Mexican Hometown Associations in the U.S.:
Motives for Transnational Engagement

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Most of the literature on Mexican hometown associations (HTAs) has focused on their role as development agents and often emphasized the rapprochement carried out by the Mexican state in order to attract remittances. Although the Mexican state plays an important part in the proliferation of HTAs in the United States, the reasons for migrant involvement in HTAs are often left unexplored and typically explained as a result of 'emotional attachments'. This article, however, taking a Weberian approach, argues that it is important to consider a wider range of motives of the individual migrants for transnational engagement such as involvement in HTAs and hometown development. The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out among migrants from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, living in Los Angeles, California.

Keywords: Hometown associations; transnationalism; collective remittances; indigenous communities; actor-centred approach; motivations.

Introduction

The question dealt with in this article concerns the involvement of migrants in hometown associations and in particular why many migrants continue to be members of such associations even after they seem to have become firmly settled in the United States. In other words, the intention is to address a well-known and –researched phenomenon by addressing it from an angle that has so far received little attention, namely by focusing on the motives of the individual migrants for participating in these associations. The empirical material used for the exploration of these motives draws upon my fieldwork among migrants from the state of Oaxaca living in Los Angeles[2] as well as on examples from the existing literature on migration. Thus, some of the motives presented here have already been described to some extent by other migration researchers in order to explain types of transnational activities. Nevertheless, the aim here is to use these various insights in a more systematic way

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[2] The main part of the fieldwork was carried out over extended periods from 2002 to 2004 in Los Angeles and supplemented with short periods in the hometown in Oaxaca. In addition, a short follow-up fieldwork was carried out in the spring of 2009 in Los Angeles.

and to apply them to one particular form of transnational engagement, namely HTA membership.

The significance of HTA membership is not merely of academic interest. Throughout the United States there has since the 1990s been a rapid increase in the formation of HTAs from Mexico and Central America (Orozco, 2004) and it is now estimated that there are more than 3,000 Mexican HTAs in the U.S. (Fitzgerald, 2008: 146). Although the collective remittances sent by HTAs have been estimated to account for only one percent of the total amount of remittances (IFAD, 2004), collective remittances nevertheless hold a different type of development potential as they typically are destined for public works projects, which benefit the entire village of origin. Thus, Portes and Landolt (2000: 543) observed that '[t]owns with a hometown association have paved roads, electricity, and freshly painted public buildings'. Similarly, Orozco and Lapointe (2004: 48) point out that investments made by HTAs 'vastly outdo public works spending in small communities, and in many cases, basic infrastructure work carried out by HTAs forms the essential base for further economic development in these towns'. In this connection, the exploration of motives can, in addition to providing information about what drives migrants to engage in HTAs, also present some indications of the circumstances which are conducive to the persistence of collective remittances flowing to the villages of origin as well as the situations in which they are likely to decrease.

Finally, it should be noted that although the article argues for the usefulness of an actor-centred approach, which brings attention to individual motives, it does not imply that this approach should be privileged in relation to more structurally focused analyses. Indeed, as it will be argued, motives can only be understood in relation to the given social, political and economic structures, and in the case of migrants these structures often include the context of reception as well as the context of origin. In this sense, the article can be said to be methodologically oriented in two ways: first, the emphasis on the insights gained by systematic explorations of individual motives and, secondly, the call for multi-sited approaches that situate the object of investigation within a framework that includes the contexts in the place of origin as well as the place of destination.

Background and Research on Hometown Associations

Migration often takes place within existing networks where early migrants help newcomers from their communities of origin to find work and housing in the new context and thereby progressively reduce the costs and risks associated with migration (Massey *et al.*, 1987). Generally, migrant associations evolve out of these informal networks of migrants who are already linked together by ties of kinship, friendship and residential propinquity. The associations typically involve a semblance of formal structure such as an organizational name, a charter, by-laws, a dues schedule and a leadership committee (Hirabayashi, 1993: 14). Although membership in most migrant associations is not ascriptive or obligatory, it is usually delimited in terms of eligibility: a migrant must come from a given locale in order to belong

(Hirabayashi, 1986: 9). That is, in contrast to voluntary associations in general, migrant associations are by definition based on ties having to do with 'common origin', although the precise meaning of this is often an issue of contention.

Some of the earliest associations of immigrants from the same hometowns are the *landsmanshaftn*, composed of Eastern European Jews who came to the U.S. between 1880 and 1923 (Rivera-Salgado, 1999: 1449). Mexican associations, commonly known as *clubes de oriundos*, also have a long history in the U.S. and the most prominent go back to the 1950s (Bada, 2003). In particular, the Mexican HTAs have proliferated since the early 1980s and this trend accelerated in the 1990s as a result of the outreach efforts made by the Mexican government through the establishment of the *Programa de Atención a Comunidades Mexicanas en el Extranjero* (PACME), which aimed at strengthening the affective ties to the Mexicans abroad (Goldring, 1998). PACME gave a reinvigorated role to the Mexican consular offices, which since then have actively promoted the formation of HTAs (Zabin and Escala, 2002), and it also included the Three-for-One programmes that provide federal, state and municipal matching funds for donations sent by HTAs for development projects in the communities of origin.[3] In addition to funding public works projects in the hometowns, the HTAs also typically provide mutual assistance to their members in the new context and host social and recreational activities, and only to a lesser extent are they beginning to become politically involved in the U.S. (Zabin and Escala, 2002; Rivera-Salgado, 2006).

