MIXTEC ETHNICITY: Social Identity, Political Consciousness, and Political Activism*

Carole Nagengast, *University of California, Santa Cruz*
Michael Kearney, *University of California, Riverside*

Culture, according to one anthropological formulation, is "the structure of meaning through which people give shape to their experience" (Geertz 1973, 312). Clifford Geertz's definition necessarily implies consideration of struggles over the politics of that meaning. Implicit and explicit in such struggles are political efforts to impose upon others a particular concept of how things really are and therefore how people are obliged to act (Geertz 1973, 316). During the process of nation building, history and the structure of meaning that it gives to contemporary "culture" are often manipulated so that socially, politically, and economically opposed groups are merged into putative harmonious "imagined communities" whose reality enters into public consciousness and social discourse as the authentic past (Anderson 1983). But consciousness of shared identity and common discourse centered upon that identity are not uncontested. In Mexico competing images of indigenous "tradition" entail just such a political struggle over meaning, a struggle over the definition of what constitutes indigenous culture—"real" ethnic identity, as it were—and a consequent struggle over what actions, if any, need to be taken (and by whom) to combat the second-class status of most of the country's indigenous peoples.

The central question that will be addressed here is how social consciousness is generated and expressed in different contexts in Mexico, in this case how indigenous consciousness of imposed ethnicity is transformed into social protest and resistance to exploitation and repression. Our concern is first to examine the historical processes and the bases of the definitional duality between *mestizo* and *indio* through which the indigenous peoples of Mexico and particularly Mixtecs from the western

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part of the state of Oaxaca have been defined as "ethnic groups" by others.[1] In these processes, they have been objectified, categorized, and provided with distinctive social identities, in some circumstances a positive identity as the survivors of a mythologized pre-Columbian past, the only true bearers of Mexican culture and history. In other circumstances, indigenous peoples have been furnished with an equally mythologized but decidedly inferior social identity that divides them conceptually from other social groups along ethnic lines but also justifies their repression and exploitation.

The second and related issue that we will address is the highly contingent emergence of a self-conscious and deliberate elaboration of ethnicity by Mixtecs themselves as they migrate north from Oaxaca to the agricultural fields of Sinaloa and Baja California Norte, to U.S.–Mexico border cities, and across the border to work in commercial agriculture in California and Oregon.[2] In their homeland in the Mixteca,[3] ethnicity is not usually a form of self-identification, but in the frontier, it has become the basis for political activism and a means of defending themselves socially, economically, and politically.

It should be clear that we take ethnicity not as an ontological given, a natural fact of life, but as a social construction formed from the interface of material conditions, history, the structure of the political economy, and social practice. In other words, we contend that there is nothing automatic about ethnicity; it is one way (among others) in which people define themselves and are defined by others who stand in opposition to them. Ethnicity can be a mode of expressing consciousness, of defending the status quo, or (potentially) of organizing social protest (Comaroff 1987).

Before elaborating these ideas further, the ethnographic research on which our analysis is based requires some description. Since 1979 the authors have spent three periods of about three months each and have visited more briefly on several other occasions in the Mixteca Baja,[4] primarily in the mountain village of San Jerónimo Progreso in the *municipio* and district of Silacayoapan. The Mixteca, which is one of the poorest and most ecologically devastated parts of Mexico, is inhabited primarily by Mixtec-speakers surrounding some enclaves of Triquis. Mestizos are found predominantly in the district and municipio centers and in the few cities. While residing in San Jerónimo, we were both participants in and observers of daily life in most settings, including political meetings, ritual events, and fiestas. We recorded agricultural statistics, oral histories, and migration and work histories. We were also given access to the village's historical archives, from which we copied or photographed many documents. We have witnessed numerous public political meetings held at the *palacio municipal* and have also recorded many accounts of political events that we did not actually witness.

While carrying out our research in San Jerónimo, we have also

conducted intensive and extensive research with migrant workers from San Jerónimo and surrounding villages living in the U.S.–Mexico border city of Tijuana, occasionally in Nogales and Mexicali, in the San Quintín Valley of Baja California Norte, and in numerous counties in California including Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Ventura, Kern, Tulare, Fresno, Madera, and Sonoma. Some aspects of our research have already been reported (Kearney 1986a, 1988; Stuart and Kearney 1981; Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney n.d.), and others are still in progress. It has been a rare week in the past ten years that we have not had some contact in one of these locations with persons from San Jerónimo or from nearby Mixtec villages. At present (1989), we are sharing a household in California with a family from San Jerónimo, a practice we have followed for several extended periods in the past, the longest being ten months in 1984–85. Thus in some respects, we have become incorporated into the transnational network of many households from San Jerónimo. We participated actively in many of the political activities of Mixtecs on the border and in California that are described in this article. We have also observed the transformation of old "traditions" and the gestation and birth of new ones as ethnicity has been defined and redefined by Mixtecs themselves and by those in structural and political opposition to them.

GLORY AND DEGRADATION

The positive ethnic image of indigenous peoples, that of ancient glory, has been articulated in the celebration of military, artistic, scientific, and (reconstructed) architectural achievements of the pre-Columbian empire. This image has also been enshrined in Mexico's archaeological monuments and ethnographic museums as well as symbolized in the everyday use of indigenous motifs in murals, emblems of state, and tourist items. Moreover, it is encapsulated in the annual festival of the Guelaguetza in the city and state of Oaxaca, which is attended by numerous municipal and state bureaucrats, tens of thousands of Mexican and foreign tourists, but few nonperforming indigenous peoples. According to Heladio Ramírez, Governor of Oaxaca, whose greetings to visitors are included in the program distributed at the 1987 Guelaguetza festival,

> Oaxaca is the richest expression of the country's ethnic majority, with its 16 ethnic groups and its 92 dialects, keeping with great pureness many of its cultural characteristics, seen in the color and beauty of its regional costumes, in the exquisite variety of its gastronomy, in its deep music spirituality, in the multiplicity and joy of its feasts and traditions, in the notable sensibility of its craftsmen, but above all, in the resumed wiseness of its philosophy before life.

The program goes on to eulogize "authentic folklore" and "age-old tradi-

tion" in setting the tone for two consecutive July weekends of "traditional" ethnic dances, songs, costumes, and food.

The glorious image of the pre-Columbian past, rehearsed and celebrated in the Guelaguetza festival, contrasts with the second version of indigenous tradition, which transcends special occasions and defines and organizes the interaction of the "ethnic groups" with the majority. This image is a negative one that evokes backwardness or primitivity as a basic trait of indigenous peoples. In 1915 Mexican novelist and revolutionary Martín Luís Guzmán wrote of the indigenous peoples of his country: "Since the Conquest or even from pre-Hispanic times, the Indian has been prostrate, submissive, indifferent to good or ill, without conscience, his soul reduced to a rudimentary grain, incapable of even hope. To judge by what we see now, the Indian has not taken a step forward in centuries. Without idealism, hope, or aspiration, feeling no pride in its race, overcome by some mortal and irritating docility, the Indian mass is for Mexico a weight and a burden."[5]

The pervasiveness of Guzmán's atavistic characterization of indigenous peoples is reflected in the everyday use of the epithet *indio* throughout Mexico to denote ignorance or stupidity by the same citizens who point with pride to the pre-Columbian ancestry of the nation, visit the archaeological ruins and anthropological museums, and idolize the murals of Diego Rivera, Pascual Orozco, and David Siqueiros. Reprehensible though racist epithets may be, they are the surface manifestation and audible representation of underlying economic and political oppression.

In El Campo de las Pulgas (Flea Camp), a labor camp located just south of the town of Lázaro Cárdenas in the San Quintín Valley of Baja California Norte, thousands of farmworkers live in squalor. Most of them are Mixtecs, one of the larger of the sixteen ethnic groups native to Oaxaca and western Guerrero that are featured in the Guelaguetza. Tens of thousands of Mixtecs have become migrants and temporary sojourners in this valley, where they are employed by vast export-oriented tomato ranches. One of these is Los Pinos, the enterprise to which Las Pulgas is attached.

Las Pulgas consists of long sheds of corrugated sheet-metal that have been divided into some 250 windowless, dirt-floored rooms about sixteen feet square. These cubicles constitute the living quarters for Mixtec farmworkers and their children, each room housing at least one family of six persons or more. Here the inhabitants cook over open fires (the only source of heat), eat, sleep, and rest from the rigors of the day. The rooms are furnished, if at all, with discarded packing boxes, boards, and tattered blankets and are almost always filled with acrid, lung-searing smoke. One central faucet serves the needs of the entire camp, and the sanitary facilities consist of a half a dozen holes in the ground enclosed with plastic

sheeting. Living conditions for farmworkers at Las Pulgas are typical of the San Quintín Valley, and some camps are even worse.

