

THE INSTITUTE OF MEXICANS ABROAD: THE DAY AFTER... AFTER 156 YEARS

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Abstract

This paper addresses the relationship between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican immigrant community in the United States 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 United States are not new; however, these relations vary across time depending on political and economic circumstances that involve U.S.-Mexico relations. These historical links have provided the basis for the existence of current organizations of Mexican immigrants in the United States 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 institutionalization of this new relation began with the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME, in Spanish) in 1990, and was strongly consolidated in 2003 with the creation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME, in Spanish). We argue that the IME is the first Mexican governmental transnational institution in the history of relations between the Mexican government and the Mexican community in the United States. As such, we explore some of the challenges it faces in order to achieve its objectives and exert influence in American ethnic politics.

In the first part of the paper we present a theoretical overview about the historical perspective of transnational politics. The second part offers a historical account of the development of the transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican immigrant community in the last 156 years. In the third part, we analyze the challenges faced by the IME and its potential influence in American ethnic politics. Finally, we conclude with a section of remarks from both theoretical and empirical standpoints.

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“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.

Introduction

This paper addresses the relationship between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican immigrant community in the United States from a historical perspective and within a framework of transnational politics. The objective of this paper is threefold. Firstly, from a theoretical standpoint, we examine the challenges historians and political scientists have to deal with when doing research on transnational politics, and show the richness of the Mexican-U.S. case for this type of analysis. Secondly, from an empirical perspective, we describe the history of relations between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican immigrant community, and analyze the transnational components of this relationship. Thirdly, we study the potential influence of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME, in Spanish) in American ethnic politics through the consideration of its interactive actions towards a growing Mexican immigrant population in the United States.

In this analysis we address the historical recognition of Mexican immigrant leadership and organizations by the Mexican government as actors with an agenda of their own within the context of Mexico-U.S. relations. To this effect, we study the role of the Mexican government agencies (mainly the consular network and the outreach programs created in different periods) in the formation, consolidation, and proliferation of community organizations; and we identify different historical periods of transnational relations between the Mexican government and organized Mexican immigrants.

In this work we argue that transnational relations between the Mexican government and Mexican immigrants in the United States are not new; however, these relations vary across time depending on political and economic circumstances that involve U.S.-Mexico relations. We note that there is currently a historical transformation in the traditional dimensions of the bilateral relationship, adding migration issues to the usual economic and political considerations in the agenda. On the Mexican side, this change, as well as the shift in the relationship between the Mexican immigrant communities and the government, began a process of institutionalization with the creation of the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME) in 1990 and was strongly consolidated with the formation 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 government and the Mexican community in the United States.

This is the last of a series of four papers that show different theoretical and empirical perspectives of the term “political transnationalism”. In the first paper, “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 in 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”, provide a more feasible working frame if the use of the term is to prevail in the neighborhood. In this paper, and the rest of the series, political transnationalism is addressed from an organizational perspective, that is, at a meso-level of analysis. In the second paper, “The Virgin, the Priest, and the Flag: Political Mobilization of Mexican Immigrants in Chicago, Houston, and New York” (Cano 2004c), the author examines the transnational character and power of the Catholic Church in the mobilization of Mexican immigrants through religious and nationalistic symbols. In the third paper, “Urban and Transnational Politics in America: Novus Ordo Seclorum?” (Cano 2004d), the author studies the role of local and state governments in the United States, and their relationship with foreign government and state agents, in the development of transnational politics within an urban context.

From a broader theoretical perspective, these papers show that research on political transnationalism, from an organizational perspective, can be developed within a theoretical and empirical confluence between migration studies and other related disciplines (i.e. political science, history, international relations), and research fields (i.e. religion, urban politics). From an empirical perspective, this serial work points out that in order to understand the political incorporation of immigrant populations in global American cities it is important to consider and understand the interactions among the host state (mostly through local and state governments), the home state (consulate networks, home state transnational institutions), and other actors (churches, unions, banks, host and home polities, local and transnational immigrant organizations, local and transnational ideologies, etc.). Finally, these four papers show the richness of the Mexican-U.S. case for the empirical and theoretical development of the term “political transnationalism”, and leave the door open to pursue this type of scholarly exercises in studies of other Latino, Asian, or European organized immigrant communities who currently live and work in the United States, as well as similar cases in other countries.

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This paper has four sections. In the first part we present a theoretical overview about the historical perspective of transnational politics. The second part offers a historical account of the development of the transnational relations between the Mexican government and the

organized Mexican immigrant community in the last 156 years. In the third part, we analyze the potential influence of the IME in American ethnic politics. Finally, we conclude with a section of remarks from both, theoretical and empirical standpoints.

The Historical Perspective of Transnational Politics

This work is developed within a theoretical juncture of migration studies, history and political science. Regarding the historical perspective of the term “transnationalism,” this research supports, from an empirical and theoretical standpoint, the assessment of Foner (1997) on the matter: “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.” From a broader, historical perspective, in Hollifield’s terms (2000), this work is about the *politics of international migration*. Within this framework, there is not much room to question the role of the state in a transnational process of this type. From a historical and political science perspective, the state indeed “never left the building.”

Regarding research on history and transnationalism, we have that this is a combined branch that has not been widely developed among scholars of the discipline, and what has been written on this topic is widely dispersed within the field. 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 United States. Furthermore, Fitzgerald (2004) identifies the concept of “transnationalism” as an important part of labor ideology and organization 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 analyzing the role of American Jews in Israel-United States 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. There are practically no studies that address in a comprehensive way the relationship between the home state and its migrant population from a transnational, historical perspective.

This paper addresses the historical role that the home state plays in the organizational potential of its migrant population in American soil. Since 1848, there have always been important migration flows from Mexico to the United States; in this sense, we can say that there has always been a “fresh” first generation Mexican-origin population in the United States. This condition makes feasible the study of transnational relations between the Mexican state and its migrant population from a historical perspective, and within a framework of migration studies.

We argue that there has always been a transnational relationship between the Mexican government and the Mexican immigrant population in the United States, and that this relationship is better understood when addressed from an organizational perspective, at a meso-level of analysis.

