

THE MIGRANT VILLAGE
ASSOCIATION IN LATIN AMERICA:
A Comparative Analysis*

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A review of the literature on migrant regional and village associations in Latin American cities reveals an emphasis on the forms and functions of such groups (Doughty 1970; Orellana 1973; Jongkind 1974; Skeldon 1976, 1977; Altamirano 1984a). Far less has been written about why such associations are formed (Kerri 1976, 34). The paucity of explanations appears to be the result of two analytic extremes.

On one hand, ethnographic conditions reportedly accounting for the formation of migrant associations can vary widely. Analyses may stress either micro or macro level, rural or urban settings, synchronic or diachronic processes, and cultural, political, or economic conditions—individually or in different combinations (for example, Kemper 1970). These varying approaches create the problem of integrating various levels and orders of analysis and trying to determine which conditions are necessary and which are merely prerequisites.

On the other hand, the waning of explanations emphasizing simple cultural continuity has led researchers to hypothesize that regional and village associations are formed by migrants in cities as the result of structural (economic and political) conditions (Butterworth and Chance 1981, 137–46). While this structural emphasis is undeniably well placed, it leaves one question unresolved. If class and power inequities

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generally cause migrants to form associations, why is it that only some rural-urban migrants form regional or village associations? In particular, how can one account for the fact that migrants suffering from poverty and “marginalized” conditions sometimes form regional or village associations and at other times do not?

PURPOSE

This article will argue that ethnographic analysis in urban settings in Latin America must be informed by a larger global perspective, and it will present a general framework for understanding the structural and situational conditions that must be considered in analyzing the formation of a “migrant village association” (or MVA). This unit of analysis is easier to work with than urban ethnic associations and offers several other advantages: MVAs are often found in Latin American cities; they are readily identifiable and fairly consistent in form and function; and they often serve as building blocks for broader regional or provincial associations.

The problem identified above can be resolved by making a controlled comparison of differential cases set in the context of a larger historical-structural setting.¹ To achieve this end, I analyze a set of studies that allow the comparison of two categories of migrants: those originating from similar villages in the same region and going to the same destination but differing in their ability to form MVAs in the city. Second, although these cases are primarily ethnographic, every attempt has been made to contextualize them in terms of larger economic, political, and sociological settings. This approach allows rural and urban spheres to be viewed as links in a global system that are simultaneously affected by industrialization and development at a national level (Oliveira and Stern 1974; Singer 1977).

Adopting this approach, I will first define MVAs and then examine some explanations that have been proposed to account for their formation. A select set of case studies from Mesoamerica will be utilized to evaluate previous accounts. On this basis, I will present a general qualitative framework identifying conditions that must be considered in accounting for the formation or lack of formation of an MVA by any given migrant group. Finally, I will argue that politicization—as a mediating process bridging a variety of conditions as well as different orders and levels of analysis—is often the single most important development leading to the formation of an MVA.

MIGRANT VILLAGE ASSOCIATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

Definition

Like other urban ethnic associations, an MVA provides resources for individual and collective adaptation to the urban setting.² Although membership in most MVAs is not ascriptive or obligatory, it is usually delimited in terms of eligibility: a migrant must come from a given locale—which entails common language, religion, ethnicity, and regional and cultural traits—in order to belong.³ These traits help ensure that members will have a common background, common commitments, and a sense of moral obligation to cooperate for purposes of mutual aid.

Although MVAs are initially based on informal networks (especially between kin, friends, and neighbors), some semblance of formal structure also exists, such as an organizational name, a charter, bylaws, or a dues schedule. What distinguishes an MVA from other associations and from informal networks is that as a formal organization, it is primarily village-oriented, in terms of both its makeup and its purposes, whether directed toward the village of origin or toward fellow villagers in the city. It is this village orientation that allows for analytic distinction between migrant village associations and other types of social organization found among rural-urban migrants to Latin American cities, which may be based on ties of kinship, friendship, residential propinquity, class, religion, politics, or mutual aid (Lomnitz 1977; Lloyd 1980; Lobo 1982; Vélez-Ibáñez 1983).

Prerequisites of Migrant Village Association Formation in Latin America

Bilateral kinship systems, in which descent is traced through both parents (Firth 1971, 197), tend to predominate in Latin America. The existing literature indicates that bilateral kinship lends itself to flexible, ego-centered networks as a form of social organization, as opposed to corporate groups in which individual needs and wills are subordinate to those of the whole (Goode 1970; Carlos and Sellers 1972; Arizpe 1973; Lomnitz and Pérez 1978; Lobo 1982, 132–34).⁴ Why is it, then, that MVAs are often reported as occurring in Latin American settings, and on what principles of association are MVAs based?

