

**Yelapan Migrant Identity Formation:
The Emergent Role of Collective Remittances
within a Mexican Transnational Community**

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June, 2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts, University of California, Santa Cruz 2005

Para mi esposo Rubén, quien siempre será Yelapense
(For my husband Rubén, who will always be Yelapan)

Acknowledgments

The fruition of this study would not have been possible without the generosity and openness of the many Yelapans who informed my research through interviews, conversations, and by sharing their lives with me. Susanne Jonas aided my field research by kindly sponsoring me through independent studies, and also provided guidance while synthesizing my findings. The logistics of my field research were made possible with a Re-Entry Student Scholarship from the UCSC Womens Club. During the writing process, Jim Grove provided indispensable technical and conceptual feedback. My deepest appreciation goes to Patricia Zavella, not only for reliably reading through drafts, but also for valuing my research and for always acknowledging me as an important contributor in her classrooms.

Abstract

Centered on ethnographic research within two geographically separate, yet tightly interconnected localities—Yelapa, Jalisco, and San Jose, California—this study uses a cultural and interdisciplinary analysis to examine the formation of this Mexican transnational community. After providing an overview of communal organizing in Yelapa, I follow the collective organizing developments of migrants in San Jose, focusing on transnational achievements. Primary attention is given to the role of informal collective monetary remittances, with an emphasis on ways in which migrants in San Jose maintain and recreate their identities through participation in the organization and implementation of such remittances. I argue that within the context of Yelapan translocalities, the use of collective remittances acts as the core mechanism for the formation of Yelapan migrants' transnational identity, while simultaneously ensuring them membership within their sending community.

Introduction

El Velorio (The Wake)

By the time we arrived at the family's home at ten o'clock that night, the open front patio of the small house where the young man's body lay in his casket was packed with people. Surrounding the casket were a group of women from the church who kept up a continual rhythm of prayer and song. The gardens surrounding the house were also full of villagers, as was the empty land directly across the path leading from the house to the river. The most impressive sight however, were the people

lining either side of this path stretching from the previous house and continuing completely around the bend in the path, hugging the retaining wall that enclosed the family's garden. These people were standing or sitting in white plastic chairs. Conversation was low and tones were reserved. People drank coffee and canela (cinnamon tea) and munched on cookies, all of which were frequently being passed around by several young women, who are traditionally family or neighbors of the deceased. At one point a picture of the young man was also passed around. Some of the people in attendance would stay all night, while others would leave after several hours, only to be replaced by other villagers. By dawn, nearly everyone from town (including babies, children, youth, and elderly) had made an appearance to pay their respects. To the outside observer, this velorio, held on a January night in Yelapa, Mexico, was just like any other held in the village.

What was not apparent in witnessing this velorio was the manner in which the event linked together various localities within what this study refers to as the Yelapan transnational community, of which the main sites are the village of Yelapa and Yelapa's daughter community in San Jose, California. Even less apparent was the fact that the dead young man, a migrant that had lived in North Carolina for several years, had been shot to death there during a drug-related conflict. It was also not obvious that it had taken a week for his body to be transported by plane and boat back to Yelapa, or that the Yelapan migrant community in San Jose had collectively contributed over one thousand dollars (about one-fourth of the total costs) towards this transportation.

In some ways it would be easy to confuse the Yelapan village with a localness defined by its geographical boundaries. However, by looking at the details of daily life, Yelapa must instead be understood in terms of transnationality, by which it is forced to deal with issues that transcend the village and the nation. Most importantly, what becomes apparent by viewing the village through this lens, is that the identity of Yelapans can no longer be separated from that of their migrant communities in the United States, and vice versa. Although the physical event of the velorio and burial of the young man takes place in Yelapa, so many other facets of the event involve all Yelapans in the transnational consequences of migration. Primarily, the nature of his death was particular to the set of circumstances which his life as a migrant in North Carolina encompassed. This unfortunate outcome is not overlooked by both migrants in the United States, as well as prospective migrants in Yelapa, especially the village's youth. They pay close attention to migration outcomes, and this case will inform their ideas and decisions regarding the option. Additionally, the fact that the sizable Yelapan migrant community in San Jose was immediately notified of the death occurring across the nation in North Carolina, and the level of their involvement creates two main functions. First, their collective monetary remittances significantly aid the quick and efficient return of the migrant's body to Yelapa. Second, and most pertinent to this analysis, the logistics of a migrant death require actions to be taken (information shared, money collected, transportation arranged). These set of actions is what creates an opportunity for migrants to show their loyalty to the village and to support their family and friends who remain there.

This velorio is only one example of transnational practices that tie villagers in Yelapa to Yelapan migrants in California and elsewhere throughout the U.S. Instances of this community transcending borders and constituting a transnational space include people in both locations watching the same soap opera and talking about it on the phone, children left behind to be raised by grandparents while parents migrate, migrants and Yelapans having business partnerships, and migrants collecting remittances for Yelapan development projects. On a daily level there is a steady exchange of phone calls. Also, the consistent flow of travelers between Yelapa and California provides for the transportation of videos of weddings, quinceañeras (coming of age celebration for girls turning fifteen), and new or remodeled homes. Yelapans returning to the village bring back consumer goods such as appliances and clothing from California, while travelers going the opposite direction carry remedies for nostalgia and homesickness such as coolers full of fish and pie, seasonal fruit, and embroidered servilletas (tortilla cloths).

Defining Transnationalism

Why study transnationalism? In the current era of globalization, many researchers and theorists within many academic disciplines are analyzing different representations of transnationalism. Within this literature, transnationalism is presented by many as a means of understanding "the penetration of national cultures and political systems by global and local driving forces" (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 3). Specific to this analysis is the literature regarding transnational processes and transnational spaces that are connected to migration (Espinosa 1998; Fitzgerald 2000; Fletcher 1999; Goldring 2001, 2002b; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Levitt 2001; Rouse 1996). More specifically to the structural relationship between migrants to the United States and transnationalism, Sassen (1988) argues that those U.S. policies which created the internationalizing of the country's economy have resulted in the formation of a transnational space within which the circulation of workers can be regarded as one of several other flows, including, for instance, capital, goods, services, and information. It is within this structural global context of migration that Mexican migrants such as those from Yelapa find themselves as members of a community no longer confined to location, but that rather circulates between and encompasses individuals in multiple physical locales.

To describe transnational processes and communities, theorists work with an array of terms. Particularly appropriate to conceptualizing the ways that migration-related transnationalism fits into the larger field of transnationalist processes is Guarnizo and Smith's framework of migration falling into the category of transnationalism "from below" as opposed to transnationalism "from above" which they use to refer to transnational capital, global media, and supra-national political institutions (1998: 3). In terms of identifying and unifying individuals who occupy the same transnational space and come from the same place of origin, different researchers have used the term "community" (Fletcher 1999), and "village" (Levitt 2001) in their migration studies. Still, others such as Rouse (1996) choose to use the term "circuit" or "transnational migrant circuit" instead of community to more adequately describe the nature of transnational migrants' membership and mobility in a newly created social space. Although the term has been criticized for obscuring possible tensions and conflicts within a transnational space (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 75), for purposes of denoting an expansion of the pre-existing community in the village of Yelapa, I will use "transnational community" when referring to the social formation to which all Yelapans belong, regardless of their physical location. I will also use "transnational locality" or "localities," as used by Guarnizo and Smith (1998) and others to emphasize the importance of place when referring to the physical locations of Yelapa, Mexico; San Jose, California; or both.