Much of the early research on migrant associations, influenced by functionalist and modernist paradigms, focused on their socio-psychological aspects by emphasizing their roles as 'buffers' that would 'cushion' the rural migrants against the culture shock of the big city or facilitate a positive transition to the urban context (e.g. Parkin, 1966; Little, 1973). Later research, informed by the historical-structuralist perspective, focused on HTAs as a result of the rural-urban ties that proliferate because of outmigration from the underdeveloped areas and as a response to dependency stemming from unequal patterns of national and local development (Roberts, 1974). Since the 1990s, a number of researchers, working within the transnational migration paradigm, have rejected the macro-approach adopted by historical structuralism and, instead of seeing migrants as passive reactors manipulated by the world capitalist system, emphasized their role as active agents (Glick Schiller *et al*., 1992, 1995). Generally, this approach has also informed most of the more recent research on migrant associations, which has tended to focus on their role as development agents – a tendency furthered by the celebratory approach of international development agencies towards migrant remittances – and their involvement in local and national politics in the country of origin.

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[3] The programme, initially known as '*Dos por Uno*' (Two for One), was first introduced in the state of Zacatecas in 1993. In 2001, the Mexican government implemented the programme nationwide and it has since then co-funded more than 7,000 projects with 723 HTAs in 34 U.S. states (Somerville *et al*., 2008: 11). In the fiscal year 2005, Mexican HTAs raised about US$22 million for small- and mid-sized development projects, which was matched by US$66 million in Mexican federal, state, and local government contributions through the three-for-one programme (Rivera-Salgado, 2006: 6).

While the latter approach provides important insights into the types of activities carried out by the migrant associations, the motives of the migrants for engaging in these practices have rarely been examined. For the most part, the HTA activities tend to be conceptualized in terms of 'migrant philanthropy' (e.g. Orozco, 2007; Alarcón and Escala Rabadán, 2007), which seems to suggest that the migrants are mostly compelled by altruistic motives. However, even in the cases where researchers have sought to explain what drives migrants to engage in institutionalized transnational practices such as HTAs, there is often a tendency to view it as being primarily a result of 'emotional attachment' (e.g. Ferguson, 1992; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002). For instance, Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo (2002: 769) argue that `immigrants who participate in transnational institutions are not necessarily driven by altruistic motives. They may be engaged in the pursuit of an enhanced social status or motivated by the desire to leave a personal mark in the place where they were born. Yet, sociocultural transnational participation is guided more by affective and symbolic motives than by instrumental rationality´.Although the motives of belonging and social status often are essential aspects of HTA membership, there may nevertheless also, as it will be argued in this article, exist more instrumental motives for this type of involvement.

Finally, it might be argued that Oaxacan migration provides a somewhat special case, because most of the migrants come from indigenous communities that maintain distinctive traditions of organizing and strong communal work obligations (Wolf, 1957), which sometimes are extended to include migrants in the new areas of destination (e.g. Kearney and Besserer, 2004; Trans, 2006). However, particularly in the research on indigenous migrants, there has often been a tendency to resort to a 'cultural' explanation where the indigenous identity and the cooperative traditions are seen as the basis for the formation of HTAs (Doughty, 1970; Zabin and Escala, 1998). Indeed, Orellana's (1973: 282) study of a group of Mixtec migrants from Oaxaca actually concludes that '[v]illage associations occur exclusively among rural Indian migrants coming from villages with a strong tradition of communal activity systems'. However, by focusing primarily on the importance of indigenous identity and traditions, such studies generally risk missing the causes and conditions which leads to the formations of HTAs, and although the cooperative traditions and identification *may* provide an important background for their creation, it is necessary to emphasize that HTAs are not mere extensions of such traditions. Rather, as Hirabayashi points out in his study of Zapotec migrants from Oaxaca in Mexico City, the 'preexisting regional sentiments typified by the phenomenon of pueblismo are shaped, re-created, and explicitly articulated in terms of the norm of paisanazgo by the Mountain Zapotec migrants *in the urban setting*' (1993: 14, original emphasis). That is, when Zapotec migrants emphasize the norm of *paisanazgo*, which prescribes solidarity and mutual aid on the basis of common origin and under specific circumstances can lead to the formation of HTAs, it is nevertheless still based on a choice that develops in response to the social, cultural and economic conditions they

face in the new urban context.[4] Thus, while indigenous migrants from Oaxaca compared to their *mestizo* compatriots often share stronger senses of communal orientation, due to the cooperative traditions in their villages of origin, the decision to be or not to be a member of an HTA is still the result of a choice, and as such it becomes interesting to examine the motives behind these choices.