Although the Latin American peasant community typically lacks a unilineal descent principle in the rural setting, when its members retain ties to an indigenous language or tradition and marry within their own village, such a community can resemble a *deme* or *endodeme* (see Graburn 1979). An endodeme is a local in-marrying community whose members are not separated into sets of unilineal kin groups but are nonetheless bound to one another by a common culture, com-

mon residence, and consanguinity (Murdock 1949, 62–64). The point is that a peasant community—combining features of an endodeme with a strongly defined territorial base—expresses community “corporateness” and solidarity in terms of a common village identity (Wolf 1957; Doughty 1970, 30). In this sense, village or regional identity furnishes an ideological basis for corporateness in Latin America, in contrast to unilineal kinship systems that provide the base for corporateness among ethnic groups in many parts of Africa and Asia (Parkin 1966; Bruner 1961, 1972; Southall 1975a). Thus although exceptions exist, the difference between bilateral versus unilineal kinship systems helps explain why village and regional associations tend to be reported in Latin American cities, and urban ethnic associations tend to be reported in African and Asian cities.⁵

The literature also suggests that the formation of an MVA is based on a number of prerequisite urban conditions relevant to the Latin American setting. Migrants to the city must be far enough from their point of origin that frequent visits home are impossible or inconvenient (Fischer 1976; Skeldon 1980). Formation of an association also requires a minimum number of migrants at the urban destination. This number is sometimes referred to as a “critical mass,” which correlates positively with the institutional completeness of a given migrant community in the new urban setting (Fischer 1976; Breton 1964).

Reasons Why Migrant Village Associations Form in Latin America

Some researchers have argued that migrant village associations tend to arise among poor indigenous migrants who come from peasant villages with a strong tradition of cooperation (Doughty 1970; Bataillon 1972; Orellana 1973). Claude Bataillon, for example, has repeatedly asserted that communal strategies of urban adaptation arise only among migrants whose lifestyles are characterized by persisting indigenous heritage and customs (1972, 163). He also states that communal adaptive strategies are not carried out at the level of the migrant group as a whole but are the recourse of a small, disadvantaged segment of the migrant group. This segment unites in order to defend itself by clustering in certain occupations and providing mutual aid and support—thus bettering the situation of the group collectively (Bataillon 1972, 164).⁶ Bataillon’s explanation thus involves elements of both ethnicity and class.

While Carlos Orellana (1973) also views MVAs as formed solely by Indian migrants who have experienced a strong communal tradition in their point of origin, he posits that certain urban conditions lead to a politicizing experience that is necessary to transform informal networks into formally organized MVAs.⁷ For example, in his fieldwork focusing

on Mixtec migrants in Mexico City, Orellana found that informal networks based on kinship or friendship, mutual aid, and propinquity became formalized in urban struggles to obtain a territorial base for Mixtec housing and community in the capital.

Orellana's Mixtec study also indicates that the persistence of an MVA depends upon the strength of its ties to the village of origin (1973). Once formed, the Mixtec MVA began to get involved in the development process of the home village of Soyaltepec, Oaxaca, even to the extent of participating directly in the village government. Because of this linkage between the village association formed in Mexico City and the social, political, and economic system of the village, Orellana argues that the formation of an MVA must be considered in terms of a larger context. He proposes a core-periphery model he calls the "total field of urbanization" (Orellana 1973, 174).⁸

While Orellana's study suggests the significance of macro-level conditions for understanding MVAs, recent research by Norman Long, Bryan Roberts, and their colleagues on migration from the Mantaro Valley of Peru further develops this point. They first carried out an extensive research project in Mantaro focusing on the impact of capitalistic economic penetration and development on rural villages in the valley (Long and Roberts 1978, 1984). These and their other studies demonstrate that special rural-urban ties proliferate between the capital city of Lima and the surrounding agricultural districts and villages as a result of a weak and dependent pattern of Peruvian national development (Long 1973; Long and Roberts 1978, 1984; Roberts 1981). Roberts states that migrant village and regional associations "are but one part of the institutional matrix that accompanies Lima's industrialization. Kinship ties, ties based on place of origin or fictive kinship ties . . . are also emphasized. . . . These provide the contacts for obtaining cheap supplies and for mobilizing labor" (Roberts 1981, 38).

The significance of Long and Roberts's careful ethnographic and comparative work is that they have effectively linked the macro-level conditions of Peruvian development to migration streams and to the processes of urban adaptation (Long 1973; Roberts 1981). They have also shown how macro-level conditions generally affect the formation and the forms of MVAs in Peru. Thus the processes of forming migrant village and regional associations are intensified because of the "pendular" nature of migration, in which out-migrants often return home. Also, the range and frequency of rural-urban ties in Peru are effectively explained: ". . . associational activities, religious celebrations and kinship gatherings provide a cultural context in which relationships needed for economic survival can be consolidated" (Roberts 1981, 38). In sum, general conditions of political economy definitely create a setting that can stimulate the reformulation of "preindustrial, precapitalis-

tic" social relations and make them rational strategies in a new economic setting (Long and Roberts 1978).

