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**Rethinking the 'Local' and 'Transnational': Cross-Border Politics and Hometown Networks in an Immigrant Union**

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# **Rethinking the ‘Local’ and ‘Transnational’: Cross-Border Politics and Hometown Networks in an Immigrant Union\***

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*Abstract.* The controversial notion of ‘transnationalism’ has generated new insights into international migrants’ on-going ties with their communities of origin that are unexplained by crude versions of the assimilation paradigm. However, the problematic conceptualization of ‘transnationalism’ and its vague usage in empirical studies needlessly inhibit the transnational perspective’s utility. Understanding the political and economic incorporation of migrants in both their communities of origin and destination is facilitated by disaggregating the types of political borders, types of nationalism, and levels of identification that have been conflated in the framework of ‘transnationalism’. I demonstrate the analytic value of these distinctions by using them to interpret evidence from a six-month ethnographic case study of an immigrant labor union in Southern California. A theoretically coherent typology applicable to both the case study and other migration settings provides a framework for explaining how institutions incorporate migrants into U.S. and local politics while simultaneously promoting cross-border ties. I argue labor migrants engage in cross-border activities as a defensive reaction against the discrimination to which they are subjected *qua* ‘foreigners’ and because cross-border networks are a strategic resource for attaining status and material benefits both ‘here’ and ‘there’.

Definitions of migrant ‘transnationalism’ have proliferated over the last decade to include phenomena as diverse as nostalgia for the home country and political parties that span two or more countries. In their influential article, Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) argue the concept requires much greater specificity to be useful as an analytic tool. They suggest transnationalism can be applied best to the economic domain, where grassroots transnational business practices are relatively novel.<sup>1</sup> Left unclarified in this and most work on migrant transnationalism (e.g. Glick Schiller 1999; Fitzgerald 2000; Levitt 2001) is why either historical

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or contemporary cross-border practices should be conceptualized as transnational rather than trans-state (Verdery 1994). As I will discuss in the following section, such problematic frameworks and conflation inhibit understanding of migrants' cross-border political ties. Extending efforts to better specify and explain 'transnationalism', I argue the term as it has often been used in migration research should be retired and its analytic categories and causal mechanisms refined.

A recent review of research on migrant political 'transnationalism' argues that few studies examine the relationship between migrant participation in politics 'here' and 'there' (Itzigsohn 2000). Studies of cross-border migrant politics have examined institutions like migrant hometown associations (Zabin and Escala 1998), sending country political parties (Graham 1997), ethnic organizations (Rivera Salgado 1999), sending country governments (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994), and ethnic lobbies (Sheffer 1986). Labor studies have begun to explore the organization of immigrant workers through hometown networks (Milkman 2000), but do not address the ways that unionized immigrants' on-going connectivity with their places of origin influences economic and political practices in the United States. Research on contemporary U.S. labor unions and immigrants too often has neglected cross-border processes (van der Linden 1999) and viewed migrants as permanent settlers rather than potential returnees (Wyman 1996:108). This paper joins research on immigrant organized labor and 'transnationalism' through an ethnographic study of a Southern California union local whose members are active in U.S. and Mexican politics on both the national and local levels.

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<sup>1</sup> The extent to which 'transnational' practices conceived as new in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have historical precedent is reviewed by Morawska (2001) and Glick Schiller (1999).

I first make a set of taxonomic distinctions of political activities and ideologies that have been considered ‘transnational’. Disaggregating ‘transnationalism’ into more carefully specified components offers a way to build on existing understandings of migrants’ and even non-migrants’ cross-border connectivity. I extend the range of actors studied in the transnationalism literature in two ways. First, I explain how and why *non-migrants* in the receiving country engage in political activities structured around transborder migrant networks, answering a question in the literature about whether non-migrants in receiving localities “experience something equivalent to transnationalism” (Rios 1992:228). Second, I bring *wage laborers* into the study of economic aspects of ‘transnationalism’, which has tended to focus on entrepreneurs (Portes et al. 1999). I argue labor migrants engage in cross-border activities as a defensive reaction against the discrimination to which they are subjected *qua* ‘foreigners’ and because cross-border networks are a strategic resource for attaining status and material benefits in both sending and receiving societies.

## **UNPACKING ‘TRANSNATIONALISM’**

The transnational perspective in migration studies usefully highlights the entire range of migrant experiences in sending and receiving countries. Transnationalism has been a corrective to versions of assimilation theory strongly colored by an assimilationist ideology that immigrants do and *should* irrevocably sever ties with their places of origin. Attention to cross-border ties is absent even from the most sophisticated versions of assimilation in the canonical literature (Gordon 1964; Glazer and Moynihan 1964). While the transnationalism literature has suggested promising avenues of inquiry, current conceptualizations remain problematic on three critical counts.

First, 'trans' refers to a crossing or transcendence that conflates distinct borders of state, nation, culture, and geography (see Basch et al. 1994:7). This conflation is particularly problematic in the notion of "deterritorialized nation-states" in which the "territorial definition of the state" is said to be "ruptured" (1994:147). It is the territorial borders of *nation* rather than state that have been ruptured in these settings. The modern state is a political organization with sharply defined territorial borders (Torpey 2000). Nation is a more ambiguous concept referring both to an imagined ethnic community and a political unit of the citizens of the state (Akzin 1966, Anderson 1991). Practically all states are clearly bounded by territorial and political lines, but national borders are rarely so clearly defined as the notion of 'nation-state' implies.<sup>2</sup> Particularly in instances of mass emigration, 'the nation' is said to exist in a global 'diaspora' without borders (Tölölyan 1996). The analytic formulation of *transnational* is inconsistent with empirical evidence in works demonstrating the promotion of particularistic *nationalisms* across *state* borders (e.g. Laguerre 1998; Guarnizo and Portes 2001).

The distinction between trans-state and transnational may not be significant when discussing kinship ties, but the difference is crucial in economic and political analysis. For example, recognizing the difference between state and nation clarifies a central finding in the literature on state-emigrant relations. States cannot directly coerce the economic participation of citizens outside the state's territory, so governments in countries of emigration increasingly invoke national solidarity across state borders to encourage emigrant remittances and investment (Freeman and Ögelman 1998; Itzigsohn 2000). When the Mexican president visited Mexican immigrants in California in 2001, as I will discuss later, he promoted a nationalist project that

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<sup>2</sup> When I refer to 'borders' without further qualification, I mean the territorial, political borders that divide the world into a system of states.

crossed state lines. States deploy the language of nationalism precisely because migrants are outside state territorial borders but within the boundaries of the imagined nation.

A second weakness of ‘transnational’ studies is an inadequate conceptualization of the relationship between ‘transnationalism’ and ‘nationalism’. Transnationalism, as the supersession of nationalism in legitimating universal rights of citizenship (Bauböck 1994) or a transnational labor movement that transcends national boundaries<sup>3</sup> (van der Linden 1999), is distinct from “immigrants’ political transnationalism” (Itzigsohn 2000). Immigrants’ ‘political transnationalism’ is often *nationalist*.