For the purposes of this paper, Mexican immigrants are those persons who were born in Mexico, who live in the United States, and who are non-citizens. Regarding the definition of transnationalism, we assume that the essence of the process of transnationalism is “living here and there” (Suárez-Orozco and Paez, 2002). However, 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 (Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Cano 2004b) it is through political organization and mobilization that the Mexican immigrant population can “be here and there”.

Regarding the role of the state in the process of transnationalization of its migrant community in a host society and polity, for the purposes of this study, any action from the Mexican government that contributes to the process of “being here and there” for the Mexican immigrant population is considered transnational. From a political perspective, the involvement of the Mexican government in the formation, consolidation and proliferation of Mexican organizations in American soil is a clear example of transnational actions. Within this context, there are three basic components that conform the essence of a transnational relationship between the home state and its migrant population: the interactive part of the relationship, the rationale of the action, and the process of agenda sharing.

In order to be considered transnational, the actions performed by organizations that deal with immigrant issues need to take into account elements from both sides of the border in a simultaneous manner. This decision-making process is better reflected whenever an organization has to make decisions under the consideration of a double agenda, one for local politics, and one for home politics. Political behavior of *Federaciones de los Estados* (Mexican-origin State Federations or umbrella hometown organizations) exposes this process at its best (Cano 2004a). Whenever a leader of a State Federation is dealing with the visiting agenda of the governor, or any other high-ranking politician or public officer of his/her home state, he or she has to ponder the role of the Mexican consulate in the process, and the convenience of paying a visit to this or that local or state politician.

From the home state standpoint, the Mexican consulate, whenever dealing with a transnational relationship, has 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 United States; (2) the local and state considerations of the polity towards the Mexican immigrant population; and (3) the agenda of the most important organizations that deal with Mexican immigrant issues. From a historical perspective, the transnational relationship between the Mexican government and the Mexican organized community evolves basically around the Mexican consulates' capacity to address the issues that affect the community and around their ability to persuade the Mexican organizations to develop a shared agenda, as well as through the links between the Mexican organized community and the outreach programs created by the government (i.e. the

PCME and the IME). In the next section we describe five different historical periods in which this type of transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican migrant community were developed.

1848-2003: A History of Transnational Relations

The objective of this section is to examine the historical development of transnational relations between the Mexican government and its immigrants in the United States. The history of 156 years of migration flows between the countries is divided into 5 periods, based on the general categories for the study of Mexico-U.S. migration, as well as what we consider the most significant changes in the relation between the Mexican government and the organized community. In order to examine the transnational components of the relationship between the home state and its population abroad, in each period we identify the main issues around which the Mexican community was organized, the types of organizations 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 organizations.

1848-1909

With the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848 Mexico lost almost half of its territory to the United States and about 1% of its population (González, 1999). Mexicans in the territory that now belonged to the United States were given the option of moving south to Mexico or keeping their property and becoming American citizens. Approximately 75,000 out of the 100,000 Mexicans living in these territories decided to remain in what became the American Southwest. Although this population did not migrate to the United States, it can be considered the first generation of Mexican immigrants in the United States as a consequence of the new territorial division.

The first political problems related to Mexicans in the United States appeared in the immediate years after the new border was established. Although the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty protected the Mexican population as United States 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 United States, which provided the basis for their struggle against political and socioeconomic subordination in American society (Gutiérrez, 1995).

During the second half of the 19th Century, Mexicans in the United States organized themselves on their own through different kinds of associations in order to defend their rights, as well as enhance their cultural values. The *mutualistas* (mutual-aid organizations) were one of the first efforts by the community to organize 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 open to all members of the Mexican community and even non-Mexicans.

The *mutualistas* mainly provided funeral and illness benefits, collective support, group defense 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 organization of their cultural events.

Through the 19th Century, *mutualistas* remained among the most numerous community-membership organizations, the largest of which was the *Alianza Hispano-Americana*, founded in 1894. The *mutualistas* also lay the foundations for labor unions, community organizations such as the *Clubes de Oriundos* (Hometown Associations), and civil and human rights organizations that proliferated through the 20th Century (Gutiérrez, 1999).

In the years after 1848, Mexicans living in the United States 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 United States elections because they were generally more favorable 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.¹ 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 modernization 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 United States also saw Mexican migration as beneficial given the economic expansion and labor shortages in the American Southwest at the beginning of the 1900s. Although new restrictive immigration laws were being implemented in the United States, 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 labor 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 criticized the lack of protection for Mexican workers in the United States. 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 labor conditions, and segregation in schools (Gómez-Quiñones, 1976). The 1907 recession in the United States 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

¹ The *Comités Cívico Patrióticos* continued these types of activities in the 20th Century (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983).

Ministry of Foreign Relations (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores –SRE*) to study the causes of emigration and to organize a survey to determine the number of Mexicans in the United States, 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 United States, 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 United States 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 United States, and they also contributed to the socio-cultural activity of the community. However, their commitment to the defense 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. The unsatisfactory response from the consulates and the Mexican government to the Mexican communities' problems in many cases led to resentment, which was a favorable environment for the opposition groups from Mexico to grow in the first years of the 20th Century. Such was the case of the groups led by the Flores Magón brothers and the *Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM)* 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 organized were their defense 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 defense 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 began expressing their concern with emigration and the problems Mexicans experienced in the United States at the end of the 19th Century. The government's response to the Mexican population abroad was channeled 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 organizations 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 organizations' agenda, 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 United States. Whole families, *campesinos* and political refugees fled to the United States 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 United States 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 United States. 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 labor 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 United States. 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).² 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 “Mexicanization” 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 United States domestic affairs) (Corwin, 1978). The results of this plan were meager. 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 United States Department of Labor’s campaign to bring Mexican workers to the United States from 1917-21 (some authors consider this the *First Bracero Program*)³ but, at the same time, protested against the ill treatment of Mexican workers in the United States (Kiser and Kiser, 1979).

The Mexican public reacted strongly against news that its countrymen were victims of racism, violence and job abuses in the United States. 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; thus, 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

² 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 laborers 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 mobilizations. 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 colonization 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.

³ See Alanís Enciso, 1999.

