

COMMUNICATING NETWORKS AND CLOISTERED NETWORKS: EVIDENCE OF THREE CONTRASTING MIGRATORY CIRCUITS^{1,2}



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ABSTRACT. This article asks a core question. How is it possible that a migratory flow to the United States, like that of the Mixtecs from Oaxaca, grounded on solid social networks, with an important internal and international migratory history, with a significant number of people who have become legal residents or U.S. citizens, is persistently located in the worst American labor marketplaces? Whereas two much more recent flows, like those from Tlaxcala and Hidalgo (one of them, on top of it all, undocumented and virtually without any social networks at all to support its migratory process, and lacking any important history of internal migration) is positioned in a relatively better situation in the United States than the group of its fellow Mixtec countrymen? To move toward a possible answer for this question, a comparison of differentiated ways of insertion within the labor market in the United States through three recent migratory circuits towards the United States is made, based on empirical evidence from the MMP data bases and ethnographic work.

KEYWORDS. domestic migration, international migration, migration, social networks, labor insertion, labor markets.

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INTRODUCTION

In existing literature on migration it is very common to find references concerning the importance of social networks as fundamental support for spatial mobility processes.⁶ The strength and consolidation of these networks are also considered an important element in the relative success of immigrant groups. In the same sense, the older the migratory flow, the more likely for it to be viewed as a positive element for labor performance of immigrants in their places of destination. Migratory status is also deemed important for labor performance among immigrants—the better the migratory status, the better the possibilities for relatively improved labor insertion (Massey et al. 1991; Durand and Massey, 2003; Herrera, 2005). Lastly, schooling is an element that has been awarded great importance to explain labor performance differentials. Paradoxically, the case of immigration of the community from the Mixtec region in the state of Oaxaca is clearly a counterexample for the first three mentioned premises. This is why it constitutes an interesting challenge for analysis. Just for the schooling variable, the very low indexes reported in Oaxaca account for the very precarious labor insertion of the immigrants from this area.

It should thus be asked: how is it possible that a migratory flow grounded on solid social networks, having an important internal and international migratory history, with a significant number of people who have become legal residents or U.S. citizens, is persistently located in the worst American labor marketplaces? Whereas two much more recent flows, one of them, on top of it all, undocumented and virtually without any social networks at all to support its migratory process and lacking any important history of internal migration, is positioned in a relatively better situation?

To answer this question, the labor performance of immigrants from the Mixtec region in Oaxaca in the U.S. labor market was compared to that of immigrants of two very contrasting origins among themselves, although coinciding in their short international migratory history (see Chart 1): *mestizo* immigrants from a semi-urban area to the center-west of the state of Tlaxcala, and the *Ñañú* immigrants from urban and rural populations in the state of Hidalgo. The comparison was based on results from an ethnosurvey of the Mexican Migration Project (MMP)⁷ in these zones, as well as on the authors' ethnographic work.⁸

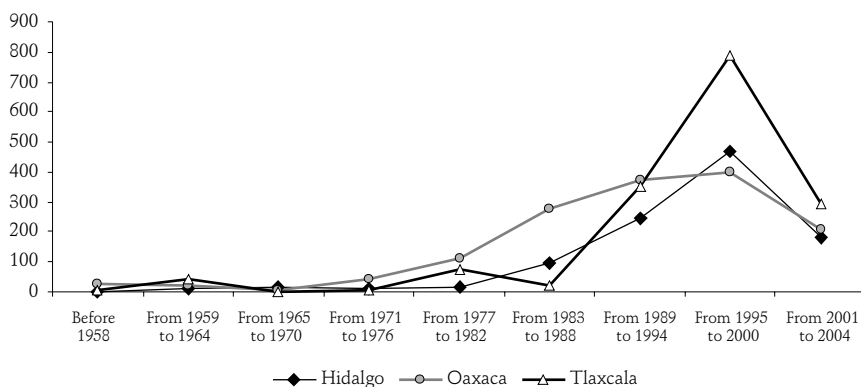
⁶ In this regard, a classic in Mexico is *Los ausentes* (Massey, Alarcón, Durand and Hernández, 1991). This reflection has been present since the pioneer work of Gamio (cf. Gamio, 2002). This may also be seen in the international sphere; i.e. Portes (1995) and Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993).

⁷ The Mexican Migration Project (MMP) is the result of collaboration between researchers from Princeton University and the Universidad de Guadalajara. For more detailed information about the characteristics and methodology of the MMP, visit the Web page <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu>

⁸ It is worthy of mentioning that the ethnographic work is still under way and this articles is mainly based on information from the MMP.

FIGURE 1⁹

First International Migration to the USA in the Three Migratory Circuits



Source: Based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca and MMP107/Persfile.