Levitt (2001) defines a transnational village (which she uses as the term for the type of transnational community she represents in her research) as having four primary characteristics. Since I believe there exists an incongruity between her term and Yelapan migrants' lifestyles in the city of San Jose, I will not adopt Levitt's use of the term "village." However, I would like to point out how these characteristics apply to the Yelapan transnational community in order to establish the level of transnational activity and processes already in use and those being added continually. First, Levitt states that actual migration is not required to be a member of such "village." This applies to Yelapans, as there are many who stay in the sending village, but remain quite involved in transnational practices. For example, specific to collective remittances, there are people that never leave Yelapa, but who are in charge of receiving and administering money collected in San Jose for Yelapa's development projects. Second, transnational villages emerge and endure partially because of social remittances, "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from host- to sending-country communities (Levitt 2001: 54). While social remittances are not the focus of this study, the transfer of such remittances are strong between the two Yelapan localities and, as Levitt notices with Miraflores, for Yelapans they are also the "tools with which ordinary individuals create global culture at the local level" (2001: 11). For example, gender roles are constantly in the process of change due to the effects of return migrants' actions or ideas. Third, transnational villages create and are created by organizations that act across borders. This feature is quite relevant to this analysis of Yelapan transnationalism, since it attempts to illustrate the manner in which this characteristic is taking hold, primarily in the practice of collective remittances. Last, Levitt claims that transnational villages are studies in contrast, often with contradictions represented by clashes

between rural life and introductions of technology, or between “traditional” and “modern” gender roles. She found that material well-being increased at a high social cost. For Yelapans, this contrast shows itself most in the irony presented when migrants spend their lives living in crowded conditions in order to save money for building a home back in Yelapa. When their home is complete, they cannot afford to live in it due to lack of local employment options. According to Levitt’s framework, Yelapa has been a transnational social space in the simplest form since migration began in 1978. Simultaneously, Yelapans are only now beginning to establish binational organizing at the level that Levitt describes, and the village of Yelapa is beginning to exhibit transformations due to social as well as economic remittances.

Goals and Theoretical Questions

Although the growing sociological and anthropological literature on migrant-led transnationalism is substantial, it often does not address the uneven levels of organizing that is occurring. As an example illustrating the important stage of formation, this study primarily describes the role of collective monetary remittances within the transformational process of becoming a transnational community. This study also describes the way that Yelapans within this transnational formation maintain and recreate identity through participation in activities involved in organizing collective remittances. The study of this process is done through participating in the everyday lives and experiences of people who belong to this transnational community, of both those who migrate from and those who stay in Yelapa. My research was driven by the following questions: Why have Yelapans in San Jose not established transnational organizations in the form of hometown associations? How do linked communities become part of a transnational community? What conditions are needed for collective organizing to take place specific to remittances and hometown development? How do Yelapans maintain and recreate their identity in the midst of migration?

In response to my own questions, I suggest that the subtle level of organizing occurring within the Yelapan transnational community is worthy of attention. I argue that within the context of Yelapan translocalities, the use of collective remittances is the core mechanism for the formation of the Yelapan migrants’ transnational identity and ensures membership in the community. These are important factors that support the worthiness of paying attention to examples such as the Yelapan case, no matter how underdeveloped and in formation it is. Informal organizing such as that done by Yelapans can even achieve the same goals as more institutionalized groups. For example, when comparing the level of Yelapan organizing to that which takes place within Mexican migrant hometown associations (HTAs), Yelapan migrants achieve similar outcomes. They maintain involvement in their home community and reconstruct personal and group identity, yet without being formalized and state sponsored structures of organization. I also argue that the Yelapan migrant experience illustrates how transnationalism changes and negotiates relationships between migrants and Yelapans, sometimes resulting in conflicts having to do with obligation, expectation, burden, and responsibility. Aside from the emergence of new identity markers based on the circumstances of transnationality, migrant identity is still very much based on characteristics of Yelapan social identity, such as the emphasis of identity based on membership in an extended family unit, religiosity, work ethics, and cultural expressions such as food and celebrations.

Methodology and Subjectivity

In order to address my research questions, this project is based on a review of academic research within the current transnational literatures specific to hometown organizing within Mexican migrant communities in combination with an ethnographic study of the transnational community of Yelapans living in Yelapa, Jalisco, and the migrant community in San Jose, California. The most important and informative portion of this research proved to be the ethnographic study of the Yelapan localities. This information was gathered during two different periods of field work, primarily through in-depth interviews focusing on, but not exclusive to, organizational aspects of the informants’ lives. I conducted all interviews in Spanish, later transcribing them in the original language. Most quotes

pulled from interviews have been translated into English so as to offer access to non-Spanish readers. All informants are represented under pseudonyms. My research was also informed through participant observation during social and cultural events and through informal socializing and from conversations.

Beginning in the summer of 2004, I conducted interviews within the Yelapan migrant community of San Jose, California. Interviews continued at this locality during February of 2005, for a total of six interviews with individuals and married couples. A separate phone interview with a migrant who lives in Stockton was especially informative regarding the establishment of Yelapan migration. In December and January of 2004-2005, for a period of six weeks, I carried out fieldwork based on the same methodology in Yelapa, Mexico. For half of this time I limited my methodology to participant observation in the community, and then during the second three weeks I focused specifically on conducting, transcribing, and analyzing a total of eleven interviews. Similarly, these interviews varied in the amount of participating individuals, ranging from the involvement of one person to the involvement of the entire extended family. During these six weeks I lived with my in-laws (natives of Yelapa), and, with the rest of our family members, we attended velorios, funerals, a baptism, quinceañeras, and the annual Día de la Virgen celebration. In addition to the ethnographic research done in Yelapa, I studied governmental sociodemographic records at Yelapa's municipal seat, El Tuito.

I find it essential to point to my close involvement with the Yelapan transnational community, without which I would not have reaped such a nuanced and detailed understanding of my above research. Originally from San Diego, California, I spent my childhood years in Yelapa and attended its local elementary school. As the only English speaking student at Juan de la Barrera elementary, I experienced the benefits and challenges of language and culture immersion. Due to a lack of further schooling opportunities, I continued my education in the United States. Despite my family's relocation and the severe shift in culture, I was able to maintain my connection to Yelapa and the relationships I had built there through visits and subsequent residence.

As well as maintaining this connection with the physical location of Yelapa, I have become increasingly involved with the local Yelapan migrant community, and keep an ongoing observation of the informal family and social organizations that connect Yelapans to their home village. Maintaining observation has been important for my personal interest in the community's evolution, as well as for informing this study. My insider perspective of Yelapa's migrant community has been largely facilitated by my being a member of their sending village, and by the deepening of family ties through marriage to a Yelapan man and by the birth of our daughter. My identity as a university student who studies transnationalism in a formal and theoretical context has also affected how I perceive activities within the Yelapan transnational community, and how I have interpreted my observations.

Transnational Localities and the History of Yelapan Migration

Located in the state of Jalisco on the Pacific coast of Mexico, Yelapa is a small bay and village belonging to the rural municipio (county) of Cabo Corrientes. The municipio was formalized in 1825, and Yelapa was established in 1850. Although there is no recent census data indicating Yelapa's population, the number given in the Plan de Desarrollo Municipal for 1995 was 711, and the municipio's office of the president estimates the current population at 1,500. Yelapa's main economic activities are tourism and fishing. Yelapa is unique from most small villages in Mexico due largely to its coastal location (which prevents automobile access) and its tourist economy. The latter facilitates a good amount of interaction between local Mexicans and gringos, a term I will use in this study strictly as it is used in Yelapa to describe any foreigner from outside of Latin America. Several gringos have lived there permanently since the 1960's, while most of the roughly 100-person gringo community settle for a seasonal residency that takes advantage of warmer summer climates in the U.S. and the drier winter climate in Yelapa. This international characteristic has facilitated migration from Yelapa to the U.S., but has also begun to create tensions due to the existence of gringo owned businesses in Yelapa.

The fact that Yelapa is located 35 kilometers south of Puerto Vallarta is also significant in terms of its access to short-term tourism traffic. Puerto Vallarta is a popular international tourist destination, as well as Mexico's second national beach destination. Yelapa's proximity to Puerto Vallarta helps to make tourism-related income occupy first place within the local economy, however, Puerto Vallarta's tourist industry tends also to dominate in Yelapa and neighboring coastal beaches. For example, the tourist industry in Puerto Vallarta sends boat tours to Yelapa, yet often provides services that include meals and drinks. Thus, Yelapan locals often find that tourists require few services during these day trips: "los turistas dejan mas basura que dinero" ("the tourists leave more trash than money"). Additionally, the tourist season falls between November and March, with the peak during Christmas and the New Year, leaving Yelapa without significant tourist income for half of the year. These inconsistent tourism conditions, in combination with the decline in the productivity of the fishing economy, have encouraged Yelapans to migrate to Puerto Vallarta, elsewhere within Mexico, and to various locations in the United States. San Jose, California, and its surrounding areas are where the majority of Yelapan migrants have settled over the past twenty-five years.

