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**The Mexican Government and Organised Mexican  
Immigrants in the United States: A Historical Analysis  
of Political Transnationalism, 1848-2005**

**By Gustavo Cano and Alexandra Delano**

Mexico-North Research Network, Washington D.C.  
and Center for Comparative Immigration Studies,  
University of California, San Diego  
&  
St Antony's College  
Oxford University

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Gustavo Cano  
Mexico-North Research Network, Washington D.C.  
and Center for Comparative Immigration Studies,  
University of California, San Diego  
([gc91@columbia.edu](mailto:gc91@columbia.edu))

and

Alexandra Delano  
St Antony's College  
Oxford University  
([alexandra.delano@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.delano@sant.ox.ac.uk))

# **The Mexican Government and Organised Mexican Immigrants in The United States: A Historical Analysis of Political Transnationalism, 1848-2005**

## **Abstract**

This paper addresses the relationship between the Mexican government and the organised Mexican immigrant community in the US from a historical perspective and within a framework of transnational politics. We argue that transnational relations between the Mexican government and Mexican immigrants in the US are not new; however, the characteristics of these connections have varied across time depending on the evolution and characteristics of migrant organizations, political and economic circumstances in Mexico and foreign policy considerations involving US-Mexico relations. The historical links between the government and the Mexican population abroad have influenced the development of current organisations of Mexican immigrants in the US as well as the recent creation and development of the Mexican government's institutions to manage this relationship.

In recent years, we identify a change in Mexico's traditional approach to migration issues in the bilateral agenda, as well as a shift in the relationship between the Mexican immigrant communities and the government. The process of institutionalisation of this new relation began with the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME or *Comunidades*) in 1990, and was strongly consolidated in 2003 with the creation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME). We argue that the IME is the first transnational institution dealing with these issues and we explore some of the challenges it faces in order to achieve its objectives and exert a positive influence for Mexican migrants in the US.

In the first part of this paper we discuss the value of using a historical perspective for the study of transnational politics. The second part offers a historical account of the development of transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organised Mexican immigrant community from 1848 to 2005. In the third part we analyse the challenges faced by the IME as a transnational institution.

## **The Mexican Government and Organised Mexican Immigrants in The United States: A Historical Analysis of Political Transnationalism (1848-2005)<sup>i</sup>**

*'From 1848 forward, the Mexican government has been concerned with how to respond to the Mexico de Afuera. In these responses the Mexican government may not have been consistent, nor has its relationship with Mexican expatriates always been felicitous, but the exchange across the Mexico-United States border has nevertheless endured for more than a hundred years.'*

Carlos Zazueta, 'Mexican Political Actors in the United States and Mexico: Historical and political Contexts of a Dialogue Renewed', 1983: 443.

### **Introduction**

This paper addresses the relationship between the Mexican federal government and the organised Mexican immigrant community in the US from a historical perspective and within a framework of transnational politics. In this analysis we examine the recognition of Mexican immigrant leadership and organisations by the Mexican government as actors with an agenda of their own through different periods of time, as well as the role of the Mexican government agencies (mainly the consular network and the outreach programs created by the federal government) in the formation, consolidation, and proliferation of community organisations. We argue that transnational relations between the Mexican government and Mexican immigrants in the US are not new; however, these relations vary across time depending on the evolution and characteristics of migrant organizations, political and economic circumstances in Mexico and foreign policy considerations involving US-Mexico relations. In recent years, we identify a change in Mexico's traditional approach to migration issues in the bilateral agenda, as well as a shift in the relationship between the Mexican immigrant communities and the government. The process of institutionalisation of this new relation began with the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME or *Comunidades*) in 1990, and was strongly consolidated in 2003 with the creation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME). Indeed, we argue that the IME is the first Mexican governmental transnational institution in the history of relations between the Mexican

state and the Mexican community in the US. As such, we explore some of the challenges it faces in order to achieve its objectives and exert a positive influence for the Mexican population in the US.

In the first part of the article we discuss the value of studying transnational politics from a historical perspective and we define the concepts used in this work. The second part offers a historical account of the development of the transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organised Mexican immigrant community in the last 156 years. In the third part, we discuss the challenges faced by the IME as a transnational institution.

### **Transnational Politics From A Historical Perspective**

Our research supports Foner's idea that 'transnationalism has been with us for a long time, and a comparison with the past allows us to assess just what is new about the patterns and processes involved in transnational ties today' (Foner, 1997: 371). However, research on the historical development of transnational political processes has not been widely developed among scholars of the discipline, and what has been written on this topic is widely dispersed within the field. Except for Sherman's work on the history of the policies of the Mexican state for the incorporation of Mexican migrants (Sherman, 1999) there are practically no studies addressing the relationship between the home state and its migrant population from a transnational, historical perspective.<sup>ii</sup>

In this analysis we address the historical role that the home state plays in the organisational potential of its migrant population in American soil. Migration flows from Mexico to the US have existed since 1848 and have become increasingly important for both countries. This long-term historical context makes the Mexican case valuable in terms of analysing the evolution of

transnational relations between the state and its migrant population and examining contemporary developments from a broader perspective.

For the purposes of this paper, the term organised Mexican immigrants refers to persons who were born in Mexico and live in the US, temporarily or permanently, regardless of their migratory status, and participate in formally organised groups with specific social and/or political objectives. This definition explicitly excludes second and third generation immigrants (i.e. Mexican Americans) taking into account the continuing debate about whether these groups' activities can be considered transnational (Glick-Schiller, 1999). However, as a result of our findings, in the following sections we do engage in the discussion of the transnational influence of Mexican Americans and its implications for relations between the organised immigrant community and the Mexican government.

Regarding the definition of transnationalism, we assume that the essence of the process of transnationalism can be abstractly defined as 'being here and there' (Suárez-Orozco and Paez, 2002: 7). In Spanish the term acquires a more complete meaning from a perspective that emphasizes the process of 'being': '*ser y estar, aquí y allá*'. This definition encompasses the broader sense of 'being': to be (the essence of being as a human being) here and there, and to be (physically being) here and there. From a perspective of political transnationalism, we consider that it is through political organisation and mobilisation that the Mexican immigrant population can 'be here and there' (Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Cano 2004b).<sup>iii</sup>

The role of the state in the process of transnationalisation of its migrant community in a host society and polity is understood here as the involvement of the Mexican government in the formation, consolidation and proliferation of Mexican organisations in American soil. From the home state standpoint, when dealing with these issues the Mexican government agencies and the consulates have to consider in a simultaneous way: (1) the official directives of the Mexican

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the context of a bilateral relationship with the US; (2) the local and state considerations of the polity towards the Mexican immigrant population; and (3) the agenda of the most important organisations that deal with Mexican immigrant issues. In order to be considered transnational, actions performed by Mexican immigrant organisations need to take into account elements from both sides of the border in a simultaneous manner. This decision-making process is better reflected whenever such organisations have to make decisions under the consideration of a double agenda, one for local politics, and one for home politics.<sup>iv</sup> In the next section we describe how this type of transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organised Mexican migrant community have developed historically.

### **1848-2005: A History of Transnational Relations**

In order to examine the transnational components of the relationship between the home state and its population abroad, in this section we identify the main issues around which the Mexican immigrant community in the US has been organised, the types of organisations formed, their recognition by the Mexican government, the inclusion of their demands in the government's agenda, and the government's influence in the formation, consolidation or proliferation of these organisations. The periodisation is based on the general categories for the study of the history of Mexico-US migration, as well as what we consider the most significant changes in the relation between the Mexican government and the organised community.

#### ***1848-1909***

With the Treaties of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) and La Mesilla (1853) Mexico lost almost half of its territory to the US and about 1% of its population (González, 1999). Mexicans who lived in the territory that now belonged to the US were given the option of moving south to Mexico or

keeping their property and becoming American citizens. Approximately 75,000 out of these 100,000 Mexicans decided to remain in what became the American Southwest. Although this population did not migrate to the US, it can be considered the first generation of Mexican immigrants in the US as a consequence of the new territorial division.

The first political problems related to Mexicans in the US arrived in the immediate years after the new border was established. Although the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty protected the Mexican population as US citizens, they were discriminated, their property was violated and they faced obstacles to enjoy their political and economic rights. As Gutiérrez explains, these hardships played an important role by laying the foundation for the eventual emergence of a new sense of solidarity, community and common purpose among Mexicans living in the US, which provided the basis for their struggle against political and socio-economic subordination in American society (Gutiérrez, 1995).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mexicans in the US organised themselves through different kinds of associations in order to defend their rights, as well as enhance their cultural values. The *mutualistas* (mutual-aid organisations) were one of the first efforts by the community to organise social welfare associations for Mexican workers. Generally, *mutualistas* were named after important individuals or events in Mexican history. Some of them restricted membership to Mexican citizens, while others were also open to people of Mexican origin and even non-Mexicans.