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 of the problems and dangers they would encounter in the United States, 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 United States 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 United States. 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 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 defense 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 organizations, 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 Honorary 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 organized repatriations, and promoted “*Mexicanidad*” projects to strengthen ties between Mexicans abroad and their cultural roots (González, 1999). Some consuls occasionally organized fund-raisers when resources were not available for the community’s projects; this brought them closer to the local population and made the consul an important figure. The funds were used to provide food, shelter and, in some cases, return transportation for unemployed and indigent Mexicans (Zazueta, 1983).

As Balderrama explains, although the consuls’ role was sometimes challenged, they became the figures around which most members of the Mexican community (both migrants 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).⁴ In order to achieve these objectives the consulates considered it necessary to lead and control community-based organizations. Thus, during the 1920s and 1930s, more than before, the Mexican government tolerated and encouraged more social and organizational 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 United States, the Mexican Foreign Ministry (*SRE*) also created a special 'protection' division, which would be in charge of issues related to Mexicans in the United States, particularly with repatriations. As the problems regarding protection of migrants and deportations increased, especially during the repatriations of 1929 due to the Great Depression,⁵ 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 United States also increased the government's concern with issues related to the impact of the Mexican community in domestic affairs (Gómez-Quiñones, 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 United States (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 Obregón was the most active in terms of seeking solutions to migration pressures and protection of Mexicans in the United States. He sought to make use of the mutual benefit and self-help societies, which had grown rapidly in number, to aid Mexicans in the United States. Obregón ordered all consuls to encourage the development of similar organizations in their districts in order to establish the primacy of the Mexican government within the political activities of the Mexican communities in the United States. 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 United States by extending consular protection into dispersed areas. These organizations 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 organizations, unionization 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 United States, including *abogados consultores* (consulting lawyers) and *Comisiones Honoríficas* (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983). However, the lack of resources, the efforts of the Catholic clergy to disrupt these organizations, the high mobility

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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).

of members, political factionalism, among other factors, limited their capacity (González, 1999; Cardoso, 1982; García, 1996).

Trade unions, including Mexicans and Mexican American workers, were also organized to combat inferior wages and labor conditions. The Los Angeles based *Confederación (or Federación) de Sociedades Mexicanas (CSM)*, formed in 1927, and the labor union *Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM)*⁶, created in 1928, also 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 organizations such as *La Sociedad Progresista Mexicana y Recreativa*, *La Cámara de Comercio Mexicana*, and *La Sociedad Mutualista Mexicana* were organized around 1924. Hundreds of Catholic organizations that brought together the Mexican community were also founded in the early part of the 20th 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 organize themselves against increased discrimination due to economic depression in the United States, the repatriation campaigns and the growth of the urban Mexican population. In this context, important organizations emerged in defense 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 their assimilation 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 organizations did not include Mexican immigrants, and the 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 organizations is important because, as we will describe further on, it influenced the Mexican government's response to its population abroad in the next periods, as well as the formation of Mexican immigrants' community organizations.

From 1910-1939 the main reasons for the formation of Mexican community-based organizations were their defense against issues of discrimination, labor rights and deportations, as well as problems related to repatriations. The most important organizations 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 organizations were labor 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, labor unions and other actors in Mexico. The transnational relation between the government and the Mexican immigrant organized 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

⁶ The CUOM later evolved into the *Confederacion de Uniones Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos*.

government's response varied according to the growth of the Mexican population in the United States, 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 United States.

1940-1969

The Second World War brought an advantageous situation for the Mexican government's negotiating position with respect to the United States. In this context, Mexico was able to establish, for once, formal bilateral cooperation for the management of labor contracting of Mexican migrants in the United States 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 recognized 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 United States increased greatly. From 1942 to 1964, almost 4.5 million Mexicans participated in the Bracero Program, 550,000 migrants were admitted legally, and approximately 5 million undocumented migrants worked in the United States (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 United States, the consulates' role in defending them was not as prominent as before. On the one hand, this can be explained by the fact that the problems related to migrants were channeled through the Bracero Program. In various occasions, the Mexican government complained directly to the United States 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 the migrant's problems.⁷

On the other hand, the Second World War opened up new opportunities for Mexicans in the United States by increasing their participation in the armed forces, defense 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 organized 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 weren't as close as

⁷ For more details about the development of the Bracero Program see García y Griego, 1983.

before. This can be considered a weak period in terms of transnational relations between the Mexican government and the organized community in the United States, although Mexican officials tried to maintain close contacts with migrants through the Bracero Program, cultural programs and visits (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983).⁸ Meanwhile, issues regarding political, economic and human rights of the second and third generations of Mexican immigrants born in the United States were mostly addressed by the Mexican American organizations that already existed and those created in the 1960s (Corwin, 1978). Through their support in education, language and job training, these organizations facilitated Mexican Americans' assimilation in the United States. It is also worth mentioning that in the context of the Bracero Program some organizations, such as LULAC, the American G.I. Forum, and the Community Service Organization (CSO), began to address issues of first generation immigrant's rights (Gutiérrez, 1999).

The Mexican community's most significant efforts towards forming organizations and strengthening ties with the Mexican government occurred during the 1960s. In 1962, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta organized 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 organization dealt with other problems related to Mexican farm workers in the United States. Through Chávez, the NFWA established contact with agencies and unions from Mexico in order to help Mexican migrants in their organizational efforts and labor disputes (Gómez-Quiñones, 1983).

In the 1960s, following the lead of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Chicano Movement, composed mainly of Mexican Americans, organized a campaign with the objective of obtaining full recognition of their rights as United States citizens and, at the same time, claim their own ethnic identity based on what they called the "Plan of Aztlán". Cultural nationalism, *indigenismo*, and the romanticizing of the Mexican 'Revolution' became common among activists of the 1960s (Gómez-Quiñones, 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 mobilization created great divisions within the Mexican community, it influenced the creation of 22 of the currently 40 most important non-profit organizations concerned with support of Mexican Americans or other Hispanic origin populations in the United States (Cano, 1997). The Mexican American Legal Defense 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 organizations 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

⁸ During the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican periodicals, records, and films were greatly disseminated in the United States and the celebration of Mexico's Independence in the United States was formalized.

view, although the disagreements between Mexican Americans, Chicanos and Mexican migrants did not disappear, most Mexican American organizations began to revise their positions about this issue by the 1970s.