The history of Yelapan migration and the way it was initiated has contributed to San Jose becoming Yelapa's primary "daughter" community. In 1978, Mario Reynoso Monteon was the first person from Yelapa to migrate to San Jose. He did so because he had an American brother-in-law who invited him to live and work in San Jose. Mario only stayed for about a year in San Jose, first working in agriculture harvesting grapes, then in landscaping. Although Mario returned to Yelapa and never migrated again, this small amount of connection to and establishment in San Jose was all it took to start Yelapa's migrant network.

For example, the next group of migrants (a handful of single young men) included Alonzo Lorenzo Monteon. He migrated to San Jose later in 1978 at the invitation of his cousin Mario and his brother-in-law, and also worked with them at landscaping. It cost him 3,000 pesos (about 200-250 dollars) for the entire trip from Yelapa to San Jose, including the coyote, who smuggles undocumented migrants across the border. Since then, Alonzo has also worked in restaurant, construction, and oil refinery businesses. He stayed in San Jose until five years ago when he moved to Stockton where he currently works in construction. Alonzo received his residency through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), but has chosen not to apply for citizenship. This decision has resulted in his wife being the only one in the family who remains undocumented, as their four children were all born in California. Despite his twenty-seven year migrant history, Alonzo has invested in property and homes in Yelapa and Puerto Vallarta (mainly through inheritance), and says that his ideal is to "ir a morir a mi rancho" ("return to die in my village"). Currently Alonzo does not maintain close contact with Yelapans in San Jose, but states that when there are collective remittances organized he is contacted and he participates.

Migrants in San Jose roughly estimate that there must be more than two hundred people living between San Jose, Gilroy, and Sunnyvale. There are also a few scattered families in Santa Cruz, Fremont, Oakland, Stockton, and Santa Rosa. Aside from the main nucleus of migrants in Northern California, there is a small group of Yelapans in Los Angeles, as well as other small groups in North Carolina and Canada. San Jose Yelapans also estimate that about 40-50% of Yelapans currently have legal documentation status, with most of those being residents, and only about half of the initial amnesty applicants through IRCA, (perhaps twenty or thirty individuals) having become US citizens. Although a few families were also able to obtain documentation through an employer during the 1980's, most migrants are obtaining documents by marriage to a U.S. citizen, which appears to be happening more frequently as migrants interact and build relationships outside of the Yelapan community.

As has been established by various researchers regarding Mexican migrant occupations in the Bay Area, and specifically in Silicon Valley (Alarcón 1997; Cornelius 1982; Hossfeld 1988; Saxenian 1981; Wells 2000; Zlotniski 1996) Yelapan migrants in San Jose constitute part of the local wage labor economy, and work primarily in service sector occupations. According to Zlotniski (1996), in the context of the economically unequal development San Jose has experienced due to Silicon

Valley's recent technological and engineering industry growth, these are the jobs that have experienced the largest and fastest growth since 1980. Despite the availability of jobs, Zolniski found that migrants remain "working but poor," due to low wages and San Jose's high cost of living. In addition, the replacement of food processing and agricultural occupations in the Santa Clara Valley with the service sector and construction jobs that support the framework for Silicon Valley's high profile jobs also meant the decline of unionized jobs, such as the ones that Zavella (1987) found in her study focused on Chicana women workers in the canning industry in Santa Clara Valley. My informants confirm these findings, as they identify restaurant, hotel, and construction jobs (all non-unionized) as the main occupations of Yelapan migrants, generating incomes considerably lower than San Jose's cost of living needs. Many migrants state that they do not see strong gendered occupational patterns, yet it has been my observation that construction work is an exclusively male occupation, and men tend to be concentrated more in restaurant jobs, while women tend to work mostly as hotel housekeepers or janitors.

The Yelapan migrant community in San Jose is relatively new compared to other more established Mexican migrant communities within the United States (Massey 1987). Yelapans have been living in San Jose and the surrounding areas continually since 1978. There appears to have been a large increase in the migration of family units and young single women between 1988 and 1993. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997), many other Mexican migrant communities became more established with the inclusion of family units and more during the same span of years after the passage of IRCA. Many who have migrated did so through a connection with a gringo Yelapan resident or a tourist. A typical pattern for Yelapans coming to the United States is to first work for a gringo (often in childcare or manual labor) and then, after a period of months or years, become independent of this affiliation and find their own employment connections or to make the connections with the help of other Yelapan community members in San Jose. Yelapans living in San Jose have not yet permanently returned to Yelapa to live in high numbers. It is common for younger migrants without family responsibilities and those families who are documented to return on a yearly or less frequent basis for visits.

Every individual that I interviewed in Yelapa had at some point during the past twenty-six years, either lived in the United States for a period of time themselves, or has close relatives such as children or siblings living in the United States. All of the individuals interviewed have lived or have relatives living in San Jose and surrounding areas in California, with the exception of one woman who had lived with her family in North Carolina for the past ten years. Migration has resulted in periods of extended separation between family members, since most Yelapan migrants are undocumented and rarely return home. Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult for Yelapans to obtain tourist visas due to the costly application fees and the corruption within the immigration service at Guadalajara. Some individuals interviewed stated that they felt lucky not to have been forced to migrate economically, while other individuals who had returned to Yelapa did so upon semi-retirement, or because separation from their families had become unbearably long. For instance, one migrant family that went ten years without returning is now waiting in Yelapa to see when they might have an opportunity to cross the border again in order to spend more years working in North Carolina. All individuals who had worked in the United States had done so either in construction or the service industry, such as restaurant or janitorial work. Their family members living on the other side of the border are employed in the same occupations.

Most migrants who moved to San Jose up until the early 1990's came for reasons other than economic necessity, but have stayed because incomes are higher and life more materially comfortable. Although I have yet to formally interview families or individuals who have migrated to San Jose later than 1993, information gathered from informal conversations points to a slower rate of migration from Yelapa. This new migration is still not due to dire economic necessity, yet migrants will undoubtedly earn more money if they stay in the United States. Instead, the migration impetus for Yelapans has always been more due to the ease of opportunity for resettlement in California provided first by gringo contacts, and later by the established migrant community, and for economic and educational advantages. For example, if a family chooses to stay in Yelapa, they can make a living (not without challenges), however, if they migrate those that work will earn over three times

as much in weekly wages. Once here, migrants stay for the advantageous wage differential, and increasingly for the educational opportunities provided to their children and themselves.

Despite the tendency for migration to lead to permanent residence, Yelapans in San Jose continue to be concerned about the progress of their Mexican village, and the quality of life for Yelapans there. This is true regardless of whether migrants in San Jose have concrete intentions to return permanently to Yelapa, although most families maintain this as an option. Migrants in San Jose invest in Yelapa in a numerous ways, including remittances to family members, purchasing land and constructing homes for themselves, and in the form of collective remittances.

The practice of sending collective remittances for public projects that will provided basic services to the village (such as for its medical clinic and for paved pathways) was initiated around 1997 when migrants in San Jose became interested in partnering with Yelapans in Puerto Vallarta to build the village's medical clinic. This project led the Yelapan community to increase the transnational dialogue regarding projects, and Yelapans in San Jose have continued to support the development of basic services back home. In addition to collective remittances for services, the San Jose community has also established an annual collection for Yelapa's religious festival in May, as well as the Mothers Day Festival in the same month.

Most Yelapans in San Jose are very willing to contribute to collective remittances for public works projects and for the annual festivals. Yet the third category of collective remittances - that of contributing for a medical emergency or sudden funeral - consistently gets the participation of every single Yelapan in San Jose. There is a shared opinion among Yelapans that these types of donations are an ethical way of maintaining connections to Yelapa and are seen as opportunities to display one's concern for their fellow Yelapans. When speaking with migrants in San Jose about the practice of sending remittances for emergencies, there is a central message of reciprocity, articulated in phrases such as "uno nunca sabe la mañana," ("one never knows what will happen tomorrow") or "uno nunca sabe cuando te va tocar a ti" ("one never knows when it will be your turn").