As way of hypothesis, we set forth that endogamous characteristics of social networks of Mixtec immigrants are largely responsible for the poor results they have achieved in their persistent presence in the United States labor market. Granovetter (1973) stated many decades ago that the predominance of strong bonds and the relative absence of a weak bonds among immigrants from the Mixtec region of Oaxaca have greatly contributed to the fact that this immigrant group has not been able to find, except for counted instances, access channels to different jobs from those of the primary sector in the state of California.

Nonetheless, why do immigrant Oaxacan Mixtecs sustain this situation? As Besserer (i.e. 2006) has pointed out, it is possible that a history of permanent social exclusion, which was first local, then translocal, and finally transnational, is the reason for these dramatic results. It should thus be asked to what extent is this description explained by the development of a defensive strategy which has resulted in the long and painful history of discrimination, social and cultural marginality, and multiple exclusion that have marked the life of the Mixtec ethnic group in Mexico and the United States. Accumulated ethnographic work (Besserer, 2006; Gil, 2006; Hernández, 2003; López and Runsten, 2004) indicates clearly that the labor situation of this ethnic group in California could be a consequence of this to a large extent. Other authors have proposed that the action of intermediary agents, who act in a differentiated way in the different market niches where immigrants work, has played an important role to condition the modes of labor insertion of each of the mentioned groups (López and Runsten, 2004; Sánchez, 2005).

⁹ As indicated at the beginning of this article, this information only pertains to the Ñañú region of Valle del Mesquital (Tlaxcala), the Mixteca region of Oaxaca and the semiurban and *mestizo* central and western area of the state of Tlaxcala.



It is by no means our intention to say that immigrants from Tlaxcala and Hidalgo are situated in privileged niches within the United States labor market. As recent research has demonstrated, those Mexican immigrants who have, in general terms, been integrated into the United States labor market in recent years have almost without exception been hired in precarious jobs at low wages, without benefits, irregular days' work, in unclean environments, and unilaterally controlled by employers (Borjas y Katz, 2005, Canales, 2000; Levine, 2004; Trigueros, 2003; Herrera, 2005 y 2006). However, within this precariousness there are differentiated situations that require an explanation.

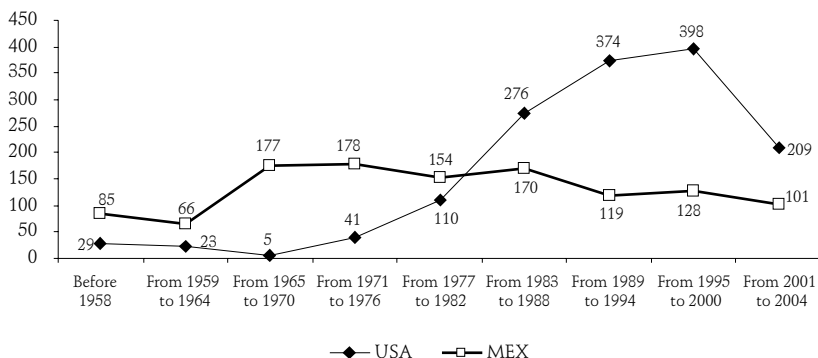
Without diminishing the importance of the effects that social networks, previous collective migratory experience, immigrants status or schooling may have to account for the way in which migratory processes develop and the modes of labor insertion of immigrants, this article will try to demonstrate how the diverse combination of these elements may result in more or less successful patterns of labor performance. The case of the Oaxacan Mixtecs is important because it illustrates the fact that social networks in certain contexts may have limiting effects on the labor domain, even if they might lead to results highly appreciated by its members, such as the defense of important cultural values and solidary long-existing practices on which a large part of the cohesion of the social group depends.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRATORY FLOWS

A common trait the three mentioned flows (Oaxaca, Tlaxcala and Hidalgo) have is that, beyond the important contrasts present among themselves, the number of new immigrants in the international immigration process has considerably decreased in recent years (see Figures 2a, 2b and 2c).

FIGURE 2A

Oaxaca: First Migration to the USA and Mexico (USA, N = 1464), MEX, N = 1177)

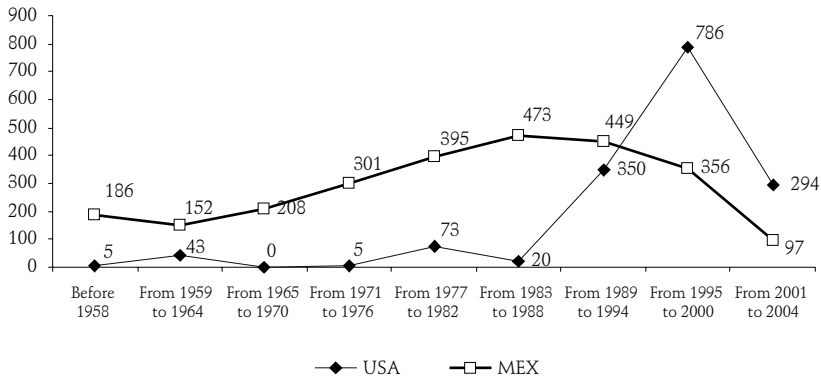


Source: Based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca and MMP107/Persfile.