The *mutualistas* mainly provided funeral and illness benefits, collective support, group defence against exclusion from political participation or abuse at the workplace, as well as recreational services. In response to union-exclusion experienced by Mexicans, the *mutualista* model usually proved more successful in organizing workers and providing benefits for them (Gómez-Quiñones, 1994). Although most *mutualistas* did not like to participate in political



activity, due to fear of racism and persecution, when their groups faced pressures they sought support from the consulates to take their complaints to the American authorities. The consulates also contributed to the organisation of their cultural events.

Through the nineteenth century, *mutualistas* remained among the most numerous community-membership organisations, the largest of which was the *Alianza Hispano-Americana*, founded in 1894. The *mutualistas* also lay the foundations for labour unions, community organisations such as the *Clubes de Oriundos* (Hometown Associations), and civil and human rights organisations that proliferated through the twentieth century (Gutiérrez, 1999).

In the years after 1848, Mexicans living in the US were also concerned about political instability and conflict in Mexico. In order to support the Mexican Republic they created the *Juntas* or *Sociedades Patrióticas* (Patriotic Councils) -also called *Juárez Clubs*, which were active in raising funds, recruiting volunteers and purchasing weapons for the Mexican army, especially during the French intervention of 1862-1867. According to Gómez-Quiñones, the members of the *Juntas Patrióticas* supported Republican candidates in the US elections because they were generally more favourable to the Juárez government (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983). The *Juntas Patrióticas* were also dedicated to cultural activities; they sponsored festivities such as *Cinco de Mayo* parades, beauty contests, and debates about social and political issues relevant to the community.<sup>v</sup> In order to promote these events they often worked closely with the Mexican consulates.

Attention to immigration issues during this period was not at the center of the Mexican government's political agenda. Although there was a significant increase in emigration from the 1890s onwards due to the land reforms in Mexico affecting many peasants, as well as the modernisation in communications and the building of a new railway that made it easier to get to the North of the country, Porfirio Díaz's government considered these flows as a natural

phenomenon that the government should not prevent or control (Cardoso, 1979). The US also saw Mexican migration as beneficial given the economic expansion and labour shortages in the American Southwest at the beginning of the 1900s. Although new restrictive immigration laws were being implemented in the US, particularly against Asian migrants, American employers justified the recruitment of Mexican workers based on arguments such as the idea that Mexicans were a race that was culturally and physiologically apt for the type of labour required (Gutiérrez, 1999; Bustamante, 1983).

In Mexico, opposition groups and newspapers used emigration as evidence to attack Díaz's 'failed' policies and the unequal distribution of benefits in the country. They also criticised the lack of protection for Mexican workers in the US. As the number of migrants increased, the Mexican consulates informed Mexico City of the rising number of complaints received by their offices related to unemployed immigrants, harsh labour conditions, and segregation in schools (Gómez-Quiñones, 1976). The 1907 recession in the US brought migration issues to the fore as large-scale forced repatriations to Mexico increased. However, the Mexican government's response was slow and ineffective. Díaz instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to study the causes of emigration and to organise a survey to determine the number of Mexicans in the US, but the lack of resources and the outbreak of the Revolution undermined these efforts. The Díaz government's only contribution was to publish information in the local newspapers about the problems Mexicans faced in the US in an attempt to dissuade them from leaving the country.

Despite the lack of a formal government policy to address the problems related to migratory flows, the Mexican consulates were present and active in the US during this time. They offered protection for the Mexican community to prevent exploitation, help with repatriations, present claims defending their civil and property rights in the US, and they also contributed to the socio-cultural activity of the community. However, their commitment to the defence of Mexicans

and the success of their efforts were uneven. As in later years, the consulates' functions were mostly determined by the support from the Mexican government, the limited number of representations, their personnel and resources, as well as the consul's personality (González, 1999). The unsatisfactory response from the consulates and the Mexican government to the Mexican communities' problems in many cases led to resentment, which was a favourable environment for the opposition groups from Mexico to grow in the first years of the twentieth century. Such was the case of the groups led by the Flores Magón brothers and the *Partido Liberal Mexicano* and, later on, of exiled revolutionary leaders and propagandists. In response to the government's orders, the consulates' activity was also directed towards suppressing these groups (Gómez-Quiñones, 1976; 1983).

Throughout this period, the main issues around which the Mexican community was organised were their defence against property violations, discrimination and abuse of their civil and human rights, and also to enhance Mexican cultural values and ethnic solidarity, particularly through the self-help *mutualistas*. In the case of the *Juntas Patrióticas*, another objective was to collaborate in support of the Mexican Republic and the defence of the country against foreign intervention. The government's attention to migration issues during this period was not a high priority, except when public opinion and opposition groups in Mexico began expressing their concern with emigration and the problems Mexicans experienced in the US at the end of the nineteenth century. The government's response to the Mexican population abroad was channelled through consulates, although the scope of their activity highly depended on the consul's personality. The consulates generally had a strong relation with the *mutualistas* and *Juntas Patrióticas* and collaborated with them to solve the community's problems. These organisations were formed without the government's support, but their relation with the consulates contributed to their consolidation and proliferation. The type of issues included in the community-based

organisations' agenda (which were related to their problems in the US, their concerns about the political situation in Mexico and their promotion of Mexican culture and values) as well as their recognition and collaboration with the consulates provide the first transnational signs in the relationship between the Mexican government and its population abroad.

### ***1910-1939***

The 1910 Revolution accelerated the exodus of Mexicans to the US. Whole families, *campesinos* and political refugees fled to the US due to the hardships and violence they experienced in Mexico. The pressures for emigration were coupled by an increase in the demand for workers in the US during the First World War. The flow of new migrants, together with the fact that many of these families decided not to return to Mexico after the Revolution, resulted in a significant demographic growth of the Mexican population living in the US. It is estimated that almost 1 million Mexicans entered the country between 1900 and 1930, joining approximately 500,000 who were already there (Gutiérrez, 1999).

In Mexico, emerging labour unions, dominated by the *CROM (Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana)*, as well as intellectuals, expressed their concern about emigration and demanded that Mexican authorities do something to stop discrimination and exploitation against the Mexican population in the US. However, as Corwin explains, the early revolutionary regimes saw migration as a safety valve for revolutionary unrest and political enemies; 'Mexico had little to offer...except unfulfilled revolutionary promises' (Corwin, 1978).<sup>vi</sup> According to González, 'conceivably, by allowing emigration to take place, Mexico escaped a fundamental social transformation...arguably, emigration provided Mexico's *way out*' (González, 1999: 28-29).

After the Revolution, when President Venustiano Carranza came to power in 1917, he proposed a national strategy for migration based on three points: dissuasion, contract protection,

and ‘Mexicanisation’ of emigrants. Mexico would not prohibit emigration, as some nationalist groups and employers demanded, but consular protection would be strengthened (although under the specific foreign policy principle of non-intervention in US domestic affairs) (Corwin, 1978).<sup>vii</sup> The results of this plan were meagre. Most of the effort did not go beyond the nationalist rhetoric and the symbolic calls for the migrants to come back and contribute to the development of the country (González, 1999). The Mexican government’s position was ambivalent; for example, it accepted the US Department of Labour’s campaign to bring Mexican workers to the US from 1917-21 but, at the same time, protested against the ill treatment of Mexican workers in the US (Kiser and Kiser, 1979).

The Mexican public reacted strongly against news that its countrymen were victims of racism, violence and job abuses in the US. At the same time, some groups argued that emigration was a symptom of what was wrong with the country and the failure of the revolutionary governments to solve underlying problems. These perceptions had political salience throughout this period and, in many cases, the Mexican government paid attention to the issues related to the Mexicans abroad to prevent domestic criticism (Zazueta, 1983). However, it must be emphasized that Mexican public opinion was ambivalent about the issue and its impact on government policy is not self-evident: some groups lamented the hardships suffered by migrants at home and abroad; others saw emigrants (who were negatively referred to as ‘*pochos*’) as traitors to the nationalist cause and as opportunists who left the nation when they were most needed (Cardoso, 1979).

Despite the Mexican government’s campaigns to advise immigrants on the problems and dangers they would encounter in the US, the nationalist rhetoric used to bring back the ‘*hijos de la patria*’, and the administrative controls to prevent farm workers from leaving, emigration did not stop. Financial constraints, lack of bureaucratic machinery, absence of cooperation with US authorities and unavailability of job opportunities in Mexico, limited these efforts (González,

1999). Thus, the government's actions concentrated on protecting Mexicans working and living in the US. Although this policy continued to be restricted because of lack of funds and personnel, fear and distrust from migrants who did not report cases, as well as the importance given to the principle of non-intervention, consuls were successful in protecting Mexican nationals in employer and civil disputes and problems with government agencies (Cardoso, 1979; 1982). Corwin points out as a 'remarkable dimension of consular activities' the defence of Mexicans from discrimination and segregation in schooling, housing and social services, and from military drafts during WWI and WWII, as well as arbitrary arrest, incarceration or deportation (Corwin, 1978: 188).