Within the context of transnationalism, the village of Yelapa deals with aspects of life that transcend its physical boundaries. Similarly, migrants in San Jose extend their lives past their physical locality, and make a big effort to maintain participation within their home community by the practice of collective remittances. Although this practice is not as formalized as other examples of transnationalism (HTAs) demonstrates, this emerging level of organization is precisely what is of interest within this study. Even more so, it is important to Yelapan migrants, since the practice offers them an opportunity to make and maintain a place for themselves within their hometown. Though Yelapan migration cannot be described strictly in terms of economic need, for the most part Yelapans choose to stay in the United States. It is within the context of the increasingly established San Jose community that migrants are encountering the need to formalize collective remittances. Organization in San Jose has been a response to, and affected by the history of Yelapa's organizing and Yelapa's underdevelopment. The opportunities for Yelapan migrants to contribute to development projects also provide a chance for migrants to remain involved in their mother community, with the added benefit of keeping social status there. Finally, participation in collective remittances has two important functions for Yelapan migrants within San Jose's daughter community. First, it provides a unifying medium through which migrants strengthen relationships with each other and advance organizational strategies as a group. Second, collective remittances play a role in shaping migrants' identity formation by providing for a stratification of social status within the migrant community, by offering migrants long-distance participation in their home village, and by allowing for changes and negotiation in their relationships with their sending community.

Chapter One

Conflicted Organizing and Underdevelopment: Factors Promoting Collective Remittances Communal Organizing in Yelapa

In order to appreciate the importance of the emergence and organization of collective remittances by migrants in San Jose, it helps to understand Yelapa's inconsistent history of communal organizing. Unlike the experience of Miraflores from the Dominican Republic who have strong traditions of collective organizing and sharing labor with one another, which has provided groundwork for their success in transnational organizing (Levitt, 2001), Yelapans do not have a consistent historical pattern when it comes to organizing. The village of Yelapa technically pertains to a *comunidad indigena* (indigenous community). I will use this term because it is the exact wording used by villagers, although many are vague or uninformed regarding its precise meaning. Although it is unclear whether the term originated to indicate indigenous ethnicity, it currently does not denote such, and I do not attempt to associate it with indigenous or ethnic features of Yelapans. The concept of the *comunidad indigena* is relevant since its inherent communal design can be understood as fostering strong community organization and consensus among individuals. Yet surprisingly, despite this status, there have existed political, ideological and land-based divisions among the residents of this community. Yelapa's oral historians describe the very formation of the village as conflicted. At its inception, Yelapa existed as seven homes at the north end of the beach. When more people came down from different mountain communities to settle, the original settlers chased them towards what became the town, supposedly due to political differences.

When speaking with people in Yelapa today about the unity of the community in terms of organizing around a development project or an educational cause, many people cite these same political divisions as interfering with the goals of unity and progress. Yelapa's residents have historically been affiliated with either the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) or Partido de Accion Nacional (PAN) political parties, however within the past few years a small group of Partido Revolucionario Democratica (PRD) members has been established. Although Yelapans tend to express political affiliations or activities in vague terms such as "la política", "politics" is often indicated as the reason for Yelapans not organizing and advancing their community towards development or social goals. Jorge, who runs a restaurant in town with his wife Sandra, additionally brought up the fact that even a period of low tourism in the 1990s was complicated by political affiliations and "the internal political problems that existed here in the community. There are political groups everywhere, one side against the other, all of them wanting the power." It appears that a sudden increase in theft and drug use among the community's youth was creating a bad reputation and scaring tourism away. To make matters worse, political alliances were such that criminals would either never be arrested, or would be released the next day by a political figure in the hopes of maintaining the offender's family's party loyalty or securing their vote.

Beyond citing political divisions, most people include themselves in citing a generally selfish mentality when it comes to contributing money, labor or time towards an organized project. Yet simultaneous with its lack of organizational unity, Yelapa was in dire need of help. Until the end of the 1990s Yelapa's infrastructure and basic services had remained primitive and insufficient: no electricity, no medical clinic, dirt paths, and no central water system. The same couple who noticed political battles exacerbating the tourism problem felt that the hardest thing to organize was a project for public good, also citing laziness and lack of consensus as reasons: "in a few words, we don't like to work." Many claim that it is this perceived or real attitude that makes it difficult to produce consistent progress on the current construction project at a new elementary school in Yelapa. Monica, a participating parent, illustrates this dynamic: "Here what we have is for example, if he does not work, neither will I. If he is not interested, why should I be forcing myself?"

As is represented above, the topic of organizing around school issues seems to be the most controversial area of community involvement in Yelapa. As part of a request for various community development projects that was submitted to the local government in 1998, a new elementary school

was built beginning in the year 2000. However, parents claim that the government planners made a mistake when creating the blueprints and built an insufficient number of bathrooms for the number of children attending the school. As a result, parents are upset that they were not given the option to review the plans before building took place. They are currently forced to match the government's donations to expand the bathrooms. Parents of elementary school children have been assigned to work groups, yet many complain that everyone does not contribute money and labor evenly, thus slowing down the process that would provide a common good for all of the town's children. Determining whether people do not contribute because they do not care, or because of financial reasons is difficult, since the amount of money needed for the purchase and transportation of the materials is quite significant.

Although these parents acknowledged their lack of initiative, many other parents interviewed criticized this prevalent selfish ideology. The fact that parents did not seem to agree regarding priorities for their children is what bothers many individuals. There are also signs of resentment towards parents who have not been contributing their part, as well as resentment from parents who feel that it is unfair to have to personally contribute for their children's education. This point of view came specifically from one mother who has recently moved back to Yelapa with her two school age children after experiencing a more government-supported educational system in North Carolina.

There are other school-related projects planned or under way to which the parents will have to contribute money, such as a bridge spanning the river that children cross daily to get to the elementary school. According to parents, this is another project the government should have been responsible for, especially if government representatives had investigated Yelapa's school related needs thoroughly. In general, parents stated that those who do participate have created a strong organizational network for the purpose of raising funds not only for emergency projects such as the bathrooms, but also for annual events such as Christmas parties for the children.

Interestingly, parents who had children in elementary school during previous generations recall there being a strong sense of unity among parents when work or donations for a building project were needed, or when a school festival was planned. Ilena and Angelino, who have grown children living in California, compare the unity they experienced as parents of school children with the unity they currently encounter within religious organizing: In those times when we had our children in the school, everyone evenly, we would contribute. One would put on events to raise funds, and we all worked the same. Now it is the same for the May festivals, here our whole neighborhood [contributes] to raise funds for the church.

In contrast with the community's split in regards to the elementary school, the Yelapan community appears to have a tight organization supporting religious events and church-related projects. For example, there are several core families which have taken on responsibilities within the Catholic Church when the priest is absent. On the first day of every month church members collect and disperse food to needy families within the community. Similarly, many of the most religiously involved women spontaneously initiate a collection when they notice that a community member needs help with medical or other expenses. This group also leads weekly "oracion," an event where church members gather to pray and sing without the formality of mass. Women are also particularly active in organizing outings to major religious celebrations and events held in other communities within the diocese.

This type of religious community consciousness is something new in Yelapa during the past five to ten years, and people have stated that such a consciousness was created several years ago when the priest arranged for religious "teachers" to come from Guadalajara and hold biblically based workshops and classes regarding the importance of social acts. Jorge and Sandra, who have maintained strong involvement in the church over the years, claim that this consciousness helped erase the community's political and familial divisions represented within the church. Despite the level of religious involvement from community members, Sandra stated that at times it was still hard to organize as not everyone shared the same level of spiritual enlightenment or understanding.

Community improvement projects were virtually non-existent until the end of the 1990s. Finally in 1998, Paulo, the secundaria's (7-9th grades) teacher and director, spearheaded a movement to request basic services from the government. After holding public meetings and voting on the specific projects, the school director helped the community submit a request for the following public works: electricity, paved pathways, water, new elementary, preparatoria (high school), library, park, sports center, dock, and the completion of the clinic. It is Paulo's opinion that a 1990 INEGI census mistake favored the quick motivation for these public works projects, which the government began supporting in 2000. So far the electricity, paved pathways, new elementary, preparatoria, dock, and clinic have been completed, with the water piping in progress. Yelapa's community members contributed one third of the expenses for these projects.