Exploring Motives in the Social Sciences

The exploration of motives in the social sciences was first suggested by the German sociologist Max Weber. Following the ideas of Wilhelm Dilthey, Weber pointed out that, within the overall phenomenon of human conduct, we may distinguish between the purely outward behaviour (*Verhalten*) and its internal aspect in the form of subjective meaning (*Sinn*). Because there is no single rational motive that underlies human social action, any given type of behaviour can in theory be caused by an infinite variety of internal, mental states – or subjective meanings – that include rational as well as irrational elements. In order to interpret a particular act correctly it is therefore necessary also to come to an understanding of the subjective meaning of the actor.

Thus, according to Weber, there are two types of understanding involved in explaining a given action. The first, which Weber terms 'direct observational understanding' (*aktuelles Verstehen*), seeks to establish the meaning of the particular act or expression without reference to any broader context. The second type of understanding, termed explanatory understanding (*erklärendes Verstehen*), consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning and by attaching a motive to it based on the situation in which it occurs. Explanatory understanding thereby adds something that cannot be derived from immediate observation alone by also seeking to establish the underlying motive, which Weber (1968: 8) defines as 'a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question'.

In order to approach an understanding of the motive behind a particular act, the researcher has to undertake a 'sympathetic participation' or 'empathic re-experiencing' in which he or she seeks to become acquainted with the actor's own intellectual and emotional categories of interpretation (Burger, 1977: 130). There are, however, a number of obstacles to this procedure. For instance, as Weber (1968: 21) points out, in most cases the actor is governed by impulse or habit where 'actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning'. Furthermore, even when a group of actors is aware about their subjective meanings of a given action, the actors themselves may not always agree on the categories and rules of interpretation (ibid. 27-28). Thus, as Weber himself cautions, in comparison with explanation in the natural sciences, the

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[4] Moreover, as Hirabayashi (1993) points out, there are limits to the mutual aid, and paisanazgo ties can be terminated in certain contexts (ibid. 129), and, indeed, some of the village migrants chose not to affiliate with their *paisanos* (ibid. 96). Paisanazgo is not a term that was used among the Oaxacan migrants in Los Angeles, but the same obligations of mutual aid entailed in the concept also exist in Los Angeles.

additional achievement of explanation by interpretive understanding is 'attained only at a price – the more hypothetical and fragmentary character of results' (ibid. 15).

Nevertheless, through methods such as long-term fieldwork and participatory observation, it is possible for the researcher to gradually become acquainted with shared emotional and intellectual ways of reacting to specific types of circumstances within a particular culture. Such techniques also permit the observation of practices, for instance surrounding HTA membership, which are often not being articulated directly. In the process, it becomes possible to identify what is considered 'rational', 'normal' or 'usual' under the prevailing conditions and, by the same token, to separate subsidiary patterns which are not shared to the same degree (Burger, 1977: 130). Through these insights, the researcher can systematize his observations into what Weber terms 'ideal types' based on 'the classification of possible types of subjective meaning' (Weber 1968: 22). These ideal types function by arranging what initially seemed to be indistinct traits into a consistent construct by an elucidation of their essential elements (Morrison, 2006: 346). That is, through an exposition or one-sided accentuation of certain essential characteristics that appear to be common tomost cases of a given phenomena, it becomes possible to synthesize them into an ideal type.

The Village of Zoogocho and Its Migrant Associations

San Bartolomé Zoogocho is a small Zapotec village located in the Sierra Madre mountain range in the state of Oaxaca. Before the twentieth century, Zoogocho was relatively isolated and only a small number of people spoke Spanish. The first experiences with migration among the Zoogochenses began in the early twentieth century when women went to do domestic work for rich families in Oaxaca City and some of the men would follow to become street vendors. In the 1930s, a number of villagers migrated to Mexico City and this trend intensified in the early 1940s as the population of Zoogocho peaked at 1,125 persons and put pressure on the available land and raised the level of poverty (Ramos Pioquinto, 1991: 334). Mexico City had in turn become the primary site of industrial development and abounded with occupational and educational opportunities (Hirabayashi, 1997: 50). The first U.S. migration began in 1944 when the US-Mexico agricultural contract labour programme (1942-1964), known as the *Bracero Programme*, opened its office in Oaxaca and 84 men from Zoogocho decided to enlist. When the Bracero Programme was ended, some of the younger Zoogochenses using the experiences acquired during the programme began to migrate illegally to the U.S. In the 1980s, the prolonged economic crisis in Mexico accelerated the trend of U.S. migration to above all Los Angeles. Since then, as one informant described it, every Thursday when the weekly bus connection to Oaxaca arrived, a few paisanos would leave the village. Today,

there are less than 100 people living in the village[5] and most of them are elderly and retired, who live on remittances sent by migrant relatives or, in some cases, on the pensions they receive from having worked in the U.S. Thus, Zoogocho has witnessed a steady and dramatic decline in the number of inhabitants, to a point where it has virtually become a 'ghost town'.