One of the major influences of the consulates was their sponsoring of a wide variety of community organisations, from *mutualistas* to political groups such as the *Clubes Liberales* and the *Juntas Constitucionalistas*. During the 1920s and 1930s, the consuls mostly encouraged the formation and development of the *Comisiones Honoríficas* (Honorary Committees or Consulates) and the *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul* (Blue Cross Brigades), which were community-based groups dedicated to cultural and civil-rights issues (Corwin, 1978; Cardoso, 1982). Through these associations, the consuls helped develop community leadership and unions, they organised repatriations, and promoted '*Mexicanidad*' projects to strengthen ties between Mexicans abroad and their cultural roots (González, 1999). Some consuls occasionally organised fundraisers when resources were not available for the community's projects (i.e. to provide food, shelter or return transportation for unemployed and indigent Mexicans); this brought them closer to the local population and made the consul an important figure (Zazueta, 1983).

As Balderrama explains, although the consuls' role was sometimes challenged, they became the figures around which most members of the Mexican community (Mexicans and Mexican Americans) rallied (Balderrama, 1982). The reaction of the community was ambivalent;

some resented the consul's intervention in their affairs, others greatly appreciated that the consulate took an interest in their welfare. According to González, the objective underlying the Mexican government's actions since the Revolution was to incorporate the '*México de Afuera*' into a political ideology and social relations consonant with the interests of the ruling upper classes in Mexico. In the author's view, one of the goals was to develop emigrant groups as a possible political lever to influence American policy toward revolutionary reforms in Mexico, but the long-term goal had more to do with Mexican domestic politics in the post-revolutionary period (González, 1999).<sup>viii</sup> In order to achieve these objectives the consulates considered it necessary to lead and control community-based organisations. Thus, during the 1920s and 1930s, more than before, the Mexican government tolerated and encouraged more social and organisational proactive efforts (González, 1999). However, the actions of each consulate depended on the consul's own perception of duty and personal political ideology (Balderrama, 1982).

As a reaction to repatriations during the 1921-22 economic crisis in the US, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs also created a special 'protection' division, which would be in charge of issues related to Mexicans in the US, particularly with repatriations. As the problems regarding protection of migrants and deportations increased, especially during the repatriations of 1929 due to the Great Depression,<sup>ix</sup> the size of the consular corps and the scope of its activities expanded through the 1920s and 1930s. The popularity of Mexican opposition parties and leaders (i.e. the *Partido Laborista* and José Vasconcelos) and extremist groups (i.e. the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*) among the Mexican communities in the US also increased the government's concern with issues related to the impact of the Mexican community in domestic affairs (Gómez-Quñones, 1983; 1994). However, the Mexican government was still struggling with economic underdevelopment and a regressive agrarian structure and therefore could not meet the

expectations of the repatriates, who soon returned to the US (Corwin, 1978). In Cardoso's view, 'it had become obvious that the root causes of emigration lay in structural defects within the Mexican economy and were not merely temporary, revolution-induced phenomena' (Cardoso, 1982: 96).

Although all the Mexican administrations of this period were concerned with these problems, President Álvaro Obregón was the most active in terms of seeking solutions to migration pressures and protection of Mexicans in the US. He sought to make use of the mutual benefit and self-help societies, which had grown rapidly in number, to aid Mexicans in the US. Obregón ordered all consuls to encourage the development of similar organisations in their districts in order to establish the primacy of the Mexican government within the political activities of the Mexican communities in the US. The most important projects included collaboration with the *Comisiones Honoríficas* and *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul*. The government's objective was to retain national contact and allegiance with the Mexicans in the US by extending consular protection into dispersed areas. These organisations acted as honorary consulates that offered protection to Mexicans on behalf of the Mexican government. The *Comisiones* and the *Brigadas* supported self-help and charity organisations, unionisation efforts, Mexican education and patriotic celebrations: 'Similar in nature to the pro-Díaz *mutualistas* fostered by regional bosses during the *Porfiriato*, the various associations served as the grassroots defenders of the Mexican state' (González, 1999: 38). By 1930, Mexico had over 50 consular agencies in the US, including *abogados consultores* (consulting lawyers) and *Comisiones Honoríficas* (Gómez-Quñones, 1983). However, the lack of resources, the efforts of the Catholic clergy to disrupt these organisations, the high mobility of members, political factionalism, among other factors, limited their influence (González, 1999; Cardoso, 1982; García, 1996).



Trade unions, including Mexicans and Mexican American workers, were also organised to combat inferior wages and labour conditions. The Los Angeles based *Confederación de Sociedades Mexicanas (CSM)*, formed in 1927, and the labour union *Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM)*<sup>x</sup>, created in 1928, maintained close ties to the consulate and to the *CROM* in Mexico (Gómez-Quñones, 1994). Their most important activities concentrated on the Imperial Valley strikes from 1928 through 1934, where they collaborated actively with the consulates (González, 1994; 1999).

Other community-based organisations such as *La Sociedad Progresista Mexicana y Recreativa*, *La Cámara de Comercio Mexicana* and *La Sociedad Mutualista Mexicana* were organised around 1924. Hundreds of Catholic organisations that brought together the Mexican community were also founded in the early part of the twentieth century. In the late 1930s, the *Congreso de Pueblos que Hablan Español* was formed to advocate the respect of minorities' human and civil rights, and the relaxation of immigration laws (Gutiérrez, 1999).

It is worth mentioning that during the 1920s and 1930s, the new generations of Mexican Americans also began to organise themselves against increased discrimination due to economic depression in the US, the repatriation campaigns and the growth of the urban Mexican population. In this context, important organisations emerged in defence of Mexican Americans, such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (1929) and the Mexican American Movement (MAM) (1930s). Their main objective was to encourage the assimilation of Mexican Americans as American citizens and prevent discrimination by helping them achieve higher levels of education and dominion of English (González, 1994). According to Gutiérrez, the fact that these organisations did not include Mexican immigrants and did not address problems related to them, exacerbated differences and resentments between these two groups (Gutiérrez, 1995). The relevance of this separation of agendas, as well as the formation of

Mexican American organisations is important because, as we will describe further on, it influenced the Mexican government's type of response to its population abroad in the next periods, as well as the formation of Mexican immigrant community organisations.

From 1910-1939 the main reasons for the formation of Mexican community-based organisations were their defence against discrimination, protection of labour rights and problems related to deportations and repatriations. The most important organisations in this period were the *Comisiones Honoríficas* and the *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul*, through which the government was able to expand its protection of the Mexican population abroad. Other significant organisations were labour unions such as the *CSM* and the *CUOM* and political groups such as the *Clubes Liberales* and *Juntas Constitucionalistas*, who also collaborated with the consulates and had contacts with the government, labour unions and other actors in Mexico. The transnational relation between the government and the Mexican immigrant organised community is mostly based on the cooperative efforts between the consulate and these groups, as well as the government's influence in the formation, consolidation and proliferation of the *Comisiones Honoríficas* and the *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul*. The Mexican government's response varied according to the growth of the Mexican population in the US, the salience of domestic public opinion criticism related to emigration and the situation of Mexicans abroad, the gravity of the problems experienced by the Mexican population abroad and their potential impact in the domestic situation (i.e. the consequences of mass repatriations), as well as the development of opposition groups within the Mexican community in the US.

### ***1940-1969***

The Second World War brought an advantageous situation for the Mexican government's negotiating position with respect to the US. In this context, Mexico was able to establish, for

once, formal bilateral cooperation for the management of labour contracting of Mexican migrants in the US through the Bracero Program (1942-1964). Although the American government accepted most of Mexico's conditions for the administration of the program, employers violated most of the rules and the flow of undocumented workers continued. Nonetheless, the Bracero Program was recognised as advantageous for both countries and, despite a few diplomatic crises, it continued long after the Second World War. As a consequence of the legal and undocumented flows brought about by the Bracero Program, the number of Mexican migrants in the US increased greatly. From 1942 to 1964, almost 4.5 million contracts for temporary workers were issued through the Bracero Program, 550,000 migrants were admitted legally, and approximately 5 million undocumented migrants worked in the US (García y Griego and Vereá Campos, 1988).

Throughout the existence of this program, the role of the consulates diminished in terms of defending the interests of Mexican expatriates and providing leadership in the Mexican American community. In Zazueta's view, 'by the 1950s the political dialogue that had peaked in the 1920s and 1930s seems to have faded' (Zazueta, 1983: 460). Even though there were complaints about the Bracero Program and public opinion in Mexico reacted against the reports of exploitation of workers in the US, the consulates' role in defending them was not as prominent as before. On the one hand, this can be explained by the fact that some of the problems related to migrants were channelled through the Bracero Program. In various occasions, the Mexican government complained directly to the US authorities about employer abuses and the rules of the Program were changed. Although in most cases these renegotiations did not turn out to Mexico's advantage, there appeared to be an institutional response to migrant's problems.<sup>xi</sup>

On the other hand, the Second World War opened up new opportunities for Mexicans in the US by increasing their participation in the armed forces, defence industries and union jobs; this accelerated their social integration, and gave them a better status (Gutiérrez, 1999). Some of the

first *Clubes de Oriundos* (Hometown Associations), which organised migrants based on their community of origin, began to develop during the 1960s. The *Clubes de Oriundos*' activities were similar to the *mutualistas*, but as they grew and developed in the following decades, their relationship with local governments was strengthened and their influence in their communities in Mexico increased. Nevertheless, during this period relations between the Mexican community-based associations and the consulates were not as close as before. This can be considered a weak period in terms of transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organised community in the US, although Mexican officials tried to maintain close contacts with migrants through the Bracero Program, cultural programs and visits (Gómez-Quñones, 1983).<sup>xii</sup> Meanwhile, issues regarding political, economic and human rights of the second and third generations of Mexican immigrants born in the US were mostly addressed by the Mexican American organisations that already existed and those created in the 1960s (Corwin, 1978). Through their support in education, language and job training, these organisations facilitated Mexican Americans' assimilation in the US. It is also worth mentioning that in the context of the Bracero Program some organisations, such as LULAC, the American G.I. Forum, and the Community Service Organisation (CSO), began to address issues of first generation immigrants' rights (Gutiérrez, 1999).