As with its educational projects, reaching consensus regarding these requests for services was fraught. The majority of community members voted in favor of installing electricity, but there were a number of people against this either because of the amount of money they would have to contribute or because of the changes it represented to existing lifestyles. A mother and school employee who lives up-river in a rather tranquil setting stated that she was opposed to electricity because it would change Yelapa forever. Another set of parents who own a restaurant in town and have four children state that although they are grateful for the convenience factor of electricity, they are disappointed and concerned with the way that electricity has changed the lifestyles of the community's children. For example, they notice Yelapa's children spending more time watching television and playing video games. The result is less time spent on outdoor activities, the lack of which is a factor contributing towards an increase in overweight children.

Probably the most formalized voluntary organization in Yelapa is the fishing cooperative, which under its current structure has been in operation since 1991. Having been a fisherman and diver all his life, Julian chose to volunteer as president when recognizing that the Yelapan fishing community needed help to get fishing licenses. He is in charge of making sure that all of the cooperative's members have proper licensing and paperwork for their pangas (boats). The cooperative was also established as a way to generate funds through the collection of member dues that would, in turn, act as an account from which loans to fishermen for boats, motors, or fishing and diving equipment could be made. Through her research in the fishing and shrimp farming villages of El Cerro and Celaya in Sinaloa, Cruz-Torres (2004:233) similarly found that fishing cooperatives offer their members an advantage over non-organized fishermen in the form of loans for pangas and equipment.

There are only nine fishermen involved in this cooperative, with the majority of Yelapa's fishermen not participating. During the 1980s there was a cooperative with larger membership, but Julian claims it was too hard to organize everyone. The cooperative has a collection room at the town's small beach, where people can go to purchase fish, and they also fulfill orders from local food stores and restaurants. The primary types of fish caught are huachinango (red snapper), dorado (mahi mahi), and tuna. Several of Yelapa's fishermen are also professional divers, and the bay also offers lobster, octopus, clams and a variety of other shellfish.

The cooperative is also a locus for a growing consciousness regarding the environmental risks presented by certain types of fishing. For example, Julian is discouraged by the fact that the government prohibits the use of spear fishing, but allows the use of net fishing. In his experience spear fishing is more environmentally friendly, since a diver can avoid spearing immature fish, whereas net fishing catches many fish that have not yet reproduced, therefore diminishing future supplies. In addition, nets often get stuck between rocks and stay there for years, continuing to arbitrarily catch and kill fish. Julian is critical of government officials who prioritize unnecessary laws such as the prohibition of spear fishing while letting other hazards slip by. He would like to make net fishing illegal in the bay, but is skeptical that this will happen. He also notes that the government prohibits diving for lobster in the summer, but that they should really prohibit it in the winter when the lobsters have eggs. It appears that with the growth of the fishing cooperative and some political leadership this group will have a growing influence in local fishing industry, and might be able to make positive changes.

The Influence of Uneven Organizing on Collective Remittances

Yelapa's organizational patterns in relation to education, religion, development, and fishing represent a range of involvement, commitment, and success levels. Yet although this history has been contradictory at times, there is a slow general trend towards working together. This emerging cohesion has been most evident within the mobilization around development projects. There is also evidence of preserving some traditional communal activities. One such example which still takes place, and is representative of the unity which Angelino and Ilena so fondly remember from their children's school days, is the construction of colados (roofs). This is the only form of labor-sharing in which Yelapans regularly participate. Fletcher (1999) also found that raising the roof during the final stage of house building was the qualified exception to the lack of widespread labor-sharing and communal organizing in Napízaro, Michoacán. Yet both Yelapan and Napizareño migrants participate in the collective organization and funding of development projects through remittances. Because of this, it does not appear that strong communal organization in a sending village is a necessary precursor for the formation of collective remittances.

In fact, it is probable that the undefined nature of Yelapa's communal organizing actually aided the emergence of collective remittances. This is such due to the position that Yelapans find themselves in upon migration: they have more opportunity to contribute financially towards the development of their sending community, and at the same time their sending community looks increasingly towards migrants to fill an organizational and leadership role since there are few people in Yelapa assuming this position.

Yelapa's Underdevelopment and Lack of Government Assistance

Over the past four decades, Yelapa's economic and development struggles have existed in stark contrast to the prosperous tourist town of Puerto Vallarta only fifteen miles away. While Puerto Vallarta features sterile resorts and a significant representation of American businesses (such as McDonalds and Wal-Mart), Yelapa did not receive even basic services until the end of the 1990s. In 1999, the medical clinic was the first project to be completed. Electricity arrived in 2000, along with other requests included in the 1998 proposal. Development projects may have arrived all at once beginning in 2000 partially due to a study done by the municipal government, and published as "Plan de Desarrollo Municipal 2001-2020, Cabo Corrientes, Jalisco." The title's subheading reads like a slogan: "Cabo Corrientes, Con Opciones Para Todos" ("Cabo Corrientes, With Options For Everyone). Yet one of the study's findings—and that most obvious to Yelapans for some time—was that the communities within the municipality of Cabo Corrientes still represent very low levels of development and socio-economic status, while the municipality of Puerto Vallarta far exceeded them in terms of social welfare (Plan de Desarrollo Municipal, 87). The claim that the Yelapan community has "options for everyone" is especially ironic, given that so many members migrate. Based on informants' estimations of the migrant population in San Jose, and by calculating the percentage of Yelapans living in San Jose relative to Yelapa's population, I estimate that 13% (200-250 individuals) of Yelapa's total population are migrants.

Since Yelapan residents contributed fully a third of the funding for development projects, and as much of the development burden still rests squarely on the community of Yelapa, many residents complain of a lack of government support. For example, costs for small projects, like the elementary school bathrooms, are assumed largely by parent groups. Organized funding for school related projects exists only at the secundaria level. Because of Yelapa's development needs, Paulo would like to encourage migrants in San Jose to organize: "Again, it is important for them to organize, because they see things different than how we see them." Here he is referring to the fact that many people in Yelapa do not have an awareness of the benefits of investing time and money into development projects. Points of tension definitely exist within the planning processes for the bulk of projects, such as the request for electricity. Paulo entered the process assuming that all Yelapans would want "progress," when in reality there was a significant portion that had reservations and

doubts regarding voting for implementation of many projects. When voting on the request for electricity, for example, 300 out of 400 households voted in favor. Due to this lack of cohesion, Paulo feels that migrants might be able to influence villagers' priorities regarding development and organization, while simultaneously making projects more financially accessible.

What is interesting regarding the late development of Yelapa's community is that when development projects began at the end of the 1990s, migrants and their networks were actually better equipped to participate in funding projects. Since all of the development projects were only partially funded by the local government, the need for migrants' contributions quickly became apparent. This is especially true when considering that a twenty dollar donation goes a lot farther when converted to pesos than what someone in Yelapa would earn for the same amount of work. Migrants in San Jose earn twenty dollars in 2-4 hours of wage labor, while it would take at least one entire day's work to earn the same amount in Yelapa. Just as the gap in Yelapa's organizational leadership has encouraged migrants in San Jose to take a role in Yelapa's welfare by promoting collective remittances, Yelapa's extreme lack of infrastructure and basic services have heightened the attention paid by all Yelapans to developmental needs, which have been prioritized within collective remittances.

Chapter Two

Collective Remittances: Emerging Organization and Emerging Identities

Migration Networks in San Jose

As defined by Massey et al., in the broadest sense migration networks consist of "social ties that link sending communities to specific points of destination in receiving societies" (1987, 139). Specifically, these authors cite kinship, friendship, and paisanaje (common origin) as providing the most important elements of network relationships through which "people, goods, and information circulate to create a social continuum" (1987, 148) between the hometown and its "daughter communities." In the case of Yelapa, I would add the importance of compadrazgo in establishing networks between Yelapa and San Jose. Voluntary organizations are also extremely important for maintaining and strengthening migrant networks (Massey et. al. 1987), and Yelapans have utilized this practice by forming a basketball team and soccer club in San Jose.