FIGURE 2B

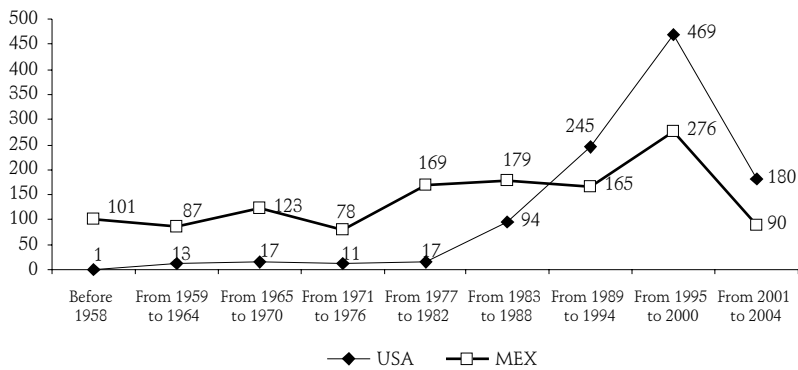
Tlaxcala: First Migration to the USA and Mexico (USA, N = 1526), MEX, N = 2616)



Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

FIGURE 2C

Oaxaca, First Migration to the USA and Mexico (USA, N = 1464), MEX, N = 1177)



Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

Although the restrictive policies of the United States have undoubtedly intervened in this arena, as a consequence of September 11, 2001, in the case of the Mixtec region in Oaxaca there has been a relative depletion of immigrant reserves. Even if this may also be seen in Tlaxcala and Hidalgo, the process in this case might be related to the material improvement remittances have brought on to the population.¹⁰

The Mixtec region of Oaxaca has a long domestic and international migratory history (Figure 2a). In the former, a great numerical continuity may be appreciated, together with large diversification of changing destinations through time. In recent years, this migration has intensified, especially to two destinations: the state of Baja California and the state of Oaxaca itself (Chart 1).

¹⁰ The differentiated impact of remittances where the migratory flows originate is the object of a study currently in progress.



CHART 1

Current place of residence of internal immigrants, in the three migratory circuits

STATE	HIDALGO %	OAXACA %	TLAXCALA %
Baja California	0.0	35.6	0.0
Distrito Federal	5.2	14.1	29.1
Edo de México	0.0	0.0	4.3
Hidalgo	83.9	0.0	0.0
Oaxaca	0.0	37.0	0.0
Puebla	0.0	0.0	4.6
Sinaloa	0.0	1.8	0.0
Tlaxcala	0.0	0.0	57.3
Other states	10.8	11.4	4.7
Total	100	100.0	100
Prudent estimate	N = 827	N = 371	N = 1258

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

International migrations are, on the contrary, of more recent origin and appear as an impressive concentration in the state of California (Figure 2).

CHART 2

Current place of residence of internal immigrants in the USA, in the three migratory circuits

HIDALGO %	OAXACA %	TLAXCALA %	
Other states	41.3	19.0	13.4
California	10.1	50.2	5.0
Florida	24.2	15.2	0.0
Idaho	0.0	0.0	22.8
Oregon	0.0	15.6	0.0
Texas	24.5	0.0	0.0
Wyoming	0.0	0.0	58.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prudent estimate	N = 543	N = 947	N = 1004

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

Regarding flow volume, a process dating back to the *bracero* period is clearly evident, but with a recently relative massification as of the second half of the sixties. A particular feature of the migratory cycles of this region is that they are not seemingly a result of the cyclic behavior of Mexican economy, but are better accounted for by the permanent conditions of marginality and poverty in the Mixtec region.

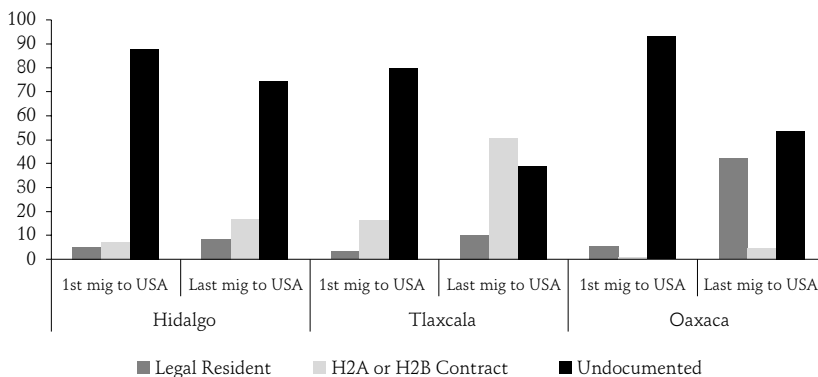
An extremely interesting element in Mixtec migration is that both types of flow are intensely associated. As a matter of fact, it is possible to talk about the historical construction of a migratory corridor from Oaxaca to California (and from there, to Oregon and Florida), passing through the states of Veracruz, Sinaloa and Baja California or the surrounding suburbs of Mexico City. Through-



out this process, the Mixtec immigration from Oaxaca gradually settled in a series of areas which have kept strong ties by means of the extension, ramification and densification of solid social networks that have allowed its members to keep their community life in spite of geographical plurilocation (Besserer, 2004; Gil, 2006).