A final model considered here is the one Ronald Skeldon developed based on his Peruvian fieldwork. At an analytic level, Skeldon addresses the question of whether migrant village and regional associations are fundamentally oriented to the point of origin or to the point of destination. He answers that they are oriented to both. Skeldon also discusses the differences between types of associations—differences in size (village or regional), leadership (Indian blue-collar or mestizo white-collar), and aims (oriented toward developing the home area or toward socializing, politics, or business in the urban setting)—and how they evolve over time and in relation to migration streams (1976, 1977). On this basis, Skeldon proposes a developmental cycle for urban ethnic associations.

In the initial phase, villagers are involved in circular or temporary migration to the city. Few associations of any kind are formed during this stage. At a later, regional stage of migration, associations are formed based on local (village) affiliations. Such groups act as a buffer for migrants, a mutual aid society, and a "society" to promote the interests and development of the home village. In the third stage, national permanent migration is occurring and conditions in both the rural and urban settings have changed. In the rural sphere, future migrants become increasingly "preadapted" for out-migration by learning about conditions and life in the city from the stories told by visiting friends and relatives. In the urban sphere, the migrants become more dispersed over time. The original associations thus experience a decline and may be revitalized only if migrant leadership is able to combine a number of smaller groups into a broader regional or ethnic association. Concomitantly, the function of the broader association shifts toward the urban needs and interests of the migrants.⁹

In summary, the four representative explanations of MVA formation considered here emphasize conditions dealing with ethnic and regional identity in combination with four other factors: first, specific urban class position; second, urban conditions stimulating politicization; third, regional and class inequities in general that stem from a pattern of uneven national development; and fourth, the stage of migration.

TWO EMPIRICAL CASE STUDIES

Methodological Note

The controlled comparison of differential cases provides, in my opinion, a natural opportunity to test hypotheses about the general conditions of MVA formation (Nadel 1952; Eggan 1954; Clignet 1973). In

fact, failure to employ this method in the past may be the reason why most available analyses do not specify any way to account for differential cases of MVA formation controlled by point of origin and point of destination.¹⁰

At present, it is even difficult to find ethnographic case studies of this kind in the literature on MVAs. Two detailed cases illustrating differential patterns of urban adaptation and association involve migrants from the Mixteca Alta living in Mexico City. In these cases, Mixtec from the *municipio* of Soyaltepec migrated to Mexico City and formed an MVA that was active from the 1940s through the 1970s. Yet Mixtec migrants from the *municipio* of Tilantongo (near Soyaltepec) migrated to the same urban destination during the same general period but did not form an MVA. Thus a global description of these two studies—including the nature of regional and local points of origin, patterns of migration, and the process of urban adaptation seen in terms of the economic structure of the city—provides data for the evaluation of the conditions outlined above. Although not a formal test, it is possible to tie the results to related studies and identify which conditions are essential for the formation of MVAs. A revised framework to account for formation can then be advanced.

The Mixteca Alta and the Former District of Nochixtlán

The two *municipios* to be described are located in the Mixteca Alta region (in northwestern Oaxaca), both located in the former district of Nochixtlán. A general understanding of conditions in the region and the district during the 1960s and 1970s is needed for this discussion.¹¹

The Mixteca Alta is an area of forty thousand square kilometers, broken by valleys, the Sierra Madre de Oaxaca, and the Sierra Madre del Sur (Butterworth 1975, 21–30). Almost a third of the population of the Mixteca are of indigenous background. The Mixteca Alta has lacked roads, as well as most of the ordinary means of transportation and communications. Its isolation is also reflected in the fact that in 1970, 73 percent of the population lived in communities of less than two thousand inhabitants. According to the 1970 national census, some 40 percent of the population were illiterate. The region also lacked the basic services and amenities found in many Mexican cities. Due to the uneven pattern of national development, the people of the Mixteca have remained poor and unable to benefit from the urbanization and industrialization occurring in other parts of the state and the nation (Aguilar Medina 1979).

The region's economy is based on agriculture. Good land is limited, however, and because of the increasing demands placed upon it, the soil has become overworked and eroded. Traditional farming meth-

ods are employed in this region: the per capita ratio of peasants per arable unit of land is high, but crop yields are low, often resulting in barely enough food to feed the farmers' families (Butterworth 1975, 25–26). The peasant economy is rounded out by some trading, small handicraft production, and limited animal husbandry (Butterworth 1975). With the exception of a few locales (mainly market towns and agricultural areas where an industrialized production process has been introduced), little or no salaried labor has been available in the Mixteca Alta.

In many ways, the former district of Nochixtlán reflects conditions in the region as a whole (Butterworth 1975). About 80 percent of the district's population are involved in farming. Nochixtlán also has the highest rate of agricultural laborers per hectare of land in production, when compared to the six former districts that make up the region (Aguilar Medina 1979, 168, 171). Some industries operate in Nochixtlán, most centering around lumbering, but they appear to have little or no effect on the district's overall economy.

In short, despite the efforts of the Mexican government since the 1960s to extend modern services into the area, the economic stagnancy of Nochixtlán and its steadily growing population have combined to increase pressure on the already overutilized agricultural lands. Not surprisingly, a high rate of out-migration has ensued, ranking Nochixtlán fourth out of the thirty former districts of Oaxaca in out-migration rates (Molinari Soriano 1979, 90–91).