Two separate forms of nationalism are conflated in the notion of immigrant transnationalism - the *transborder homeland nationalism* of identification with a ‘nation’ despite physical absence from the homeland and the *dual nationalism* of political identification with two distinct ‘nations’. Migrants who claim membership in a ‘nation’ while living outside a nation-state’s borders, or state actors that claim emigrants as their own, are engaged in discourses and practices of transborder homeland nationalism. A transborder nationalist project invokes the wholeness of one ‘nation’ despite intervening state borders (Brubaker 1996).<sup>4</sup> Dual nationalists claim to belong to both sending and receiving ‘nations’, yet conceive of those ‘nations’ as distinct. The legal concept of ‘dual nationality’ expresses a legal status, while ‘dual nationalism’ describes a discourse and political program of dual affiliations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The difference between ‘transnationalism’ and ‘internationalism’ when referring to a global organization of workers is slight. Theoretically, the difference is that an ‘International’ is constituted by national units while a ‘transnational’ organization does not imply constituent national-level units.

<sup>4</sup> Brubaker’s original concept of ‘transborder nationalisms’ refers to a rather different context from labor migration, in which the Russian state promoted itself as protector of ethnic Russians stranded outside Russian borders following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible for migrants to consider themselves members of more than two ‘nations’. Such a scenario could be described as ‘plural nationalism’ (rather than ‘multinationalism’, which already has a distinct though conceptually muddled usage that more accurately refers to multi-*state* arrangements like ‘multinational peacekeeping’).

Michel Laguerre (1998) has called the sense of membership in more than one polity and an attachment to a distant homeland an instance of 'diasporic citizenship'. "Diasporic citizenship induces openness and prevents narrow nationalism because it elicits attachment to both the homeland and the country of residence" (p.18). The degree to which migrants are attached to *both* homeland and country of residence is variable, however. Migrants may consider themselves dual nationals and engage in cross-border nationalist practices, but dual and transborder nationalisms are analytically distinct. For example, a self-defined member of both the Catalan and Spanish 'nations' could think in dual nationalist terms without leaving the state's territory (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001). A second form of dual nationalism would characterize a migrant maintaining dual national ties across a state border, like a Mexican-American dual national (Hammar 1989). Dual nationalism would *not* characterize diasporic émigré or sojourner migrants who are transborder nationalists with little sense of belonging to the receiving country (Tölölyan 1996). Neither would dual nationalism characterize the stance of an immigrant who severs ties with the former homeland according to the expectation of assimilationism (Harrington 1980).

Most work in the transnationalist paradigm has emphasized transnationalism as a counter-narrative to assimilation (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Guarnizo and Portes 2001), but Levitt (2001) rightly suggests some types of assimilation and transnational practices are compatible. Institutions like churches simultaneously promote cross-border linkages and incorporation into the receiving society. Other institutions only promote sending country ties. Distinguishing dual and transborder nationalisms provides a tool to explain the nuances and variability in relationships among states, migrants, and civil institutions.

A third conceptual problem with transnationalism is the conflation of multiple *levels* of identity that may be local, regional, or national. Long periods of residence might stimulate identification with *local* receiving communities without the transference of those attachments to a *national* community. Migrants' strongest cross-border links are often highly *localistic* ties between particular sending areas and their satellites in the receiving country (Smith 1998, Levitt 2001). Transborder local connections are embedded in macro structures, but the specifically 'national' element cannot be assumed. The level of ties, type of political border crossed, and type of nationalism only become evident by examining participants' attitudes and practices.

## **EXPLAINING CROSS-BORDER TIES**

What explains why migrants create and maintain cross-border ties? The transnationalism literature emphasizes migrants' loss of social status and their 'racialization' in the United States. In the sending country, migrants are not subject to the same kinds of ethnoracial prejudice they encounter in the United States. Cross-border ties provide migrants with a way to regain a level of status recognized 'there' but not 'here'. Migrants also tend to be upwardly mobile relative to their sending country compatriots who never left. Thus, cross-border practices allow migrants to 'escape' their subordinated place in the United States (Goldring 1998, Glick Schiller 1999; Levitt 2001).

This paper argues that cross-border practices can be a mechanism of incorporation into the receiving society as well as a different kind of defensive reaction than existing studies emphasize. First, I argue that cross-border practices oriented around common hometowns are activated as a means to achieve greater economic and political success *in* the United States as well as in sending areas. Cross-border practices increase the strength of hometown networks that



are valuable sources of information, mutual aid, job recommendations, and even patronage when migrants control the allocation of jobs (Massey et al. 1987; Boyd 1989; Hagan 1994).

Transborder ties can improve economic prospects for low-skilled workers who form the majority of Mexican migrants to the United States as well as for more scarce ‘transnational entrepreneurs’ (Portes et al. 1999). Cross-border practices are also a way for non-migrants to enhance their political position in the United States by acting through hometown networks to which they do not belong.

Second, while there is evidence that some immigrants respond to racial prejudice in the United States through cross-border practices and returns to the sending country (Levitt 2001), the ‘racialization’ argument is incomplete. Discrimination against migrants targeting their putative qualities as *foreigners*, beyond any additional discrimination aimed at a particular ethnoracial category, is a motivation for migrants’ defensive consolidation of cross-border ties. A way to observe the effect of foreign nativity on cross-border outcomes is to keep ethnoracial categorization constant in some sense by examining the relationships between U.S. and foreign-born union members lumped together in the same category of ‘Mexican’.

## **RESEARCH SITE AND DESIGN**

I chose Local 123 of a laborers’ union affiliated with the AFL-CIO as a research site based on previous contact with Local<sup>6</sup> members in Mexico and newspaper articles describing a Local 123 internal election campaign waged among members’ families in Mexico. The Local is politically influential in South City, California, and is active in the U.S. labor movement’s efforts

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<sup>6</sup> When capitalized, ‘Local’ refers to Local 123, while ‘local’ retains its common sense meaning. The names of places and persons in this paper have been fictionalized.

to organize Latino immigrants. Local 123 is a strategic site to explore in detail the interaction between politics ‘here’ and ‘there’ at the levels of locality, state, and nation.

The largely Mexican-born membership is part of the largest national-origin group of contemporary migration to the United States, representing a quarter of all immigrants. Rates of entrepreneurship are very low. The majority of Mexican immigrants are low-skilled workers like the members of the union (*Binational Study* 1998). I chose Local 123 not because its cross-border practices are ‘representative’ of unions or other institutions in any statistical sense, but because the case allows me to refine the concept of ‘transnationalism’ while advancing theoretical explanations for cross-border practices among labor migrants and non-migrants.