The Mexican community made significant efforts towards forming organisations and strengthening ties with the Mexican government during the 1960s. In 1962, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta organised the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) later known as United Farm Workers (UFW). The NFWA rallied against the Bracero Program because of the abuses it led to. After the Program was cancelled, the organisation dealt with other problems related to Mexican farm workers in the US. Through Chávez, the NFWA established contact with

agencies and unions from Mexico in order to help Mexican migrants in their organisational efforts and labour disputes (Gómez-Quíñones, 1983).

In the 1960s, following the lead of the Civil Rights Movement in the US, the Chicano Movement, composed mainly of Mexican Americans, organised a campaign with the objective of obtaining full recognition of their rights as US citizens and, at the same time, claimed their own ethnic identity based on what they called the 'Plan of Aztlán'. Cultural nationalism, *indigenismo*, and the romanticising of the Mexican 'Revolution' became common among activists of the 1960s (Gómez-Quíñones, 1983). Towards the end of the decade, these groups made great efforts to strengthen ties with the Mexican government and academic institutions through the Chicano Student Movement, but their activities declined after 1975. Although this type of mobilisation created great divisions within the Mexican community, it influenced the creation of 22 of the currently 40 most important non-profit organisations concerned with support of Mexican Americans or other Hispanic origin populations in the US (Cano, 1997). The Mexican American Legal Defence and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) were created in 1968. The emergence of the Chicano movement also gave birth to organisations that began to reassess the relationship between Mexican immigrants, Chicanos and Mexican Americans. For example, the *Centro de Acción Social Autónoma* (CASA), established in 1968, sought to provide assistance to undocumented immigrants and integrate Mexican Americans and Mexicans as part of one same group (Gutiérrez, 1999).

According to Gutiérrez, 'the rhetoric of Chicano militants on both immigration and ethnic politics contributed to their growing awareness of the close relationships that bound Mexican immigrants to American citizens of Mexican descent' (Gutiérrez, 1995: 203). In the author's view, although the disagreements between Mexican Americans, Chicanos and Mexican migrants

did not disappear, most Mexican American organisations began to revise their positions about this issue by the 1970s.

Neither the Chicano movement nor any other issue related to migration motivated widespread support from the Mexican public, except within certain intellectual circles and leftist opposition groups who complained about abuses to Mexican workers related to the Bracero Program and about the consequences of emigration for Mexican development (Craig, 1971). Regarding the Chicano movement, ‘within political circles in Mexico, apprehension existed concerning involvement with Mexican Americans’ (Gómez-Quíñones, 1983: 433). Thus, during this period the Mexican government’s relationship with the migrant population was mainly based on the Bracero Program. When the Program ended and the Mexican government realised its inability to re-establish formal cooperation with the US to manage these flows, it sought other alternatives to control emigration pressures, such as the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* of 1965. The objective of this program was to create new job offers in the *maquiladora* sector in the North, but some scholars consider it was counterproductive because it attracted more migrants to the border and it made it easier for them to cross in search for better salaries and labour conditions in the US (Bustamante, 1975). Given this inability to find effective solutions for emigration, in the ensuing years the government turned its attention to ‘protection’ through consulates and, especially, to fostering its relations with Chicanos and Mexican Americans.

From 1940 to 1969, the transnational relationship between the government and the organised community reached a low level; the interaction between Mexican immigrants and the Mexican government or the consulates was not strong. The existence of the Bracero Program as a channel for most problems related to migrant workers, and the Mexican government’s interest in maintaining the *status quo* as a safety valve to potential economic and political programs, as well

as a way of avoiding tensions with the US in the management of the flows, are the main explanations for this situation.<sup>xiii</sup>

It is important to note the activity of Mexican American organisations and the Chicano Movement during this period. Although within migration studies, migrants of second and third generations are not generally considered part of the existing transnational relations (Brettel and Hollifield, 2000), during this period there is evidence of the inclusion of issues related to Mexican migrants in the Mexican Americans' agenda and their contact with agencies and unions in Mexico. Even though there are no formal ties between the Mexican American community and the Mexican government, these contacts provide the basis for the government's actions regarding Mexican American and Mexican organisations in the next decades. The relevance of this relationship is that the development of a more active position from the Mexican government regarding migration issues, although not directly linked to the organised community during this period, is a key point in the evolution of the transnational relationship between them, as well as the shift in Mexico's official position towards migration issues.

### ***1970-1989***

As a consequence of the legal and undocumented flows brought about by the Bracero Program, the high levels of fertility among the population of Mexican origin in the US, demographic and economic pressures in Mexico, and the regularisation of undocumented migrants through the IRCA (Immigration Reform and Control Act) in 1986, the Mexican population in the US (including legal and undocumented Mexican immigrants as well as Mexican Americans) increased dramatically in the last decades of the twentieth century, from approximately 3.5 million in 1960 to 4.5 million in 1970, 8.7 million in 1980, and 13.4 million in 1990 (Gutiérrez, 1995).

When President Luis Echeverría came to power in 1970, interest in the Mexican population abroad was widespread among intellectuals, businessmen and some government officials. The ties between Mexico and the Mexicans living in the US began to grow in cultural, political, social and economic areas, and became more complex (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983). At the same time, the Mexican government sought a more active and independent foreign policy in order to draw attention from domestic political and economic problems, which had reached a critical point during the 1968 protests against the government and led to great criticism, especially from leftist groups. In this context, the Echeverría government took an active interest in the population of Mexicans abroad. Through Echeverría's initiative, Mexican consuls renewed their active role in defence of Mexicans' rights and supported their organisational efforts. Echeverría also promised more action against smugglers and immigration fraud cases, and established a fertility control program to control demographic and emigration pressures. In 1972, the US and Mexico set up high-level inter-secretarial study groups to examine the migratory problem, and to exchange proposals on what could be done through international cooperation.<sup>xiv</sup> Although the Mexican government insisted on the possibility of establishing another Bracero Program or any other formal collaboration mechanism for managing migration, the US dismissed its proposals (Cornelius, 1979; García y Griego, 1990).

Given the lack of success in the formal management of migration, whether bilaterally or unilaterally, the Mexican government turned towards a 'policy of no policy'. This position meant that the government sought to preserve the *status quo* by letting migration flows continue without establishing any specific programs to address its problems, and avoided negotiations with the US that could lead to a negative outcome in this or other areas of the bilateral relationship (García y Griego, 1988). However, the main issue on which Echeverría concentrated the government's efforts regarding the Mexican origin population in the US was the support of the Chicano



movement. According to González, in an environment of political repression in Mexico, support to the Chicano movement was seen as convenient for the government because ‘it could present its benevolent face to the world by declaring itself the natural ally of Chicanos seeking to return to [their] Mexican roots...While celebrating nationalist ideals for the pleasure of the Chicanos, the regime could display potent historic symbols that incidentally reflected the *PRP*'s\* nationalist traditions and its political aims’ (González, 1999: 213). Thus, the government offered assistance to Chicanos, promoted contacts with Mexican American leaders and activists, created scholarship programs for Mexican Americans interested in studying in Mexico, such as the *Becas de Aztlán*, donated funds for the establishment of cultural centers, and distributed Mexican books for libraries and schools in cities with large Mexican communities (González Gutiérrez, 1993). The government’s educational programs, as well as academic projects in Mexican universities developed in the following administrations.<sup>xv</sup>

In the early 1970s, the Mexican government organised numerous meetings between Mexican American leaders and officers in Mexico, including President Echeverría, ambassadors, and other high-ranking officials (González, 1995; 1999). Echeverría’s successors continued these exchanges with the objective of finding areas of mutual interest, establishing networks and sharing information (González Gutiérrez, 1993). The *Comisión Mixta de Enlace* (Binational Outreach Commission), created during the José López Portillo administration, formalised contact between these groups. The *Comisión* was in charge of managing relations between the Mexican government through the Ministry of Labour and several Mexican American organisations (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983).