Mixtec Migrants from Soyaltepec

Mixtec migrants from the municipio of San Bartolo Soyaltepec to Mexico City provide a good example of the successful formation of an MVA (Orellana 1973). Soyaltepec is a poor, underdeveloped, and somewhat isolated municipality in the Nochixtlán Valley. Village organization beyond the nuclear family is based on a civil-religious hierarchy as well as on a system of mandatory civil labor called *tequio*. A total of 1,756 persons were listed as residents of the municipality in 1970; of these almost 700 had migrated, 474 of them to Mexico City (Orellana 1973, 275–76).

Carlos Orellana emphasizes that the functioning of the civil government of Soyaltepec depends heavily upon *tequio*, and he asserts that this rural cooperative tradition has persisted in the city as the basis for a well-organized, multifunctional village association, La Unión Vecinal. According to Orellana, this village association was developed "by the migrants in Mexico City in order to facilitate adaptation to the city in terms of employment, housing, and community solidarity" (1973, 276).

Orellana describes each of these aspects in some detail. He first

observes that the Unión Vecinal established links with the most important labor union (the Confederación de Trabajadores de México) and then provided job recommendations and employment for many Mixtec migrants (1973, 276–78). As many as 90 percent of the migrants in Orellana's quota sample were referred to a job through the Unión Vecinal. This rate of referral may well have been facilitated by the dynamic, expanding economy of Mexico City between 1940 and 1950, when many of the migrants from Soyaltepec arrived (see Oliveira 1976).

In the area of housing, the Unión succeeded in establishing a territorial base for the community in the downtown area of Mexico City. Later, due to the expansion of the city and the rising number of migrants arriving, other tightly clustered migrant neighborhoods arose in peripheral areas of Mexico City during the 1960s and 1970s (for example, in the Colonias Anahuac and Ajusco). In this particular case, Orellana stresses, the attempt to establish a territorial base for the migrant community—by squatting on unoccupied land in the southern edge of the Federal District—was the key event in politicizing informal migrant networks (1973, 278).

Orellana's study is particularly interesting on the participation of the Unión Vecinal in the politics of the home community, San Bartolo Soyaltepec. He first points out the structural similarities between the village government in Soyaltepec and the administrative structure of the Unión Vecinal. Orellana then notes that migrants in the capital were still expected to pay quotas for village projects (via the Unión Vecinal), and even to serve as officers for community projects. Moreover, the Unión actually took over the village government and became the major force in developing various large-scale community projects, including building schoolhouses, basketball courts, the government *palacio*, obtaining telephone service, and initiating a community development project. Orellana also points out that these projects eventually caused factionalism in the migrant community and in Soyaltepec as well. Conflicts were resolved over the years, however, partly by creating a joint council that gave equal decision-making powers to villagers and migrants alike (1973, 279–81).

In summary, the settlement of Mixtec migrants from Soyaltepec in a single neighborhood in Mexico City enabled them to form an informal neighborhood association. The Unión Vecinal began to succeed when it became a mechanism for obtaining employment and finding housing for the migrants. The Unión's efforts to provide these services, especially the attempt to seize land for a territorial base by squatting, triggered the evolution of the informal neighborhood association into a formal MVA. This development then "led to the formalization of its relations with both the CTM and the village" (Orellana 1973).

Nevertheless, it is also clear that Soyaltepec lacked a modern

infrastructure. Given that the village government was somewhat disorganized, the citizens of Soyaltepec initially accepted the leadership and the efforts of the out-migrants, and thus the Unión was able to initiate a rural development process.

Mixtec Migrants from Tilantongo

Now let us consider the contrasting case of Mixtec migrants who left Tilantongo for Mexico City (Butterworth 1962, 1970, 1975). Lying approximately fifty kilometers south of Soyaltepec, Tilantongo exhibits many of the same organizational features as Soyaltepec. It is a municipio (similar to a county) that is made up of a *cabecera* (a county seat) and a number of smaller associated hamlets (Butterworth 1970, 5). Tilantongo's population of thirty-five hundred (as of 1970) includes many inhabitants who speak both Spanish and Mixtec.

The economy of Tilantongo is primarily agricultural, but because of soil and climatic conditions as well as the increasingly fragmented landholdings, farming is poor. Butterworth reports that only about one-fourth of the families in the 1960s were able to grow enough food to meet their own needs (1970). Thus although Tilantongo is linked to the national economy, the municipio is described as "impoverished" and lacking social and political integration with the rest of the nation (1970). During Butterworth's fieldwork, the municipio had no serviceable roads, no electricity, and no doctor. Only one-quarter of the population could read. In addition, a castelike division separated the mestizos from the Indians (Butterworth 1975, 202–14).

While the population of Tilantongo maintains the traditional practice of tequio (Butterworth 1975, 123, 137), church posts are markedly distinct from those in the local government (1975, 129). The local government is ruled by mestizos and has been characterized by fierce competition between "progressives" and "conservatives" for power and office. The political situation in Tilantongo is rife with factionalism, political intrigue, and even violence, and it cannot be understood fully without considering the role that out-migrants play in the situation (Butterworth and Chance 1981, 88).