Another feature worth noting is that the migratory status of Oaxacan Mixtecs that have migrated more than once to the United States has improved considerably, in such a way that a little over 40 percent of those who initially left undocumented to the United States have returned there as legal residents or citizens (Figure 3).¹¹

FIGURE 3
Migratory Status of the First and Last Migration to the USA
in the Three Migratory Circuits (%)



Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

The case of Tlaxcala differs in several relevant aspects from that of the Oaxacan Mixtecs. Even though this migration has an important internal migratory tradition (Figure 2b), its destinations have mainly concentrated in the state of Tlaxcala itself and the metropolitan area of Mexico City (Chart 1). Since the beginning of the 80's, and as a result of the 1982 crisis, decline in this migration has been constant and has reached its lowest in recent years.

In this case, international migration appears as a clear replacement for domestic migration. Almost unexpectedly, it underwent marked massification as of the first half of the 80's. Like the Oaxacan Mixtec migration, it tends to concentrate in only one main destination found within the limits of the states of Idaho and Wyoming (Chart 2). Without having formed a kind of migratory corridor, interviews we have carried out report there was a kind of social-network reconstitution that helped domestic migration adapt to the needs of international migration.

¹¹ The majority of first-time immigrants, however, are still largely undocumented.



Evolution of the legal status of the aforementioned Tlaxcaltec immigrants proves to be very interesting because those who have immigrated to the United States have been able to receive support from their employers for the obtainments of H-2A and H-2B visas. In the last Tlaxcaltec migratory events, those who were hired with these visas outnumbered undocumented individuals (Figure 3).

The Nañú migration from the state of Hidalgo is in sharp contrast with the previous two domestic and international migrations (Figure 2c). Domestic migration, on the one hand, has been traditionally of an intermunicipal kind (Chart 1). On the other, besides its being constant, it has noticeably increased during the consecutive economic crises that have marked economic life in Mexico since 1982. Only in recent times has there been a strong declining trend.

Up until the beginning of the 80s, Nañú international migration, as in the case of Tlaxcala, was very limited. Later, at the beginning of the 90s and the turn of the century, it increased at an accelerated rate. Unlike Oaxaca and Tlaxcala, Nañú immigration is characterized by very strong destination dispersal. It has not only been directed to several states, without having clearly settled in any of them, but even within each American state it has been scattered in a large number of places. The main states with labor insertion have been California, Florida and Texas (see Chart 2).

Unlike the two previous cases, several indicators reveal that this group from Hidalgo is migrating without the support of social networks, in an individualized manner or in small groups which are not very connected with each other. Lastly, this migration from Hidalgo was largely comprised by undocumented individuals at the beginning, and is still so, as may be seen with the small group that has migrated again to the United States (see Chart 3).

NETWORKS AND MIGRATION

When reviewing relevant data to gauge the importance and consequence of social networks in the international migration of the three elected circuits we find that Oaxaca has more solid and adequate networks for migration, largely combining family and friendship networks.¹² For instance, Chart 3 (a, b, and c) show how these networks act to facilitate illegal crossing of the border.

It may be seen that 80 percent of people migrate with relatives, friends or both, while very few do so alone or with strangers (Chart 3), and 33 percent of the total number does not need to pay a *coyote*. In addition, among those who do see the need to hire a *coyote*, more than 50 percent has the support of family members or friends for the required payment the first and the second time they cross the border (Chart 3b).

¹² In the case of the Oaxaca, as in the others, statements about the nature of its social networks have also been supported by results from our own and accumulated ethnographic work. Lack of space allows us only to exemplify with information from the MMP bases.



CHART 3A

Who they crossed the border with

WHO WITH?	HIDALGO		TLAXCALA		OAXACA	
	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %
Alone	8.9	2.6	2.1	0	7.8	16.2
With relative	11.4	20.5	17.5	0	36.4	35.3
With friends	21.9	35.9	55.3	81.3	22.6	25.5
With relatives and friends	3.8	0.0	14.7	13	21.8	19.7
With strangers	54.0	41.0	10.4	5.7	11.4	3.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100	100	100	100
Prudent estimate	N = 149	N = 55	N = 191	N = 93	N = 124	N = 113

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

CHART 3B

Who paid the *coyote*

WHO DID?	HIDALGO		TLAXCALA		OAXACA	
	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %
He/she	82.7	62	79.8	85.7	33.3	31.2
Family	7.3	12.7	4.9	4.3	32.8	37.4
Friends	8.2	12.7	0	0	3.9	0
There was no payment	1.8	12.7	15.3	10	30	31.4
Total	100.0	100	100	100	100	100
Prudent estimate	N = 154	N = 50	N = 191	N = 93	N = 123	N = 113

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

As part of this collectively accumulated knowledge, Mixtecs from Oaxaca have established crossing routes that are part of their social capital in the state of Baja California (Tijuana is one of the main historical settlements of Oaxacan Mixtecs outside their land) and, more recently, the state of Sonora, as a consequence of harsher measures at the border (Chart 3c).