In contrast, the packing-shed employees of Los Pinos, all of them mestizos, are provided with small row apartments located apart from Las Pulgas. Although extremely rudimentary, these apartments have standard facilities, and these employees take their meals in a spacious, well-appointed cafeteria. Startled by the contrast with the quarters of the Mixtecs, we asked the manager of Los Pinos about the living conditions of the fieldworkers. He replied, "That's the only way those people [the Mixtecs] know how to live. I know it looks bad to us, but they cook over wood fires in their villages; there aren't any toilets there. If I gave them stoves, water, they wouldn't know what to do with them. If I put windows in their huts they would just cover them up. They're used to the heat and smoke. It doesn't bother them. Why, they have lived like that for centuries. They like the way they live; it's their tradition." This statement reflects more than bigotry mediated by the pragmatics and exigencies of labor costs and management. It encapsulates the second rendition of "tradition," one much closer to the daily lived experience of Mixtecs than the first. But this image attributes abysmal living and working conditions to conscious choice ("They like the way they live") as well as to a certain primitiveness or backwardness, traits supposedly as timeless and innate, if less charming, than those consecrated in the Guelaguetza festival.

To some degree, the negative stereotype of indios is believed by Mixtecs themselves. Most do not know themselves as accomplished artisans, superb agriculturalists, the builders of the once-great civilizations of the preconquest (Spores 1967, 1984). Rather, they know themselves as speakers of a language they refer to as *tu?un nda?vi* ("poor words"), as non-Spanish speakers who are often forced by the dominant mestizo majority to pay more for what they buy and to receive less for what they sell, as inferiors from whom bribes are extorted as they make their way north to work on the ranches of Sinaloa and the San Quintín Valley, in the border towns of Tijuana and Nogales, and across the border to pick fruit and vegetables in California and Oregon. They know themselves as those who originate in *lugares tristes* (sad places), villages in the Mixteca where food is often scarce, a decent living is difficult to obtain, and children die of preventable diseases complicated by malnutrition. But even though the negative myth reflects their daily lives in the Mixteca and on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border with sad accuracy, the Mixtecs do not glamorize their poverty by claiming that it is traditional.

Myths are not necessarily false—they can be partial fictions implying prescriptions for action or nonaction to believers and can embody a deep symbolic truth. All peoples take myth as reality to a certain extent. Rather than being philosophical questions, such "fictions" may become

what Michael Taussig terms "a high-powered tool for domination and a principal means of political practice" (Taussig 1984, 492). One essential ingredient of myth noted by Roland Barthes is "inoculation": "One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion" (Barthes 1972, 150). Taussig discusses alternative and partially mythical early-twentieth-century accounts of relations between the indigenous Putumayo of Columbia and European colonists who established rubber plantations there by means of Putumayo labor power (Taussig 1984). These myths dealt with the real or imagined cannibalism of the Putumayo and the European punishment of it. In Taussig's view, they provided the "cultural space" for the torturing, terrorizing, and killing of Putumayos—macabre rites of European solidarity intended to serve notice of the fate that continued resistance would bring those who defied the establishment of civilization (the appropriation of Putumayo land and labor power). In this instance, one example of cannibalism and retribution was sufficient to "inoculate" the Putumayos, that is, for Europeans to justify to themselves their extermination of an entire people without further reflection and to compel the Indians to accept the interlopers' definition of civilization. Thus do myths reconcile contradictions and justify social action.

Historically similar events and processes of inoculation occurred in Mexico during the conquest, profoundly shaping the economic and political subjugation of the indigenous population through direct coercion. Torture and killing of those who oppose the status quo is scarcely unknown today: witness the discovery of the tortured and manacled bodies of prisoners in the rubble of the headquarters of the Attorney General of the Federal District after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, the reports of police brutality and torture in the jails of Tijuana, the disappearance and killing of peasant leaders in Chiapas and Oaxaca, and what are widely believed to be political killings in the period surrounding the elections of July 1988. But such methods have not been publicly or officially practiced, acknowledged, or condoned in Mexico for a long time.[6]

Power does not proceed only from the official arm of the state downward, however, as considerable recent research suggests (Foucault 1970, 1973, 1980). The effective exercise of power depends as well on disparate sources of "social knowledge" that become a part of public discourse. Following the centuries of direct coercion of the indigenous population of Mexico, exercised first by the conquistadores and colonizers and then by the Mexican state, the social knowledge embodied in public discourse inoculated and continues to inoculate popular opinion, thus providing a space for exploitation. This space, then and now, depends on invoking the dualistic version of "indigenous traditionalism" that emphasizes devotion to the "backwardness" of the past to justify and explain

contemporary exploitation while the "positive" aspects of tradition are glorified in a manner that denies the continuing exploitation. The political meaning and irony of both partially mythical images echo Raymond Williams's description of tradition as a highly selective reading of history, an ideological device invoked to justify the status quo (Williams 1975).

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AS OBJECTS

The dual image of complexity and accomplishment in the past but simplicity, backwardness, and passivity in the present is widely shared and articulated by ordinary Mexican citizens as well as by many social theorists and agencies of social change, Mexican and foreign alike. Theorists and agencies, however, usually express this image in more subtle terms. Tradition is invoked to account for indigenous culture, with some aspects regarded as negative (such as the inability or unwillingness to adopt behavior or technology characterized as "modern") and a few as positive (handicrafts, costumes, "traditional agriculture," and "wiseness of philosophy"). The task often set for themselves by social planners, applied anthropologists, and agencies of the state dedicated to "indigenous affairs" is to devise means of overcoming the negative traditions while not injuring the positive. But indigenous peoples are more often the object of theoretical and applied research and development projects than they are subjects who have played an active role in their own past and have a voice in their present and future.

The dual vision of indigenous peoples was encoded in the earliest Spanish renditions of the "Indian other" (Todorov 1984), a duality that has taken on added dimensions in recent social theory. Todorov, for example, seeks to foster communication between the contemporary "self" and "other" by making an exemplar of the outcome of the Spanish and Mesoamerican encounter and the ease with which the conquistadores overcame and subjugated the indigenous peoples. But as Coronil has noted, an undifferentiated West is the unambiguous "self" and an equally undifferentiated Third World is the "other," analogs to "the Spanish" and "the Mesoamericans" of the sixteenth century (Coronil n.d.). Despite good intentions, Todorov reduces a complex historical reality inextricably bound up with the exercise of power to a set of predetermined binary oppositional characteristics attributed to Spanish and "Indian." In the final analysis, indigenous peoples are reduced "to enactors of a single pre-constituted code [which] denies them selfhood and reproduces a view of them as 'others'" (Coronil n.d., 3). This process has historically entailed their reification, ranking, and mythologizing as a social group vis-à-vis the Spanish and later the more generalized mestizos or Latinos: it eventually resulted in the control of the less powerful by the more power-

ful (Foucault 1980). Indigenous peoples thus remain objects of study, and Todorov has enshrined duality by making it part of social theory.

More insidious in some ways than abstract social theorizing are the federal and international development projects designed for remote villages, with their immediate and concrete consequences on indigenous peoples' lives. From its inception in 1948 through the 1970s, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), the major Mexican state institution charged with overseeing projects intended to implement social change in indigenous villages, promoted Spanish-language education, vaccination programs, "modern" farming techniques, and closer commercial ties with mestizo towns. The underlying rationale came directly from the then-dominant, but now mostly discredited, modernization theory of development. This theory essentially hypothesized that indios are poor because they are backward and tradition-bound, and what they therefore need is to become more like "modern" people.

Since the mid-1970s, the INI has responded to criticisms that its earlier program was not only paternalistic but promoted internal colonialism in the interests of advancing capitalism. The INI has since begun to emphasize bilingual education and bilingual media, to promote projects to bring drinking and irrigation water to villages in order to help them become self-sufficient, and to subsidize grain, fertilizers, and pesticides. Nonetheless, indigenous persons and other critics allege that corruption and paternalism continue to characterize the INI.[7] Similar criticism has also been directed toward applied anthropologists, Mexican, and U.S. alike, and foreign and domestic agencies of social change, past and present (Riding 1986, 291–99). For example, the much-vaunted "green revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s, which was also predicated on the principles of modernization theory and was supported by U.S. foreign aid and the Rockefeller Foundation, actually intensified rural inequities and widespread poverty while contributing to the concentration of economic resources (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978, 1984; Griffin 1974, 1987; Stavenhagen 1978).