Following the Second World War, Tilantongueños began to leave their village for Mexico City in a "steadily increasing stream" (Butterworth 1962, 261). Once in the city, they tended to cluster together, purchase land, and build their own housing. Tilantongueños retained strong family ties, preferring a *gemeinschaft* quality to their social interaction, and consequently they related primarily to other members of the migrant group (Butterworth and Chance 1981, 101–2). These migrants succeeded in finding gainful employment, with as many as twenty-two employed in the same firm at one point (Butterworth 1962,

261). Yet although the Tilantongueños stuck together and followed informal leaders in the urban setting, they apparently did not form a formal MVA. Their social organization consisted instead of “highly connected and spatially diffuse networks” (Butterworth and Chance 1981, 101).

Butterworth did not focus explicitly on the question of why no MVA developed, but his ethnographic account is sufficiently detailed to permit interpretation. In the urban setting, conditions seemed to favor the development of an MVA: Tilantongueños were clustered, provided one another with mutual aid, and maintained a strong sense of cultural and regional identity (Butterworth 1962).

At the same time, however, first-generation migrants perceived their children (born in the city) as being Mexican-mestizo, therefore part of the national mainstream (1962, 267). Also, because of the greater deprivation they had experienced in the municipio, Tilantongueño migrants seemed to feel little discomfort or discontent in the urban setting. In fact, despite the economic decline occurring in Mexico City in the 1950s when many Tilantongueños arrived (Oliveira 1976), and although most of them apparently lacked union membership or other guarantees of job security, these migrants believed conditions and opportunities in Mexico City to be much better than in Tilantongo (Butterworth 1962, 273). Thus Tilantongueño migrants apparently lacked the material incentives, motives, or experiences that would lead to urban politicization or cohesive unity.

It is also important to recall that the village government in Tilantongo was tightly controlled by a conservative group of mestizos (Butterworth 1975, 138–44). Most of the progressives in fact left the village for Mexico City. Because Tilantongo was poor and needed their help, the progressives tried to effect development and change in their village from a distance. To some extent, they succeeded (Butterworth and Chance 1981, 88–90). While the conservatives depended on the progressives’ contributions, the conservatives clearly saw change and development as a threat to their power and status in the village. Thus they blocked extensive and direct participation in the village development process. Part of the conservatives’ strategy involved playing on the fears of the village population by arguing that too much influence from the outside would result in a loss of autonomy and self-determination (Butterworth and Chance 1981).

DISCUSSION

The case studies described indicate the complexity of the process of MVA formation. It is therefore not surprising that few general models have been presented because ethnographic variations virtually rule

out identifying any universal sequence or pattern of cause and effect. But a number of points do arise from considering the differential case studies in terms of the explanatory accounts outlined above.

On one hand, the case study of migrants from Tilantongo indicates that ethnic or regional identity (often involving a cooperative, communal tradition at the point of origin) may be a prerequisite but is an insufficient cause in itself (see also Butterworth and Chance 1981, 145).¹² MVAs clearly involve more than the unaltered maintenance of traditional identity and values from the village among migrants in the new urban environment.

Similarly, while migrating from a poor “underdeveloped” village is surely a key condition favoring the formation of MVAs, the case of Tilantongo suggests this factor is not a determinant in itself either. No evidence from the Tilantongo and Soyaltepec cases establishes that those migrants who suffer the most difficult or poverty-stricken situation in the city are the most likely to spearhead forming an MVA (compare Roberts 1973, 1974; Altamirano 1984a, 204–8).

Another consideration involves the general structural conditions in Mexico City between 1940 and 1970, especially the urban job market. On the whole, the Federal District was a favorable point of destination for rural-urban migrants, being the economic and industrial center of the nation (Unikel 1976). But during the 1950s, when many of the migrants from Tilantongo arrived, the urban economy suffered a setback. Yet these broad structural changes in the employment market did not seem to affect the strategies of urban adaptation selected by rural-urban migrants from the Mixteca Alta.¹³

The Tilantongo case study indicates that the “stage of migratory movement” is not the sole determinant of MVA formation, nor does the developmental sequence of associations necessarily progress in a unilinear fashion. Butterworth’s account is somewhat unclear in this regard, however. For example, he mentions that at first the Tilantongueños did not form any kind of migrant association in Mexico City (1962). In another report, Butterworth notes that the migrants from Tilantongo had organized a “formal voluntary association,” but he provides no further details (Butterworth 1972, 50, n. 5). A recent report makes no further mention of this association, but neither does it indicate that the Tilantongueños ever joined the larger Mixtec association in Mexico City, the *Coalición de Pueblos Mixtecos Oaxaqueños* (Butterworth and Chance 1981, 142–46).¹⁴

On the other hand, the process of politicization appears to be more central than other conditions. A reanalysis of Orellana’s and Butterworth’s ethnographic descriptions indicates that conditions in both the urban and the rural settings combined to promote or block politicization and the formation of an MVA. For this reason, I will link a

number of important conditions to explicating the politicization process. While the resulting framework is closely tied to the ethnographic materials on the Mixtec migrants described above, related literature from other studies will also be cited to suggest the results have heuristic value.

AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK

Based on the foregoing analysis and other relevant materials, an alternate framework can now be outlined to provide a more fully specified and integrated set of conditions that need to be considered in accounting for the formation of MVAs. Important prerequisites established thus far include: first, an ethnic or regional sense of identity, often accompanied by a cooperative tradition in the rural point of origin;¹⁵ second, state promotion of, or at least noninterference in, the process of rural development; and third, a sufficient number of migrants at a given urban destination, which must be relatively inaccessible to those traveling between it and the village of origin.

An examination of the Mixtec cases along with other studies of MVAs and regional associations in Latin American urban settings indicates that a politicization process is often the key cause stimulating the formation of an MVA (see Adams 1959; Long 1973; Roberts 1973, 1974, 1981; Skeldon 1976, 1977, 1980; Altamirano 1977, 1984a, 1984b; Osterling 1978, 1980; and Hirabayashi 1981, 1983).¹⁶ *Politicization*, as I use the term here, is first based on a communal identity,¹⁷ then involves the struggle for resources and self-determination as a group (Little 1965, 1970; Cohen 1969, 1974; Parkin 1974; Altamirano 1977, 1980, 1984a; Nagel and Olzak 1982). Thus a politicization process among peasant migrants of indigenous background, who are members of an endodeme, can result in a formal communal strategy of urban adaptation,¹⁸ as opposed to the ego-centered strategy of urban adaptation so commonly found in Latin America (Goode 1970; Rollwagen 1974). For rural-urban migrants who engage in a formal communal strategy of adaptation (such as an MVA), the effect is a newly forged sense of ethnic identity and solidarity based on rural ties, but one that is reformulated and redefined in the urban setting. In addition, at the conceptual level, focusing on the politicization process can help mediate and integrate orders and levels of analysis, given that politicization is contingent upon an appropriate combination of conditions (see table 1).

Two conditions in the rural sphere are underdevelopment in the home village or region and local political decentralization, separately or together. These two conditions often stimulate the formation of an MVA that can participate in, even lead, the development process back home (Adams 1959, 95–96; Long 1973; Orellana 1973; Roberts 1974, 221–

TABLE 1 *Conditions Accounting for the Presence or Absence of a Migrant Village Association among Rural-Urban Migrants*

<i>Conditions Promoting Communal Strategies of Urban Adaptation</i>	<i>Conditions Discouraging Communal Strategies of Urban Adaptation</i>
RURAL CONDITIONS	
Ethnic or regional sense of identity, often accompanied by communal orientation	Weak or nonexistent ethnic or regional identity, partly reflected in a social organization based on ego-centered networks or dyadic ties
Rural underdevelopment*	A developed village with a full range of services available
Political decentralization*	A strong village government that discourages active migrant participation in the development process
Threat to communally held lands*	
Acceptance by village of migrant participation in development	
URBAN CONDITIONS	
Sufficient distance from origin	Opportunity to compete and to achieve upward mobility
Sufficient numbers of migrants and informal urban networks	Adequate salary and access to urban services
Urban economic or political interests of ethnic or kin group*	Ability to assimilate if desired
Negative urban conditions that stimulate the need for mutual aid and defense*	Dispersion throughout the urban point of destination
A governmental development strategy combined with ethnic brokerage*	Formal outlawing of ethnic associations or political activity

*Conditions that promote politicization

22; Hirabayashi 1981; Sutton 1983; Altamirano 1984a, 203, 206; 1984b, 112).¹⁹

But it is evident that rural class interests may result in power struggles over development (Butterworth and Chance 1981). Thus while state development policies can provide an important contextual

setting for the formation of MVAs, class interests and the nature of village and migrant leadership can be critical (Altamirano 1984b, 133–38).

A final aspect that can result in politicization in the rural point of origin is conflict over land, specifically communally held land. An excellent example is the early association of Ongoy, Peru, which was formed to defend the community's boundaries from the encroachment of neighboring haciendas (Roberts 1974, 220; Altamirano 1984a, 204). But both Roberts and Altamirano argue that special circumstances gave rise to such developments in the context of Peruvian society: indigenous communities obtained formal recognition and rights to collective resources, and a less centralized state structure enabled associations to communicate directly with and influence the Peruvian national government (Roberts 1974; Altamirano 1984a, 204–5).²⁰

At the same time, migrants in the urban setting usually need to undergo a process of politicization explicitly or implicitly related to a set of negative urban conditions that impede adjustment and adaptation (Orellana 1973; Hirabayashi 1981). Such conditions would include prejudice, discrimination, or the lack of equal economic, political, or social opportunities. Politicization can also develop from efforts to protect collective economic or political interests (Adams 1959, 90–96; Long 1973; Jongkind 1974).