In the opposite extreme, a vast majority of those who migrate from Hidalgo (almost 100 percent) needs the services of a *coyote* and have to pay with their own money, with nobody's help (Chart 3b). More than half the immigrants travel the first time with strangers and it is not until the second trip when half of them do so with relatives, friends, or both (Chart 3a).

On the other hand, these immigrants from Hidalgo do not have preferential crossing routes but depend on crossing the border at many points because of their lack of migratory experience (Chart 3c). Our ethnographic work reveals that migration of this group from Hidalgo is markedly individualized (Trejo Olguín, 2007).



CHART 3C

State where they crossed the border

STATE	HIDALGO		TLAXCALA		OAXACA	
	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %	1 ST CROSSING %	2 ND CROSSING %
Baja California	26.4	23	16.2	0	43.7	38.8
Coahuila	17.3	35.9	5.5	0	0	0
Chihuahua	8.2	0	5.5	0	5.8	10.1
Sonora	32.7	30.8	39.8	75.7	29.1	39.9
Tamaulipas	10.9	10.3	2.8	0	0	0
Unknown	4.5	0	30.2	24.3	21.5	11.2
Total	100.0	100	100	100	100	100
Prudent estimate	N = 154	N = 55	N = 191	N = 93	N = 131	N = 113

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

In the case of the Tlaxcaltecs, a high percentage uses *coyotes* and is forced to pay the costs of the operation (Chart 3b). However, it must be stressed that the great majority (approximately 90 percent) crosses the border in the company of relatives, friends or both (Chart 3a). Ever since the beginning of the migratory flow from this area of Tlaxcala, immigrants have chosen the area of Agua Prieta, in Sonora state, as the privileged place to pass illegally to the United States (Chart 3c), which speaks, as with the Oaxacans, of accumulated knowledge by the social network.

LABOR INSERTION

Within the migration process from the three aforementioned regions, there are patterns of differentiated geographic and labor insertion which have given way to labor trajectories of varied success. Based on the higher or lower quality of the labor market niches where there has been insertion, the immigrant *mestizo* Tlaxcaltecs are found in the upper extreme, the *Ñañú* from Hidalgo are situated in-between, although more towards the bottom, and the Oaxacan Mixtecs are found at the bottom. The indicator used for this classification is salary. Although we know that it is not the sole important indicator to assess labor insertion quality, reasons of space force us to include other commonly used indicators to estimate degrees of labor precariousness elsewhere.¹³

As mentioned, migratory groups from the Mixtec region of Oaxaca endure the most precarious conditions in the labor arena due to its persistent insertion mainly in the agricultural sector of the state of California (see Charts 2a and 4).

¹³ These indicators include: day's journey length, presence or absence of benefits, work continuity or lack of it throughout the year, formality or informality of hiring procedures, presence or absence of unions, and other indicators more commonly used as referents to appraise degrees of labor precariousness.



Unlike the majority of migratory flows from Mexico to the United States, Oaxacan migration continues arriving in the same agricultural niches of the United States' labor market, both in the case of first-time immigrants as in those who have been there before.¹⁴

CHART 4
Occupation sector of immigrants currently in the USA

SECTOR	HIDALGO	OAXACA	TLAXCALA
Others	3.1	3.4	9.1
Primary	6.0	60.3	3.3
Secondary	56.5	17.1	42.5
Tertiary	26.4	11.1	43.2
Housewife	7.9	8.0	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prudent estimate	N = 535	N = 915	N = 972

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

Destination diversification is limited and percentage of workers in the secondary and tertiary sectors are extremely low. In addition to California, there are two important destinations geographically, Florida and Oregon. Even so, work is predominantly in the primary sector. Some immigrants manage to move to other states, following the so-called "*corridas*" (Hernández, 2003) –the series of agricultural harvests throughout the year–, as a means of defense against lack of continuity in agricultural work. These moves, however, are merely seasonal, as California remains the main settlement area.

Several studies have shown (Trigueros, 2004, among others) that wages are lowest in the primary sector of United States' economy, and working conditions are the worst, a scenario controlled informally and unilaterally by employers and their intermediaries in the labor market. To cap it all it should be added that there is a strong trend in the Californian agricultural sector towards saturation, leading to increased competition for work among the diverse immigrant groups. This situation is complicated by the extreme hostility towards Oaxacan Indians, who are discriminated against by most of the groups living in California-among them, other groups of Mexicans or of Mexican origin.