#### *A UNION OF IMMIGRANTS*

Like much of Southern California, South City has been rapidly transformed by immigration. The mid-sized city’s Hispanic population, most of whom are of Mexican origin, increased from 44 percent in 1980 to 76 percent in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, 2000). A similar demographic shift took place in Local 123 and the entire California construction sector. The percentage of foreign-born construction workers in California increased from 20 percent in 1980 to 64 percent in 1996 (Lee 1997). In 1996, 49 percent of California laborers were foreign-born Latinos and 9 percent were native-born Latinos (Lopez and Feliciano 2000:34). The majority of Local 123’s active members were born in Mexico. The second largest group is U.S.-born Chicanos. Anglos comprise less than five percent of the membership. All of the staff, officers, and politically active members at Local 123 are of Mexican origin. Union officers and members I interviewed say most of the Anglos left the Local over the last thirty years because

Anglos lost political control to Latinos or found work in other unions where the work is less physically demanding.

Formally, the union requires members to document their eligibility to work by providing a social security card. An officer explained the informal policy during an orientation class for incoming members: “We’re not immigration. We don’t give a fuck... Make sure your paperwork is yours. We won’t check it, but [the contractors] will.” Most formerly undocumented members legalized their status through family sponsorships or the 1986 amnesty, in which the union provided crucial documentation of members’ U.S. work history. Local 123 leaders support the AFL-CIO’s position adopted in 2000 supporting a new amnesty, but the Local is not engaged in a concerted effort to organize undocumented immigrants like unions in other sectors (Milkman 2000).

Non-residential construction workers dominate the union numerically and politically, though the Local includes landscapers, maintenance workers, and hospital employees. Over 90 percent of the members are men. Construction salaries range from \$10.59 an hour for the lowest level of trainee to more than \$30 an hour for members with specialized skills. Benefits include a pension fund, health insurance, and vacation pay. Local 123’s active membership has fallen by 3000 over the last 20 years to a total of 3500 in 2001. In the nine months following the 2000 election of a new business manager with a greater focus on labor organizing, the Local added more than 300 members. The overall outlook remains relatively pessimistic, however, as union density in the United States has fallen by half in the last 40 years (Milkman 2000).

*“THE STRENGTH OF THE UNION IS IN THAT TOWN”*

I first met Local 123 members in the Mexican village of Guadalupe, Michoacán, during a separate research project in 1999 examining political ties between immigrants and their communities of origin. The mayor of Guadalupe and his deputy were both members who alternated migrating to South City to work while the other stayed behind to attend to village affairs. Each had children and a house in South City and Guadalupe. About 500 of the Local's 3500 active members are from Guadalupe. The adjacent village of San Juan is the source of roughly 200 members. Smaller networks are linked to diverse towns and villages throughout Mexico. The union does not keep records of members' hometowns, so the only figures available are members' estimates. Regardless of the actual numbers of Guadalupanos, everyone I interviewed said Guadalupanos have the largest and most politically influential hometown network at the Local. The internal political structure of the union is bilocal in that it is based in two localities separated by a state border and 1500 miles. As the political captain put it, "The strength of the union is in that town [Guadalupe]."

During the 1960s and 70s, five 'pioneer' Guadalupanos at the Local provided fellow villagers with lodging and an introduction to the Local. The wife of a dead pioneer estimates that 150 Guadalupanos lived at their home for periods of a few weeks to several years before finding their own housing in South City.<sup>7</sup> About 50 Guadalupano families still live in the pioneers' neighborhood within walking distance of the Local. On any weekday morning, a score of Guadalupano retirees wearing the straw hats common to rural Mexico gather at the hiring hall to play cards and dominos. Guadalupanos (like other members) rent the hall for private parties to celebrate weddings, baptisms, and quinceañeras. 'El hall' is the social center of the Guadalupano community.

## *METHODS*

I conducted fieldwork at the Local from January to June 2001 primarily using methods of participant-observation and informal interviews. I spent several hours each week at the union, mostly in the gymnasium-sized hiring hall or parking lot where 50-100 members gather on weekday mornings to wait for work assignments and play cards. It is an extremely sociable environment conducive to snowball sampling. Once I established relationships with members in different networks, I could engage in long private conversations, participate in group discussions, and observe interactions in the hall. For technical reasons of high levels of ambient noise and to establish a more comfortable rapport with informants while treating sensitive subjects, I did not record conversations. As the fieldwork progressed, I openly took notes. I also spent time with union officers and staff as an observer during closed meetings, in numerous conversations lasting as long as an hour each, and formal, private interviews with the four highest officers.

There are over 4000 members of the Local including retirees, and I make no claim to representative sampling. In selecting members for interviews and repeated conversations, I purposefully sampled for variation by country of birth, hometown, and affiliation with the factions in internal Local politics. I attended membership meetings, orientation and training classes, and a hometown fund-raising dance at the labor hall. I also attended a Guadalupeño union election campaign party at a private home, two political rallies in South City, and a labor organizing action at a job site.

I spoke to informants in Spanish or English depending on their preference. Most Chicanos (U.S.-born of Mexican descent) preferred English while most of the Mexican-born

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<sup>7</sup> For a general description of network migration, see Massey et al. 1987.

preferred Spanish. All translations are my own. Members often called me *güero* (fair-complexioned) or *gabacho* (Anglo or ‘gringo’). I sometimes deliberately called myself *gabacho* to signal the members that such talk would not offend me. I believe members were willing to discuss union politics and tensions between Chicanos and Mexicans because I was perceived as an outsider without a personal stake in political outcomes. Gaining access and a degree of acceptance was facilitated by my familiarity with members’ places of origin in Mexico despite the categorical differences between us. For all the challenges of doing multi-sited ethnography, displayed knowledge of the other sites can be a passport to acceptance by members of multi-sited networks.

## **LEVELS OF POLITICAL IDENTITY AND PRACTICE**

### *NATIONALISMS*

Local 123 is part of an ‘International Union’ and a labor movement that in theory transcends national borders, but the member locals are exclusively U.S. or Canadian. Organizing by U.S. building trades is effectively limited to North America by economic nationalist sensibilities and the fact that construction jobs cannot be moved offshore to cheaper competitors. The Local only buys American union-made products. Displayed all over the building are American flags and stickers with slogans reading “Buy American. The job you save may be your own.” Like unions organizing Mexican immigrants elsewhere (Kornblum 1974; Zabin 2000), the current leadership also deploys Mexican symbols. For example, the business manager, who holds the most powerful position in the Local, distributed t-shirts featuring her name and an image of Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata during the last internal election.

Performative displays of everyday nationalism are rare, with the exception of the ‘pledge of allegiance’ before every general meeting. Members stand and face the U.S. flag, most raise their right arms over their hearts, and about half appear to say the pledge. A collective American nationalist ritual of even the most banal sort (Billig 1995) is significant in the context of other expressions of Mexican national belonging. The current business manager is a naturalized U.S. citizen who cannot vote in Mexican elections, but in December 2000, she brought a big-screen television into the hiring hall so members could watch a live broadcast of Mexican President Vicente Fox’s inauguration. She sent Fox a letter on behalf of the union referring to a shared Mexican nationality as well as regional Mexican and partisan identities.