More recent efforts to bring "progress" to the Latin American countryside through projects originating in the metropolis, while formulated differently, have often had similar effects, actually creating hunger where it did not exist before (Lappé and Collins 1979; 1986). Critics note further that few locally initiated projects have sufficient support to thrive.

Thus although the pre-Columbian past has been mythologized and glorified in the interests of the Mexican state and nation, the economic and social conditions of the indigenous present, while widely recognized and discussed, remain unaddressed in any meaningful way. Indios remain objects of research, a population that poses problems requiring solutions devised by institutions of the wider society, especially those of the state, rather than subjects who experience problems resulting from

structural and historic processes and their position within the dominant society. Michel Foucault has demonstrated the relationship between the "official" discourse of the state and political practice and control. This discourse is constantly legitimated by the state and by academic institutions and has become part of daily societal practice, linguistic forms, and ideas about the norms of everyday life (Foucault 1980). Within this framework, it follows that any attempt by minorities or ethnic groups to manifest opposition to their subordinate position not only will be resisted by the forces of the state but will also be labeled as "deviant" or "subversive" (Kearney and Nagengast 1989, 3).

THE TRADITION OF SURVIVAL

Most of the farmworkers employed at Los Pinos and other agribusiness enterprises in the San Quintín Valley come from the Mixteca, as do the Mixtec performers in the Guelaguetza. The largest unit having everyday political and social saliency within the Mixteca (as elsewhere in indigenous Mexico) has been the "closed corporate community" described by Eric Wolf (1957). Political and social singularity from one commune to the next has been inscribed in a set of distinctive cultural, religious, and linguistic symbols. For example, the male-dominated civil and religious complex organizes commune affairs and serves as the primary vehicle of political activity. Religious festivals are organized around reverence for a particular saint or saints who contrast with those of neighboring communes. Mixtec is the language of everyday life, although many men and some women and children speak Spanish with varying degrees of competency (few speak it well). Although linguistic differences from one village to another do not always render Mixtec dialects mutually unintelligible, they underscore separateness, as do distinctive variations in women's costumes. Marrying within the village population is the rule, and reciprocal suspicion of those from neighboring villages the norm. Thus within the Mixteca, individuals identify themselves as being from a given village. The primary political opposition emerges between villages, and ethnicity is only occasionally salient. For example, Mixtecs and Triquis may invoke their ethnicity to distinguish themselves from each other in market towns. To urban and semi-urban mestizos, however, all indigenous peoples are usually perceived simply as "indios."

San Jerónimo Progreso is a rather remote Mixtec village located high in the mountains of the Mixteca Baja. Until fifteen years ago, no road existed between San Jerónimo and its municipal and district center of Silacayoapan, and no more than twenty years ago, the sixty miles between Silacayoapan and Huajuapan de León on the Pan American Highway (the only major north-south road) required a four-day trek.[8] Today, in the dry season (November through April), a daily bus negotiates the

narrow, ungraded road that winds the four miles between San Jerónimo and Silacayoapan. The road was built and is maintained by means of the communal labor obligation known as *tequio*, which is organized and enforced in San Jerónimo by elected village officials.[9] Regular bus service is also available between Silacayoapan and Huajuapan.

At present, San Jerónimo has a population of some two thousand inhabitants in 250 households. All the available land, most of it divided into tiny plots, has long been under cultivation, leaving none for growing families. In most crucial respects (the form of the domestic economy, social structure, and relations), San Jerónimo resembles hundreds of other indigenous villages in the Mixteca. A Mixtec dialect is spoken by all, and older women wear clothes identifying them as from that village. San Jerónimo is a commune rather than an *ejido*, that is to say, all land is communally held and apportioned among individual households on a more or less permanent usufruct basis. All households, even those of the few store owners, cultivate corn, beans, and squash for domestic use by means of family labor and rudimentary farming technology (machete, hoe, plow, and oxen). The division of labor is determined by age and sex, with little deviation. The civil hierarchy is staffed solely by men, and the main religious complex is organized around reverence for San Jerónimo. While women participate actively in the religious festivals, their role is decidedly that of housewives: they prepare and serve the food, arrange flowers for the altar and the processions through the village, and fulfill similar functions. Like so many closed corporate communities in rural Mexico, San Jerónimo has been engaged for decades in boundary disputes with neighboring villages. Thus to all outward appearances, San Jerónimo is a "traditional" community.

What is it exactly that is "traditional" in villages like San Jerónimo? During the first hundred years of the conquest, the native population of Mesoamerica (which was far from politically, economically, or ethnically homogeneous) declined by some 90 percent due to Spanish practices of domination but also to the ultimately more devastating diseases introduced inadvertently by Europeans. Yet despite the depredations of the conquest, much of southern Mexico 350 years later—especially the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas—maintains the appearance of and is celebrated as being "ethnically diverse" or "Indian." What appear to be indigenous cultural and social forms are presumed survivals of the pre-Columbian past.

During the first century of the conquest, the economy and society of the Mixtecs were profoundly transformed via the introduction of Spanish agricultural technology, forced conversion to Catholicism, and the imposition of Spanish social and cultural forms. Most of the previously dispersed population was forcibly concentrated into Spanish-planned settlements to facilitate more effective government, conversion, and (most

important) extraction of wealth—all under the tutelage of priests who were largely responsible for incorporating the native peoples into the administrative structure of the colonial society and economy. Each commune was given semi-autonomy and was in fact enjoined from interacting with other communes to prevent banding together and resisting Spanish rule (Spores 1967, 1984). In time the communes became socially and culturally separate worlds in which new "traditions" developed from a syncretism of local practices and the imposed Spanish culture. One of the few genuine survivals of the pre-Columbian past is the array of indigenous languages, and these cultural traits invest all others with apparent authenticity.

Unlike their less-fortunate kin directly in the path of the Spanish, the people of the Mixteca Baja in the newly isolated communes were partially insulated by the generally inhospitable mountain terrain and by the lack of mineral riches from the most direct and severest forms of exploitation (like forced labor). They were also insulated from outright appropriation of their land by outside interests—first by the conquistadores, caciques, and regional land barons; then by the crown, the church, and the Mexican state; and most recently, by national and international capitalist enterprises. But these peoples were not protected from appropriation of value produced in the villages. While wealth was extracted in the forms of taxes to the crown, tributes to the local caciques, tithes to the church, and migratory labor, villages were still able to reproduce their numbers and the means of their existence and to define themselves collectively vis-à-vis the forces surrounding them by fusing their cultural resources and cosmology with the Spanish colonial culture forced on them.

The coalescence of ancient religious systems with Catholicism, a syncretism that owes more to indigenous forms than to Rome is but one example (Greenberg 1981). It has been widely argued that the Catholic religious complex involving the veneration of specific saints (every village has it own saints) by staging elaborate and costly fiestas in their honor actually funnels enormous sums out of the villages into the control of nonindigenous middlemen, priests, and merchants and is thus a disguised extraction of wealth from the community (Diener 1978; Wolf 1957). Endorsing this view, James Greenberg has also pointed out that while the largest share of money expended on the religious fiestas flows out of the village into the coffers of the church, mestizo merchants, and the state, the fiestas also redistribute some food to the poorest villagers (Greenberg 1981). He hastens to add that this redistribution is not ordinarily a consciously articulated intent of the religious fiestas and the amount involved is not large. Greenberg argues nevertheless that in the absence of even the most rudimentary social services (a circumstance related to the imposed isolation of most communes), the poorest might not otherwise survive.

Unable to resist actively the incursions of the Catholic Church and its demands on resources, communes have managed to fulfill some of their own internal needs as well, while not incidentally reenforcing their perceptions of isolation in a hostile world.

Antipathy between adjacent communes has also reenforced village singularity, directing hostility laterally rather than vertically. Armed conflict between villages has been common in the Mixteca, as elsewhere in southern Mexico. Its endemic cause has been boundary disputes among neighboring communes, all of which suffer land shortages resulting from population pressure, soil erosion, and land grabs by those who are politically and economically more powerful. Dialect differences from one village to the next as well as differences in collective representations, no doubt intensified during the centuries of imposed isolation, continue to be seized upon as icons of village singularity, symbolizing imputed insider-outsider status.

