of origin resolve the tensions and burdens felt by community members who must travel to fulfill their servicio terms? With more and more people crossing into the United States illegally, will the annual trips to Oaxaca become less possible and frequent? What is the fate of displaced indigenous communities in Mexico? To begin answering these questions I turn again to the work of Velasco Ortiz. She states,

Ethnic identity implies a subjective collectivity that shares a common sense of life. This collectivity pursues its own collective survival and enables its members to survive as individuals...the strength of the collective interest suggests that these indigenous migrants realize their individuality to a considerable degree in the framework of the community (Velasco Ortiz 2005: 105).

Velasco Ortiz points to ethnicity as a strong force in the maintenance of collective identities and community survival. While I do not doubt the power of ethnicity and community, I also do not doubt the power of neoliberal policies, discourses and practices that severely undermine the ability of indigenous groups to pursue their collective lifeways in their homelands. I also do not doubt the forces that may restrain people from expressing their individual and collective identities in circumstances of inequality and discrimination. Thus, the tensions between the potential ethnocide and demise of indigenous communities and the struggles to maintain continuity ties and collective identities remain central and will continue to shape the lives of displaced communities in the future. At this point in time it is impossible to predict the fate of the Mixtec community in Nogales, however, it seems clear that their story will continue to be one marked by struggle.

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