Today, the far largest group of Zoogochenses lives in Los Angeles, numbering approximately 5-600 migrants (Trans, 2006), while much smaller numbers remain in the two other main destinations, namely Oaxaca City and Mexico City. In each of the destinations, the Zoogocho migrants have set up hometown associations and every adult who was born in the village is automatically considered a member of the union. The HTAs all have close ties with the village of origin but have each fulfilled different functions depending on its location, leadership and number of members. The first of the HTAs, the *Unión Fraternal Zoogochense* (UFZ), which was formed in Mexico City in 1951, has fulfilled an important economic and political function, sending its yearly monetary contribution to the village and dealing with the federal department offices to acquire public services to the village (Ramos Pioquinto, 1991: 337-8). The latter purpose of establishing links between villagers and government officials in their petitioning for access to governmental resources was an important aspect of the Oaxacan HTAs that was set up in Mexico City during this period (Hirabayashi, 1997). Second, in 1969, the Zoogocho migrants in Los Angeles created the *Unión Social Zoogochense* (USZ), which although being politically insignificant has had an incomparable economic importance for the development of the hometown by sending by far the largest amount of money. Finally, in 1974, the Zoogochenses residing in Oaxaca City founded the *Frente Unificador Zoogochense "José Jacinto de Santiago"*, which has mainly had a political function through their close ties with the municipal authority in Zoogocho (Ramos Pioquinto, 1991: 337-8).

In the case of the USZ, the association was initially founded when the president of Zoogocho wrote to the small group of Zoogochenses residing in Los Angeles at the time and asked them to help pay the debt incurred while repairing the church in the village. Since then, the USZ has carried the main burden of financing a wide range of public works projects in the village, as for example when the roughly 25 migrants residing in Los Angeles later in 1969 each contributed 80 USD to have electricity installed in Zoogocho – making it the first village in the surrounding area to have it. In a similar way, a number of other projects from the construction of a community centre and a basketball court to pavement of the roads have been accomplished in the village over the years, with the USZ providing the bulk of the finances while the male heads of the households in the village have carried out the work through *tequio* [mandatory community labour requirements for the maintenance and construction of village infrastructure]. As the word of the USZ got out and the number of members increased, membership gradually came to be expected of all

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[5] According to the official statistical count of INEGI in 2005, there were 361 people over the age of five living in the village. However, this number contains the more than 200 children who live at a nearby boarding school, which the villagers include in the official census to boost their numbers.

migrants who were born in Zoogocho and, in the process, the yearly quotas paid by the migrants have come to resemble a fixed tax rather than a philanthropic arrangement to support work projects and festivals in the village. While initially, the migrants each would give in the range of 100 USD annually, the membership fee has gradually been lowered over the years, reflecting not only the successful completion of the many projects sponsored by the migrants, but also that there are increasingly more opportunities to access government funds to carry out such projects. Still, in 2001, the USZ sent 40,000 USD to the village for the construction of the *panteón* (cemetery). In addition, the USZ each year sends a significant amount for the celebration of the patron saint, a week-long festival taking place in the village in August. Most recently, in 2008, the incumbent president of Zoogocho travelled to Los Angeles to ask the USZ to help finance a modernization of the *cancha*, the basketball court in the centre of the village, a project that would cost an estimated 300,000 USD. All of the members supported the idea and the USZ agreed to come up with 200,000 USD for the project while the remainder will be provided by the associations in Oaxaca City and Mexico City. However, with no young or middle-aged people living in the village any longer, one may speculate about the practical need for such a project. Furthermore, with most of the Zoogocho migrants working in the lower segments of the Los Angeles economy, one may wonder why they would all agree to finance such a large project.

The Effects of Collective Governance Traditions on HTA Participation

One reason for the continued support of the HTA and participation in the migrant community in Los Angeles might be related to the intended patterns of migration and settlement of the migrants. If a migrant plans to return to live in the community of origin at one point, the continued participation in the HTA and the willingness to give donations in support of public works projects in the village, for instance to provide it with potable water and amenities such as electricity and telephone lines, can be seen as an investment in order to improve the possible, future lifestyle of the return migrant. Indeed, in the case of the Zoogochenses, most of them do hold on to the dream that one day they will be able to return to live in the village. However, because their children are growing up in the United States, it often becomes difficult for the parents to realize this wish. This point is illustrated by Pedro, a 40-year-old man who came to Los Angeles as a young child to live with his mother who had migrated to the city a few years before him. Thus, Pedro explained:`We are here because my kids were born here, but if I could have it my way we would probably be in Zoogocho. My kids were born here, my wife wants to stay here … so in that sense I am stuck here for a while, but I never lose hope that one day I will go back and live in Zoogocho´. In addition to the intended migration and settlement patterns, there is in the case of many of the indigenous communities from Oaxaca often a much more immediate reason for the migrants to retain their HTA membership and pay their contributions to the village of origin. Thus, one study comparing four Zapotec communities in Oaxaca found that they to varying degrees were able to use the organizational capacity of the traditional governance systems to access collective