Neither the Chicano movement nor any other issue related with 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-Quiñones, 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 realized its inability to reestablish formal cooperation with the United States 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 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 labor conditions in the United States (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 1940-1969 the transnational relationship between the government and the organized community reached a low level; the interaction between Mexicans living abroad 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 by cooperating with the United States, is the main explanation for this situation.

It is important to note the activity of Mexican American organizations 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 Americans and Chicanos in the next decades. The relevance of this relationship is that the development of a more active position from the Mexican government regarding migration-related issues, although not directly linked to the organized 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 United States, demographic and economic pressures in Mexico, and the regularization of undocumented

migrants through the IRCA (Immigration Reform and Control Act) in 1986, the number of Mexicans in the United States increased dramatically in the last decades of the 20th 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 officers. The ties between Mexico and the Mexicans living in the United States began to grow in cultural, political, social and economic areas, and became more complex (Gómez-Quíñones, 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 defense of Mexicans' rights and supported their organizational 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 United States 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.⁹ Although the Mexican government insisted on the possibility of establishing another Bracero Program or any other formal collaboration mechanism for migration issues, the United States dismissed its proposals (Cornelius, 1979; García y Griego, 1990).

Given the lack of success in the 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 United States that could lead to a negative outcome in this or other areas of the binational relationship (García y Griego, 1988). However, the main issue in which Echeverría concentrated the government's efforts regarding the Mexican origin population in the United States 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 *PRI*'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

⁹ One of the proposals that emerged from these groups was the stationing of consular attachés at immigration detention centers to oversee collection of unpaid wages and humane treatment (Corwin, 1978).

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

government's educational programs, as well as academic projects in Mexican universities developed in the following administrations.¹⁰

In the early 1970s, the Mexican government organized 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, formalized contact between these groups. The *Comisión* was in charge of managing relations between the Mexican government through the Ministry of Labor (*Secretaría de Trabajo*) and several Mexican American organizations (Gómez-Quñones, 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 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 United States 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 United States' 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 organizations 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*, 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 legalization 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 labor flows gradually transformed into a migration motivated by family reunification and longer or permanent stays. Their socioeconomic mobility gave them 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 regularization, legal and undocumented flows of

¹⁰ In 1978 the *Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales*, a special office within the Ministry for Education (SEP), was created to support the education of migrants in the United States. The university, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, specialized in migration issues, was founded in Tijuana in 1983. Many academic institutions also organized exchanges with Chicano studies programs.

Mexican migrants increased. The number of *Clubes de Oriundos* increased with the new flows of Mexican migrants and *Federaciones de los Estados* (State Federations or umbrella hometown organizations), such as the *Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos* created in 1972, began to grow.¹¹

The demand for Mexican consular services in the context of the IRCA regularization 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 recognize 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 United States through regular visits (Goldring, 2002). In 1986, De la Madrid created the *Programa Cultural de las Fronteras* within the Ministry of Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública* - SEP) to promote academic activities, journals, radio programs, seminars, publications and exhibitions related to Mexico and Chicanos; and established the *CONAPO* within the Ministry of Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación* -SEGOB) to study migration and population issues.

The 1988 presidential campaign brought political interests into this context. For the first time, Mexican parties, mainly the ruling PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) and the leftist PRD (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*), competed for the loyalty of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States (González, 1999). The potential impact of these groups in national and international politics was evident. The mobilization of various United States-based organizations 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 recognize 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 United States became more dynamic. The demographic, economic and political changes experienced by the Mexican population in the United States influenced the government's responses. Through the 1970s and most of the 1980s, the immigrant's agenda was "tacitly omitted"¹² 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 its pursuance of contacts with Mexican American leaders, organizations and businesses in the United States. Although these initiatives were not formalized 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 set the stage for the development of a more comprehensive response to migration issues from the 1990s onwards.

¹¹ 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).

¹² The idea of a migration policy strategy as a "benign omission" is developed by Gómez Quiñones, 1981.

The changes in the political and economic context in Mexico, as well as the transformation in the government's relations with the United States, mainly as a result of the liberalization of the Mexican economy, impacted the development of contacts between the Mexican government and immigrants in the United States. During this period, Mexican community organizations 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 technological innovations that helped strengthen the ties between the Mexican organizations, 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 United States. The politicization 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.

1990-2003

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 their activities expanded. The government also promoted business ties between the *Cámara Nacional de la Industria de la Transformación*, the *Banco Nacional de Comercio*, the *Secretaría de Comercio*, *Nacional Financiera (NAFIN)*, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Most importantly, Salinas created the *Programa de las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior* (PCME) within the Ministry of Foreign Relations (*SRE*) and the *Programa Paisano* and *Grupos Beta de Protección a Migrantes*, managed by the Ministry of the Interior (*SEGOB*) and later on by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM* (National Migration Institute), which was created 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 the PCME 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 organized community, and to the demand of Mexican American organizations, 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).¹³ The PCME 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 organized community (mainly through *Clubes de Oriundos* and *Federaciones de los Estados*) gave them strong support, promoted the creation of more of these organizations, and helped

¹³ See also Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2000.

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 the PCME was designed for the whole of the Mexican communities abroad (including Mexican Americans, and migrants), it was mostly the Mexican migrants who participated in these programs (De la Garza, 1983). Nonetheless, the Mexican American community generally supported the PCME, and organizations such as LULAC, NALEO*, NCLR and the UFW, cooperated with the PCME to strengthen its campaigns and expand their scope (González Gutiérrez and Schumacher, 1998).

Through consular activity and the creation of the PCME, Salinas' purpose was, on the one hand, to stimulate ties with the Mexican community at all levels (intellectuals, businessmen, politicians, leaders, activists, Latino leaders and organizations), promote their cultural ties and understanding of Mexico, and seek their political and financial support as a way to incorporate issues on the bilateral agenda and affect United States policy towards Mexico (González Gutiérrez, 1993). On the other hand, the Mexican government was looking towards the promotion of its image in the United States 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 United States. During the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) negotiations, begun in 1991, for the first time Mexico launched an open lobbying campaign in the United States (including Mexican American organizations, leaders and politicians) to promote its interests, no longer fearing that Mexican "intervention" in politics north of the border might prompt United States intervention in Mexican affairs (Dresser, 2000).¹⁴

During Ernesto Zedillo's presidency, the government's support of mobilizations against anti-immigrant campaigns such as Proposition 187 in California in 1994, enhanced its new position towards issues regarding the Mexican population in the United States. The intensity of the immigration debate in the United States, as well as the consequences of the border control operations initiated by the United States 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 United States. In 1996, the Mexican Congress also approved an initiative to eliminate legal restrictions on the right to vote by nonresidents (the details of how this right will be exercised continue to be debated and have yet to be approved by the Mexican Congress).