The Mexican government gave an important priority to the Chicano movement and the Mexican American leaders, although the extent of its support throughout this period highly

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\* *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

depended on the country's economic situation (González, 1999). During the years of economic growth and the oil boom, the Mexican authorities seemed to lose interest in ties with the Mexican Americans; the government's strong negotiating position with the US limited its interest in these groups' assistance in order to achieve foreign policy objectives. During the crises, Mexico again turned towards Mexican Americans and sought stronger ties with them. Regardless of this inconsistency, the government's support, particularly regarding Mexican Americans' political activities, was always limited because it feared the US' possible negative reactions to an apparent interventionist position (De la Garza, 1983).

The 1982 economic crisis led to great disappointment in relations between Mexico and Mexicans abroad. The cultural and education programs weakened, as well as the existing political ties. However, President Miguel de la Madrid continued to hold meetings and establish cooperation mechanisms with organisations such as LULAC, MALDEF, and the NCLR (González, 1999). De la Madrid also sought a closer connection with the business community through the *Proyecto de Acercamiento del Gobierno y el Pueblo de México con la Comunidad Mexico-Norteamericana* (Project for the Strengthening of Ties Between the Mexican Government, the Mexican Population and the Mexican-American Community), but this contact was not pursued actively until the Salinas administration.

The most relevant activity during this period was the protection of Mexican migrants through consular activity, revived in the context of the IRCA legislation and the growth of the electoral influence of the Latino population during the second half of the 1980s. The legalisation of almost 2 million Mexicans through IRCA meant that the Latino constituency grew substantially, but it also brought about significant changes in migration flows. The circularity and temporality of labour flows gradually transformed into a migration motivated by family reunification and longer or permanent stays. Their socio-economic mobility gave immigrants

access to new jobs in other sectors and their presence in cities became more evident. The migration networks were also strengthened and, together with the pressures of Mexico's economic crisis and the optimism created by the IRCA regularisation, legal and undocumented flows of Mexican migrants increased. The number of *Clubes de Oriundos* (Hometown Associations) grew with the new flows of Mexican migrants and the *Federaciones de los Estados* (State Federations), such as the *Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos* created in 1972, began to expand.<sup>xvi</sup>

The demand for Mexican consular services in the context of the IRCA regularisation and temporary worker programs, as well as the growing importance of Mexicans abroad in economic terms -in 1980 remittances represented an income of almost \$1.8 billion a year, almost equal to tourism (Lozano, 1992)-, led the Mexican government to enhance its consular activity and to recognise the need for a comprehensive, long-term strategy for dealing with the Mexican population abroad (González Gutiérrez, 1993). Additionally, governors and municipal presidents strengthened ties between local authorities and their communities in the US through regular visits (Goldring, 2002). In 1986, De la Madrid created the *Programa Cultural de las Fronteras* (Cultural Program for the Borders) within the Ministry of Education to promote academic activities, journals, radio programs, seminars, publications and exhibitions related to Mexico and Chicanos; and established the *CONAPO*\* within the Ministry of the Interior to study and issue policy recommendations on migration and population issues.

The 1988 presidential campaign brought political interests into this context. For the first time, Mexican parties, mainly the ruling PRI and the leftist PRD\*, competed for the loyalty of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the US (González, 1999). The potential impact of these

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\* *Consejo Nacional de Población* (National Population Council)

\* *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution).

groups in national and international politics was evident. The mobilisation of various US-based organisations such as the *Mexican Assembly for Effective Suffrage*, the *Mexican Democratic Forum*, and the *Mexican Committee to Support Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas* in support of the PRD candidate and, afterwards, against the victory of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the PRI, led the new administration to recognise the political and economic impact of Mexicans abroad in domestic issues, and to design a new policy towards them (García-Acevedo, 2003).

During this period, the relationship between the Mexican government and the Mexican communities in the US became more dynamic. The demographic, economic and political changes experienced by the Mexican population in the US influenced the government's responses. Through the 1970s and most of the 1980s, migration issues were 'tacitly omitted'<sup>xvii</sup> from the political agenda and the government's activities towards this population were concentrated on consular protection. However, its ties with the Mexican American community were strengthened and the government became very active in developing contacts with Mexican American leaders, organisations and businesses in the US. Although these initiatives were not formalised or pursued systematically, and even if the relationship with second and upper generations is not generally considered transnational, they are relevant because the government's activism with these groups set the stage for the development of a more comprehensive response to migration issues from the 1990s onwards.

The changes in the political and economic context in Mexico, as well as the transformation in the government's relations with the US, mainly as a result of the liberalisation of the Mexican economy, impacted the development of contacts between the Mexican government and immigrants in the US. During this period, Mexican community organisations were mainly *Clubes de Oriundos* and *Federaciones de los Estados*. The government's relationship with these associations was not very strong, although local authorities began to build ties with them.

However, these contacts were greatly developed in the following decades due, in part, to innovations in communication technologies that helped strengthen the ties between the Mexican organisations, their communities of origin and the government, and also as a result of the changes in the domestic and international politics of Mexico and the US. The politicisation of the Mexican community, especially in support of the opposition in the 1988 elections, and the growth of their importance for the economy through their remittances, had a significant impact in the Mexican government's attention to migrants and determined its policies in the next period.

### ***1990-2005***

During the Salinas administration consular activity was given a high priority. New consulates and Mexican Cultural Institutes were created, the appointment of consuls and their staff was carefully decided with regards to their experience and qualifications and the scope of consular activities expanded. The government also promoted business ties between the National Chamber of Transformation Industries (*CANACINTRA*), the Mexican Bank for Foreign Trade (*BANCOMEXT*), the Ministry of Commerce, the Development Banking Institution (*NAFINSA*), and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Most importantly, Salinas created the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (*Programa de las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior – PCME-*, commonly known as *Comunidades*) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Programa Paisano* and *Grupos Beta de Protección a Migrantes*, managed by the Ministry of the Interior and later on by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM* (National Migration Institute), which was formed in 1993 to manage migrant issues within the Mexican borders. At the local level, many Local Offices for the Attention of Migrants (*OFAM*, in Spanish) were established.

According to González Gutiérrez, the creation of *Comunidades* in February 1990 was the government's response to the growing influence of the Mexican community abroad in the issues

related to Mexico, the expansion of non-governmental actors in both sides of the border, the need to strengthen protection of Mexicans through ties with the organised community, and to the demand of Mexican American organisations, such as MALDEF and NCLR, to have an office within the Mexican government that would be dedicated exclusively to the attention of the Mexican community and provide official channels for communication between them (González Gutiérrez, 1997).<sup>xviii</sup> *Comunidades* coordinated various Ministries and state and local governments to implement different projects in areas of education, health and social welfare, culture, sports, business and tourism.

In order to promote these programs, the government sought a close relationship with the organised community (mainly through *Clubes de Oriundos* and *Federaciones de los Estados*) gave them strong support, promoted the creation of more of these organisations, and helped strengthen their ties with their communities of origin in Mexico (González Gutiérrez, 1997). The number of *Clubes de Oriundos* increased dramatically in the early 1990s, when consulates began to foster their development. Although *Comunidades* was designed for the whole of the Mexican communities abroad (including Mexican Americans and immigrants), it was mostly the Mexican immigrants who participated in these programs (De la Garza, 2000). Nonetheless, the Mexican American community generally supported *Comunidades* and organisations such as LULAC, NALEO\*, NCLR and the UFW, cooperated with the program in order to strengthen and expand the scope of its campaigns (González Gutiérrez and Schumacher, 1998).

Through consular activity and the creation of *Comunidades*, Salinas' purpose was to stimulate ties with the Mexican community at all levels (intellectuals, businessmen, politicians, leaders, activists, Latino leaders and organisations), promote their cultural ties and understanding of Mexico, and seek their political and financial support as a way to incorporate issues on the

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\* National Association of Latino Elected Officials

bilateral agenda and affect US policy towards Mexico (González Gutiérrez, 1993). Through this program, the Mexican government was also looking towards the promotion of its image in the US in order to strengthen economic and political ties between the countries. This represented an historical shift in the nationalist discourse and the Mexican government's attitude towards the US. During the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) negotiations, begun in 1991, for the first time Mexico launched an open lobbying campaign in the US (including Mexican American organisations, leaders and politicians)<sup>xix</sup> to promote its interests, transforming the traditional idea that Mexican 'intervention' in politics north of the border might prompt US interference in Mexican affairs (Dresser, 2000).

During Ernesto Zedillo's presidency, the government's support of mobilisations against anti-immigrant campaigns such as Proposition 187 in California (1994) enhanced its new position towards issues regarding the Mexican population in the US. The intensity of the immigration debate in the US, as well as the consequences of the border control operations initiated by the US in 1993, which increased the number of apprehensions and led to a great number of deaths at the border, attracted great attention from public opinion and media in both countries. The Zedillo administration continued and intensified the programs directed towards support of Mexicans abroad. The constitutional reform in 1996 to allow dual nationality was a crucial step in terms of giving Mexicans abroad the possibility to participate more actively and take full advantage of their rights as citizens in the US. In 1996, the Mexican Congress also approved an initiative to eliminate legal restrictions on the right to vote by non-residents (after almost 10 years since the passage of this law, the details of how extraterritorial voting rights should be exercised were approved by the Mexican Congress in June 2005 and will take effect for the first time in the 2006 Presidential election).