The first migrants who moved to California, and many after, did so because of a connection with an American. Soon after, their dependence upon these connections shifted towards a mutual dependence with other migrants from Yelapa, coinciding with the beginning of a network. For example, in 1978 Alfredo came to Santa Cruz on an invitation from an American acquaintance, but also visited, and later that month moved up to live with, the handful of Yelapans who already lived in San Jose. There, he started building up the San Jose community by hosting Christmas, New Years, and Mother's Day parties at his house. Similarly, Elena was offered a live-in nanny job near Santa Rosa by an American family who lived seasonally in Yelapa. She took them up on their offer and, in 1989, worked with the family for three months. She then moved to San Jose with her boyfriend, Gerardo. One year later, through a connection with the same American family, her cousin Leandra moved up to replace her as the family's nanny. After working with them for ten months and later returning to Santa Rosa in 1993 to work with the family for two years, Leandra was able to move to San Jose with her new husband, where they successfully established housing and employment with the help of her family members and their networks. Hence, what started out as a dependence on Americans slowly shifted to an interdependence and reliance on fellow migrants for support.

As was the case for many Mexican migration networks, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) helped San Jose's migrant networks to stabilize and expand. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997), such developments typically occurred when undocumented migrants were granted legal status, as their new legality provided the encouragement and financial stability needed to further integrate family and community members who had not previously migrated. Juan received his residency through IRCA, and later become a citizen, in this way arranging documentation for his wife Arcelia and their oldest daughter. According to this couple, practically everyone from Yelapa who currently has legal documentation received it through IRCA either directly or through a family member. Most of the forty Yelapans living in San Jose when Arcelia joined them in 1988 had taken advantage of the 1986 amnesty. At this point Yelapans expanded their networks due to the migration of family members, especially women, and migrants were afforded a wider access to society through legal documentation. Migrant networks were also responsible for grouping people in the same apartment complexes, such as the apartment complex on East Gish Road which was home to a majority of Yelapan migrants throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The established migrant networks proved to be very important for Salvia and Jose when they moved up to San Jose rather unexpectedly in 1990, needing help in re-establishing their lives. Jose is particularly grateful for daily rides he received to and from his first job.

I worked washing dishes, all the way in Los Gatos, and I did not have a car...well the people from Yelapa, the friends, but you have to bother people by asking for rides. Juan was someone, and Arcelia, they went all the way there all the time, and well, helped.

The main function of migration networks in San Jose was originally, and still continues to be, for providing the down payment to pay a family member's coyote, and hosting an individual or family while they got established. Just as Leandra got support from her family members when she moved to San Jose, she now gives support to family members when they arrive from Yelapa. "This time

when my nephew Toni came, it took him seven months to get established, but he was not charged those months. Yes, in this way we also help [new migrants who are arriving]." Similar to Leandra's move from Santa Rosa, Manuel was encouraged to move to San Jose from Petaluma in 1993, since he knew the existing networks would offer more employment connections.

In a restaurant near Santa Cruz, the daughter of Yelapan migrants celebrates her first communion. But migration networks in San Jose do much more than merely soften the financial landing for new arrivals. They constitute a community of mutual support and collaboration, within which it is common for migrants to swap childcare, share transportation, and organize *cundinas*. They also play a key role in the formation of the Yelapan community as a transnational space. The connections that people maintain on a daily basis through working together, phone conversations, and social events keep news and gossip from Yelapa updated by the hour. It is common for members in San Jose to be informed about an event which took place in Yelapa even before it has had time to spread through the village. This is likely a result of the entire San Jose community receiving information through co-workers and cell phone calls faster than it spreads by foot, horse, and now even telephone communication through Yelapa. By existing as such efficient information relay systems, San Jose's networks facilitate an exchange of information regarding employment and housing opportunities, social services, transportation tips, childcare availabilities, school system navigation, legal residency opportunities, and border-crossing strategies.

Information about migrant life in San Jose is condensed through networks and spreads back to Yelapa, aiding in the decision making process for people planning to migrate north. Most importantly, Yelapans in San Jose are quick to mobilize networks when there is an emergency either in San Jose or in Yelapa. As it happens, it is usually the case that Yelapans contact their family in San Jose for financial or other assistance before they call on fellow villagers. As Yelapa's population has grown, the need for development and public services has become more pressing, and as a response to the low level of government support for such development, migrants in San Jose have incorporated the communal needs of the village into the information typically circling through migrant networks.

History and Scope of Yelapan Collective Transnational Projects

Within the literature on Mexican migration, several researchers have documented collective transnational remittances most often being used for public infrastructure and development projects in the home town (Alarcón 2002; Bada 2003; Fitzgerald 2000; Fletcher 1999; Goldring 2002a; Levitt 2001). Specifically, in order to do this an increasing number of migrant communities are forming hometown associations (HTAs), which are formal clubs that are sponsored at the state level of the Mexican government through matching funds programs (Alarcón 2002; Bada 2003; Goldring 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Zabin and Escala-Rabadan 1997). Although the collective remittance process which Yelapans are currently involved in is not as formalized as are many examples of HTAs from these scholars, the nature of Yelapa's most needed and tangible projects falls into this category. According to Alfredo, the self-described primary organizer in San Jose, the first collective remittances for a development project began in 1997 when his nephews in Puerto Vallarta contacted him regarding their idea to mobilize Yelapans towards beginning construction of a medical clinic. Alfredo got the idea to collect donations for the clinic from migrants in San Jose just as he had collected donations for a sickness or death in the past.

The connection was made with my nephews, Lalo and Hector. They were the ones in charge down there. The money would get sent to them, and they gave the money that was necessary for building the clinic...I think that has been the biggest project so far. Every fifteen days or every month when we would get together we donated money, and would send it to my nephew Lalo, who had all of the records of expenses. Because if we sent it directly to the people in town, well you know...

Since Alfredo emphasizes that it was important to give the money to someone trustworthy and committed to the project, it gives the impression that integrity is hard to come by within the Yelapan

community. This theme continues throughout Alfredo's interview. He stresses that he has become the main organizer not only due to the amount of seniority he has living in San Jose, but also because he is very honest: "If someone gives me five dollars for me to send, I send those five dollars. I record on paper everything that people give me." It also appears that he feels hesitant to propose involvement in new projects because he does not have one trusted contact person who will be directly involved in project implementation. Interestingly, by all accounts from Yelapans (including his own), the secundaria director Paulo is trustworthy, motivated, and highly interested in development projects. He is the individual who spearheaded the 1998 application for services, and currently takes responsibility for administering electrical services. Yet while Alfredo cannot name someone he trusts, and Paulo wishes San Jose migrants would become more involved, the two have not communicated with each other regarding promoting and coordinating development plans.

After the medical clinic was completed in 1999, migrants continued to contribute to development projects. For example, aside from contributing towards the construction of the clinic, migrants in San Jose also paid for the clinic's generator, since it opened before electricity arrived in Yelapa. When the project of paving the paths was underway, migrants collectively sent money for Yelapans who could not contribute their part of the pathway, and this money was used for the stone, while the government paid for the labor. Unlike with formal HTAs, government assistance was not provided through a matching funds program, but instead was sent directly to Yelapa from the municipio. Two previously mentioned factors may have been responsible for the fact that the local government supplied any support at all: the census mistake, and findings regarding the unequal development within Cabo Corrientes from the Plan de Desarrollo Municipal. Although it is unclear how much total money in remittances was sent to Yelapa for the above projects, according to Alfredo the clinic remittances entailed the most amount of time and money.

A second type of collective remittance emerged with the organizational efforts of Arcelia, who has been living in San Jose since 1988. For the past five years she has taken the initiative to send collective remittances as contributions toward Yelapa's annual church festival and Mother's Day festival, both in the month of May. Arcelia started this when she and her family returned to San Jose after living in Yelapa for a period of two years, when she noticed the community's need for more help from migrants. Her husband Juan hopes that these particular collective remittances will help ensure that traditional celebrations will be revived in Yelapa, such as Mother's Day, Easter, and Dia de la Marina celebrations. Migrants in San Jose tend to contribute readily to the annual church festival, and collectively send an average of 400 dollars a year. During Yelapa's May church festival, a one-day pilgrimage throughout the village is dedicated to absent migrants, or those who are "ausentes."