At the same time, during Zedillo's government, contacts and sharing of information between Mexican and United States authorities at all levels were deepened in issues related to migration. As Alba describes it, the "migration dialogue was institutionalized" through the creation of working groups, bilateral commissions, memoranda of understanding, discussion forums, interparliamentary commissions and the signing of various accords related to

* National Association of Latino Elected Officials.

¹⁴ See also Todd A. Eisenstadt (2000). "El Auge del Cabildeo Mexicano en Washington: más lejos del cielo y más cerca de Estados Unidos", in Bernardo Mabire (ed.) *México- Estados Unidos- Canadá 1997-1998*, Mexico: El Colegio de México: 61-119.

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 United States from implementing unilateral policies such as the operations at the border and the IIRIA (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 United States. Nonetheless, the strengthening of mechanisms of cooperation between Mexico and the United States in migration issues contributed to the Mexican government's capacity to carry out its consular activity with successful results, particularly in terms of defense of Mexicans who were apprehended for violation of immigration laws. Moreover, this "migration dialogue" lay 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 *Partido Acción Nacional –PAN*) 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 United States, 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, it represented a major shift in the government's traditional position regarding migration issues. Various factors such as the change of regime, the deepening of economic integration between Mexico and the United States, the growth of the Mexican population abroad, its economic and political influence, and the public's attention to it from both sides of the border, influenced the fact that President Fox was able to accept more openly and directly the need to establish formal mechanisms, both unilateral and bilateral, to manage the problems related to migration. As Alba explains, "the Fox administration 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).

The 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 United States. 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..."¹⁵ 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 the PCME, 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 United States government with the objective of establishing an extensive migration accord. However,

¹⁵ "Interview with Juan Hernández", *Migration World Magazine*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2001. p. 27.

these efforts crumbled when the United States' 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 possibilities for establishing a comprehensive bilateral agreement almost disappeared.

Nonetheless, at the national level, 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 the PCME and the OPME programs into a single office: the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME). The IME became the executive branch of a 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.¹⁶ The IME, directed by Cándido Morales, a Mexican migrant who has lived and worked most of his life in the United States, is in charge of channeling and implementing the CCIME's recommendations and coordinating the CNCME's activities.

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 United States 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 United States. In the long-term, the Mexican government's objective is to create a strong relationship with the communities that will allow them to mobilize, and join efforts to pursue common objectives in the United States and Mexico (González Gutiérrez, 2003).

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 organized community. As compared to past programs and campaigns, during this period a comprehensive institutional structure was developed, mainly through the PCME, the OPME and the IME, and a pattern of continuity was established. Relations between the government and the Mexican organized community were closer, particularly through cooperation between immigrant home-oriented organizations (*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 institutionalization of this transnational relation is embodied by the IME and its Advisory Council (CCIME), where the community leadership is recognized, 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

¹⁶ The CCIME is composed by 105 Mexican, Mexican American and Mexican-Canadian elected representatives, 10 members of Latino organizations in the US, 10 specialized advisors and 32 representatives of the state governments in Mexico.

as a result of the historical development of contacts between the community and the government.

Through the 156 years of history analyzed in this section, we have identified the transnational signs that characterize 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 reasons for the community's organization and the way it is organized, whether it seeks the government's support and includes it as part of its agenda. This type of relationship can be identified since the later half of the 19th Century, but it varies depending on the type of problems experienced by the community, the government's capacity and interest to attend to them and its interest in collaborating with the organized community. These organizations have been key for the government's policy responses to Mexicans abroad because they provide channels for aid, they voice the community's demands and they exercise pressure over the authorities.

On the other hand, the transnational relationship is based on the government's recognition of the organized community through the support in the formation, consolidation or proliferation of their organizations, and the mutual inclusion of their concerns in both, the Mexican government's and the organizations' 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 the PCME, and afterwards the OPME and the IME, the government's response was mainly channelled through consular protection and there was no institutionalization of policies towards Mexicans abroad. The type of governmental response varied according to the problems experienced by the Mexican population abroad, the demographic, economic and political influence of Mexicans on both sides of the border, the type and level of organization of the Mexican community, political and economic pressures in Mexico, and the context of U.S.-Mexico relations. It is possible to assert that as the Mexican communities became better organized and more significant demographically, economically, and politically, the government's response was more comprehensive and systematic.

There is a long history of transnationalism in the relations between the Mexican government and the community organizations of Mexicans abroad. The contacts developed throughout this history have allowed for the formation, proliferation and consolidation of Mexican immigrant organizations, and the institutionalization of their transnational relationship with the Mexican government. Thus, it can be argued that "the fact that Mexican foreign policy made room for the *Mexico de Afuera* at various times since 1848 is significant for today's political dialogue. The types of policy responses that occurred in the past seem to have established a pattern influencing the options presently available" (Zazueta, 1983). The challenges faced by the existing structure, mainly based on the IME experience, and the extent to which it can influence American ethnic politics will now be examined.

The IME's challenges and American Ethnic Politics

American ethnic politics are exerted at three different levels of government: national, state, and local. Within each level, the main actors are the members of the executive and legislative branches. The product of the interaction between these actors, at intra or intergovernmental

levels, determines the public policies that are exerted on behalf of different ethnic groups in the United States. These ethnic groups are formed generally by first, second or upper generations of immigrants. First generation immigrants may be documented or undocumented. In the Mexican case, the majority of its migrants are undocumented and there is an increasing proportion of their population living and working in urban and metropolitan areas.

The relationship between the Mexican government and American ethnic politics is basically given at the national, and the state/local level. The national level is determined by the bilateral relations between the two countries, and generally addresses major migration issues through agreements that involve the legislative and/or executive branches of both countries. At a state/local level, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Mexican consulate network and the IME, addresses issues that affect the life of Mexican immigrants, mostly through consistent outreach and dialogue with local and state authorities. Nonetheless, Mexican state governments, and even local authorities, have started, or have increasingly reinforced, a relationship of their own with state and local U.S. governments (Cano 2004d).