At the same time, during Zedillo's government, contacts and sharing of information between Mexican and US authorities at all levels were deepened in issues related to migration. As Alba describes it, the 'migration dialogue was institutionalised' through the creation of working groups, bilateral commissions, memoranda of understanding, discussion forums, interparliamentary commissions and the signing of various accords related to migration management (Alba, 2004). This dialogue allowed for some of the tensions related to migration at the national and international level to be relaxed, although it did not prevent the US from implementing unilateral policies such as the operations at the border and the IIRIRA (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act) and PRWORA (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) legislations of 1996, which directly affected migrants' access to health and education in the US. Nonetheless, the strengthening of mechanisms for cooperation in migration issues between Mexico and the US contributed to the Mexican government's capacity to carry out its consular activity with successful results, particularly in terms of defence of Mexicans who were apprehended for violation of immigration laws. Moreover, this 'migration dialogue' laid the foundations for President Vicente Fox's activism on migration issues and the negotiation of a possible migration agreement with President George W. Bush in 2001.

In 2000, Vicente Fox was the first elected president from an opposition party (the *PAN*<sup>\*</sup>) in 70 years. One of the main pillars of his election campaign had been to seek a new relationship with the almost 22 million Mexicans living in the US, and integrate them into the design and implementation of policies directed towards them. Although Fox's concern with Mexican immigrants was not new, but rather can be seen as the result of an evolution in relations between the government and its population abroad, especially since the 1970s, placing this issue as a

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\* *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party)



priority in the agenda represented a major shift in the government's traditional position regarding migration. Various factors such as the change of regime, the deepening of economic integration between Mexico and the US, the growth of the Mexican population abroad and its economic and political influence in both countries, the increase in remittance flows (which became the second most important source of income for Mexico), and the public's attention to migration issues, influenced President Fox in accepting more openly and directly the need to establish formal mechanisms, both unilateral and bilateral, to manage the problems related to migration. As Alba explains, as opposed to previous administrations, Fox 'did not feel responsible about the problem of Mexican migration being linked with the limitations of national development, given the fact that this could be attributed to the failure of the past governments and regimes' (Alba, 2004: 35-36).

Fox's first effort to establish a closer, interactive relationship with the Mexican and Mexican American communities was the creation of the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad (OPME) in 2000. Headed by a Mexican American, Juan Hernández, the purpose of this office was to establish direct communication between the President and Mexicans living abroad, including Mexican migrants and Mexicans born in the US. As Hernández explained in 2001, 'Of my office's four charges, three are related to Mexican citizens who are abroad...and the other concerns Mexican Americans...'<sup>xx</sup> The OPME's main activities concentrated on promotion of businesses for distribution of Mexican products, investment in communities of origin and management of remittances, which amounted to almost US\$10 billion in 2000. Comparing the OPME with *Comunidades*, González Gutiérrez argues that the main difference was that the OPME did not promote its actions through the consular networks but rather through its Director's personal contacts (González Gutiérrez, 2003).

At the same time, the Mexican government pursued bilateral negotiations with the US government with the objective of establishing an extensive migration accord. However, these efforts crumbled when the US' foreign policy priorities changed after the 9/11 attacks. Although the dialogue continued and some agreements were reached in terms of border security (i.e. the 22 point Smart Border Agreement of 2002) and development in high-emigration regions in Mexico through the Partnership for Prosperity of 2002, the favourable conditions for negotiating a comprehensive bilateral agreement disappeared.

Nonetheless, the issue was maintained as a high priority in the national agenda. In April of 2003 the Mexican government took a major step towards the constitution of a new institutional framework for the management of migration issues by integrating *Comunidades* and the OPME programs into a single office: the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME). The main differences with the OPME were that the IME would not be led solely by an individual (a situation which had created tensions between the Mexican Foreign Ministry and the Director of the OPME -Juan Hernandez), it would integrate the existing infrastructure based on *Comunidades* and it would directly involve Mexican immigrants in the policymaking process through an Advisory Council.

The IME became the executive branch of a three-way structure constituted by the CNCME (*Consejo Nacional para las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior* –National Council for the Mexican Communities Abroad), which incorporates 11 Ministries within the Mexican government that deal with issues related to migration, and the CCIME (*Consejo Consultivo del IME* –Advisory Council of the IME) formed by 157 representatives of the Mexican communities abroad organised in different committees.<sup>xxi</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Relations appointed Cándido Morales, a Mexican migrant who lived and worked most of his life in the US, as director of the IME, which is in charge of channelling and implementing the Advisory Council's recommendations and coordinating the National Council's activities. The Advisory Council has

two general meetings per year and issues recommendations to the Mexican government about a wide range of topics related to Mexican immigrants. The objective of these recommendations is to expose the problems of the migrant community and channel them through the Mexican government agencies that can give them partial or total solution, in order to help improve the quality of life of Mexicans living abroad.<sup>xxii</sup>

The most relevant aspect about the IME is its recognition of the necessity to formally integrate the Mexican communities abroad in the process of formulation and implementation of the policies that affect them. It is the first institution that brings together all the relevant groups (at the government and community levels, both in the US and Mexico) in order to discuss the problems and necessities related to Mexicans abroad and propose solutions. Its immediate objectives are to 'facilitate the synergy between the communities and the government's initiatives, and contribute to the consolidation of the Mexican communities abroad as a bridge of communication and understanding between Mexico and the US' (González Gutiérrez, 2003). In the long-term, the IME's goal is to create a strong relationship with the communities that will allow them to mobilise and join efforts to pursue common objectives in the US and Mexico (González Gutiérrez, 2003). The interaction between the Advisory Council and the IME is one of the most innovative features of the new structure of institutional outreach between the Mexican government and the organised Mexican migrant community. The Advisory Council is the key transnational component of the IME. It is because of the Advisory Council that the IME and the communities can be in Mexico and the US practically 'at the same time' by having a representative body who can influence policymaking debates and has direct contact with the Mexican government.

In sum, from 1990 onwards the Mexican government carried out an unprecedented effort to respond to the Mexican immigrant's necessities and strengthen its ties with the organised

community. As compared to past programs and campaigns, during this period a comprehensive institutional structure was developed (mainly through *Comunidades*, the OPME and the IME) and a pattern of continuity was established. Relations between the government and the Mexican organised community were closer, particularly through cooperation between immigrant home-oriented organisations (*Clubes de Oriundos* and *Federaciones de los Estados*) -whose formation, consolidation and proliferation was greatly influenced by the government's support, and Mexican authorities at federal, state and local levels. The crucial point in the institutionalisation of this transnational relation is embodied by the creation of the IME and its Advisory Council (CCIME), where the community leadership is recognised, for the first time, as a main actor in the design of policies that affect Mexican migrants. This transformation can be explained as a result of the changes in the demographic, economic and political conditions related to Mexican migrants, which have an impact at the national and bilateral level, and also as a result of the historical development of contacts between the community and the government.

Through the 156 years of history analysed in this section, we have identified the transnational signs that characterise the relation between the Mexican government and the Mexican population abroad. On the one hand, the transnational characteristics of the relation are based on the objectives of the migrant organisations and whether they seek the government's support and include it as part of their agenda. This type of relationship can be identified since the later half of the nineteenth century, but it varies depending on the type of problems experienced by the community and on the government's capacity and interest in collaborating with the organised community, which is based on economic, political and foreign policy considerations. Mexican immigrant organisations have been key for the government's policy responses to the Mexican population abroad (including Mexican Americans) because they provide channels for aid, they voice part of the community's demands and can exercise pressure over the authorities.

On the other hand, the transnational relationship is based on the government's recognition of the organised community through the support in the formation, consolidation or proliferation of their organisations, and the mutual inclusion of their concerns in both the Mexican government's and the organisations' agenda. In these five periods we identify the existence of such a relationship with different levels of intensity and types of responses from the government. Until the 1990s, with the creation of *Comunidades*, and later the OPME and the IME, the government's response was mainly channelled through consular protection and short-term programs. The type of governmental response varied according to the characteristics of Mexican migration and their organizations (this is reflected on the type of problems experienced by the Mexican population abroad, the demographic, economic and political influence of Mexicans on both sides of the border, and the type and level of organisation of the Mexican community), political and economic pressures in Mexico, and the context of US-Mexico relations. It is possible to assert that as the Mexican communities became better organised and more significant demographically, economically, and politically, the government's response was more comprehensive and systematic. In most cases, the organisational initiatives of the Mexican consulates towards the Mexican community in the US also led to higher levels of organisation and politisation of the community.

There is a long history of transnationalism in the relations between the Mexican government and the community organisations of Mexicans abroad. The contacts developed throughout this history have allowed for the formation, proliferation and consolidation of Mexican immigrant organisations, and influenced the characteristics of their relationship with the Mexican government.