I want you to know that we are at the disposition of you and your cabinet to offer you our total support in whatever way possible. Our union membership is predominantly Mexican compatriots from the states of Michoacán, Jalisco, Zacatecas and Guanajuato. Also, the majority of them are Panistas like you and me. (translation of Spanish letter dated 12/1/00)

A second letter in March 2001 used more explicitly nationalist language:

By this instrument, on behalf of our Laborers Union 123, located in the city of South City, California, I want to congratulate you for all the hard work that you have been able to do in *our Mexican nation* and in other countries in such a short time, and at the same time we feel very honored by your visit today in *our city of South City*. (translation of Spanish letter, emphases added)

The letters to Fox express a collective identification on two different levels - the *locality* of “our city of South City” and the transborder community of “our Mexican *nation*.” Combined with the deployment of U.S. national symbols and rituals at the Local, the letters illustrate the union leadership’s construction of dual nationalism. The second-generation Chicano political captain explicitly appealed to dual yet complementary nationalisms during an interview.

My daughters and I are fierce nationalists. We belong to two cultures. Some people say it’s hard to walk that line. It’s not hard. We speak English and Spanish. I know both histories.

Official rhetoric of dual nationalism is significant because it publicly defines the Local's corporate identity in relationships with other institutions. Everyday expressions of American and Mexican nationalisms are manifest while discourses of labor transnationalism are absent.

### *TRANSBORDER MEXICAN POLITICS*

Local 123's participation in U.S. and Mexican politics extends beyond the discursive domain. When the business manager learned President Fox planned to visit South City to promote California-Mexico trade, she sent him an invitation to a luncheon at the union. The Mexican consul replied that Fox did not have time to visit the union, but the South City mayor arranged preferential seating for the business manager and political captain at Fox's public appearance. Fox's speech linked U.S.-Mexico trade with the role of migrants as Mexico's "dear beloved heroic *paisanos* [compatriots]." The president emphasized the centrality of migrants' economic power in his formulation of transborder Mexican nationhood. "Mexico's gross product, together with the gross product of Mexicans generated in the United States, makes us the 8<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world," he said. Fox invoked an inclusive idea of the Mexican nation precisely because migrants are outside state territorial borders and their economic resources cannot be captured directly by standard state mechanisms.

Members hanging out in the hiring hall had frequently discussed Fox's approaching visit, almost always in favorable terms, but few members attended the event voluntarily. Ten of the approximately 15 members at the Fox appearance were staff required to attend by the business manager. Neto, a 28-year-old Michoacano agent who immigrated to California as a child, said he hardly follows Mexican politics though he often attends South City council meetings. A 40-year-old, third-generation Chicano agent said privately he would rather have seen his daughter's



softball game. The staff unfurled a Local 123 banner, but I did not see any of the business agents join the crowd of 3000 chanting “*Me-xi-co! Me-xi-co!*” Just as Fox’s speech was beginning, the agents left to drive freeway ‘patrol’ looking for road construction contractors using non-union employees at night. The union presence at an event emphasizing cross-border politics was primarily a project of its top officers and indirectly illustrated the union’s predominantly localist concerns.

The business manager shook Fox’s hand, but neither of the officers had the opportunity to speak with him. Before Fox’s appearance, the captain said privately his first goal in meeting Fox was to lobby for an amnesty for undocumented migrants. In other words, an American union official hoped to lobby the Mexican president to affect a change in U.S. policy. The captain’s second goal of insuring that retired members living in Mexico could collect their full U.S. social security benefits and use their U.S. medical insurance was driven by the same logic. However, the location of the policy goal’s implementation was in Mexico. The captain sought the more effective extension of social rights of U.S. citizenship to members residing abroad. The dichotomy of domestic and international relations does not provide a framework to understand these interventions across state borders. They are a case of transborder intermestic politics played on multiple levels of two states and two civil societies (see Manning 1977).

Union leaders engage in transborder politics to address problems related to members’ bilocal lives and because displaying concern for Mexican politics might improve the Local administration’s standing among the *‘paisanos’* in the membership. In a meeting with other officers, the captain characterized the invitation to Fox as part of their effort to establish ties with members’ families in Mexico and to fight for immigrant rights. Privately, he said, “We wanted [Fox] to come over to give us a little P.R.”

The union has regular contacts with the Mexican consulate.<sup>8</sup> The Local's social services director distributes consular pamphlets, and the consul periodically attends membership meetings to advertise consular services for migrants returning to Mexico. Consular visits have a history at least as far back as the previous union administration. "We have a relationship with him for the simple fact that he can help the people in Mexico – the relatives," explained the political captain. "We keep him informed on civil rights abuses of Mexican nationals. If he wants a big audience, we'll get him one... It benefits us both ways."

The Mexican government policies that most interest members, like policies regulating the temporary importation of cars, relate to crossing the U.S.-Mexican border. Members' bilocal, cross-border lives have not allowed them to become autonomous from the state (cf. Rodríguez 1996). Migrants care about Mexican government policies not in spite of their residence across a state border, but because of it. Yet only a few union members, mostly officers, are active in cross-border politics at the national level.

### *AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP AND SOUTH CITY POLITICS*

American unions have historically promoted the naturalization of immigrant members to increase union clout (Briggs 2001). Local 123 became deeply involved in citizenship issues following a 1987 incident in which the Republican Party hired armed guards to stand outside polling places in Latino areas of South City warning that voting as a non-citizen is a felony. Of the five Latino citizens who subsequently sued the Republican Party for intimidating Latino voters, three were members of the Local. They established the Hispanic Political Council that

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<sup>8</sup> During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mexican consulates were deeply involved in organizing Mexican labor unions in the United States because Mexicans were often excluded from American unions (González 1999).

won a \$400,000 settlement. Part of the settlement was spent on citizenship classes taught by the current business manager. More members naturalized as a reaction against the anti-immigrant policies promoted by Governor Pete Wilson's 1994 re-election campaign and Proposition 187 (see Uhlaner 1996). The business manager estimates 40 percent of immigrant members naturalized in the last 10 years.<sup>9</sup> Union leaders promote the political assimilation of immigrant members, but they assimilate into a mode of American ethnic politics.

The three top Local leaders view cross-border politics and dual nationalist commitments as complementary to their political project in the United States. One of the plaintiffs in the poll guards case, the current secretary-treasurer, said the incident motivated him to become involved in both U.S. and Mexican politics.

"What happened here with the Republicans charged me up. They made me mad because of their bigotry and racism. I wanted to organize people to tell them: In the numbers, we have the power," he said.

I asked him to explain how he thought his involvement in Mexican politics would help fight racism here.

"Because my people are so timid of government, that by getting involved to see what we can do in Mexico, they will become citizens and get involved in politics here too," he responded.

Mexicans historically have had among the lowest naturalization rates of any immigrant group (DeSipio and de la Garza 1998). One of the barriers to members' naturalization is their fear that becoming a U.S. citizen requires a ritualistic rejection of Mexican nationality that includes stomping and spitting on the Mexican flag. Union officials held a citizenship program informing members that this pernicious and widespread rumor was false and that becoming an American does not mean denigrating one's Mexicanness.