Within this context, we analyze the most important elements that determine the potential influence of the IME on American ethnic politics: the IME's Informative Conferences, the Mexican consulates, the IME personnel in the United States and, most important of all, the CCIME. We also identify the most important challenges that the IME has to overcome in order to accomplish its short and long-term goals.

Informative Conferences

One activity within the IME's agenda that is highly related to the capacity of the Mexican government to influence American ethnic politics and policies is the organization of Informative Conferences. These Conferences were originally designed in the second half of the 1990s by the PCME with the aim of bringing prominent members of the U.S. public administration closer to the Mexican reality, hoping that they would then become "spokespersons for, and goodwill activists towards Mexico" (SRE, 2000). About 166 public officers -from 18 different states of the Union- at local, state, and federal levels, attended seven Informative Conferences between 1997 and 2000.

There are two main differences between the Informative Conferences of the PCME (1997-2000) and the IME (2003). First, the content of the PCME's Conferences was designed mainly for participants to acknowledge and understand the Mexican reality, whereas the IME's Conferences are also designed to introduce them to the public policies and programs of the Mexican government that deal with the needs of its migrant population. Second, the IME's Conferences show higher levels of diversity regarding the origin of their participants. The nine IME Conferences organized in the second semester of 2003 involved a total of 349 participants from several fields in similar proportions: education, health, community leaders, Latino elected officials, sport, tourism and law, while the 201 total participants in the seven PCME's Conferences between 1997 and 2000 were constituted in more than 80% by public officers, and no more than 4% of community leaders and non-profit organizations leaders.

This second difference is crucial to understand the potential influence that the Mexican government may exert on American ethnic politics. If it is true that the PCME program was

specifically designed to establish contact with public officers, there was no follow-up on the real effect that these Conferences had on the political behavior of these persons. A similar situation may happen with the IME. The main difference is that the IME is creating a huge network of prominent individuals, organization leaders, and public officers that are becoming familiar not only with the reality of Mexico, but also with what the Mexican government can and cannot do on behalf of their immigrant population. A coordinated follow-up of their activities through the IME representatives in the Mexican consulates, beyond and throughout *sexenios*, will be extremely useful for the Mexican government when trying to know what works and what does not work with this type of outreach programs.

Mexican Consulates and IME Representatives

The extended network of 45 Mexican consulates throughout the United States gives Mexico a unique opportunity to disseminate IME's projects and programs. No other country has this diplomatic infrastructure within the borders of the most powerful nation in the world. However, the Consul's attitude towards the IME and its representatives is an important factor to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of the IME in disseminating its projects and programs. Some Consuls are enthusiastic supporters of the IME, others are not, and the majority stands in the middle.

During the 1990s, most Consuls assessed the PCME representatives in their job performance, that is, their capacity to administer programs directed towards the Mexican and Mexican American communities. With the IME, the role of the Consul is expected to be more intense and subject to closer scrutiny. In addition to the programs that have to be administered by the IME representatives, the Consuls will have to deal with the activities of the leaders of the Mexican community, members of the Advisory Council of the IME (CCIME), and local and state authorities that have or have not attended Informative Conferences. This, under the premise that a follow-up of the IME and CCIME activities takes place through the whole consulate network.

There are also about 70-75 IME representatives in the 45 Mexican consulates in the United States. These IME employees are in charge of implementing the IME programs and projects in each consular circumscription. Most of them were formed within the PCME lines of action, with a strong emphasis on administration of programs that were initially designed to establish contact with the Mexican-origin population living and working in the United States. Even after more than one year of the creation of the IME, some of them still identify themselves as members of "Comunidades" which is the short name for the PCME.

The institutional transformation from the PCME to the IME is reflected in the profile that is needed for the IME representatives. With the PCME, most of its representatives spent their time administering programs designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City - sometimes in coordination with other federal offices to approach the Mexican community living abroad. The priorities of the PCME's programs were targeted to the community in general, local and state authorities, and Mexican and Mexican American or Hispanic organizations, in that order.

The role of the IME representatives has more to do with the actions of the community's leadership. The IME's approach is focused on the activities of the local Mexican and Mexican American leadership of the community, the actions of local and state authorities, and the community in general, in that order. With the IME, direct support for previous PCME activities such as soccer tournaments and cultural events has practically disappeared,¹⁷ while education and health programs have continued to develop in the new structure. This is mostly because of the infrastructure created by the PCME 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 "Informative Conferences". A key difference with the PCME is that the 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 CCIME members, local and state authorities, and, of course, the Mexican Consuls.

One of the few things that has not changed between the PCME and the IME regarding their employees abroad is that they deal in fact with two bosses and, therefore, have two jobs. They follow the guidelines of the IME in Mexico, but most of them also address other activities that are more related to the consulate's agenda, like the organization of *Consulados Móviles* (Mobile Consulates),¹⁸ press and cultural events, issuing Consular I.D.'s, services to the public in general, and other "Consul's recommendations."

Also, substantial overloads of work and prominent shortness of material, human, and budgetary resources have limited the IME representatives' capacity to do whatever they can in order to make ends meet in filling the Consul's recommendations, and accomplishing their IME duties. As a result of this, some consular circumscriptions show a modest progress in accomplishing IME goals, whereas others receive the full support of the Consul, and give priority to IME activities. Some IME representatives are not very familiar with the members of the CCIME members of their circumscription; others do have periodical meetings with them, and are perfectly aware of their agenda. However, the interaction between IME representatives and the CCIME is highly regulated by the Consuls' agenda.

The Advisory Council of the IME

The main difference between the PCME and the IME is the existence of the Advisory Council (CCIME) within the new institutional structure. The group of 105 elected members is composed of Mexican Americans and Mexicans who live in the United States, and who are mostly community, organization, and business leaders. Together with the other 52 appointed members, the CCIME has two general meetings per year and issues recommendations to the

¹⁷ The cultural activities sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became highly independent of the PCME (in budgetary and even institutional terms) with the creation of the Mexican Cultural Institutes or Cultural Centers in the United States during the second half of the 1990s.