Phillip Dennis has argued convincingly that intervillage conflict over land between closed corporate communities in Oaxaca has been actively promoted for centuries by the state (first Spanish and then Mexican) to enrich its coffers and facilitate central control over the communities and their inhabitants (Dennis 1987). Such tactics have also preserved the closed nature of communities and prevented horizontal solidarity and collective action among those who have unrecognized interests in common. The perennial tension created by the dialectic of insider-outsider is experienced locally and has reinforced villagers' sense that their communities need defending and that neighboring villages they fight with over boundaries (rather than distant outside interests) are the enemy. This is the perceived reality that motivates their actions.

In short, new "traditional" forms continued to develop in response to oppression, forms that diverged from one village to the next and from those emerging in mestizo communities. Thus the perpetuation of local identity has facilitated and justified a collective closing of ranks against outsiders. It is our contention that this closing has historically constituted passive resistance to outside dominant forces and has meant that in the Mixteca, villagers ordinarily identify themselves as being from their particular village, rarely as Mixtecas, and almost never as indios.

The contemporary closed corporate communities with their diverse customs are thus not necessarily indigenous "traditional" forms left over from the pre-Columbian past. Many of them first emerged from the tension between Spanish and Mexican, the powerful and the powerless. Their isolation has been further reinforced by the economically and politically more powerful in the century and a half since independence. Even the traditions celebrated in events such as the Guelaguetza festival are not unambiguously indigenous. In the 1987 festival, for example, a dance performed by a group of Zapotecs from a pueblo in the Sierra Juárez was

billed as an ancient tradition of that village. It was instead an unmistakable rendition of an eighteenth-century minuet, probably derived from Spanish court ritual. Relatively superficial traits like costumes aside, indigenous strategies for survival surely have not been preserved in their "new" sixteenth-, seventeenth-, or eighteenth-century "traditional" forms but are constantly undergoing transformation in response to changing conditions.

If *tradition* is an elusive concept, that of *indio* is equally amorphous. Given village endogamy, the relative lack of spatial mobility, and imposed commune status that dates back at least to the conquest, the inhabitants of any particular village clearly constitute a gene pool, as do those of the Mixteca Baja when contrasted with, say, the Zapotecs of the Sierra Juárez. Genes, however, may be the least salient of the criteria variously cited as defining indios. In actuality, a minuscule percentage of contemporary Mexicans (primarily elites) have no indigenous ancestors at all, and Spanish-speaking urban mestizos are often genetically indistinguishable from the Mixtec-, Zapotec-, or Mayan-speaking indios whom they despise. The most important element in the identification of indios is how the rest of Mexican society treats them, which is to say, how it exploits and represses them.

When using the term *exploitation*, we are referring explicitly to any economic, political, social, cultural, or ideological conditions and practices that enable one class, class fragment, or ethnic group to extract net value from another (Kearney 1988). Appropriation of land is an extreme form of exploitation, and repression is any practice that furthers exploitation. Thus the murder or "disappearance" of those who protest too loudly is not only repression but an extreme form of exploitation.[10] Indirect exploitation and repression are more subtle, and their sources are not immediately apparent. An example would be the historic circumstances that resulted in closed corporate communities and, more recently, the lack of alternatives to migrating from one's village and family because of having insufficient land to feed a family and being consequently forced to deliver oneself cheaply to employers in distant labor markets.

Resistance is defined as whatever enables peoples to retain value that would be otherwise taken from them, and it can be either active or passive. The form taken is shaped by the kind of exploitation or repression to which it responds. When repression is indirect (not immediately perceivable), resistance is most likely passive. As such, it is embodied in the cultural forms and cultural content that are often defined and described as "traditional." In other words, much of what is regarded as the inwardness, stoicism, passivity, and "traditionalism" of the indigenous pueblo may actually constitute a subtle and not immediately perceived resistance to repression.

We therefore suggest that the "closed" nature of the corporate

commune, which is emblematic of indigenous culture, results from a political structure literally forced on indigenous peoples combined with their own resistance (albeit passive) to outside forces—a recursive dialectic of insider-outsider. This dialectic generates distinctive local social forms and symbolic systems or gives new meaning to existing ones, such as the civil-religious complexes that form the backbone of community political organization and identity and linguistic variations from commune to commune.

By the same token, to describe resistance as "active" is to imply that it is a conscious response to the immediately experienced and directly perceived relations of exploitation and repression inscribed in the realities of everyday contemporary life. Only under specific conditions have Mixtecs, as a defined social group, engaged in active resistance. This response has occurred as Mixtecs have left their natal villages in Oaxaca and become more obviously incorporated into the national and international political economy of capitalism.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY AND CAPITALISM

On the surface, San Jerónimo appears to be made up of "traditional" noncapitalist subsistence farmers engaged in domestic production solely for household use. But just as other traditions have been shown to be illusions, so too is the vision of "peasant economy." San Jerónimo is integrally articulated with national and international capitalist production through relations of domination, exploitation, and repression (Kearney 1986a).

Unlike most communes in the Mixteca, San Jerónimo's origins are relatively recent. According to village archives, it was founded in 1879 by a half-dozen families who were pushed from their former village by soil depletion and land shortages onto previously unoccupied territory higher in the mountains. The extraordinarily steep slopes that constitute most of the land of San Jerónimo render it generally unsuitable for intense cultivation. Not surprisingly, the village land, like virtually all the land of the Mixteca that has been cultivated far longer, has become severely eroded after a century of being farmed with plow and oxen. Mario Ortiz Gabriel has demonstrated that the high rate of permanent out-migration from the Mixteca in general is attributable primarily to ecological deterioration at the local level (Ortiz Gabriel n.d., 112–17).

Few households in San Jerónimo have enough land to feed their inhabitants. Stuart and Kearney (1981) have calculated that collectively, the village can raise no more than 20 percent of the corn and beans necessary to feed its population. Posed somewhat differently, the typical household can eat for less than two and a half months on its yearly

harvest. Thus most families would face starvation without some other form of income.

Only a few households are tied to the local capitalist economy through their contact with regional markets. For example, among the elite who are able to sustain themselves year round in San Jerónimo are four landowners who also have small retail stores in the village. They import necessities like corn, beans, salt, and matches, and "luxuries" like soft drinks, beer, and canned goods—all sold at prices considerably higher than in the nearest town. Macario T., easily the wealthiest person and the largest landowner in the village, speculates in corn and beans in addition to selling retail goods in his store. Households buy from him on credit after their own reserves are depleted, usually months after harvest time, when the prices are high. After the next harvest, they are forced to sell their corn at low prices to pay the debt. In recent years, Macario T. has purchased several cargo trucks in which he transports supplies for his store. He also rents space on his trucks to neighbors for transporting building supplies and fertilizers, to elected religious functionaries for transporting the oxen, extra food, and ceremonial items needed for the numerous fiestas (purchased mostly in the mestizo town of Juxtlahuaca), and to migrants traveling to Huajuapan on the first stage of their journey north. The other store owners, some of the few larger landowners, follow suit but on a smaller scale. It is no accident that Macario T. and the other merchants have been leaders in religious and political hierarchies and have helped arrange the *tequios* needed to maintain and improve the new road to the village. Macario T. is also the village's primary moneylender, and he finances many migrations north at an interest rate of 15 or 20 percent per month.

The only means for the rest of the population to supplement their living in San Jerónimo itself is to weave palm hats, which are sold to merchants for about ten cents each. Two can be made in a day if every spare moment is devoted to the task. The merchants market hats to a factory in Puebla, where they are "finished" and sold for about a dollar and a half in U.S. currency. In the mid-1980s, some villagers began to concentrate on making *tenates* (tortilla baskets) rather than hats because they can be more easily stockpiled, transported, and sold directly to tourists in metropolitan areas for seventy-five cents to a dollar. Almost everyone—men, women and children—weave hats or tenates as a source of cash income, and for some households, it is the only source.

Erosion, the unavailability of arable land, population growth, and the absence of opportunities for wage employment mean that almost all households must send some members away from the village for part of every year in order to survive. After the spring planting, fewer than 25 percent of the men of working age can be found in San Jerónimo at any one time until the most important fiesta of the year (that of the patron

saint) brings many of them back at the end of September. By the beginning of the harvest in October, the population swells further and temporarily peaks.