Mexicans have been eligible to hold dual nationality since Mexican constitutional reforms went into effect in 1998 (Vargas 1998). A Juaneño club leader who has lived in South

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<sup>9</sup> Holding U.S. citizenship allows members to fully participate in union politics, because only citizens are eligible for officer positions. In March 2001, the International began to allow non-citizens to serve as delegates to the International's convention.

City over 40 years is a naturalized U.S. citizen and dual national. “I tell everyone here: Become a citizen, you don’t have to lose your Mexican nationality,” he said. He is the only member I met with dual nationality. The secretary-treasurer lobbied Zacatecan state legislators visiting California for a measure that would allow dual citizenship,<sup>10</sup> but he would be ineligible if the measure passed because he and his parents are U.S.-born. He became involved in Mexican politics through his Mexican-born wife.

The growing number of U.S. citizens at the union increases its influence in local politics. The business manager and political captain routinely meet with city council members, state and federal congressional representatives, and school board members. During elections, the union makes financial contributions and operates a phone bank at the Labor Hall to support primarily Democratic candidates. Staff and members campaign door-to-door in South City and travel around Southern California in a 25-member ‘strike force’ to walk precincts in critical battlegrounds. The union has the greatest impact on the most local level. One school board member whom the union has always endorsed did not fulfill his election promise to build more schools, which would have been built by union workers. The board member is losing the Local’s crucial support.

Participation in local politics, like the cross-border politics of the Fox visit, is generally the result of top-down mandates from officers. Some members resent the allocation of union resources to politics and would rather receive direct services or goods like free jackets. Union officers are sensitive about the requirement that members pay supplementary dues for political expenditures. During an orientation class, the secretary-treasurer raised his voice and became animated while defending supplementary dues, even though no one in the class questioned the

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<sup>10</sup> See Vargas 1998 on the difference between dual nationality and dual citizenship in Mexico.

requirement. “If you think you can do better, go negotiate your own goddamn contract and safety agreement,” he said. The officer explained that the union spends money on politics “to bring infrastructure to the area. That’s contracts for our workers.”

All unions engage in politics, but unions organized primarily in the public sector have a particular incentive to engage in local politics because of their reliance on government contracts. The Local encourages immigrant incorporation into both ethnic and class politics in the United States even as it creates cross-border political ties.

### *HOMETOWN LOCALISM*

Migrants’ ties to a particular Mexican locality do not necessarily imply a concern with Mexican regional or national affairs. Some members are deeply involved in their sending community politics but ignore major national issues like the Zapatista rebellion or transborder issues like Fox’s policies towards Mexican emigrants. One of the most active club leaders at the union is attempting to expand members’ level of organization to higher levels of region, nation, and dual nations. The U.S.-born secretary-treasurer is a member of the Zacatecan Federation of hometown associations who uses the union as a venue for holding hometown fund-raising events, recruiting Zacatecan members to the federation, and even campaigning for the successful Zacatecan gubernatorial candidate in 1998. Over time he has shifted his attention upward from a Zacatecan village, to the state of Zacatecas, to a project that incorporates all people of Mexican origin. “We’re trying to get other [Mexican] states to get involved with us. Everybody should partake in the movement for a better Mexico and United States – that our voices be heard on both sides of the border,” he said in an interview. During an orientation class for prospective union members, the treasurer offered to help a prospect from the Mexican state of Guanajuato start his

own hometown club. The treasurer's regionalist focus is becoming dual nationalist as he promotes political engagement in both the United States and Mexico.

A major barrier to transborder collective action on the national level is the salience of subnational identities. Most hometown associations at the union are highly localistic. For instance, Guadalupanos say that migrants from all over Mexico come to their parties and fundraising events. Yet when I attended a Guadalupano club dance at the union, the only non-Guadalupanos anyone could identify among the 350 people in attendance were spouses of Guadalupanos. Club leaders from San Juan said they would like to follow the Zacatecan model of a federation of hometown associations from the same state with institutionalized relations with Mexican municipal, state, and federal governments (see Goldring 2002). Yet Juaneños have not even coordinated their activities with Guadalupanos, whose village is a mile from San Juan. Juaneño club leaders say their events attract more people and higher ticket sales than Guadalupano events because Juaneños invite non-Juaneños, while Guadalupanos stick to themselves. Members from another ranch next to Guadalupe with a dozen union members have an entirely separate club and events. Organizations based on such narrow interests are unlikely to achieve the sort of celebrated impact of the Zacatecan Federation. Everyone at the union I spoke to said they had a circle of friends that goes beyond hometown networks, and members from all over Mexico frequently chat in the same groups at the hall. Still, there is often an underlying sense of competition among members based on differential access to resources allocated through hometown networks.

#### *OUTSIDERS AND HOMETOWN NETWORKS*

One of the questions raised in the transnational migration literature is the extent to which non-migrants in sending or receiving localities “experience something equivalent to transnationalism” (Rios 1992:228). This study explains how and why non-migrants act in both the distant sending area and the near receiving area. The bilocality of members’ lives motivates outsiders like union leaders to adopt an instrumental bilocal strategy for controlling the union and directing its relationships with other institutions. Employers regularly take advantage of hometown networks to recruit workers (Boyd 1989), but the Local 123 officers are far more deeply involved in hometown networks in their pursuit of internal political power. Union officers also draw on members’ hometown and family networks in union organizing, citizenship drives, and election campaigns.<sup>11</sup>

It is useful to distinguish political activities involving the physical movement of people or collective remittances across the state border from activities taking place exclusively in the receiving locality that involve transplanted social networks based on a distant town of origin. In both instances, non-migrants at the union seek political and economic power by demonstrating their commitment to members of hometown networks. The current business manager, Refugio, adopted a multi-faceted strategy for winning her election and solidifying her base that illustrates both forms of hometown network politics. An understanding of those politics first requires a brief explanation of clientelism at the union and a description of the resources exchanged.

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<sup>11</sup> At a protest outside a company that officers said blackballs union members, five of the seven rank-and-file members from the Local were family members of the Guadalupano business agent.

## *PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONS*

According to the formal work dispatch system, there are three ways for union laborers to obtain a job: laborers may find a contractor willing to sign a union contract; a contractor may request to rehire a laborer; or contractors call the union dispatcher who assigns work to laborers based on their position on a list of unemployed members. Laborers who take the second and third options can either wait for a dispatch call at home or in the union hiring hall from 6:30 to 10:00 am. At a monthly roll call, the dispatcher assigns members to different lists according to their particular skills and length of unemployment. In practice, the dispatch process is not transparent and permits the dispatcher a measure of discretion in allocating job referrals.