¹⁸ The Mexican consulates offer some services to Mexican citizens (i.e. issuance of Consular I.D.'s and passports) through the *Consulado Móvil*. Through this program, a truck is driven several miles away from the consulate on weekends to address the consular needs of Mexican communities who live within the circumscription but are relatively far from the consulate headquarters, and whose daily work would not allow them to go to the consulate to address their business.

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.¹⁹ Thus, the CCIME is the living transnational component of the IME. It is because of the CCIME that the IME and the communities can be in Mexico and the United States practically “at the same time.” The interaction between the CCIME and the IME is one of the more innovative features of the new structure of institutional outreach between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican migrant community.

Originally, the CCIME was designed to influence and guide the Mexican government in its relationship with the whole community. As time passes by, in addition to the recommendations issued by the CCIME, the horizon of activities that members of the CCIME may exert in their respective circumscriptions is amazingly vast. The members of the CCIME not only are able to create their own agenda of activities within their community, but they also have direct access to the Consuls’ office and, as a group, they have access to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The fact that they are not part of the official structure of the Mexican government allows them to act with a liberty that the IME representatives do not have. It is this freedom of action that allows the CCIME members to learn about the real horizons and influence of their work with the Mexican government, and with local and state authorities in the United States.

The way in which the CCIME was conceived, and the expectations about its future activities can give a clear idea of the potential political influence that this group can exert simultaneously on both sides of the border, and some of the challenges it has to meet in order to take full advantage of its capacities. Firstly, the lack of clear guidelines in the election of the CCIME members makes it difficult to believe that the CCIME, as a whole, is actually representative of the Mexican community in the United States and Canada. In broad terms, it is safer to say that the CCIME is representative of the relationship between the Consuls and the organized Mexican community in their respective circumscriptions, given the fact that most CCIME members were selected directly or indirectly by the Consuls.

Generally, the closer the member of the CCIME is to the Consul, the higher the chances that he/she has to share or coordinate his/her agenda with that of the Consul. However, there is nothing written in stone in this relationship; some CCIME members who were strongly favored by the Consul in the selection process have shown high levels of independence in developing relations with local and state authorities and politicians, and the media of both countries. Based on these considerations, it is possible to argue that the scope of action of present and future CCIME members 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) depending on the circumstances, their capacity to launch initiatives in American soil, at a local level, independently from their duties at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁹ Since its creation in March 2003, the CCIME has held three meetings and issued more than 200 recommendations, which are publicly available at www.sre.gob.mx/ime/.

Second, once their membership concludes in 2006, there is a big question mark regarding the activities of the more than the 100 elected/selected former members of the CCIME. Several scenarios may arise. Having participated in the first council created to establish a direct dialogue between the Mexican immigrants and the government, the CCIME representatives have gained valuable knowledge and access to certain mechanisms that they can use in favor of the Mexican community (and even the Mexican government) when their term is over. For example, as individuals or as a group, they could collaborate with the new CCIME, the Mexican government and/or other groups to help form the first national lobbying organization that would address the needs and interests of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the United States. They could also work independently to promote their own agenda in Mexico and in the United States or they could create different pro-immigrant organizations, from education or health-oriented, to political organizations that might approach Mexican and/or American political parties. Another possibility is for them to simply return to their former activities.

Challenges in the Near Future

In this initial stage of its creation, the IME has a whole set of challenges that have to be addressed sooner or later in order to determine the real influence of the Institute in American ethnic politics. In order to achieve its objectives, it is important for the IME to approach consistently local and state American authorities and politicians as central targets of action, a similar approach to that of the PCME in the second half of the 1990s. It is at this level that changes can be made in order to affect positively the lives of Mexican immigrants in the United States. It is through the activities of the CCIME, and the extended consular network throughout the United States, that the IME's influence can materialize and become a permanent mechanism to set up a shared and interactive agenda with other main actors in American soil.

At this point, the IME has to create feasible links between the immediate aims of establishing a dialogue and developing stronger links between the Mexican government and the community, and the long-term objective of creating a lobby group in favor of Mexican immigrants (and Mexico) in the United States. However, more questions than answers arise in this regard: Are the CCIME and the Informative Conferences the right strategy for creating a lobbying group that can look for Mexican and Mexican American interests in the United States? What are the chances that this lobby group will look after the interests of Mexico in the United States, which is a natural field of action of the consular network? To what extent does this group have the skills and will to institutionalize its actions? What is the optimal level of independence of action of this group from the actions of the Mexican government regarding Mexican migration policies and politics? Through time, the interactive, transnational nature of the IME will provide answers, but also will modify the questions themselves.

In the meantime, two factors stamp the way to the secondary, transition stage of the IME in 2006. In December of that year President Fox's term will end, and the new administration will determine its position regarding the management of migration issues in the domestic and bilateral agenda. It will also decide issues regarding the political continuity of current key

institutions at the core of Mexican migration policy: the IME and the National Migration Institute (INM).²⁰

Firstly, the permanence of institutional efforts in migration politics and policies, like the IME, depends strongly on strategic considerations in the U.S.-Mexico relation. During the current administration, in addition to economic and political considerations, the migration issue has been brought to the fore within the bilateral agenda. As recent events, and historical tendencies show, the way in which migration is dealt with bilaterally is determined by international economic and political circumstances that affect the U.S.-Mexico relationship, and also by each country's political and economic context at the domestic level (Délano, 2003). Scenarios may change depending on which candidate is elected in the United States in 2004 and the result of the 2006 presidential elections in Mexico, as well as the state of the economy in both countries. Currently relevant issues, such as national security or the deepening of the NAFTA integration process, can affect this context and limit the options available, regardless of the fact that migration has taken an unprecedented priority in the Mexican government's agenda and was a key point in the bilateral negotiations of 2001.

Secondly, the IME and the INM currently face strong budgetary shortages, which are a product of the inability of the Fox administration to create a successful lobbying strategy in the Mexican Congress in order to negotiate the financial viability of prominent projects for the nation. In order to implement a viable migration policy, the Mexican government must recognize, and reflect in budgetary terms, that the social, economic, and political future of Mexico depends in a good measure of its migrants, and on the manner the Mexican government deals with the issue in the present. Without the basic resources, there is no way for the Mexican government to institutionalize a permanent and consistent state migration policy.