Another dimension of politicization is that MVAs are often formed in the context of governmental programs of rural development, such as extending infrastructure and “urban” services to the rural hinterlands. A number of ethnographic accounts have shown that elite members of migrant groups became effective brokers between the rural village, the urban migrants, and the state and national governments and also spearheaded development or association formation for the same purpose (Buechler and Buechler 1971; Roberts 1974, 219, 221; Skeldon 1980; Butterworth and Chance 1981, 142–45; Hirabayashi 1981; Altamirano 1984a, 203, 206).

The conditions tending to discourage the politicization process are almost a mirror image of those encouraging such a process. In the rural setting, conditions precluding politicization are the absence of ethnic or regional identity, including a weak or nonexistent communal base (Kemper 1977, 15–50, 100–108, 195–201; Osterling 1978, 1980), as well as a developed village with a centralized village government (Kemper 1977; Osterling 1978, 1980; Hirabayashi 1983). Opportunities in the urban sphere—access to adequate jobs, salary, urban services, acceptance in the larger urban social and political system, and upward mobility—tend to discourage politicization and the evolution of a collective strategy of urban adaptation (Kemper 1977; Osterling 1980), as does residential dispersion throughout the urban setting (Roberts 1973). Finally, the actual outlawing of ethnic associations or political movements

by the state or stringent state control over the development process would also impede the formation of MVAs.

One especially striking aspect of this framework, then, is how complex and interwoven the conditions favoring the formation of an MVA are. Another notable aspect is the plethora of factors in the rural and urban settings that can actively prevent politicization and the emergence of an association.

CONCLUSION

It is certain that future ethnographic research must be more theoretically and comparatively informed. Researchers will be able to make cumulative progress in the study of MVAs and other kinds of urban ethnic associations only if they systematically develop sets of conditions and specify contexts for analyzing the dynamics of these associations.²¹

The framework proposed here offers several potential advantages. In addition to identifying the basic conditions that impede or promote the formation of MVAs, this framework incorporates three key dimensions that need to be considered in the study of MVAs. It acknowledges that conditions in the points of both origin and destination must be considered simultaneously in most cases. It also recognizes that conditions on various levels, from the micro to the macro, impinge on the process of MVA formation. Most importantly, the politicization process is here defined and identified as the single most important cause stimulating the formation of MVAs, and the conditions behind politicization are delineated in terms of a variety of orders and levels of analysis.

An acknowledged limitation is the primarily descriptive nature of the general conditions presented in this framework. That is to say, identifying conditions that either promote or discourage an association does not itself explain why these conditions are present to begin with. What needs reemphasizing here is that fieldworkers must pay close attention to the historical-structural setting surrounding and affecting ethnographic data. The above framework is proposed in the belief that the key to determining the weight and specific combinations of conditions in any given case lies in their relationship to larger structural forces and dynamics, particularly those resulting from national development as it affects both rural and urban spheres.²² A number of researchers have pointed out the obvious connection between the presence or absence of the conditions described herein and development and urbanization in the context of peripheral capitalism in Latin America (in addition to those already cited, see Slater 1978; Guillet 1980; Walton 1982). Clearly, the nature and operation of this connection must continue to be pursued vigorously in future research.

At the same time, the ethnographic comparison indicates that the macro level alone cannot account for the differential patterns of MVA formation exhibited by rural-urban migrants from similar villages. Rather, the impact of structural forces and dynamics is always mediated by a process of politicization, which is played out in terms of factional and class interests in the points of both origin and destination.

In conclusion, this framework can offer new possibilities for research because by focusing on politicization as a mediating process, social scientists will have to inform themselves about the larger political and economic setting and how its dynamics affect the micro settings often studied by ethnographers. By developing frameworks that allow for a better understanding of the linkages between “structures” on one hand and persons and “events” on the other, it will be possible to understand more fully the interaction between the macro level and adaptation and response at the micro level.

This goal is important because while MVAs do reflect “the relationship between national and regional strategies of development, and their intended and unintended impact on local populations,”²³ such associations should also be viewed as “genuine forms of social organization, created by migrants, for migrants” (Altamirano 1984b, 77). That is, while MVAs are shaped by larger structural forces, they represent a creative response by migrants who are trying collectively to control or address changes resulting from larger development processes that impact on their lives, families, and communities.