The self-contained nature of Oaxacan Mixtec social networks is evidenced in the labor sphere by the fact that its members generally work and live in the same places as do their direct fellow countrymen. Additionally, practically every people have an association of native-born individuals whose constant activity favors continued contact and permanence of community bonding among the majority of those from the same birthplace.¹⁵

¹⁴ The United States-born children of immigrants have not been considered.

¹⁵ The main labor and residential concentration of Oaxacan Mixtecs is found in the San Joaquin Valley, especially in the areas of Fresno and Madera (cf, for example, Gil et al., 2006).



It is relevant that since the beginning of the Oaxacan Mixtec immigration, professional *enganchadores* (labor contractors) of undocumented workers have been behind this pattern of agricultural labor insertion, many of them coming from the same region or community of origin (López and Runsten,¹⁶ 2004). It may be stated that, to a large extent, the few weak links of the Oaxacan Mixtecs have decreased precisely because of the presence of this kind of intermediaries in the labor market.

Immigrants from the central area of the state of Tlaxcala

Among the flows chosen for this comparison, Tlaxcala lies at an extreme opposite to Oaxaca, as its immigrants have the best relative labor conditions. It shares with Oaxaca a large geographical concentration, since almost all of its migration is found within the bordering area between Idaho and Wyoming (Chart 2). Idaho is basically used as a place to live, because rents are lower, while Wyoming is the place to find work. It should be noted that dwelling places are very scattered, and the main point of reunion for immigrants is the soccer field during regular season (May-October, every year). However, they do not have any links with native-born Tlaxcaltecs and their bonds are more of the family and friendship kind rather than of the community type.

As for labor, the activity of immigrants from these Tlaxcaltec towns is found in several sectors (Chart 4) and they have found a limited number of niches with relatively less precarious labor conditions, relatively higher wages, as well as labor relations with consensual spaces and informal negotiation with employers. Men are preferentially hired in building projects and women in services related to tourism (the hotel industry mainly), an area where there is now an oversupply because of the massive arrival of Tlaxcaltec women who, in response, have begun to build another labor market niche in house-salaried services, through informal contracts per days worked. People from Tlaxcala originally headed to work Idaho's main crop: potatoes. These jobs, however, have been abandoned and a very limited number of new immigrants are now doing agricultural work which, by the way, is very different from that of California, where they deal with pine production and forest care.

This migratory flow has several characteristics:

- Their destination does not have the tradition of welcoming immigrants. Ever since the first immigrants settled there, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, they have not welcomed new migratory flows. This is

¹⁶ López and Runsten compare the relative success of Oaxacan immigrants from the Zapotec region to that of their Mixtec neighbors and consider it to be largely due to the absence of this type of intermediaries in the Zapotecs' case and to the insertion of a significant number of them outside the primary sector.



why the Tlaxcaltecs do not need to compete for labor spaces with other recent immigrants. In addition, their market niches are generally relatively open. This has enabled large voluntary labor mobility among immigrants and the possibility to continue negotiating with employers, among other things.

- There have been no signs of rejection nor discrimination against Mexican immigrants in this area of the United States.
- Behind the growing presence of Tlaxcaltecs in these American states there is the action of a type of intermediaries different to those from the Mixtec region in Oaxaca, as the former seek to hire documented workers through the program for Temporary H-2A Visas for Agricultural Workers and, more specifically, through the H-2B visas. This makes it easier for Tlaxcaltec workers to combine this condition of labor legality with additional jobs not contemplated by the visas or longer stays than those allowed, further enabling them to do without the intermediaries and be hired directly by employers they already know.
- In spite of this, we have encountered an apparent paradox: there is no significant improvement in labor insertion conditions among immigrant who have achieved a change in legal status.¹⁷

Ñanú immigrants from the state of Hidalgo

The case of immigration from Hidalgo lies at an intermediate point between the previous cases. Despite its precariousness, the Ñanú have a slighter salary advantage with respect to immigrants from the Oaxacan Mixtec region (see Chart 5 below). This is so in spite of the fact that it is a very recent international migration, of its lack of adequate support networks and its large geographical dispersal (Chart 2).

Salary advantages in this group of immigrants are largely explained by the fact that, ever since its first incursion into the American labor market (Chart 4), labor insertion has been outside the primary sector. It should be noted that the salary average in this sector is lower for these immigrants than for Oaxacans in California (see Chart 5 below).

Immigrants from Hidalgo are geographically very scattered throughout the United States, although they tend to concentrate in California, Florida and Texas, and are also present in several states, but in limited numbers (Chart 2). Even in those three states where concentration of Hidalgo immigrants is higher, they are dispersed in many specific places. The relative advantage they have concerning wages is the insertion of a majority of them outside the primary sector (Chart 4). This group is generally hired for very different unskilled jobs within industrial and service activities, where they work under very precarious conditions: subcontracting, employers eluding legal labor responsibilities, informal contracts, unilateral labor relations and a strong involuntary labor mobility which, as we have seen, is not the case of the Tlaxcaltecs (Trejo Olguín, 2007).