remittances (VanWey et al., 2005). In the most organized communities (in terms of the requirements for labour and monetary contributions and enforcement of the rules), the community governments were able to access remittances through fees assessed on migrants for missed tequios (ibid. 97). Similarly in the case of Zoogocho, the yearly membership fee that the Zoogocho migrants pay to their HTAs has come to substitute the tequio requirements demanded of the people living in the village, as one migrant pointed out, 'instead of tequio, we send money'. Moreover, the villagers in Zoogocho have also frequently been known to nominate migrants for cargo duties [community service in government and religious affairs], which mean that the migrant has to return to the village for a full year to complete his service obligations or, if he is unable to do so, pay a substitute to fulfil his requirements and thereby maintain his good standing with the community.

While most of the Zoogocho migrants would argue that it is their duty as Zoogochenses to help their village of origin and pay their quotas, there nevertheless also exist a range of social mechanisms on both sides at the border, which seek to enforce these obligations. In Zoogocho, a migrant who plans to return to the village of origin even for a short visit will risk being ostracized if he has not fulfilled his remittance and cargo obligations. As pointed out by Pedro, 'if they don't serve with the community, if they don't give their quotas, then if they go back home, they are looked upon as outcasts, as people that don't belong there'. In the more extreme cases, a person who refuses to perform his cargo could lose his village citizenship and have his property foreclosed. On the U.S. side, the enforcement mostly takes a more subtle form, as for instance through the distribution of a '*lista negra*' (black list), as the Zoogochenses refer to it, containing all the names of people who for some reason were unable or did not want to pay. This list is printed on the back of the official membership list, detailing all the members who paid their quotas as well as any voluntary contributions for the patron saint's celebration, and distributed annually by the incumbent board.[6] By distributing the membership list, detailing donations as well as defaults, to the community, it functions as a mechanism of social control to induce migrants to meet their obligations (Philpott, 1968: 472). Nevertheless, these mechanisms do not always achieve their aim. As Rogelio, a 75-year-old man who worked in Los Angeles from 1978 until 1988 when he decided to return to live in Oaxaca City, explained, 'I have always felt like a Zoogochense even though I don't live there. We were born there and we have certain responsibilities, but there are always negative people who do not want to participate'. In the end, if the mechanisms of social control, such as becoming an object of gossip, fail to compel the migrant to remain in good standing with the community, he faces an additional sanction.

According to Robles Camacho (2004: 470), a native of Zoogocho, '[a] migrant who has never supported his community and has never participated in his hometown association is a migrant who has lost his community rights. He even loses the rights to have the church bells rung for him when he dies'. That is, he is both legally and symbolically excluded from the community. Both statements made by Robles Camacho and Rogelio seek to shape the meaning of absence from the village

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[6] In 2003, the 'black list' contained 28 names (7.7 percent of the total list).

and define what is expected of a Zoogocho migrant. As such, they are discursive and practical tactics intended to frame the communal understanding of migration and village membership and in the process influencing symbolic as well as practical forms of social action, but they also indicate that these practices are contested.[7]

Although the obligations placed on the migrants have been objects of renegotiation over the years, in particular the cargo duties, there has generally been a remarkable support for sponsoring various projects in the village. Today, however, with the availability of more government funds for public works projects, a very limited number of people still living in the village and most of the present migrants being unable to carry out the idea of returning permanently, one may well ask what the point is to continue this type of support for the village of origin. In order to come to an understanding of some of the mechanisms involved in the continued support, I suggest that it is necessary to outline some of the motives of the migrants for this type of engagement. Such an exploration will also provide a better understanding of migrant involvement in HTAs in general, regardless of the collective governance traditions found in the indigenous communities in Mexico.

The Motive of Belonging

The most commonly cited motive (among migrants as well as researchers) for migrant engagement in transnational activities is unquestionably the motive of belonging and the emotional attachment of the migrant to the place of origin. This motive is typically framed within the migrant's personal (childhood) memories of the place of origin, often in combination with a wish some day to return, and, indeed, this is also how many of the Zoogocho migrants tend to express it. However, belonging also seems to involve a number of other dimensions. For instance, as Pedro, who at the time served as the secretary of the USZ, explained about the migrants from his native village: `There are so many people that have never gone home, who have been here like twenty or thirty years… They have no desire to go back home, but they still cooperate. Every year they give their quotas because it is part of their culture. It gives them a sense of being, a sense of community and a sense of unity. So, they give their quotas anyway, even though they don't ever want to go back home… Very few people isolate themselves from us´. As Pedro points out, continued membership of the village HTA is an important aspect of individual identity, as it confirms your connection with the village of origin, and it is also a way to recreate a sense of community in the new context by making the migrants feel that they are part of something. However, even though giving quotas in Pedro's statement is couched in terms of being 'part of their culture', one should be mindful that such loyalties do not necessarily exist *a priori*. To put it differently, it is not an ontological part of their