By and large, the neighboring town of Huajuapan has offered little in the way of employment to workers from San Jerónimo. Men now in their late seventies and eighties report having traveled to the Gulf Coast to work as cane cutters on sugar plantations from the 1920s to the 1950s. Their sons migrated to the commercial agricultural fields of Sinaloa on the Pacific Coast, and some grandsons still go there because long-established networks of kin and neighbors can provide the crucial initial support. Since the late 1960s, however, migrants from San Jerónimo have established new networks, first in the border cities of Tijuana, Nogales, and Mexicali and since 1978–79 in the San Quintín Valley, after unusually heavy rains raised its water table and made the formerly arid land attractive to agribusiness. A few pioneers crossed the U.S. border in the late 1960s, beginning what is now a large and growing U.S. network. Substantial numbers of San Jerónimo residents regularly find employment in California and Oregon agriculture, and some now go to Florida as well.

Most San Jerónimo households have some members working as migrant wage workers for part of every year, or even all of every year on a rotating basis. The remittances they send home are vital to maintaining the local economy. Between January and May 1987, almost 875,000,000 pesos were transferred to the Silacayoapan telegraph office. Of this amount, two-thirds came from other parts of Mexico, primarily the border region, and the rest from the United States.[11] According to one study, the value of remittances sent by migrants to the Mixteca as a whole exceeds the total value of all agriculture produced there (Ortiz Gabriel n.d., 28). In 1987 almost twenty billion pesos were sent to the Mixteca from the United States alone (Ortiz Gabriel n.d., 61).[12]

There is no land available for purchase in San Jerónimo and few opportunities for capital investment (the village has all the merchants it can support).[13] Consequently, wage income from the north that is not spent on food or fertilizer and pesticides is put into consumer goods (beds, radios, an occasional refrigerator, and other furnishings) and especially into house construction. Houses in San Jerónimo are now built from cement block and have poured cement floors and glass windows (contrary to the remarks of the Los Pinos manager). The round houses made of poles set into the earth with conical thatched roofs, which we observed on our first trips to San Jerónimo ten years ago, have now disappeared, although adobe structures with dirt floors are still common. Because few villagers can afford to live in the village permanently, some of the new concrete block houses stand empty for years while others are occupied sporadically.

Most migrants can be described as "circular," that is, they spend

only a portion of each year engaged in wage labor on either side of the U.S.–Mexican border, returning to their villages for planting, harvesting, and the major fiestas as well as to rest from the rigors of agricultural wage labor. Generally, a migrant worker's optimum years are those between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five. Those younger and older lack the strength and endurance for the work, and they say that they lack the speed and agility to evade unscrupulous Mexican officials or *la migra*, as the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service is usually called by migrants. Raised and nurtured by the village economy, they retire back to it at an early age. In the interim, their adult years have been expended in the service of capitalist production, and the village and its putative domestic economy have suffered the loss of net value.

The village subsistence minifundios are today's source of cheap labor power for Los Pinos and other commercial agriculture in Baja California Norte, Sinaloa, and across the border into California, Oregon, and Florida. The minifundios were a similar source of labor power for the cane plantations of the coast a generation ago. Thus despite the surface appearance of a "traditional" community and a largely domestic economy divorced from the national culture, the national economy, and capitalist production, the economy of San Jerónimo and other villages in the Mixteca is an inextricable part of the encompassing political economies of Mexico and the United States.

NEW IDENTITIES, NEW ETHNICITY

Village identification in the Mixteca has historically prevented or at least retarded collective intervillage action and has handicapped Mixtecs in efforts to defend themselves in the modern world of capitalist production into which they have been thrust. Yet Mixtecs from all over the Mixteca have subsumed their differences to band together in northern locations. They have formed associations and joined labor unions dedicated to defending their interests. Their political activism in the border region has been partially structured and defined in terms of the ethnic identity that is alternately glorified and despised by the majority population. Mixtecs themselves, however, are seizing neither the positive nor the negative myths of existing images but are constructing a new identity based on both that enables them to understand their experiences and attempt to make changes. Mixtecs are beginning to define their own reality in a highly contested struggle over the meaning of ethnicity, amidst the conditions of their daily lives. In light of what is generally known about the difficulties of forming cooperative associations across the linguistic and social barriers of diverse and historically closed village organization and identity, let us now examine the specific conditions that are fostering Mixtec consciousness of direct oppression.

During the early years of migration to the frontier and into the United States, women and children remained in villages in the Mixteca, as they had when husbands and fathers migrated to the Gulf Coast and returned only to plant, harvest, and participate in the ceremonial cycle. The border, however, is fifteen hundred miles away, ninety-six hours on the bus, and consequently, a trip north from the Mixteca requires a substantial financial investment. Staying north less than six months makes no sense. But in six months' time, corn and bean reserves in the village are depleted, and the money orders that families depend on to survive do not always arrive because the men have suffered bad luck, robbery, or worse.[14] As a result, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, entire families began migrating to the border region, thus initiating a new social and economic strategy: the satellite or "daughter" community. Families from San Jerónimo set up temporary, subsidiary households in enclaves within neighborhoods in border communities. Adjacent enclaves were populated by families from other Mixtec villages. At this point, a new economic pattern began to emerge among Mixtecs, whose women had not previously played a significant economic role outside the household. Now Mixtec women and children sell trinkets, tenates, or hats made the previous year in the village on the streets of frontier cities, or they beg to supplement the family's subsistence while men seek employment in the informal economy, working as casual laborers if they are fortunate, peddling handicrafts or scavenging if they are not.

The membership of such households in border towns shifts constantly as some return to the village to cultivate or harvest, cross the border seeking employment, or move south to the San Quintín Valley. At first, enclaves replicated the corporate separateness of the Mixteca, but as border cities grew with the increasing migration from the interior, well-defined geographic barriers began to break down. Marriages now occur occasionally between inhabitants of different villages, making endogamy less the rule than in the Mixteca. To the degree that migrants return to their natal villages, spouses from other places are beginning to become part of everyday life in the Mixteca.

As difficult as life in frontier cities often is for Mixtecs, conditions in the agricultural fields of the San Quintín Valley are far worse. Here, men, women, and children plant, tie, prune, weed, spray, irrigate, hand-pick, and stack vine-ripened tomatoes for ranches like Los Pinos, while living in labor camps like Las Pulgas. Although Los Pinos is a family-owned company, other similar enterprises, like the much larger ABC Ranch, are transnationals with substantial shares owned by U.S.-based corporations. Whether Mexican or internationally owned, all employ primarily Mixtecs interspersed with small numbers of other indigenous persons from Oaxaca and Chiapas, as well as some Salvadorans, Guate-

malans, and other Central Americans. The vast majority of field laborers, however, continue to be Mixtecs.

All commercial ranches in the San Quintín Valley produce mainly for the export market, selling to U.S. grocery and fast-food chains. Together, these ranches house and employ between thirty and forty thousand field-workers who earn about three dollars a day for eight to ten hours of stoop labor.[15] The short-handled hoe, outlawed in California, is legal in Mexico and is used daily at ABC, Los Pinos, and elsewhere in the valley and on similar plantations in the coastal state of Sinaloa, where Mixtecs are also employed under virtually identical circumstances.[16] Farmworkers in both locations routinely apply pesticides that are controlled or banned in the United States with few or no safety precautions,[17] and some are known to have died from acute pesticide poisoning. Doctors in the valley report that the infant mortality rate is especially high and that the incidence of respiratory ailments is extraordinary.[18]

When feasible, Mixtec migrants seek better working conditions and higher wages by crossing the border into the United States. But even under the best of circumstances, border crossings are fraught with peril. As indios, Mixtecs are especially vulnerable to extortion and exploitation by border guards, municipal and state authorities, and gangs of ordinary criminals (Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney n.d.). Daughter communities on the Mexican side, especially in Tijuana, serve as launching pads for those about to attempt a border crossing and places of refuge and rest after capture and repatriation by the INS.

Daughter communities also have been established in California and Oregon and, like their counterparts in Mexican border towns, often serve as temporary places of refuge for groups of lone men from the Mixteca. Childless women sometimes enter the United States with husbands or brothers to work, but they are often subjected to attacks as women that range from verbal abuse to rape (Juffer 1988). Only occasionally do women with children cross the border, although the practice has become more frequent since 1984–85.