¹⁷ The advantages of no longer being undocumented seem to lie elsewhere.



Because of geographical dispersal and the more individualized characteristics of their migration, immigrants from Hidalgo find dwelling places and jobs to share with relatives, friends, acquaintances or people from their community of origin. They usually share with recent immigrants of very varied origins (Trejo Olguín, 2007).

Subcontracting companies that control many of these immigrants' labor movements cheat them considerably, taking advantage of their undocumented status and lack of social resources for their defense. These companies usually control markets where there is strong competition among recent immigrant groups from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, as well as for social situations characterized by discrimination against Indians (Trejo Olguín, 2007). Although it is not possible to evaluate how far-reaching the phenomenon of intermediaries among undocumented workers in communities in Hidalgo has been, there is information about the role they play and the limited action of social networks to help immigrants establish contact with subcontracting companies in the United States.

Salary comparison

An analysis of the relative salaries earned by members of the different mentioned migratory groups in the United States (Chart 5) shows that the Tlaxcaltecs working in the secondary sector earn better mean wages per hour (\$9.21 USD) and that immigrants from Hidalgo with labor insertion in the primary sector earn the lowest wages of all (\$5.25 USD).

CHART 5A
Pay per average hour in the USA in DLS,
by immigrants' place of origin (1997-2004 period)

STATE	PAY PER HOUR	PAY PER YEAR
Hidalgo	7.9	15,168
Oaxaca	6.8	13,056
Tlaxcala	8.2	15,744
Average	7.6	14,572

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

Tlaxcaltecs, on the other hand, consistently earn the highest mean wages per hour in all sectors, whereas wages earned by individuals from Oaxaca and Hidalgo are very similar, even outside the primary sector. Nonetheless, Oaxacan Mixtecs are found within the sector in the lowest salary level among the three groups under study (Chart 5a).



CHART 5B

Pay per hour for occupation sector

	TLAXCALA			OAXACA			HIDALGO		
	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
MEX	1.04	1.37	1.51	0.70	1.27	1.54	0.00	2.21	1.37
USA	6.73	9.21	8.00	6.59	7.75	8.00	5.25	7.83	7.90

Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

When considering average salary per hour and number of workers in each sector, the image is truer to the reality of labor precariousness for each of these groups. Thus, while the general mean for the three groups is \$7.6 per hour, immigrants from the Mixtec region of Oaxaca earn an average of \$6.8 USD while, in the opposite extreme, Tlaxcaltecs earn \$8.2 USD and immigrants from Hidalgo earn \$7.9 USD. These differences may seem minimal when compared to abysmally lower wages in Mexico or mean salaries of Anglo-Saxon workers born in the United States. However, they are actually not so, when considering that the weekly difference may amount to almost \$80 USD for the highest wages (Tlaxcaltecs in the United States), constituting approximately 33 percent more of what those with the lowest wages (Oaxacan Mixtecs, also in the United States) earn in a complete day's journey (8 hours).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following three tables summarize some of the main characteristics when comparing the three described migratory flows.

TABLE I
Migratory Experience

	DOMESTIC MIGRATORY HISTORY	INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY HISTORY	RELATIVE TIME OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY EXPERIENCE*	DOMINANT MIGRATORY STATUS (PARTICULAR FEATURES, BESIDES THE DOMINANT CONDITION OF BEING UNDOCUMENTED)
Oaxaca	Long	Long	Average	Legal residence & citizenship
Tlaxcala	Average	Short	Little	H2A y H2B
Hidalgo	Short	Short	Little	Undocumented

* With respect to Mexican immigration to the United States in general.



TABLE II
General characteristics of networks in the United States

	PREDOMINANT BONDS	ADEQUATE SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION	MAIN NETWORK ROLE	DIVERSIFICATION
Oaxaca	Strong and plentiful	Yes	Support	Little
Tlaxcala	Combined and plentiful	Yes	Support and contacting	Ample
Hidalgo	Strong and few	No	Support	Little

TABLE III
Performance in the labor market¹⁸

	RELATIVE SALARY	DOMINANT INSERTION SECTOR	DOMINANT SKILL LEVEL	RELATIVE QUALITY OF WORK
Oaxaca	Low	Agriculture	Low	Low
Tlaxcala	High	Construction and Services	Average	High
Hidalgo	Average	Agriculture, Construction, Industry	Low	Low

TABLE IV
Schooling and Intermediation in the labor market

	RELATIVE SCHOOLING	IMPORTANCE OF INTERMEDIARIES IN THE LABOR MARKET
Oaxaca	The lowest	Determinant
Tlaxcala	High intermediate	Little
Hidalgo	The highest	Determinant

It may be seen that immigration originating in the Mixtec region of Oaxaca has features that would hypothetically place it under conditions of relative advantage. Nonetheless, reality has proved otherwise. Neither its long-standing migratory history within and without the country, nor its undocumented status which has been accompanied by a group that has been able to legalize its stay in the United States, nor the existence of an ample and plurilocal social network supporting the migratory process with strong links to different anchoring places where Mixtec immigrants live and work have made it possible for these immigrants to abandon their insertion in the lowest-quality jobs to be found in the United States.