The current administration claims to adhere to the formal rules of the dispatch system, while administration opponents openly charge it with showing favoritism to its allies. One of the third-generation Chicano members of the opposition comes to the union hall every morning to copy the referral cards posted on the dispatch office window. He maintains a private file based on his personal investigations and has filed complaints of favoritism with the International. The Local has been under a series of investigations into racketeering, election fraud, and misappropriation of funds over the last 20 years. Regardless of the veracity of these charges, many members expect corruption. One Mexican member who has worked at the union for 23 years said he is not sure if the system is more or less fair under the current administration, but he approves of alternating the union leadership. “They’re all corrupt, but if you change [the leadership] it balances out,” he said. He expects that each group of leaders will give preference to their friends, but if the leaders change, different groups of friends will have a chance to work.

Union officers access networks based on friendship, kinship, common worksite, and common hometown to dispense favors in return for votes. In the 2000 election for business



manager, winning candidate Refugio won 90% of her votes from Guadalupanos. A field split by three candidates and a high rate of abstention among non-Guadalupanos allowed a concentration of Guadalupano support to win the election. Voting is secret, but candidates calculate the source of votes based on known supporters and how many voters the supporters can 'deliver'. Although Refugio is from the state of Jalisco, her son married a Guadalupana he met in South City. Refugio has visited Guadalupe four times. She is building a house there and says she enjoys vacationing among friends in the peaceful countryside. Refugio said she combined business and pleasure to campaign among members' families in Guadalupe several months before the election.

Refugio's campaign manager offered a more instrumental explanation of her interest in Guadalupe. Refugio was dispatcher for four years. "When you're in dispatch, you get to know everyone," he said. The post is "a magnet for votes." He said Refugio harbored political aspirations, so she visited Guadalupe five or six years ago to make personal contacts and develop the residents' trust. After the election, a family emergency prevented her from traveling to Guadalupe for the fiesta. The campaign manager explained in an interview why Refugio sent him and the receptionist to represent her.

Most members have family who reside in Guadalupe. They depend on their income from the members – to fix their houses or to buy food. [Guadalupanos] have to be choosy about who becomes business manager. The people back home have greater influence on the members here... If Refugio calls grandfathers or wives in Guadalupe and asks them to please call their provider here and ask him to vote for her, they will do it... When I went, we made a big hit over there.... Now I can make a call over there and say, 'I want you to push your brother or cousin to get 10 guys to vote for us.'

Demonstrations of personal ties with the distant locality and its residents are a valuable political resource. Outsiders can also tap into receiving locality nodes of hometown networks without ever crossing the border. Union officers solicit donations from members to pay for the

costs of shipping deceased members to Mexico for burial. The Guadalupe club, like half-a-dozen hometown clubs at the union, holds two or three dances a year to raise money for village projects like church and infrastructure improvement. The union donates the use of the hall, which would cost \$2000 to rent. Officers give technical advice to club leaders about how to register their clubs as non-profit corporations. As the political captain explained, “People love Refugio. They call her ‘the Queen of Guadalupe’.” She donates to the church in Guadalupe and sets up fund-raisers. It’s all politics.” Previous business managers have gained support from Guadalupanos using the same strategy of supporting hometown fundraisers.

Hometown and kinship networks figure prominently in the selection of union electoral candidates and staff members. The selection of delegates for the 2001 convention of the union’s International illustrates the machinery of internal union politics. The two factions at the Local each nominated a slate of 17 candidates. Each delegate is expected to attract 100 votes. Patrons select candidates from hometown networks and major work sites where there is a concentration of laborers from the Local. Three of the candidates on Refugio’s slate were Guadalupanos and a fourth was married to a Guadalupana. Refugio held a campaign party barbecue for Guadalupanos at a member’s home two weeks before the election. Eighty percent of the approximately 180 members who attended the party were Guadalupanos. The business manager introduced her delegates to the crowd, describing one of them as a representative of the laborers at a company with over two hundred members and of “Guadalupe and the surrounding area.”

Union leaders allocate staff jobs based on a member's ability to attract votes for the slate or as a reward for past support. In half-a-dozen conversations with staff in which I asked why they were selected, they never mentioned personal qualifications. The eight business agents, dispatcher, and janitors are all political appointees. One janitor is Guadalupano and the other is

from the second largest sending community of San Juan. Tomás, the janitor from Guadalupe, is a power broker in the union known as one of the four “generals” along with the business manager, dispatcher, and political captain. In return for delivering a minimum of 150 Guadalupano votes, a third of the winner’s total, the business manager gave him a job. Janitorial positions are desirable because the work does not require heavy labor. Like many staffers, both janitors are partly disabled by work injuries and can no longer do heavy construction work. The positions also generate prestige. The janitors have a great deal of discretion in controlling members’ access to top union officers. They are literally gatekeepers who can unlock the right doors in the building. Even janitorial jobs are valuable resources exchanged in the ‘marketplace’ of the union in return for their hometown network votes.

All of the business agents, who earn \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year, are former laborers who are selected based on their ability to deliver votes. A 44-year-old Guadalupano agent, who immigrated to South City when he was 10 years old, said he was chosen by a former business manager “to represent the people from my town.” Members from San Juan said they want to elect a Juaneño to help other Juaneños get work, but they have been stymied by the difficulty of delivering the Juaneño vote as a bloc. When I asked a 28-year old agent why he was hired, he gave a typical answer: “Because I have about 60 family members at the union. Uncles, cousins, relatives. I can bring in 60 votes, and if each one of them has 1 or 2 friends, that’s over 100 votes.” His family members are from two towns in western Michoacán and his wife is Guadalupana. He did not frame his selection in terms of hometown networks, but his appointment clearly derives from his position in both family and hometown networks.

Hometowns are a basis of affiliation in the United States even if they were not particularly relevant in the sending country. For example, two members from Galeana,

Michoacán, became close friends after they met at the union and discovered their common place of origin. One of them told me privately that their families are feuding in Galeana, but they are drawn together in California because they are Galeanos. They avoid discussing family issues.

There is nothing illicit about selecting *staff* jobs or candidates on a slate according to network criteria. One of the main reasons why families and transborder communities collectively seek ‘representation’, however, is to obtain preferential access to construction jobs through the informal dispatch system. There is no guarantee that positioning in a powerful hometown network will provide access to a good job. For example, two friends from Guadalupe explained how one received preferential treatment while another was abandoned to the formal dispatch system. Hector left the union after working only two months in two years because unlike Jose, he did not have a personal relationship with the dispatcher known for helping Guadalupanos. Jose’s other advantage was that his father is a well-known retired member and former mayor of Guadalupe. Workers’ chances of obtaining a good job increase with the multiplexity of their ties with patrons (see Portes 1995:10).