Of the uncounted thousands of Mixtecs in the United States,[19] almost all are "illegals," never having had the opportunity to obtain "green cards." They consequently seek employment, with few exceptions, in agricultural enterprises where they can more easily hide from the INS and where technical skills are not required. They typically work in citrus or strawberry fields, generally at minimum wage or a piece rate. The work is almost always in secondary and tertiary labor markets, often temporary, and usually offers few, if any, benefits (Kearney and Nagengast 1989).[20]

Although wages in U.S. agribusiness are higher than in Mexican counterparts in Baja California and Sinaloa, living and working condi-

tions are sometimes equally bad (Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney, n.d.). Because Mixtecs speak little Spanish and no English and are usually undocumented, they live in double jeopardy in the U.S. labor market, exploited even more viciously than mestizo undocumented workers by unscrupulous labor contractors and coyotes (those who smuggle workers across the border for a fee), who are ironically Mexicans themselves in most cases (see Conover 1987). Farm-labor contractors typically charge for all services performed for "their" workers: taking them to the market or to cash their paychecks, bringing them what few medicines they can afford (Vaupel and Martin 1986). In this setting, Mixtecs are stigmatized as indios as often as they are in Mexico.

Despite state and federal regulations requiring U.S. growers to provide living quarters for workers that meet certain minimal standards, Mixtecs are often forced to seek abandoned vehicles, shacks constructed of cardboard, or even holes dug in the side of riverbanks or canyons in which to sleep. The only alternative, if any, may be to pay seventy-five to one hundred dollars a week per person for crowded, unheated, unfurnished, filthy rooms that lack water or toilets.

Few Mixtecs qualified for amnesty under the provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Our preliminary research suggests that those who do not qualify for legalization but remain in the United States are being subjected to even more extensive exploitation and human rights abuses then before, especially (although not exclusively) at the hands of legal and illegal labor contractors, who are proliferating and replacing direct hiring by growers (Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney n.d.; see also Cornelius 1988; Vaupel and Martin 1986).

To these hardships may be added others: exposure to dangerous pesticides; minimum and below-minimum wages for back-breaking work; no job security; the need to be constantly on the move following jobs; inadequate or nonexistent housing, education for children, and health care; constant fear of repatriation; and the everyday discrimination experienced by minorities. The total picture that emerges reveals life conditions that make it especially difficult to realize human dignity.

In all the locations outside the Mixteca that have been discussed (tomato plantations on the west coast of Sinaloa and in the San Quintín Valley, urban enclaves in Mexican border cities, and commercial agricultural fields in California and Oregon), Mixtecs are more directly incorporated into capitalist production than in the villages where their articulation is less immediately perceivable. In all these new settings, they experience the most direct exploitation possible: they are paid starvation wages; they are forced to compete with each other to be the most docile and willing laborers; and they often must live in subhuman conditions. The sense of oppression that results cannot be displaced to neighbors from adjoining villages. It is ironically in these conditions in the north, far

from their homeland, that Mixtecs are discovering that they are indeed Mixtec. A new political consciousness and activism has coalesced into an emerging pan-Mixtec ethnic identity, an ethnic awareness that transcends commune and even district identification and manifests itself in the form of Mixtec associations and labor-union activity in the border area of the Californias and Sonora and in Oregon. This new identity as Mixtecs, which was latent in the Mixteca, has become the raw material for new cultural, ideological, and substantive resources in altered circumstances. Significantly, this new elaboration of ethnicity is also causing Mixtecs to become the target of political and economic repression as Mixtecs.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTIVISM

Let us examine the situation of Mixtecs in the San Quintín Valley as a case in point. As noted above, between thirty and forty thousand Mixtecs from all over the Mixteca have migrated to the valley to work in transnational agriculture. Since 1984 the indigenous Mixtec leaders of the Central Independiente de Oberos Agrícolas y Campesinos (CIOAC), an independent national labor union, have been supported by the main leftist political parties, first by the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (PSUM) and then by its successor, the Partido Mexicana Socialista (PMS). These groups have been trying to organize this work force into a union opposing that belonging to the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM).[21] The latter confederation is administered by the federal government and is closely aligned with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which has ruled Mexico for more than four decades. The PRI has historically held a virtual monopoly on municipal, state, and federal offices. Neither the PRI nor the CTM had shown any particular interest in Mixtec farmworkers until the CIOAC began to form a local in the San Quintín Valley.

Since the CIOAC became active in San Quintín, it has been subjected to well-orchestrated repression by the combined forces of the growers and the Mexican state at all levels. For example, according to Mixtec eyewitnesses, a Mixtec organizer was deliberately run down and killed in 1984 by a driver for one of the major growers. No investigation of what was perceived by farmworkers and union activists as a political killing was launched publicly by any state agency, despite large demonstrations and mass appeals. In the summer of 1987, the body of another Mixtec CIOAC leader was found by the side of the road, apparently the victim of a hit-and-run accident. Although the man had received several death threats in the weeks prior to the incident, the police claimed they were unable to find any evidence of foul play (*Boletín Mixteco* 1987, 6). Other less dramatic but repressive incidents—including numerous death

threats directed at leaders and nonlethal attacks—punctuated the three years between these deaths.

Given the ethnic composition of the work force, the confrontation in the San Quintín Valley has become a conflict of Mixtecs versus a coalition of growers and the state. The last two groups view the situation as not only a major labor conflict on their hands but also a rather embarrassing *problema indígena* in Baja California Norte, one of the most "mestizo" parts of Mexico.[22] Mixtec leaders have repudiated the PRI and the CTM and thrown their lot in with the political opposition. Unlike the Mixteca, where there is no direct non-Mixtec political opposition against which to define Mixtec identity, in San Quintín the growers are confronting labor unrest and workers not as workers but as Mixtecs. Thus ethnicity has emerged as a noticeable theme of political consciousness and political action on both sides.

Similar scenarios are unfolding in Tijuana, Nogales, and Mexicali. Mixtecs are subject to the same dangers in these cities as other poor urban workers—crime, violence, high unemployment, low wages, and dismal living conditions—but they alone are targeted for harassment and police extortion as indios. For some years, they were referred to by the derogatory epithet of "los oaxacas" (a corruption of *los oaxaqueños*), but now one increasingly hears "los mixtecos." Mixtec women street-vendors are referred to derisively as "las Marías." In border towns that had been homogeneously mestizo for generations, racism now poisons public space.

As a result of police mistreatment and extortion of women street-vendors, several spokespersons from the Mixtec community in Tijuana publicly confronted municipal authorities in 1984, demanding that harassment of the women cease. These events were well-covered by the media on both sides of the border. During an embarrassing scandal, a police commandant was forced to resign, and abuses of the women subsequently decreased. Heartened by this victory, the Asociación de los Mixtecos Residentes en Tijuana (ASMIRT) was founded. It was patterned after the indigenous town council, but with two important differences: first, the association was open to any Mixtec living in Tijuana, an indication of an emerging pan-Mixtec identity; and second, unlike the make-up of the town councils, women were encouraged to take active roles and to be officers. These innovations have now become "traditions" in the association.

ASMIRT immediately declared its independence from the PRI and all other political parties and soon began to forge links with the CIOAC in San Quintín, just to the south. Perhaps because of the novel presence of indios in border cities, the media—especially newspapers opposed to the Mexican government—began to cover regularly what soon developed into the "Mixtec story." Although the Tijuana Mixtecs lacked the numbers of the San Quintín population, where the CIOAC could turn out eight to

ten thousand marchers, the Tijuana group has mustered a thousand or more for demonstrations. On several occasions, they confronted the state governor in what was characterized by the local media as embarrassments for the PRI and the state. At one of these events, representatives of ASMIRT presented the governor with a jar of *mole*, a traditional Oaxacan dish said to predate the conquest, to remind him of the presence of "indígenas" in the city. On yet another occasion, a copy of the Mexican Constitution was ceremoniously presented to the governor on the steps of the new cultural center, a museum and auditorium complex that pays homage to the pre-Columbian ancestry of Mexico. The unmistakable message conveyed was that Mixtecs, who are celebrated in other contexts as the original inhabitants of Mexico, were not being accorded the basic civil and human rights of citizens—a calculated rebuke to the governor, to the PRI that he represents, and to the state. Such activities and public discourse about them have strengthened the Mixtecs' sense of themselves as Mixtecs, primarily in opposition to the state in its various guises, and have conversely caused the state, the media, and the public to define and treat them as Mixtecs.