Its permanence in the agricultural sector, specifically in the state of California, has kept Oaxacan immigrants at the lowest wage levels and the worst labor conditions. Unlike immigrants from Tlaxcala, who have increased their contacts

¹⁸ Only referring to the groups here considered.



within their social networks (weak bonds), and those from Hidalgo who, practically without an adequate immigration social network, have managed to diversify their labor insertion, Oaxacan Mixtecs in the United States have reproduced social networks with markedly endogamous characteristics, where intermediaries are precisely their weak linkage to the labor market.

Schooling is an element that could help explain the relative precariousness of labor insertion among Oaxacan Mixtecs. Chart 6 shows that this group is the most illiterate of the three (almost 10 percent of the total) and that the percentage of people who only finished grammar school is over 50 percent, unlike immigrants from Hidalgo and Tlaxcala who are not illiterate (less than 1 percent in the first case and 0 percent in the second one), with a high percentage having studied junior high and high school (65.6 and 74 percent, respectively).

CHART 6
Schooling

SCHOOLING LEVEL	HIDALGO %	OAXACA %	TLAXCALA %
Illiterates	0.8	8.9	0
Primary	21.5	50.1	23.5
Secondary	39.4	25.5	39.5
High School	26.2	13.1	34.5
BA or BS	2.8	2.1	2.5
Postgraduate studies	9.3	0.4	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Schooling Average	9.8	6.4	9.0
Prudent estimate	N = 540	N = 944	N = 999

At least with a certain degree of schooling per level in a population over 12 years old.
Source: Authors', based on data from ETONATC/Oaxaca y MMP107/Persfile.

Might the explanation lie in schooling, despite the fact that immigrants get mostly unskilled jobs that require no school certificate? Based on the collected information, we believe with reservations that the answer is a negative. There are two main reasons for this. The first one is that the groups we have studied have very homogenous schooling levels as well as salary differences, which turn out to be important. The second reason is the evident lack of relation between the jobs performed by Mexican immigrants in the United States and the knowledge acquired through formal schooling in Mexico. This leads us to think that schooling levels do not explain why the majority of Oaxacan Mixtecs continuously remain in the agricultural sector in California.

Another possible explanation of the higher precariousness of labor insertion of the Mixtecs must be analyzed according to the particular features of the different labor markets of insertion of each of these immigrant groups and the presence and role played by the diverse intermediaries who recruit workers and negotiate labor relations for immigrants. While the Oaxacan Mixtecs are found in



a very competitive labor market, where intermediaries, particularly the traditional kind, have strong control as manual labor recruiters, negotiators of labor relations and even as transportation facilitators, immigrant Tlaxcaltecs are able to get by without intermediaries since their insertion is in a labor market with expansion niches, practically devoid of competence with other immigrants. Lastly, the Ñañaú from Hidalgo are at the hands of intermediaries, just like the Mixtecs. However, these intermediaries are preferentially connected to precarious jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors.

This is also the case when deciding where to cross the border. According to a recent study by Ma. Eugenia Anguiano (2007), choice does not depend on the immigrant but on the *coyotes*—on the definition of labor markets where insertion of each of the different groups takes place. Decisions for immigrants from Hidalgo and Oaxaca are to a large extent made by the intermediaries and not by themselves, as with the Tlaxcaltecs.

In spite of this, based on some testimonials,¹⁹ it is possible to detect that hiring through intermediaries has a number of advantages because, even if agricultural labor in California is very unstable, immigrants may receive some advantages which, from an outsider's point of view, might not seem very relevant but which are considered significant for them, such as short-term agreements with the team boss, promotions within the team organization or changes in work conditions (i.e., working in the greenhouses and not in the fields), etc. However, this topic requires further study.

Another line requiring a qualitative study related to immigrants in workplaces has to do with the expectations and hopes of those directly involved. Might the ambition for a better salary be the only motivation when making the decision to stay or to look for other destinations? How important is the cost of dispersal to advance in the labor world within a group characterized by strong community bonds and solid shared traditions, as in the case of the Oaxacan Indians? Or, conversely, might it be that keeping the largest possible number of members from the community of origin together, as with the Mixtecs, is a worthier goal than financial success at an individual or group level?

The answers may perhaps be based on these considerations. Nonetheless, for more detailed responses it will be necessary to delve further into the study of the internal functioning of social networks—their quality, extent of social and cultural capital, among others—and their relation to the diverse operational guidelines of the local labor markets in the United States, as well as the differentiated role intermediaries of all kinds play in this process.

¹⁹ Insufficient for this project to attempt definite conclusions.



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