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[7] During the fieldwork I was unable to locate any of the Zoogochenses who for some reason did not pay their quotas or had deliberately chosen not to be a part of the community. In one case, as I was told by one of my informants, a woman from Zoogocho had married an African American man and had renounced her indigenous background by beginning to 'dress and eat American'. In other cases, some Zoogocho migrants had chosen not to associate with the community of Zoogochenses in Los Angeles because of various conflicts, but nevertheless still paid their yearly quotas to avoid becoming the objects of gossip.

being to be *a Zoogochense* and *to belong* to the Zoogocho community in Los Angeles (see Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Rather, the creation of this type of *pueblismo* – village-based identity – is the result of, on the one hand, the larger structural contexts and dynamics, such as the Mexican government programmes of centralization, rural development and assimilation of indigenous peoples (Hirabayashi, 1993: 129) and, on the other hand, the internal village discourses seeking to frame the meaning of belonging and the obligations it entails.

The moral obligations of belonging can be attributed to a number of causes such as the nature of the social networks that the migrants form in response to the challenges that confront them in the city – which sometimes are given formal expressions in the creation of HTAs – as well as what Stuart Philpott terms the 'migrant ideology', a cognitive model that the migrant holds as to the nature and goals of his migration, which is reinforced by, and in turn reinforces, the social networks (Philpott, 1968: 474). Furthermore, in the case of Zoogocho, the moral obligations are also formed by the nature and demands of the cargo system as it has been enforced by the village authorities, and since many Zoogocho migrants have held on to the idea that they may one day return to the village, their actions in the place of reception can have very real consequences upon the feasibility of this wish. Thus, a number of factors work to shape the meaning of belonging among the Zoogocho migrants, in addition to their personal memories, and they have found their expression, among other things, in the creation of a 'contract' among the villagers and the migrants that the latter should contribute to the advancement of the village of origin as well as in the obligations to aid fellow migrant villagers.

Moreover, this relationship is also reinforced by the particular ethnic and social structures that the migrants encounter in the U.S., and especially in Los Angeles. For instance, in the case of migrants from Oaxaca, they frequently suffer discrimination both as Mexicans in relation to the larger society and as indigenous in relation to their fellow Mexican compatriots (Nagengast and Kearney, 1990). According to one view, the creation of Oaxacan migrant associations can be seen as a response to this kind of discrimination, while also providing the migrants with a space for their cultural reproduction (Ramos Pioquinto, 2003: 17). Thus, structures of discrimination in the new context are likely to reinforce the sense of belonging, which can be articulated through membership of an HTA. In this sense, the HTA addresses some of the socio-psychological needs identified in the early research on migrant associations by providing a comfortable and relatively secure linguistic, cultural and social environment for new migrants in the city. However, while the motive of belonging undoubtedly is a fundamental requirement for HTA participation, it does not preclude the existence of other motives.

The Status Motive

Another explanation for the continuation of ties between migrants and the village of origin focuses on the importance of status. In many ways the motive of status is closely related to belonging, because status claims are often made within the context

of the community of origin, and they thereby also serve to confirm the migrant's belonging and continued membership of this community. However, it differs from the motive of belonging by drawing on a different kind of rationality – understood in the Weberian sense as a type of orientation to reality based on strategies for ordering the world in order to obtain specific goals – which is less predicated on emotional sentiments.

The significance of the place of origin in relation to the status motive is due to the fact that people often interpret status claims in a historical and community context, where certain practices, rituals, goods and artefacts have mutually intelligible meanings and valorisations. Therefore, as Goldring argues, having one's status valorised among peers who share claims to community membership provides an important context for expressing statuses and identities, which are not readily available in the United States (Goldring, 1998b: 173-4). According to this view, Mexican migrants tend to continue to orient their lives in part around their places of origin, maintaining transnational spaces and multiple identities, because these localities `provide a special context in which people can improve their social position and perhaps their power, make claims about their changing status and have it appropriately valorized, and also participate in changing their place of origin so that it becomes more consistent with their changing expectations of statuses. (ibid. 167)´. One of the most important contexts in which to display spending power, claim status and have it valorised are village events like patron saint celebrations since they are usually attended by a large concentration of fellow villagers. Consequently, as Mountz and Wright (1996: 416) observed in a village in Oaxaca, migrants and their families who engage in fiesta sponsorship 'sometimes spend more than their total annual income on a particular celebration. The size of investment exemplifies the extreme material competition for successful migrant status at work in the village'. In the case of Zoogocho, the patron saint celebration, the most important event in the village, is financed entirely by voluntary donations made by the migrants and collected by the HTAs. In addition, the returning migrants often donate *castillos* (expensive firework castles) or hire *bandas* (brass bands) to play the traditional Zapotec music during the celebrations, which in some cases can cost as much as 3,000 USD. These donations are often made to fulfil promises made to the patron saint for instance in return for a safe journey across the border, but they also serve to mark a status claim in front of one's peers and not least to reaffirm the migrant's community membership. Ironically, however, while claiming status may serve to reinforce community membership, it is also something that contributes to the continuing fragmentation of the community by spurring renewed migration. For instance, as José, a 38-year-old man who grew up in Zoogocho and came to Los Angeles with his parents as a young child in 1978, explained, 'When people go back [to the village] the people there see them with video cameras and nice clothes, so they also want to go to the U.S., but if you tell them about the reality [about life in the U.S.], they think that you just want to keep it to yourself. That you are jealous'.