By far the most common type of collective remittances, and that which established the practice, go towards life and death situations. Examples include sending a deceased migrant home, paying for medical expenses for a community member in Yelapa, or sending a migrant back to Yelapa to attend a family member's funeral. While doing my fieldwork in Yelapa in January of 2005, two such cases transpired. One week, migrants in San Jose contributed approximately 1,000 dollars towards the expenses for sending back the young man who died in North Carolina. Assisted by a cousin, Alfredo drove around San Jose collecting these donations. The next week, migrants collectively contributed 1,300 dollars for a young woman who lives in San Jose to travel home for her father's funeral. In this case, the help was critical for her, since her father had been missing with another family from a neighboring village for over a month, and she had just traveled back to be with her mother and siblings the previous week with her own savings. Since her father's body was found only a few days after she returned to San Jose, Arcelia quickly started a collection by driving from house to house, obtaining the above amount within two or three hours. Although the details of the second death are unnecessary here, it has become apparent that both of the above cases involved individuals with questionable moral character. Yet consistent with the support given to morally respectable individuals, Yelapans have shown solidarity for these family emergencies.

There are many ideas and plans for projects germinating in the minds of Yelapan migrants and village residents. Some have been initiated, while some have yet to be proposed to the community.

Among the projects that people in Yelapa would like to see materialize are the library, park, sports unit, and the completion of the water piping. However, Yelapans in both localities recognize the need for very much more. Already in progress is a collection among community members in Yelapa for renovations to the church, including expanded pews and towers. It does not appear that migrants have yet collectively donated to this project. Other needs include an expansion of the graveyard and an extension of the paved pathways through areas of town that have not been incorporated. Migrants also have visions for the future, such as Alfonso, whose dream is to make a gymnasium/health center in Yelapa, where people of all ages can have access to exercise equipment and fitness and nutrition education. This idea stems from the fact that there is an increase in obesity and health problems in Yelapa. Migrants are also concerned for Yelapa's youth, and see a great need for services and activities offered to this sector of the community as an attempt to prevent drug abuse and delinquency.

Benefits and Challenges of Informal Collective Remittances

For Alfredo and Arcelia, taking part in the organization of collective remittances often means jumping up at a moment's notice to drive around San Jose in order to gather donations for an emergency. When gathering remittances for a long term development project, individuals in charge of collections invest a significant portion of their time in physically gathering donations at work and at social events. After remittances have been gathered, the most common and preferred method of transfer for Yelapans is by sending the cash with a Yelapan who is returning to the village. Alarcon (2002) similarly points to the practice of sending cash remittances through family and friends as the preferred and most widely used method by HTA members from Los Angeles who send remittances back to Zacatecas and Jalisco. Yelapans find benefits in this method such as trustworthiness, but acknowledge that the difficulties lie in infrequent opportunities to send money, and the risk involved for migrants carrying large amounts of cash. Both Alfredo and Arcelia feel that they are ready to formalize their organizational methods into a club, with appointed officials such as president, secretary, and treasurer. They propose a scenario where members could contribute twenty dollars a month, and thus establish a fund from which to plan allotments for development projects and emergency aid. However, there has yet to be a meeting held in San Jose to discuss the formation of such a club, and Arcelia has expressed doubt that people would be responsive to becoming formally involved.

What Alfredo and Arcelia are envisioning is characteristic of a structured type of organization that many Mexican transnational communities have achieved in the form of HTAs. According to Bada (2003), although Zacatecas has the oldest matching funds program, Jalisco is among several states that have recently signed similar agreements with HTAs. Although collective organizing among Yelapan migrants is far from achieving this level of institutionalization, this development offers an opportunity for such organizing. In combination with state sponsorship, the fact that Yelapans in San Jose are becoming more physically and economically settled will likely increase the chances for such sophisticated organizing to occur in the future. For instance, Fitzgerald (2000) found evidence that the most transnationally active Sahuayans from Michoacán are those who appear to be most settled in the United States, based on such markers as home and business ownership, permanent legal status, or U.S. naturalization. The fact that the amount of Yelapan migrants who currently hold any combination of these markers is about half or less supports the underside of Fitzgerald's correlation between high transnational activity and settlement markers. However, there concurrently exists evidence that challenges Fitzgerald's argument and points to a potential level of informal organization that Yelapans have not achieved. For example, the "Grupo Union" as featured in the film documentary *Sexta Sección* (2003) is composed of about fifteen Mexican migrants who live in Newburgh, New York, and send collective remittances to their hometown of Boqueron, Puebla for development projects. Although they do hold formal meetings with appointed administrative roles, all but one of the group's members have undocumented status, and none of them own a home or a business. Much like Yelapan migrants, migrants from Boqueron work as wage laborers with occupations such as taxi drivers, bakers, and snow scrapers. Yet they have completed fourteen major projects, with a recent collective remittance of 12,000 dollars for the completion of a water well.

Migrants like Manuel, who has lived in San Jose for thirteen years and contributes to collective remittances without participating more profoundly in their organization, think that more transnational organizing will take place in the future. Currently, he perceives challenges such as lack of initiative or stinginess. This prevalent ideology shows that possibly too few Yelapans agree regarding the importance of organizing, or too few are able to do so. Also, the informal nature of collective remittances has inhibited primary actors in San Jose and Yelapa from communicating about each other's activities and entering into collaboration.

The benefits of keeping the organization of collective remittances at an informal level have much to do with the ability to strengthen San Jose's migration networks through the physical act of traveling from home to home to collect donations. This gives the person who is collecting remittances and the family whom they are visiting an opportunity to connect and commiserate regarding the project or emergency. In a way, this also provides a quick (and sometimes unexpected) break from the grueling routine of wage labor which often isolates Yelapans from fellow migrants. In addition, keeping donations at this informal level allows migrants to participate when they choose to, while allowing them to vary the amount of their contributions depending on their life circumstances.

Identity Construction through Collective Remittances

Several researchers investigating transnationalism have highlighted diverse issues of identity formation and construction within this context (Fitzgerald 2000; Fletcher 1999; Goldring 2001; Grimes 1998; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Levitt 2001; Rouse 1996). For example, Fitzgerald (2000) claims that political identity and membership need not be tied to state territory, and proposes a model of "extra-territorial" citizenship, wherein migrants claim legal and moral citizenship in their sending communities while being absent; while Goldring (2001) found that the participation of women within the Zacatecas Federation of Hometown Associations in Los Angeles excluded them from positions of power, and re-enforced and institutionalized traditional feminine roles and identity construction. While identity tends to play itself out differently depending on the context, one broad recurrent thread running through most studies of transnational social formations is the acknowledgment that identity can no longer be fixed or solely constructed in relation to one locality, yet at the same time cannot exist by entirely negating such influences. Exemplifying this, and using the framework of Michael Shapiro, Guarnizo and Smith (1998:21) represent transnational identity politics as a way to characterize personal identity as neither static nor free-floating:

In this way various "social spaces" like trans-local migrant networks, transnational working arrangements, and globalized neo-liberal ideology, can be viewed as affecting the formation of character, identity, and acting subjects at the same time that identity can be seen as fluctuating and contingent, as the contexts through which people move in time-space change and are appropriated and/or resisted by acting subjects.

This representation of identity construction applies to the malleability, yet collective solidity of migrants' identities within the Yelapan transnational community. The emergence of collective remittances has affected the Yelapan community in more ways than just through development projects, traditional religious and social events, and emergency aid. While Fletcher found that "the building of houses [in Napízaro, Michoacán] is an important part of the construction of both identity and locality for Napizareño migrants" (1999, 21), Yelapan migrants are similarly redefining their identity through participating in the practice of collective remittances. Part of a migrant's identity which is constructed as part of donating remittances is the ability to secure and maintain a social place for themselves within the Yelapan community while they reside in San Jose. Although Alfredo does not plan to return to Yelapa to live until he is able to retire, he does know that he will always be invested in Yelapa's future whether he ever lives there or not. Promoting collective remittances is a practical way for him to show that he is "someone," who has an important role in the development and well being of the Yelapan community, while displaying his loyalty to his hometown. Levitt (2001:11) notes that many migrants continue to use their sending community as the reference

group against which they measure their status: One of the reasons so many Mexicans, Dominicans, and Central Americans contribute to development projects or help organize and participate in beauty pageants and patron-saint celebrations in their communities of origin is to affirm their continued membership in these transnational groups and to demonstrate their enhanced position within them.

This demonstration of status is important for many migrants, who like Alfredo, do not have access to many positions of status within their lives in San Jose. Their lack of access to status often has to do with language barriers, undocumented status, and racism. As Levitt (2001:19) also found, Yelapans remain active within their community of origin because they are prevented from achieving full social membership in the United States.