## **The IME's Challenges**

As an institution of a transnational character, the IME faces great challenges, both at the domestic and international level. Firstly, in order to affect positively the lives of Mexican immigrants in the US, the IME has to continue developing stronger links between the Mexican government and the communities abroad and create feasible strategies that balance the multiple interests within the Mexican communities in the US as well as the Mexican government's objectives. Secondly, the IME has to consolidate its structure and be able to promote the continuation of its programs and its structures beyond changes in the domestic and international contexts, and also paying careful attention to the reactions both from the immigrant community and from the US government.

Since its creation in March 2003, the IME has organised more than 25 Information Seminars (*Jornadas Informativas*) with the objective of bringing community leaders closer to the Mexican government and institutions. The purpose of the Information Seminars is to create a large network of prominent individuals, organisation leaders, and public officers from Mexico and the US and give them information about existing programs and institutions that the Mexican government can offer to the immigrant population and their families. Such efforts are considered a positive step towards creating stronger links among the Mexican communities and developing their relationship with the Mexican government, as well as finding ways to address the communities' priority issues. However, it is not yet clear whether the creation of the Advisory Council and the Information Seminars are a sound strategy for creating a common agenda, whether these leaders will have the skills and capacity to act as a consolidated group, or what their relationship will be to the IME or the Mexican government. A coordinated follow-up of these leaders' activities through the IME representatives in the Mexican consulates will be extremely useful for the Mexican government to assess what kind of strategies work in this

regard and take advantage of these and other leaders' influence in order to build support for its agenda.

It is also important for the IME to approach consistently local and state American authorities and politicians as central targets of action. Through the activities of the Advisory Council and the extended consular network throughout the US, the IME's influence can materialise and become a permanent mechanism to set up a shared and interactive agenda with other main actors in the country. The existence of 46 Mexican consulates in the US gives the IME a unique opportunity to disseminate its projects and programs. However, as has been the case historically, the Consuls' personality is a determining factor in the consulate's relationship with the local community. Therefore, the effectiveness of the IME's strategies will depend partly on each Consul's attitude towards the IME and the IME's capacity to develop this relationship.

Another important element for the success of the IME's strategy to implement programs and create closer ties with Mexican immigrants in the US will be the 70-75 IME representatives, who are hired by the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the mandate of managing the IME programs and projects in each of the 46 consular circumscriptions. Most of the IME representatives were formed within *Comunidades'* lines of action. However, as opposed to *Comunidades'* concentration in a services agenda, the role of the IME representatives now has more to do with the actions of the community's leadership.<sup>xxiii</sup> Thus, in order to be effective, IME representatives not only have to administer programs, but they have to learn to pay attention and read the political language of a whole set of actors on the scene (the local Mexican and Mexican American leadership, the Advisory Council members, local and state authorities, and the Mexican Consuls) and be able to use this information in order to push the IME's objectives forward. Nevertheless, the IME representatives' engagement with this new role and their effectiveness in

fostering the IME's agenda is not yet clear; even after more than two years since the creation of the IME, some of them still identify themselves as representatives of *Comunidades*.

In terms of the IME's structure, the Advisory Council has very distinct characteristics that could enable it to exert influence on both sides of the border given some the counsellors' close relationship to the communities they represent and their direct contact with the IME and Mexican authorities. However, it faces important challenges in order to take full advantage of these capacities. The scope of action of present and future members of the Advisory Council is based on their legitimacy, which is determined by (1) the process of their selection/election; (2) their knowledge of, and commitment to the Mexican community that they represent; and, (3) their capacity to launch initiatives at a local level. In order to achieve this, the IME and the Advisory Council have to negotiate clear guidelines for the election of the new members in 2005 in order to guarantee that the Advisory Council is actually representative of the Mexican community in the US and Canada and prevent the criticism and questioning of the election/appointment of its members in 2003.<sup>xxiv</sup> The IME still needs to establish clear mechanisms to follow-up on the activities of members of the Advisory Council during and after their period as members of this body and as potential leaders of lobbying coalitions.

As recent events and historical tendencies show, the evolution of migration policies and institutions in Mexico and in the US has been determined by international economic and political circumstances that affect the US-Mexico relationship, and also by each country's political and economic context at the domestic level (Delano, 2005). At the national level, when President Fox's term ends in 2006, the new administration will determine its position regarding the management of migration issues in the domestic and bilateral agenda and the role of current key institutions at the core of Mexican migration policy, including the IME and the National Migration Institute (INM, within the Mexican Ministry of the Interior).<sup>xxv</sup> The IME must be able



to demonstrate the importance of maintaining the existing institutional design and the need for sufficient resources and infrastructure in order to implement a viable and consistent migration policy.

At the international level, the Mexican government will have to re-evaluate its foreign policy regarding migration including its position in terms of a possible negotiation with the US for a migration agreement or its potential influence in the debate on immigration reform. In this arena, the IME faces the challenge of continuing to develop its relationship with the Mexican organised community and its supporters in the US with careful attention to negative reactions from the US government or anti-immigrant groups. The IME's activities can lead to accusations of intervention in the US' internal affairs and violation of Mexico's key principle of non-intervention.<sup>xxvi</sup> In addition, a stronger and more active organised Mexican community with close ties to the Mexican government can lead to further development of arguments such as those put forward by Samuel Huntington about Mexican immigrants' lack of incorporation to US society and values given their strong ties to Mexico. This may also lead to accusations of dual loyalty and discriminatory or xenophobic attitudes against Mexican immigrants.

Finally, in its approach to the Mexican population abroad, the IME also needs to take into account the heterogeneity within and amongst the existing groups and their different interests in their relationship with the Mexican government and its representatives. As Vertovec explains, most diasporas include opposing factions and dissenting voices, which are often muffled by the better organised, networked, and financed actors, who are often the ones pushing nationalist or ethnic agendas but not necessarily represent the whole community (Vertovec, 2005).

## Conclusion

In the five periods analysed in this paper, the relationship between the Mexican government and the Mexican immigrant community in the US has been characterised by different levels of involvement of the Mexican consulates and governmental programs or institutions in the formation, consolidation, and proliferation of Mexican immigrant organisations. This relationship between the Mexican government and the organised Mexican immigrant community is the core element of an evolving process of political transnational activities of the community. Through organisations such as *mutualistas*, *Juntas Patrióticas*, *Comisiones Honoríficas*, union organisations, Hometown Associations and State Federations, the Mexican government, based on its extended consular network, has developed ties with the organised Mexican migrant population in the US. These links have provided the basis for the existence of current organisations of Mexican immigrants in the US as well as the recent creation and development of the Mexican government's institutions to manage this relationship.

With the formation of the IME and the CCIME, the institutionalisation of this transnational relationship goes beyond any precedent in the history of the Mexican government's efforts to address the needs of the Mexican immigrant community *from both sides* of the border. The IME is the first transnational institution emanated from the official structure of the Mexican government, with specific programs and activities oriented to address the needs of the Mexican community in the US from a federal perspective, and with a strong potential to involve local actors in the solutions of the community's problems. Nonetheless, the IME faces important challenges within the domestic and bilateral political context that will determine its capacity to launch effective strategies to achieve its objectives, which are still in the process of being defined more clearly.

This type of historical analysis within a framework of transnational politics, allows us to assert that the transnational relationship between the Mexican state and its organised migrants has varied across different periods of time according to political and economic factors in the home state and the characteristics of the migrant community and its organizations. In this case, the level of interaction between the state and its organised migrant population is also influenced by foreign policy concerns and the dynamic of the US-Mexico bilateral relation. This study provides evidence to support the claim that ‘states and state politics shape the options for migrant and ethnic trans-state social action... International migrants and their descendants do repeatedly engage in concerted action across state boundaries, but the use, form, and mobilization of the connections linking “here” and “there” are contingent outcomes subject to multiple political constraints’ (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004).

We agree with Sherman in claiming that more specific theoretical attention must be paid to state relationships with emigrants, specifically in a historical context (Sherman, 1999). Further research on this topic should address, for example, to what extent different levels of political organisation of other migrant communities have affected their relationship with the host and home states, or how to measure systematically the components of a transnational relationship between the home state and its migrant community. Comparative analyses, such as the studies by Levitt and De la Dehesa (2003) and Smith (2003), can be greatly enriched by a historical background that examines the factors that determine the evolution of transnational relations between home states and migrant communities across different cases.

Throughout this research we also note that an issue that requires further development in the field is the activity of Mexican American organisations, as well as their relatively recent interactive relationship with the Mexican government regarding immigration issues. The evidence of a historical development of links between Mexican American organisations and

Mexican immigrants, as well as their relation with the Mexican government, supports the affirmations of transnational scholars in the sense that ‘transnational migration is more than a first-generation phenomenon’ (Glick-Schiller, 1999).