Union officers lose political support when they do not reward clients. Alberto, a popular Guadalupano who has worked at the union 32 years, had a steady job until he quit without warning to return to Guadalupe for the December fiesta. As in migrant-sending areas all over Mexico, Guadalupe’s population explodes overnight as migrants return for vacation and to reaffirm their hometown ties (Massey et al. 1987). When Alberto came back to South City several weeks later, the dispatcher assigned him a number at the bottom of the unemployment list in accordance with the formal procedure. Four months later, Alberto was still unemployed. He complained bitterly to staff members and friends that he had supported Refugio in the election by bringing in votes from 20-30 Guadalupanos and two or three others, but she had not given him a

job. After two weeks of unsuccessfully pressing his case, he publicly refused to attend a meeting to nominate candidates for the International's convention, where he had been expected to support Refugio's slate. He said he was withdrawing his support from Refugio and leaving politics altogether.

Laborers who make extended trips to Mexico often have trouble finding work when they return to California. Members' bilocal commitments negatively affect their economic opportunities in South City, so they draw on their social capital to compensate by seeking special favors.<sup>12</sup> Alberto's appeal failed, but his case is not idiosyncratic. He was angry because he *expected* to be rewarded as a politically active figure in a hometown network that had provided 90% of the business manager's votes. The hometown network is a critical feature of the union's internal political geography, but it is a double-edged sword for members. Membership in hometown networks facilitates access to union resources, yet the reaffirmation of hometown ties through extended cross-border trips can threaten members' immediate economic prospects.

### *CHICANISMO AND MEXICANIDAD*

Non-Guadalupanos say they are excluded from equal access to good jobs. Several of the members who actively oppose the administration are self-defined Chicanos who express this complaint most forcefully. Robert, a 26-year union veteran, said it is hard to get work because Guadalupanos only give work to other people from Guadalupe.

"They've got uncles, cousins, brothers, fathers - YOU'RE not gonna get a job." He said that on several occasions, he was the first worker dismissed from a job site where the foreman and other workers were Guadalupanos. The people from Guadalupe "have a real animosity towards us Chicanos." Robert later said the current business manager got most of her votes from Guadalupe.

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<sup>12</sup> Hagan (1994) describes a similar process in which Guatemalan immigrants at a retail store in Houston used their hometown network connections with the supervisor to attend their hometown's fiesta without paying an economic penalty upon return to Houston.

“You don’t vote for her; you don’t have a job,” he said. “We [Chicanos] don’t have any representation.”

The Chicano dissidents’ resentment of Guadalupano political power is often accompanied by resentment towards the Mexican-born membership in general. It would be a mistake to describe the internal divisions of the union as a simple fissure between Chicanos and Mexicans. Both Mexican and U.S.-born members are on the same slates and serve in the same administrations. Many of the members who say they are “from Guadalupe” are U.S.-born. Yet three Chicano members approached me separately to discuss a struggle between Chicanos and Mexicans for jobs and ‘representation’. Like other Chicano opponents of the administration, Eddie acknowledged a common ancestral origin in Mexico but distinguished himself in cultural terms.

I’m not against no immigrants coming over, but there has to be a quota. They’re overwhelming us... I don’t have anything against the Mexican-born, but they have different customs... There’s a lot of corruption in Mexico. They’re bringing that with them. My grandfather was from Mexico, but I was born here, and my father was born here... I was brought up to play by the rules, but all of these new people don’t know the rules.

Three Chicano members of the opposition told me separately they believe that immigrants degrade the quality of existing jobs. According to this argument, the Mexican-born are not fully committed to the union’s struggles because of their Mexican frame of reference that includes corruption and low expectations of labor rights. The on-going connectivity of Mexicans in the United States with Mexico also threatens the dissidents’ economic nationalist sensibilities. For instance, Robert and Eddie lamented that Mexicans send \$8 billion a year to Mexico, thus weakening the U.S. economy and the union. Their nationalist sentiment opposes mass immigration that “overwhelms” American culture. Perhaps most importantly, the Chicano dissidents believe their material interests are threatened by exclusion from Mexican hometown and family networks.

These Chicano union members' attitudes towards Mexican immigrants are not unusual. In summarizing Mexican-American attitudes towards immigration levels, de la Garza and DeSipio (1998:411) find the "results from these various surveys conducted over the past five years indicate a consistent pattern: Mexican Americans support reductions in the number of immigrants admitted to the United States." Historically, American union members (including co-ethnics) have feared the adverse effects of immigration on union membership, wages, and work conditions regardless of whether such effects have been demonstrated empirically. Immigrants are presumed to have lower expectations relative to native workers and an interest in returning to the sending country rather than investing in U.S. union activities. Immigrants long have been blamed for local political corruption as well (Mink 1986; Lane 1987).

When asked in separate interviews, the business manager denied there were tensions between Chicanos and Mexicans, and two Mexican officers agreed there were tensions but declined to discuss them. Two self-described Chicano officers accused the administration's other Chicano opponents of "hating Mexicans" and giving Chicanos preferential access to jobs when the opposition Chicanos held power. The officers made these charges in separate, private interviews and to a visiting Chicano attorney. Tony accused three Chicano opponents<sup>13</sup> of being racist:

One has lighter skin than most Mexicans and thinks he is superior. When they were in charge, the first 400 people on the dispatch list were from Guadalupe, but they were only being sent out for two or three-day jobs. They were giving all the good long-term contracts to "their *pocho* friends." He said the second agent was a '*Tío Taco*'. I asked what a *Tío Taco* was, and he said a *Tío Taco* was someone whose parents came from Mexico, but doesn't want to speak Spanish or won't speak slang Spanish. "They don't care about Cinco de Mayo or the Virgin of Guadalupe's birthday. They try to assimilate to this country, and the ultimate sign of that is to become a Republican."

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<sup>13</sup> These three opponents were not the same Chicanos who approached me to discuss Mexican-Chicano tensions.

*Pocho* is a derogatory term that literally refers to something like fruit that is spoiled, but here refers to ‘gringoized Mexicans’. The cleavage between those claiming to be Chicanos with a sense of Mexicanness and their ‘*pocho*’ enemies falls along the division between the Chicanos closely allied with the Guadalupano network and Chicanos excluded from that network. In at least one case, a charge of prejudice seems to have been manufactured by actors seeking to strengthen their political position. A third-generation Chicano accused of hating Mexicans displays a plaque on his desk reading “*Orgullo Mexicano*” [Mexican Pride]. He organizes infrastructure projects in his wife’s Mexican hometown, where they are building a home. His behavior suggests it is unlikely that he categorically “hates Mexicans.” Yet in a union where the majority of the membership is Mexican-born, accusing someone of prejudice against Mexicans is a powerful charge that may resonate because of underlying tensions that do exist between many Chicanos and Mexicans.

Mexican members hanging out in the hiring hall frequently tell stories about negative U.S. influences like a culture of drugs and gangs which Mexicans acquire in the United States and import to Mexico. Hometown club leaders encourage transborder localism as a means to ‘protect’ their children from the putative pathology of U.S. culture. “When people come to the United States, they lose their culture,” said an organizer of the San Juan club who retired from the Local but visits the hall regularly. He said the club holds their dances to encourage an alternative to youth hanging out on the streets and painting graffiti. Members I interviewed speak of a Mexican/Chicano division based on both cultural differences and opposing material interests.