Status can, however, also be claimed at the community level, for instance in relation to other nearby villages. Thus, many of the Zoogochenses spoke proudly of the village as being a role model for the surrounding villages because of the many

public works projects they had been able to carry out with the help of the HTAs over the years. Indeed, the sense of collective achievement and the recognition it bestows, can be highly motivating factors for participating in such projects. This point was illustrated by Maria, a 33-year-old woman who like José also came to Los Angeles as a young child with her parents, who had suggested that the HTA membership fee should be raised to 300 USD in order to finance the rebuilding of the basketball court. As she explained, 'It is a thing to show your kids when you go back, something to be proud of'. In this sense, as Goldring (1998b: 183) argues, participation in changing the material landscape and services available through community-level service and infrastructure projects 'also increases people's feeling of having a stake in the community, which again reaffirms community membership'.

In addition to the status claims at the collective level, there are also a number of more individually oriented status motives for participating in HTAs. In particular, because migration is often associated with a loss of social status, involvement in HTAs and development projects in the home community can be ways of compensating for the loss of self-esteem and respect in the new context (Goldring, 2001; Kleist, 2007). Indeed, the motives of migrant organizers can sometimes be based more on a desire for social status, prestige and personal power within the migrant community, than with facilitating migrant compatriots or helping out in the home village (Jongkind, 1974). More generally, however, it should be noted that HTAs are often dominated by a small migrant elite – consisting of long-time immigrants who have reached a significant level of economic security (Zabin and Escala, 1998: 10) – who have more time and resources to participate.

While claims for status and improvement of social position in relation to the community of origin undoubtedly play an important part in the lives of many migrants, one should expect that the importance of this context depends on the kind of integration that the migrants experience in the United States. In particular, as the migrants become increasingly involved in the receiving society and shift their orientation towards this context, their obligations towards the home community are likely to become a burden and status-driven remittances are therefore also likely to be transitory. However, there may also be instances where increasing involvement in the receiving society is not necessarily at odds with continued support of the home community.

The Option Motive – The Importance of the Village Network in Los Angeles

When most of the Zoogocho migrants arrive in Los Angeles for the first time, they are often able to find employment with relative ease by using their network of paisanos in the place of reception. In this way, by obtaining referrals from fellow migrants, many Zoogochenses have found work in restaurants. For example, Rogelio recounted that he through his close friendship with his employer in the U.S. was able to have dozens of Zoogochenses employed in the restaurant where he worked for about a decade. In fact, as Pedro explained, 'the new migrants from Zoogocho only worry about crossing the border, not about whether they will be able to make it in Los Angeles, because they know that they will be able to find a place to live and a job

through the network up here'. Thus, another motive for continued participation and affirmation of membership of the community of origin might be to gain access to the employment options provided by the network in the place of destination.[8] This is particularly the case when migrants work in imperfect labour markets, such as the ethnically segmented economy of Los Angeles, where personal contacts are the main avenue for economic mobility (Waldinger, 1996: 27). Above all, undocumented, less-educated migrants, who have few alternative information or mobility channels, benefit from engaging in these networks. Under these circumstances, the community of origin takes on a particularly important role because, as Roberts and Morris (2003: 1260) argue, it 'is not only the conceptual locus of the network but also the place where much of the interchange of information concerning opportunities actually occurs'. In this sense, one can argue that community events, like the village fiesta, in addition to being important symbolic and religious events also serve an instrumental function. Not only do they reaffirm the existence of the network and confirm individual memberships, they also provide an occasion for exchange of employment information among migrants, which in turn increases the value of participation in the network. In addition to the occasional, physical return of the migrant to the village and participation in events in Los Angeles, other important ways of confirming membership are by paying your quotas to the HTA, as exemplified in the quotes by Rogelio and Robles Camacho, as well as sending remittances to family members in the place of origin.

From this perspective, HTA quotas, family remittances and the maintenance of rural ties more generally, are comparable to a financial option, a contract which entitles, but does not oblige, its owner to a particular course of action (ibid. 1253). That is, the option, in the form of membership in a network, not only reduces the risk of unemployment, but also allows the migrant to take advantage of the potential gains resulting from economic mobility (by having access to more occupational alternatives). The price the migrant pays for the option is, according to this theory, 'the support given to family and community that is paid to maintain membership in the network, which can be measured by a portion of remittances' (ibid. 1267). In this conception, the option is a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1985), which requires the 'investment of some material resources and the possession of some cultural knowledge, enabling the individual to establish relations with valued others' (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 531). Following the option model, it is not obvious, in contrast to the argument made by Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo (2002: 769), that 'sociocultural transnational participation is guided more by affective and symbolic motives than by instrumental rationality'. On the contrary, although most of the Zoogocho migrants will support the notion that their affective ties and sense of belonging guide their participation, there is also a more instrumental side (motive) to this argument.