Final Remarks

During the last 156 years, the Mexican government has always created links with the Mexican organized community to address its needs and concerns. Through organizations such as *mutualistas*, *Juntas Patrióticas*, *Comisiones Honoríficas*, union organizations, Hometown Associations, and State Federations, the Mexican government, based on its extended consular network, has created ties with the organized Mexican migrant population in the United States. These links have provided the basis for the existence of current organizations of Mexican immigrants in the United States as well as the recent creation and development of the Mexican government's institutions to manage this relationship.

In the five periods analyzed in this paper, the relationship between the Mexican government and the Mexican immigrant community in the United States has been characterized by different levels of involvement of the Mexican consulates and programs or institutions created by the

²⁰ The Mexican Senate is currently analyzing an initiative introduced in October 2003 -the "*Ley de Protección a Migrantes e Inmigrantes*"- with the objective of merging the IME, the INM and the Office for Consular Protection within the *SRE (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 decentralized office coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior (*SEGOB*). The proposal is 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.

Mexican government in the formation, consolidation, and proliferation of Mexican immigrant organizations. The rationale is that it is more efficient for the Mexican consulates to accomplish their duties by collaborating with an organized community, just as the community's objectives can consolidate and expand with the consulates' support. This relationship between the Mexican government and the organized Mexican immigrant community is the core element of an evolving process of political transnational activities of the community. However, the Mexican government's activity has varied historically in accordance to the problems experienced by Mexicans in the United States, the domestic political and economic situation, and the context of Mexico-U.S. binational relations.

During the first period, 1848-1909, we identify the first transnational signs in the relationship between the Mexican government and the Mexican population in the United States. The relation between the Mexican government and the community is given by the formation and consolidation of community organizations such as the *mutualistas* and *Juntas Patrióticas*, whose activity involved issues related to Mexico as well as collaboration with consulates in defense of property rights and discrimination.

During the second period, 1910-1939, the Mexican consulates continued to be involved in the formation and consolidation of self-help *mutualistas* and other political and labor associations such as the *Comisiones Honoríficas*, the *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul*, the *Confederación de Sociedades Mexicanas (CSM)* and the *Confederación de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM)*. The transnational relation between the Mexican government and the community is given by collaboration between the consulates and these community-based organizations in defense of labor rights and the formation of unions, discrimination and assimilation issues, as well as repatriation procedures.

In the third period, from 1940-1969, the Bracero Program became the basic parameter to measure the relations of the Mexican government and the organized Mexican immigrants in the United States. Throughout the existence of the Bracero Program, the level of consular activism decreased. Although the first *Clubes de Oriundos* were formed during this period, their relationship with the consulates or with their local governments was not strong. Transnational relations between the Mexican government and Mexican community based organizations reached a passive status, in comparison to the activity of the two preceding periods.

In the fourth period, 1970-1989, there was a focus shift of the Mexican government towards the Mexican-origin population living and working in the United States: the Echeverría government implemented new programs, specifically directed towards the Chicano and Mexican American community. The level of involvement between the Mexican government and the Mexican migrants remained passive. Community organizations continued to develop, mainly through the *Clubes de Oriundos* and *Federaciones de los Estados*, although their relations with the consulate and Mexican authorities were minimal in terms of political activism. Consular activity was mainly concentrated on the promotion of cultural and education programs and the pursuance of contacts with Chicano and Mexican American leaders. However, the demographic, economic and political changes experienced by the Mexican population in the United States led to a transformation of the Mexican government's policies towards them in the next decades.

In the fifth period, 1990-2003, transnational relations between the Mexican government and the Mexican immigrant population reached new levels of institutionalization. In a first stage, with the creation of the PCME, the Mexican government gave *de facto* an institutional status to that relation. During the 1990s, the support in the formation, consolidation, and proliferation of Hometown Associations and State Federations became the most sophisticated transnational activity of Mexican consulates in the United States. Through the OPME, in 2000, this relation became interactive for the first time in history. Organized immigrants had the opportunity of approaching an official instance, other than the consulate, to express their concerns and give their opinion on several issues on both sides of the border.

With the creation of the IME and the CCIME, the institutionalization of such 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 community from a federal perspective, and with a strong potential to involve local actors (local authorities, politicians, the church, unions, and Mexican and Mexican American organizations) directly in the solutions of the community's problems. Nonetheless, as we have pointed out, the IME faces important challenges, both structural and budgetary, that, within the domestic and bilateral political context, will affect its capacity to achieve its objectives and influence American ethnic politics.

From a theoretical perspective, this is one of the few works in the last twenty years that can be properly considered historical within the boundaries of transnational politics. This type of analysis allows us to assert that the essence of a transnational relationship between a home state and its organized migrant population is based on their continuous interaction through a process of agenda-sharing, under the consideration that such agenda is formed by a set of binational components. It is through historical analysis that we have been able to identify different levels of transnational relations between the home state and its migrant population across specific periods of time.

The development of this work has left several open doors for further research. This type of historical analysis can be extended to other similar migrant groups and test the hypothesis if being an organized community is a necessary and sufficient condition for a transnational relationship to emerge between the home state and its migrant population. This certainly is a great incentive for migration scholars to go beyond the American experience and do research on large, historical, continuous migration flows between two countries, such as Turks in Germany, Moroccans in France, Indians in Great Britain, or Koreans in Japan. Comparative historical research on the matter should address, for example, to what extent different levels of political organization of migrant communities have affected the structure of the host and home states, or to what extent the agenda-sharing process can be considered the essence of a transnational relationship between the home state and its migrant community.

Regarding the Mexico-U.S. case, we note that an issue that requires further development in the field is the constant immigrant-related actions of Mexican American organizations, 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 organizations 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).

Finally, this type of research can also be taken into the macro-level of analysis, and try to determine to what extent it is possible to talk about the formation of transnational communities from a political-historical perspective. At the micro-level, further analysis could be based on oral history research, studying, for example, the current and future members of the CCIME regarding their personal motivations, their political circumstances, their view of the importance of migration issues for U.S.-Mexican relations, and their understanding of historical transnational processes between the home state and its migrant population.²¹ Considering all the unexplored possibilities in this field, we are optimistic that future theoretical development of political transnationalism will rely on historical research on the matter.

²¹ Atala Pérez Rodríguez, Director of Education and Health, Institute of Mexicans Abroad, Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, personal communication, 2004.

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