The process of collecting remittances also highlights conflicts in identity or perceived identity among migrants. For example, a Yelapan migrant who lives in Santa Cruz but is clearly an active member within San Jose's community through kinship and *compadrazgo*, has felt offended and ignored various times when a remittance collector from San Jose has failed to contact him for a donation: "They don't even pay attention to me anymore." Not only does this indicate that part of this migrant's identity involves the desire and ability to contribute, as a way of maintaining connection to his community of origin, but also that remittance organizers belong to an emerging upper social strata which has some control over who participates in this identity-making process.

There are some migrants, such as Leandra, who although they do not identify with having a strong social or organizational nature, still consistently contribute money for projects, and especially for emergencies, because "one never knows what tomorrow may bring." This refrain was echoed time and time again through various phrases such as "one never knows when it will be your turn," and "some day one might be in that situation" by migrants in San Jose who described their commitment towards collective remittances as a way to develop their home town, and most importantly as a way to help fellow Yelapans in crisis. This commitment and loyalty is part of what characterizes the strong emergence of collective remittances, and what provides the basis for migrants to organize with one another through this practice, creating also a collective identity.

Migration networks, informal collective remittances, and identity negotiations are all inextricably linked together within the Yelapan transnational community. Strong migration networks were an important precursor to the organization of collective remittances, and they remain the medium through which migrant donations are collected. In turn, collective remittances provide an opportunity for migrants to maintain a level of social status with their sending village. In addition, migrant identity is challenged and negotiated in several ways. Through this practice Yelapan migrants fulfill expectations other Yelapans put upon them to improve the village, although this burden of responsibility is sometimes hard to negotiate with the economically demanding nature of migrants' lives in San Jose. Finally, by organizing and participating in collective remittances, migrants create a structure of social stratification among them, and expand their identity past the limits of wage-laborer to include markers influenced by transnational organizing.

Conclusion

Many of my observations regarding the Yelapan community prior to conducting the research for this study have held true, although at times they have required adaptations. For instance, it has been evident for more than two decades that the village of Yelapa deals with aspects of life that transcend its physical boundaries. This was the case even before migration became a pattern in the late seventies, since the gringo population had already been established and has been a source of Americanization and influence ever since. Yet today, gringos are not the primary source of transnational influence in Yelapa. Instead, it is the migrant family members of those who have stayed behind who bring home the latest trends in U.S. culture. As other studies of transnational

communities have shown (Fletcher 1999; Grimes 1998, Levitt 2001), consumerism plays a large role in transmitting this culture. Yelapan migrants bring home tastes of their California lives through brand name clothes purchased from outlet stores at the Great Mall in Milpitas; through highlighted hairstyles and closed-toe footwear; and through the provision of a slew of appliances ranging from toasters to washing machines.

Other observations have been thoroughly challenged. It appeared that Yelapans in the village were a close, mutually supportive community, yet challenged when it came to organizing on behalf of public projects. While a strong unifying element does exist in the village (as demonstrated by the example of the *velorio*), numerous divisions underlie and confound the collective intentions within this communal culture. Examples of divisions are the governmental contradictions seen in corruption and incompetence, the unequal desire among villagers for implementation of development projects, and conflicting attitudes regarding financial contributions towards the village's improvements. Some go so far as to claim that this divisiveness inhibits consistently productive organizing. Nevertheless, people in Yelapa have been more successful than I originally imagined at securing development projects and basic services. The truth remains that their success in requesting services from the government and their implementation at the end of the 1990's was dependent on several factors, including the existence of a highly motivated individual who spearheaded projects in Yelapa, the fact that Yelapa was long overdue for developmental assistance and this was known to the local government, and the fact that migrants in San Jose provided financial support. This last factor raises questions about the role of migrants. First and foremost, are they a potential political force for further economic development in Yelapa? My research suggests that they may very well be.

A separate question was why migrants in San Jose had not become more formally organized for the benefit of their sending village into a HTA or a structured informal group such as "Grupo Union" in Newburgh, New York. It was apparent that San Jose Yelapans had successfully established supportive migrant networks, within which they had little difficulty organizing and planning for social events and cultural celebrations. My research shows that migrants in San Jose are committed to collectively contributing for the benefit of Yelapa, but so far have not yet been ready to do so within a formalized structure. As Fletcher (1999) found with the similar organizational success of Napizareño migrants from Michoacán, Yelapan migrants successfully contribute towards development projects through collective remittances despite their inconsistent history of communal labor and organization in the sending village. Although two main organizers in San Jose vocalized their wishes for the creation of a club that can execute the collection and planning of collective remittances, they seem to be on the fence regarding whether the San Jose Yelapan community will support such an endeavor. It will also take stronger collaboration and communication between organizers in San Jose and those in Yelapa to solidify the mechanisms for implementing a seamless process of binational teamwork for the completion of projects funded by collective remittances.

Since the completion of my research, evidence has been presented which supports the probability that Yelapans between localities will increase their collaboration and level of organization. In May of 2005, Yelapa residents who have been involved in organizing the annual religious festivals formed a committee to oversee the planning and implementation of the church's renovations and improvements. They have received support from the current priest, whose intentions are to act as an advocate within the diocese for Yelapa's church development project. His support is important, since according to Arcelia, who collects remittances in San Jose for Yelapa's religious festivals, a certain amount of the combined Yelapan money has been leaving Yelapa as a contribution to the diocese. Interestingly, Arcelia emphasizes that during her recent annual visit to the village, the newly formed committee in Yelapa was pressuring her to better organize migrants in San Jose so that their contributions and participation might be more effective.

Despite the current informal level of collective organizing in San Jose, the practice of collecting and sending remittances for Yelapa's development projects, cultural and religious festivals, and family emergencies plays an enormous role in the way that migrants unite among themselves in San Jose, negotiate their relationships to and membership in their sending community, redefine and construct their identity, and embed themselves within the larger Yelapan transnational community. Because of

this, and exemplifying the theories of transnational identities in developed in Guarnizo and Smith (1998), the identities of Yelapans living in separate localities cannot be separated from one another. Instead they are constantly reflecting values, cultural norms, and priorities upon one another. Aside from the ways that collective remittances provide avenues for migrant identity and community membership, it cannot be forgotten that the primary benefit of collective remittances goes to the village of Yelapa, which would currently have less of its basic needs met without migrant contributions. In this way, collective remittances must be seen as a form of investment or social insurance for a community that has little governmental support, and limited economic opportunities. The social insurance aspect of collective remittances also facilitates the existence of dual residential options for migrants. While investing in Yelapa, migrants keep open the possibility of return by increasing the attractiveness of a future life in their sending village as well as by maintaining social status within Yelapa. Whether migrants actually choose to return permanently in large numbers or not remains to be seen.

Because there exists a growing amount of academic research focused on Mexican migration within transnational contexts, this study is useful both in the broad sense that it contributes to this literature, and in the way that it specifically offers a perspective which has not been explored much: that of transnational hometown and community development in formation. It is precisely this gestational nature of Yelapan transnational organizing which commands attention within my research, as it illuminates a process of becoming, as opposed to a state of being. Furthermore, unexplored preliminary findings of this study point to future research. For example, the sudden increase in technology used in Yelapa is beginning to have visible effects on social relationships, such as the shift occurring from women communally hand washing laundry in the river to machine washing it individually in their homes. Fletcher (1999) similarly found such changes in social space occurring with the incorporation of western style housing in Napízaro, Michoacán. Technology has additionally presented itself in the sudden surge in modes of communication available to Yelapans. Whereas prior to the arrival of electricity the entire town shared one telephone, today the majority of Yelapan households have their own, and the use of fax and email is steadily becoming incorporated into the village's business life. Results include a general increase in transnational communication, more efficient options for advertising and selling services to tourists, and the erosion of the complete isolation previously felt in Yelapa.

My research indicates that Yelapans are currently at a crossroads between the emergence of collective remittances and potential formal organizing. This positionality allows them to hang on to an identity free from the constraints of institutional frameworks, within which some of the literature referencing HTAs (Goldring 2001, 2002b; Zabin and Escala-Rabadan 1997) suggests that identity can be influenced and sometimes become fixed. Above all, this study speaks to a process in formation, with migrants solidifying transnational identities and their place within the Yelapan community vis-à-vis collective remittances.

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