Outside the union, the rest of American society lumps together members of Mexican origin regardless of their country of birth. For instance, one 32-year-old Mexican laborer said



that at a job site with *güeros* (Anglos) and people of Mexican origin waiting for work, *güero* supervisors routinely give other *güeros* jobs first. Workers complain of anti-Mexican slurs directed against them by Anglo supervisors. Both Chicanos and Mexicans are subject to similar discrimination. Many rank-and-file members situationally share a sense of common ethnicity that unites Chicanos and Mexicans as '*la raza*' in the face of that discrimination, yet there is a tension between the notion of a pan-Mexican *raza* on one hand and the exclusive nature of hometown networks on the other.

Samuel, born in the Mexican state of Guerrero to Guadalupano parents, said he twice received jobs from a dispatcher because he is Guadalupano. He deplored the dispatcher's favoritism and said "*la raza* is suffering" because the business agents only give jobs to their friends and family. When I asked what he meant by '*la raza*,' he said he meant "my people" and that '*la raza*' was about *Mexicanidad* (Mexicanness). "*La raza* should be united," he said. Moments later, Samuel lamented the factionalism of Guadalupanos, complaining there are only two Guadalupano agents despite the large numbers of Guadalupano members. Even though he claimed the current business manager favored members from Guadalupe, he said he wanted to elect a new manager who is actually a Guadalupano.

"If we were united, we could do whatever we wanted. We would have someone to help us."

I asked how someone "on the inside" could help them. He looked at me as if I had asked a stupid question.

"All this" he said, sweeping his arm around the hiring hall packed with unemployed members. "If you're from the rancho, I'm going to give you a job. Yes or no?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Yes! If you're living with your cousins, you're going to give them a job."

Notwithstanding abstract calls for the unity of *la raza* and an equitable dispatch system, members have a pragmatic understanding that belonging to an endogamous hometown network is a means to obtain valuable resources. Even second-generation members who were not born in

the sending locality, never lived there, and never plan to return for more than a vacation, claim membership in the transborder hometown community. While Samuel's defense of hometown clientelism was more explicit than the euphemistic notion of group 'representation', the logic of exclusion in the struggle for scarce resources is the same.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conceptualization of migrant 'transnationalism' can be refined by distinguishing type of border crossed, type of nationalism, and level of identification. The borders crossed in the processes described here are *state* borders. There is no evidence that transnationalism in the strict sense of transcending nationalism in a 'workers of the world' discourse, for example, was relevant to the actors in this case. On the contrary, the administration of Local 123 departs from an American nationalist labor movement to incorporate Mexican immigrants (but not workers in Mexico) as dual nationalists. Some Chicanos contest the dual nationalist project, which they interpret as a threat to their material self-interests and an American nationalist sensibility opposed to members' foreign ties.

*Transborder nationalism*, at least in the cultural sense, is illustrated by the notion of a single *raza* spanning Mexico and the United States. The discourse of 'heroic *paisanos* abroad' promoted by the current Mexican government implies a more politically significant transborder nation that could include the entire *raza* of Mexican-origin or only Mexicans by nativity. Some union members described themselves as Mexicans but not Americans. Others, like the political captain, described themselves as *dual nationalists* - members of two *distinct* American and Mexican cultural and political communities. While the 'container' version of distinct national cultures may not be empirically accurate (DiMaggio 1997), that is the self-understanding of

participants. Dual and transborder nationalisms may sometimes be combined empirically, but they are analytically distinct and have different implications for defining legitimate political communities and places of practice.<sup>14</sup>

The distinction between the local and national has theoretical and practical implications for political organization. Identification with a distant, cross-border hometown is often more situationally relevant to members than identification with the home *land*. Consequently, hometown localism inhibits organization at the regional or national level in federations of hometown clubs. The local/national distinction is significant for political incorporation of immigrants into U.S. politics as well. The union encourages immigrant members to become involved in city politics so union workers will gain government contracts, higher wages, and workplace protections. The long-term consequence may be incorporation into national U.S. politics since effective participation in city politics requires speaking English and becoming an American citizen.

This study supports the contention that the opposition between ‘assimilation’ and ‘transnationalism’ has been overdrawn (Levitt 2001). Some of the distinct modes of assimilation and the specific target groups towards which immigrants assimilate (Gordon 1964:71; Alba and Nee 1997) facilitate cross-border connectivity. For instance, ‘structural assimilation’ includes becoming part of host society institutions dominated by immigrants and co-ethnics that encourage cross-border ties and excoriate co-ethnics who become ‘too culturally assimilated’ to Anglos. Officers promote engagement in both Mexican and American politics as a reflection of members’ binational lives.

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, dual nationalism theoretically includes co-nationals like Anglos and African-Americans that are not included by the transborder notion of *la raza*. Transborder nationalists may contest the legitimacy of dual nationalism as a betrayal of the homeland (Fitzgerald 2000).

The transnational migration literature has emphasized migrants' loss of social status (particularly for men) and their 'racialization' in the United States to explain their ongoing ties with their communities of origin as a means to 'escape' subordination (Goldring 1998, Glick Schiller 1999). Evidence from the union suggests cross-border practices in some contexts are a means to achieve greater economic and political success *in* the United States. Hometown networks would continue to provide a source of social capital in the receiving country even if cross-border practices ceased, but the capital would likely dwindle without a regular affirmation of the hometown's importance through hometown projects or collective returns to the fiesta. Cross-border connectivity in this instance provides material benefits and prestige in both localities for low-skilled workers as well as 'transnational entrepreneurs' (Portes et al. 1999). However, workers face economic penalties for long trips to Mexico. They frequently are unemployed for extended periods upon their return unless they can draw on their networks for preferential treatment. The pressure to ultimately settle is strong.

'Racialization' is primarily a process that happens *outside* the Local as official and folk categorizations lump together Mexicans from diverse regions and Chicanos as 'Mexicans' or 'Latinos'. These categories are not simply imposed. The Local stimulates the transformation of members who arrive in California with a diverse set of experiences and identities into a more politically powerful aggregate that frames politics in ethnic and class terms. *Within* the Local, appeals to pan-ethnic or Mexican identities are not effective frames for achieving advantage in the struggle for the Local's resources. At this lower scale, members seek advantage by making "we/ they dichotomizations" along the lines of hometown or nativity (see Cohen 1978:395). The status of being a foreigner or native is of greater significance here than racial categorization.

Both race and nativity are potential axes of exclusion, but in areas like South City where the population is predominantly Mexican-origin, nativity is especially significant.

Hometown divisions inhibit the project of transborder nationalists seeking political influence in Mexico. Divisions between Mexicans and Chicanos impede the construction of a single political community for members on both sides of the border or a pan-Mexican political coalition within the United States. The point here is not to promote a teleological construction of any particular aggregate of identity or location of practice, but to highlight the complexity of political processes that are of theoretical and political concern. To conflate these processes as ‘transnationalism’ fails to disaggregate levels of practice and identification that are analytically and experientially distinct.

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