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## End Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> Fitzgerald (2000) addresses the issue of Mexican transnationalism from a historical perspective and asserts that transnational political action is not new in the Mexican case. The author emphasizes the role of the Mexican consulate in the process, and examines the reasons why the Mexican state has strengthened its ties with the Mexican migrant population in the US. Furthermore, Fitzgerald (2004) identifies the concept of ‘transnationalism’ as an important part of labour ideology and organisation in earlier periods of American history, and proposes that it would be prudent to give the term a more specific and careful usage than the catch-all notion generally used in migration literature. Yang (1999) focuses on writing a transnational history of the Nanjing Massacre with the aim of reinforcing a fruitful dialogue among historians in different countries with a shared past (in this case, China and Japan), mostly to secure a common ground for writing transnational history. Bick (2003) addresses how the unofficial relations, actions, and a relatively independent agenda of transnational actors can influence the foreign policies of home and host states in a time of crisis, by analysing the role of American Jews in Israel-US relations during the Suez Crisis period. Kocka (2003) identifies the ‘trans-national’ as a new and more comprehensive level of analysis for the development of the paradigm of social history, and exalts that, within this new perspective, networks and relations become objects of study, instead of social entities, like societies or specific groups within those societies.

<sup>iii</sup> This article is part of a series of four works that show different theoretical and empirical perspectives of the term ‘political transnationalism’. In ‘Organizing Immigrant Communities in American Cities: Is This Transnationalism or What?’ (Cano 2004b), the author argues that the term ‘transnationalism’ has been transformed to a point to which it is extremely difficult to sustain the broader sense of the concept beyond its generic roots. Categories such as ‘political transnationalism’, ‘anthropological transnationalism’, or ‘sociological transnationalism’, for example, provide a more feasible working frame. In this article, and the rest of the series, political transnationalism is addressed from an organizational perspective, that is, at a meso-level of analysis, and underlines the role of the home government in the development of ‘state transnationalism’ (See ‘The Virgin, the Priest, and the Flag: Political Mobilization of Mexican Immigrants in Chicago, Houston, and New York’ (Cano 2004c) and ‘Urban and Transnational Politics in America: Novus Ordo Seclorum?’ (Cano 2004d)).

<sup>iv</sup> Political behaviour of *Federaciones de los Estados* (Mexican-origin State Federations or umbrella hometown organisations) exposes this process at its best (Cano 2004a).

<sup>v</sup> The *Comités Cívico Patrióticos* continued these types of activities in the twentieth century (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983).

<sup>vi</sup> Some of the revolutionary leaders, such as Francisco I. Madero, framed the problem of migration in terms of how it affected development in Mexico, given the need to secure labourers for production in the borderlands. This concern was also raised with regards to the political volatility of the *campesinos* and the need to prevent violent mobilisations. Thus, Madero proposed projects to study the possibility of rooting migrants in certain regions in Mexico, give them land and strengthen their national roots. However, as Walsh explains, nothing came out of these plans, mostly because of the instability of the Mexican government and the lack of resources for development projects. In Walsh’s view, these type of repatriation and colonisation projects, which Presidents Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles also failed to implement in the 1920s and 1930s, show that while the Mexican government viewed migration as an economic necessity and even as a safety-valve for potential political threats, it also considered migrants a potential resource as agents for development (Walsh, 2000). See also Cardoso, 1982.

<sup>vii</sup> Article 89 of the 1917 Constitution states that non-intervention is one of the basic principles on which Mexican foreign policy is based. As a response to the various foreign interventions experienced by México in the 19th Century, the proclamation of a non-interventionist foreign policy was considered essential in order to prevent other countries (mainly the US), from interfering in Mexico’s domestic affairs.

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<sup>viii</sup> David G. Gutiérrez also argues that the government was aiming to develop ‘appropriate allegiances’ between the Mexican community and the government (Gutiérrez, 1999). See also Corwin, 1978.

<sup>ix</sup> Although there is no official record of the number of repatriations during the Great Depression, it is calculated that between 350,000 and 600,000 Mexicans were sent back to Mexico during this period (see Gonzáles, 1999 and Gutiérrez, 1995).

<sup>x</sup> The CUOM later evolved into the *Confederacion de Uniones Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos*.

<sup>xi</sup> For more details about the development of the Bracero Program see García y Griego, 1983.

<sup>xii</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican periodicals, records, and films were greatly disseminated in the US and the celebration of Mexico’s Independence in the US was formalised.

<sup>xiii</sup> Sherman’s explanation for the lack of attention to emigrants during the Bracero Program and through the 1960s is that the Mexican state has tended to manifest interest in emigrants at moments of political and economic instability and crisis. Given that ‘the 1960s corresponded to the heyday of the Mexican miracle and the dominance of the PRI’, Sherman argues that the Mexican state did not consider it necessary to incorporate migrants as a strategy to resolve challenges to its legitimacy (Sherman, 1999). While we agree that the Mexican government’s involvement in issues related to Mexican migrants is determined by economic and political circumstances in Mexico, we also argue that governmental attention to migration issues is affected by the type of problems experienced by the Mexican-origin population in the US, the economic, political and demographic characteristics of this population, and is also limited by the dynamic of US-Mexico bilateral relations.

<sup>xiv</sup> One of the proposals that emerged from these groups was the stationing of consular attachés at immigration detention centres to oversee collection of unpaid wages and humane treatment (Corwin, 1978).

<sup>xv</sup> In 1978 the *Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales*, a special office within the Ministry for Education, was created to support the education of migrants in the US. The university El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, specialised in migration issues, was founded in Tijuana in 1983. Many academic institutions also organised exchanges with Chicano studies programs.

<sup>xvi</sup> In the case of Zacatecas, the number of clubs in the *Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos* grew from 6 in 1986 to 22 in 1989. By 1996 there were almost 40 clubs (González Gutiérrez, 1995; Goldring, 2002).

<sup>xvii</sup> The idea of a migration policy strategy as a ‘benign omission’ is developed by Gómez Quiñones, 1981.

<sup>xviii</sup> See also Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2000.

<sup>xix</sup> See also Todd A. Eisenstadt (2000).

<sup>xx</sup> ‘Interview with Juan Hernández’, *Migration World Magazine*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2001. p. 27.

<sup>xxi</sup> The first Advisory Council (2003-2006) was composed by 105 Mexican, Mexican American and Mexican-Canadian elected representatives, 10 members of Latino organisations in the US, 10 specialised advisors and 32 representatives of the state governments in Mexico. The number of members of the Advisory Council per consular circumscription was based on their population density. The process of election of the members of the Advisory Council varied in every circumscription and led to great criticism given the absence of clear rules and the lack of transparency in some cases.

<sup>xxii</sup> Since its formation in March 2003 and until September 2005, the CCIME has held five meetings and issued more than 200 recommendations, which are publicly available at [www.sre.gob.mx/ime/](http://www.sre.gob.mx/ime/).

<sup>xxiii</sup> With the IME, direct support for previous PCME activities such as soccer tournaments and cultural events has practically disappeared, while education and health programs have continued to develop in the new structure. This is mostly because of the infrastructure created by *Comunidades* and other federal offices, as well as the fact that health and education are priority issues for the community. It is also a result of the IME’s interest in investing its resources in the consolidation of its relationship with community leaders, particularly through the Information Seminars. The fact that cultural activities sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became highly independent of *Comunidades* (in budgetary and even institutional terms) with the creation of the Mexican Cultural Institutes or Cultural Centres in the US during the second half of the 1990s also reduced the number of cultural activities promoted by *Comunidades* and now the IME.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> In June 2005 the IME and the Advisory Council published a call for the election of the new members of the Advisory Council for the period 2006-2009, which gives each consular circumscription the possibility to select between various models for the election based on the characteristics and preferences of their community. The publication of clear guidelines and specific rules for the election of the new Advisory Council and the fact that the September 2005 election was organised mainly by the members of the current Advisory Council rather than by the consular representatives are considered very positive steps in terms of promoting democracy and transparency in this process. Whether this strategy will be effective in terms of preventing conflicts within the community or achieving a genuinely representative and efficient Advisory Council is a question that the IME and the new Advisory Council will face in the 2006-2009 period.

<sup>xxv</sup> In October 2003 the initiative *Ley de Protección a Migrantes e Inmigrantes* was introduced at the Mexican Senate. Its main proposal was to merge the IME, the INM and the Office for Consular Protection within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*DGPAC*, in Spanish) into one single office: the National Institute for Protection of Migrants and Emigrants (*Instituto Nacional de Protección a Migrantes y Emigrantes*), which would be a decentralised office coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior. The proposal was based on the idea that it is necessary to integrate all the offices that currently manage migration issues in order to guarantee comprehensive and effective responses for the population abroad.

<sup>xxvi</sup> An example of the political sensitivity to these issues was the reaction from various sectors in the US against the Mexican Foreign Ministry's publication of *The Migrants' Guide* (*Guía del Migrante*) in January 2005. The *Migrants' Guide*, which was intended to inform Mexican immigrants about the perils of crossing the border through dangerous and unregulated areas and the ways in which they could protect their rights once they arrived in the US, was described by many groups in the US as an attempt by the Mexican government to promote illegal immigration and an interference with US domestic affairs (see FAIRUS, 'Mexico's Defense of Illegal Immigrants', July 2005, [http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=iic\\_immigrationissuecenters\\_defense](http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=iic_immigrationissuecenters_defense)).