NOTES

1. Historical structuralism, as I understand it, is a macro-level analysis (see Oliveira and Stern 1974 for a clear theoretical and methodological outline of this approach as it applies to issues of internal migration in Latin America). I am following the lead of a number of authors who have shown how it can be utilized in the analysis of ethnographic data (for example, Arizpe 1976, 1978; Young 1978; and articles in Cámara and Kemper 1979; Balán 1981; and Safa 1982).
2. For individuals, contact with fellow migrants in the city can provide a “psychological anchor” as well as a “medium of sociability and recreation in the city” (Goode 1970, 153; compare Mangin 1959; Doughty 1970). At a collective level, migrant associations can also function as interest groups whose members share common economic or political goals (Long 1973; Orellana 1973). Teófilo Altamirano (1984a) presents an excellent commentary on this literature and develops an analysis that helps resolve recent debates over the functions and forms of migrant associations in Peru.
3. Altamirano’s newest book (1984b) provides the most comprehensive framework yet available on the nature of regionalism as a basis for identity, as well as for informal activities and formal association, among rural-urban migrants in Latin America.
4. *Corporate* is an elusive and complex term. I utilize the following general definition: “Corporate refers to a group in which the needs and wills of individuals are subordinate to the needs and wills of the whole” (Fischer et al. 1977, 8). In adopting this definition, I acknowledge, but leave unexamined here, specialized debates about the term itself (for example, Smith 1975; Appell 1983).
5. Again referring to broad types of kinship systems, it is possible to hypothesize that

an MVA or an urban ethnic association formed on the basis of common village or regional origins will have a potentially more limited membership than will urban ethnic associations utilizing a unilineal, segmentary descent system as a structural model (Parkin 1966; Southall 1975a, 1975b).

6. To be fair, Bataillon also suggests that migrants can associate on the basis of a larger identity on the state level. He cites as evidence the case of migrants from Oaxaca who have helped each other enter certain occupations in Mexico City (Bataillon 1972).
7. Orellana (1973) proposes the presence of *tequio*, or mandatory labor in service of the community, as a good operational index of a "strong communal tradition."
8. Following the work of John Friedmann, Orellana defines urbanization as "the systematic interrelationship of four basic processes capable of creating conditions that will favor social development": that is, migrants and wealth tending to flow toward the city, and power, decisions, and innovation all tending to move in the opposite direction (Orellana 1973).
9. See Skeldon 1976, 1977; Laite 1984; but also note Altamirano 1984b, 123–25, proposing a reversal of Skeldon's stages.
10. Thus much of the otherwise excellent Peruvian research on MVAs and regional associations is of limited use here (Adams 1959; Mangin 1959; Long 1973; Skeldon 1976, 1977). None of these studies introduce data concerning the differential ability of migrants to form MVAs, nor do they suggest a way to account for the presence or the absence of MVAs among migrants from neighboring villages of the same region.
11. This section draws heavily on Butterworth (1975), Aguilar Medina (1979), and statistics in Molinari Soriano (1979).
12. Readers, however, are invited to place this point into the context of Altamirano's discussion of the general relationship between regionalism and politics among rural-urban migrants (1984b).
13. As for rural conditions in the Mixteca Alta, it is likely that migrants from there had the fewest skills to sell in the urban job market, whether the urban economy of Mexico City was expanding or contracting.
14. A clearer example challenging the power of the so-called stage of migratory movement can be seen in terms of a Rincón Zapotec case study I recently published (Hirabayashi 1983). Nevertheless, studies by Skeldon (1976, 1977), Long and Roberts (1978, 1984), and Altamirano (1984a) do make the point that MVAs and other urban associations are often transitory, and they provide new leads for analyzing the proliferation and scope of associations. Altamirano's recent research (1984b) is especially instructive as to how and why "provincial associations" lend themselves to other kinds of social, political, and economic alliances.
15. Bryan Roberts observes that ethnicity is an important prerequisite condition for the formation of an association. He notes that where ethnicity is weak (as in Brazil) or where rural-urban migrants can "easily assimilate with the dominant urban ethnic groups" (as in the case of Ladino migrants in Guatemala), less evidence is found of migrant associations (Roberts, personal communication; see also Roberts 1974). I agree and would add that ethnic or cultural traditions are central in determining the manner in which the formation and organization of a migrant association are carried out, once other conditions favoring formation have been set into motion.
16. Also note that the process of politicization, as the key condition stimulating the formation of an association, seems to hold best for the "matrix" (or original) association of a given village or region (Altamirano 1984b).
17. According to Weber, "A social relationship will be called 'communal' if and so far as the orientation of social action . . . is based on a feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together" (cited in Fischer et al. 1977, 8).
18. I have adapted the term *communal* (as opposed to *corporate*) to describe the collective strategies of urban adaptation in Latin America because the term *corporate* is associated with moral, jural, and social obligations somewhat beyond those entailed in an ethnic or regional sense of identity.
19. But the village of origin must be willing to accept the aid, and sometimes even the leadership, of out-migrants in this process.
20. Altamirano also describes the initial formation of an association by migrants from

- the Mantaro Valley community of Matahuasi in responding to the sale of collectively used church lands to members of the local elite (1984a, 204).
21. This generalization can be verified by considering one of the key lessons reported from a historical examination of the comparative method in anthropology: "Reliable comparisons cannot be made between data sets that are not governed by similar theoretical intent, techniques of data collection, and types of classification" (Hammel 1980, 153).
 22. Hirabayashi 1983, which was specifically written to illustrate this point, makes an ethnographic comparison of Mixtec and Rincón Zapotec migrants.
 23. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of a previous version of this article for this phraseology.

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