The political independence of the Mixtec Association in Tijuana and the CIOAC in San Quintín has been their greatest strength but in retrospect also their biggest liability. Just as growers and state government have succeeded in stalemating the organizing efforts of the CIOAC in San Quintín, so have outside interests (apparently emanating from the PRI) intervened in the internal affairs of the Mixtec Association in Tijuana in efforts to neutralize it and bring it into the PRI fold. In fact, the independent Tijuana association has fallen into disarray as a political organization since 1986, and some of its non-Mixtec political allies have been forced to curb their activities because of unproved and almost certainly unfounded charges leveled against them by local authorities. But although the state has successfully curtailed the association's political activism through overt repression and the co-opting of some Mixtec leaders, it has nevertheless been forced to direct increased social services to the residential enclaves of the Mixtecs. Yet in attempting to crush Mixtec political opposition, the state has actually objectified what had been only a latent pan-Mixtec identity. Ethnic awareness in these circumstances of overt repression and exploitation is beginning to offset the negative self-image that Mixtecs had internalized during centuries of less apparent oppression. For example, the everyday use of the Mixtec language now thwarts the agents of growers and the state who attempt to monitor meetings and public demonstrations of CIOAC and ASMIRT, thus giving "ugly words" a previously unrealized value to Mixtecs.

As economic conditions in rural Mexico continue to deteriorate, incentives for migrating to California and other parts of the United States to work will increase. Associations of mestizo migrants, typically made

up of members from the same community in Mexico, are now common in the United States, including several founded since the mid-1980s by Mixtec migrants in California and Oregon. Like mestizo associations, they promote self-help and collect money and other resources for community projects in their home villages. But unlike mestizo groups, Mixtec associations crosscut community of origin and base themselves instead on shared ethnicity. Moreover, they are dedicated to defending their members from the kinds of human and civil rights abuses described above.

Although the living and working conditions of foreign migrant workers in the United States have always been harsh, they have not been uniformly so, fluctuating over the decades with the vagaries of U.S. immigration policy and the economic and political contexts that shape it (Cockcroft 1986). Adding to the conditions noted above, the passage and implementation of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) has increased concern among human and civil rights activists in Mexico, the United States, and elsewhere over the plight of migrants to the United States. Much of this concern centers on the large numbers of Mixtecs and other undocumented workers currently in California and neighboring states who do not qualify for immigration amnesty under IRCA. Indications already suggest that such individuals and their families are being subjected to unusually extreme hardships and abuses because of this heightened vulnerability (Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney, n.d.; Cornelius 1988).

The Asociación Cívica Benito Juárez (based in Fresno and Madera, California, and in Salem, Oregon) is a pan-Mixtec transnational association based on shared ethnicity that has arisen to defend Mixtecs in their new circumstances in the United States. Members of ACBJ promote village development projects in Oaxaca but also increasingly concern themselves with discrimination, exploitation, health, and human rights abuses in Mixtec enclaves in California and Oregon, regardless of the member's village of origin. They are now attempting to transform one aspect of their organization into a labor contracting association in which Mixtec farmworkers would sell their labor directly to growers, thereby avoiding the usually exploitative labor contractors now depended on by most workers. Concern is also focusing on gathering and publicizing testimonies of human rights abuses through independent human rights organizations. The ACBJ participated in a transnational conference in Mexicali on human rights violations suffered by migrants on both sides of the border in January 1989 and in a seminar on international human rights law and its applicability to them in Los Angeles in May 1989. Overall, the ACBJ is working toward forming a transnational league of Mixtec associations that will incorporate Mixtec groups on both sides of the border. Mixtecs in the United States say that there is "more space" to organize

north of the border than in Mexico, meaning that overt political oppression in the United States is less intense.

Like its counterpart organizations in Mexico, the ACBJ has taken care not to affiliate itself with any organs or institutions of the Mexican state. But since the July 1988 elections, in which the PRI probably suffered a major (although unacknowledged) defeat at the hands of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and the Frente Democrática Nacional, the PRI is taking unprecedented steps to woo Mixtecs (and others) back to the fold. Historically, the PRI has been able to count on the votes of most Mixtecs in national, state, and local elections.[23] According to a political leader from San Jerónimo, village authorities in the past more or less delivered all the votes of the inhabitants in a block to the PRI. The July 1988 returns thus represented a notable departure from this routine, according to many observers. Although no accurate figures exist (nor are there likely to be any), the popular perception is that Mixtecs in the Mixteca as well as those in the frontier voted overwhelmingly for the Cardenistas—a major blow to the PRI and especially to Heladio Ramírez López, the PRI governor of Oaxaca and a self-identified Mixtec.

Ramírez López made an extraordinary visit to California in April 1989 to meet with Mixtec migrant workers living there, the first time a governor of Oaxaca ever met with constituents outside the state. At two meetings in Watsonville and Madera, he heard grievances and demands from Mixtec leaders of the ACBJ and other Mixtec organizations and from independent Mixtecs. All complained about extortion by government officials when traveling north, dishonest telegraph officials who appropriate portions of remittances sent to families in the Mixteca, and economic conditions in the Mixteca itself. One political leader from San Jerónimo solicited Ramírez López's intervention with the governor of Sonora to stop police harassment of Mixtecs in Nogales.

Corn prices, the costs of fiestas, and other expenses in villages in the Mixteca have all been driven up by Mexico's economic crisis, the huge inflation since 1982, and the influx of cash income. Other problems requiring attention are the inexorable soil erosion that takes more land out of production every year and reduces the yield of the rest, contaminated water, malnutrition, and the lack of even basic medical facilities. The character of the response of the Consul General of Mexico in Los Angeles to the demands of the Mixtecs is instructive: he suggested that it would be less expensive for migrants to fly from Oaxaca to the border than to pay the bribes extorted from them on the road; he further suggested that Mixtecs telegraph Oaxacan state officials in advance when large sums of money are about to be sent to the Mixteca. Governor Ramírez López, however, pledged his administration's help in better "policing" of authorities and in implementing additional local projects in the Mixteca.

What will come of the promises of Ramírez López remains to be seen. It is tempting to characterize this politician's efforts as yet another effort to "objectify" Mixtecs—an attempt to define the "problems" of indigenous migrants in terms of the official discourse and within the parameters of existing institutions of the state. In any case, the significance of Ramírez López's encounter with Mixtec immigrants lies not in his promises but in the fact that the political activism of Mixtecs qua Mixtecs in the border region is profoundly affecting the conduct of politics in the interior of Mexico, an outcome that further reinforces Mixtec ethnic identity and activism in both locations.

It is ironic that Mixtecs' hitherto unrecognized identity as mixtecos has become an icon of their new-found solidarity, both to themselves and to others. As Mixtecs go north to border towns seeking wage work and encounter more direct forms of repression, they are actively resisting exploitation and repression by invoking some of the "traditions" that previously served them in a more passive form. Group activism through ASMIRT and CIOAC in Baja California, ACBJ, and other Mixtec groupings is not simply a desperate response to stress. By claiming adherence to the "traditions" of their people and devising new ones when appropriate, they are struggling to control the politics of meaning given to the identity of Mixtec. Simultaneously, they are establishing the legitimacy of Mixtec workers as Mixtecs in altered circumstances and are transforming passive resistance to indirect and direct repression into active resistance.

TRADITION COMES FULL CIRCLE

While a few families from San Jerónimo have settled more or less permanently in daughter enclaves in Mexican border towns, California, and Oregon, most migrants are circular and most daughter settlements remain subsidiary to major residence in and identification with San Jerónimo. There they own land, albeit insufficient to provide subsistence, there parents live and grandparents are buried. And there also they will "retire" when they are too old, too sick, or too worn-down to withstand the rigors of border crossings, stoop labor, and miserable living and working conditions everywhere. In San Jerónimo, they invest their discretionary earnings and build permanent residences. Most Mixtecs feel insecure about long-term residence in the border region, especially in the face of uncertainties about IRCA and the precariousness of employment on the Mexican side. Moreover, one possible liability of prolonged absence is loss of membership in one's natal commune and the reassignment of one's land to others. Consequently, both temporary and long-term residents on both sides of the border make special efforts to reaffirm their commune membership on a regular basis. This strategy involves periodically returning to fulfill ceremonial and civil duties as well as remitting

money to communal projects. In recent years, as a result of dollar income, the money expended by migrants on civic and religious obligations in San Jerónimo and other Mixtec communes has increased dramatically. Civil and religious ceremonial complexes in San Jerónimo and throughout the Mixteca have been enhanced, and the construction of migrant-financed public works has boomed in the form of new municipal buildings, churches, and chapels. Thus while Mixtecs are being expelled greater distances from their homeland in increasing numbers by economic conditions, one effect of migration is to revitalize some of the symbolic and collective expressions of commune identity in the Mixteca. Yet awareness of a new pan-Mixtec ethnic identity is also being transferred to daily life in the Mixteca and is beginning to undermine some of the results of their centuries-long oppression. The situation is now fluid, but Mixtecs are beginning to talk about intercommune projects that in time may break down the most deleterious effects of the "closed corporate" structure of villages. Ramírez López's attention to Mixtec demands may lend additional impetus to an emerging political and economic solidarity in the Mixteca that will transcend the oppressive aspects of the "traditional."