Following the option model, the higher the migrant's earnings in his or her current job, the lower the value of the option, and when the potential benefits

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[8] In addition to providing job references, membership of the Zoogocho migrant community also provides important mutual aid insurance in the case of family accidents or deaths. For instance, if a migrant dies the HTA will initiate a collection to help the family and to cover for the funeral expenses.

provided by the network in obtaining future employment no longer is enough to offset the cost of network membership, the result will be permanent migration (Roberts and Morris, 2003: 1268). However, migrants do not only engage in these networks for instrumental reasons but also for social and emotional purposes, as described in the sections on the motives of status and belonging. Moreover, because jobs held by migrants, especially the undocumented, are often unstable and cannot be relied upon to provide permanent employment, the migrant runs a great risk by not retaining membership of the network.

If, as the option motive asserts, remittances and hometown association engagement are 'fees', which migrants pay in order to maintain their membership of the network, then transnational participation may coexist with successful incorporation into U.S. society (see Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002). In fact, these conditions can lead to a strengthening of the migration networks and the continued participation and affirmation of loyalties to the place of origin. From this perspective, it seems likely, as Kenneth Little (1973: 421) suggests, 'the regional associations' appearance may be governed by the presence or absence of certain structural factors'. In particular, this seems to be the case when migrants are left with few channels of social mobility (ibid.). Consequently, migrant associations can function as a symbol of community membership in the new context, which may provide the migrant with access to resources accruing from the network and provide a measure of security against the vagaries of the particular job market.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have argued for the need to explore in a more systematic way the motives of migrants for engaging in transnational activities, such as HTA membership. Through a greater attention to the subjective dimensions entailed in these acts, it is argued, it will be possible to achieve a better understanding of what compel migrants to continue to participate in transnational fields. In particular, such an approach may reveal that what is commonly conceptualized in terms of 'migrant philanthropy' and thought to be primarily the outcome of emotional attachment can also be based on more instrumental and self-interested motives.

Moreover, when HTAs are referred to as 'philanthropic associations' (e.g. Orozco, 2007; Alarcón and Escala Rabadán, 2007) there is a risk of not only ignoring other important dimensions of these associations, but also of regarding their donations as acts of altruism and thereby ignore some of the complex sets of relations and exchanges that take place between the villagers (the non-migrants) and the migrants.[9] Rather, as pointed out by Fitzgerald (2008: 159), local politicians in the community of origin may sometimes be uneasy about soliciting migrant HTAs for support of local projects, because they 'worry about migrants transforming their collectively donated economic capital into political capital and the generation of demands on government services, or even worse, for political change'.[10] Thus, HTA donations often imply much more complex relations of exchange than what is suggested by an act of altruism – that is, an act without any expectations of reciprocity – and, indeed, the same may also be the case behind some of the motives of the individual migrants for maintaining their HTA membership.

More generally, while individually based motives can coexist and complement collectively oriented goals, such as public works projects, the individual motives cannot be deducted from the goals by themselves. Thus, only by examining the individual motives can we gain a better insight into the efficacy and persistence of HTAs as well as the situations that sustain transnational involvement more broadly. In this connection, it should be noted that the reasons for HTA involvement is often the result of a combination of different motives, which are likely to reinforce each other. Moreover, the motives for participating in different fields of transnational life are likely to vary over time, as is the extent of participation in such practices.

Although the article has called attention to the need to systematically consider the motives of migrants for participating in HTAs, it is necessary to emphasize that such an analysis cannot stand alone. The three motives outlined above arise to various degrees from some of the challenges and disadvantages, which the migrants face in their attempts to adapt to the new urban context. As such, the motives are importantly framed by historical and structural conditions in the place of origin as well as the place of destination. In order to explain the formation of HTAs,

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[9] Levitt (2002) has similarly used the term 'migrant philanthropy' but has also emphasized some of the complex negotiations between migrants and non-migrants surrounding the projects.
[10] Two interesting cases where the HTAs came to dominate their villages of origin are provided by Orellana (1973) and Hirabayashi (1986).

it is therefore also necessary to consider other factors than individual motives. Often some type of politicization is a key aspect for the formation of HTAs, as for instance the development and integration programmes created by the Mexican government in the 1960s and 1970s where HTAs in Mexico City became crucial intermediaries between the state institutions and the rural villages. More recently, the Mexican government has since the 1990s played a key role in the formation of Mexican HTAs in the U.S. by setting up PACME and matching funds programmes. In addition to these programmes, there are, as in the case of Zoogocho, often specific social, political and economic dynamics in the places of origin as well as reception that shape the form and outcome of the HTAs.

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