CONCLUSION

The most salient identity in the Mixteca—that of village—is negated as individuals leave their communes, especially as they leave Oaxaca for the north and find themselves collectively identified by the predominantly mestizo population in Mexico as "other," members of a minority and a despised one at that. This enforced duality between themselves and others has prevented Mixtecs from developing a common class consciousness with mestizo workers who share their everyday experience of poverty and exploitation. In the north, however, a new ethnic identity has been set into motion as a result of a dialectic relationship between the direct incorporation of Mixtecs into the capitalist organization of production, their collective exploitation and identity by others as a minority, and their own social actions. The fact that they are experiencing exploitation not as anonymous individual workers or isolated *campesinos* but as a cohesive social unit based on their ethnicity, defined by themselves and others, has led to the emergence of ethnic consciousness and political activism. Mixtec ethnicity is consequently a social creation brought into being by social actions.

Members of indigenous groups like the Mixtec who are forced to migrate into the hostile social, political, and economic environments of the wider society, whether in Mexico or in the United States, often become permanent members of an economically and politically marginalized underclass. To varying degrees, they experience "ethnocide," defined by Stavenhagen (1986) as the systematic negation or even destruction of

what is described as indigenous culture. This process occurs through deliberate policies of dominant groups controlling state power but also through "unofficial" repression, economic and political exploitation, and denial of a group's positive ethnic and cultural identity. Mixtecs, however, are resisting ethnocide by distinguishing between oppression and culture and by preserving their positive cultural identity thus far with extraordinary success.

We have argued that tradition is what peoples do today (and perhaps did yesterday) and that peoples transform their traditions and their culture in the face of unique political, social, and economic conditions in ways that help them resist repression and exploitation. Thus history, social and political structures, and human agency constitute each other in the formation of new configurations. A new tradition—Mixtec ethnic identity, political consciousness, and activism—has been created and is contesting in the arena of politics the very meaning of tradition.

NOTES

1. Although the term *mestizo* implies persons of mixed European and indigenous stock, we use it here in a cultural rather than a genetic sense.
2. The movement of persons between three separate locations spanning as much as three thousand miles and an international border raises questions of an appropriate "unit of analysis." Kearney (1986a) addressed this problem by theorizing the "articulatory migration network," a unit encompassing persons in all three locations. Large Mixtec enclaves also exist in Mexico City, and smaller ones in other Mexican cities including Oaxaca, Chihuahua, and Hermosilla. On Mixtec migration to Mexico City, see Butterworth (1975).
3. The Mixteca region lies in western Oaxaca and adjacent areas of Guerrero and Puebla and is broken into three more or less ecologically distinct zones: the Mixteca Alta, the Mixteca Baja, and the Mixteca de la Costa.
4. The Mixteca Baja comprises seven of the thirty administrative districts of the state of Oaxaca, namely, Coixtlahuaca, Huajuapan, Juxtlahuaca, Nochixtlán, Silacayoapan, Teposcolula, and Tlaxiaco.
5. See Martín Luís Guzmán, *The Eagle and the Serpent*, quoted in Riding (1986, 290).
6. Amnesty International has documented the incident in Mexico City as well as similar cases of the apparent brutalizing and torture of political opponents by the state or those presumed to be operating with the tacit approval of the state. See Amnesty International, *Annual Report 1988* (London: Amnesty International, 1988), p. 176, as well as earlier *Annual Reports* for details, particularly Amnesty International's special report on Mexico, *Mexico: Human Rights Violations in Rural Areas* (London: Amnesty International, 1986). Torture and other human rights abuses in Baja California have been documented in the archives of the Tijuana-based Centro Binacional de Derechos Humanos. The Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos in Mexico City holds extensive documentation of human rights violations in Oaxaca and elsewhere in Mexico. See also Nagengast, Stavenhagen, and Kearney (n.d.).
7. O. Luis, an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, the child of Mixtec and Zapotec parents, spent six months in 1987 working as an intern in the Secretaría de Educación Pública in Oaxaca. He reports widespread corruption in the department in terms of bribery and chicanery and also an often-expressed contempt for the department's indigenous clients and the needs they cite (O. Luis, personal conversation, December 1987).

8. Romney and Romney (1966) report that the trip from Huajuapan to Juxtlahuaca, a town not far from Silacayoapan, took twelve hours by four-wheel-drive jeep in the 1960s.
9. Tequio is nonpaid communal work for projects such as constructing and maintaining public roads and buildings. It is an ancient system of obligation that has been utilized by the Aztecs and Mixtecs for community projects.
10. See Amnesty International, *Mexico: Human Rights Violations in Rural Areas*, which focuses on the repression, disappearance, and murder of Mixtec, Triqui, and other indigenous activists in the rural areas of Oaxaca and Chiapas.
11. This estimate is based on an examination of records of the telegraph office in Silacayoapan, Oaxaca, in July 1987. The figure includes remittances from about ten villages in the municipio of Silacayoapan, including San Jerónimo.
12. This figure was cited by the manager of the telegraph office in Oaxaca.
13. Kearney (1986b) reviews migration literature and concludes that the impact of remittances and the international experience of migrants on economic development in home locations is typically negative or neutral at best.
14. We first encountered workers from San Jerónimo in 1978 in Riverside, California, where, in the course of a robbery committed against them, one had been murdered, a second had been shot, and twelve others were being held in the Riverside county jail as material witnesses to the crime.
15. The value of the peso against the dollar has declined rapidly since 1982, when it stood at 12.5 to 1. By fall 1987, it had dropped to 2300 to 1.
16. ABC, for example, is one of the major growers in Sinaloa. Mixtec farmworkers employed by this company in the San Quintín Valley report being bused by ABC between the two locations according to the needs of the different growing seasons.
17. In 1985 we surveyed every store that sells pesticides in the several towns of the San Quintín Valley. Not one clerk knew what safeguards should be used when employing pesticides nor did any of the stores sell the protective clothing suggested on the pesticide containers. One doctor in the valley reports that the foremen of field crews sometimes carry syringes of atropine (a stimulant) in their trucks in case a worker goes into convulsions. See also Kistner (1986) and Wright (1986, n.d.). The use of pesticides on crops imported into the United States is beginning to concern U.S. legislators because of the potential long-term dangers being posed to U.S. constituents, but none of this official concern is directed toward the Mexican workers who are exposed to daily doses of acutely toxic and sometimes lethal pesticides. U.S. growers are the apparent proximate stimuli of the pesticide concern, although consumer concern is growing. While pesticides are undoubtedly a serious long-term hazard to U.S. consumers, newspapers and television reports suggest that competition from Mexican growers, with their decidedly lower production costs (including labor costs), is causing the dialogue. See, for example, "Crackdown Sought on Imports of Tainted Food," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 May 1987, p. 23.
18. Based on interviews with doctors at the Buen Pastor Clinic and the state clinic in Lázaro Cárdenas in 1985.
19. Estimates vary, but there are probably at least ten thousand Mixtecs living in the United States at any one time.
20. A full description of secondary and tertiary labor markets and the place undocumented workers occupy within them can be found in Kearney and Nagengast (1989).
21. In 1987 the PSUM was incorporated into a coalition party, the Partido Mexicano Socialista (PMS), which also supported the CIOAC. In 1988 the PMS threw its support to the Frente Democrática Nacional (FDN) led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and has since been absorbed into his new party, the Partido de Revolucíon Democrática (PRD).
22. The autochthonous peoples of Baja California are at present few in number and politically insignificant.
23. Exceptions generally occur at the local level. For example, the Mixtec town of Alcozauca in Guerrero elected representatives of the PSM to the municipal government in the mid-1980s (Sidman 1988).

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