

“We Are Against the Government, Although We Are the Government”

State Institutions and Indigenous Migrants in Baja California in the 1990s

By

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RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el trabajo de dos agencias gubernamentales mexicanas con migrantes oaxaqueños y de otros estados del sur de México a la península de Baja California, localizada en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, durante la segunda mitad de los 1990s. Sostengo que las agencias gubernamentales promovieron que los migrantes se identifiquen como indígenas y que refuercen lo que oficialmente se entiende por su organización social tradicional. El Instituto Nacional Indigenista y la Dirección General de Educación Indígena llegaron a redefinir y expandir la categoría de indígena para mantener la frontera étnica en una situación de migración y cambio cultural. El trabajo que los funcionarios indigenistas realizaron en los años noventa tuvo efectos complejos en Baja California: Por un lado, los migrantes reconocieron estar al tanto de sus derechos y sentirse orgullosos de su identidad étnica gracias al trabajo institucional. Por otro lado, el tipo de identidad promovido por las agencias estatales mexicanas no reconoció necesariamente su historia y sus experiencias, sino que les impuso una identidad indígena genérica. Esto tuvo lugar en un contexto en el que gran parte de los migrantes desean asimilarse a la sociedad nacional para mejorar económica y socialmente ya que trabajan en la agricultura de exportación por sueldos más bajos y en peores condiciones que los mestizos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Raza y Etnicidad, Antropología del Estado, México, Pueblos Indígenas, Frontera México-Estados Unidos. **KEYWORDS:** Race and ethnicity, Anthropology of the State, Mexico, Indigenous Peoples, Mexico-U.S. Border.

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Introduction

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES the role of two government agencies, the National Indigenist Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, INI) and the General Directorate of Indigenous Education of the Secretary of Public Education (*Dirección General de Educación Indígena de la Secretaría de Educación Pública*, DGEI-SEP), in strengthening indigenous identity and social organization among indigenous migrants from the Mixteca region of Oaxaca and Guerrero to Baja California, Mexico during the second half of the 1990s. Unlike other cases in which states tend to repress difference, or tolerate it only when forced to by social movements or international pressures, government officials from these Baja Californian government agencies did not perceive the national and the ethnic projects as contradictory. On the contrary, they firmly believed that to promote indigenous identity and social organization was to work for the Mexican nation. However, the kind of ethnicity that government officials promoted did not necessarily recognize the particular experiences of Oaxacan migrants, but imposed on them a generic Indian identity. Furthermore, indigenous identification was encouraged among people who generally wished to assimilate into Baja Californian society, in a context in which those labeled as Indians are offered harsh jobs for less pay than *mestizos* in commercial agriculture for export.

Influential scholars have described the relationship between states and indigenous peoples in Latin America during the 19th and most of the 20th centuries in terms of conflict in which states tried to impose homogenizing national projects on indigenous peoples that resisted these attempts and reinforced their consciousness in the process (e.g., Kearney 1991; Urban and Sherzer 1992; Van Cott 1994; Stavenhagen 1994; 2002; Varese 1996; Díaz Polanco 1997; Stephen 1997; 2002; Warren and Jackson 2002). However, some of these same writers have occasionally acknowledged the collaboration of indigenous organizations with the state (e.g. Stephen 1997; 2002, Warren and Jackson 2002). In the 1990s, a number of Latin American states subscribed to the International Labor Organization Convention 169 on the rights of indigenous peoples and reformed their constitutions accordingly, stating that they were willing to recognize and promote indigenous languages, cultures, and forms of social organization (Sieder 2002; Van Cott 2002). This shift has been interpreted as an insufficient and poorly implemented concession made to a growing indigenous movement of continental proportions (Van Cott 1994; 2000; Stavenhagen 1994; 2002; Díaz Polanco 1997; Warren and Jackson 2002). It has also been called a populist initiative intended to overcome a deep crisis of legitimacy and governability in the context of neoliberal reforms that have negatively affected indigenous peoples and other popular groups (Van Cott 2002; Sieder 2002; Stephen 2002). Others interpret it as a response to international pressures (Warren and Jackson

2002). And scholars have suggested that the state should accommodate difference within its institutional system to avoid potentially destructive ethnic conflicts (Maybury-Lewis 1997). In all these cases, the state appears to impose homogeneity or responds, tolerates, or accommodates to pressures from below and above.

In the same way, the dominant interpretation of Mexican indigenism—a combination of social science based on the sympathetic awareness of the Indian, and public policy—holds that from the 1920s to the 1970s, this movement basically consisted of ideas and policies geared towards the assimilation of ethnic groups (Stephen 1997; 2002; Díaz Polanco 1997; Dietz 1995; Bonfil 1990). A later phase, the so-called “new” or “participatory” indigenism that started in the 1970s and that promotes the preservation of indigenous cultures and social institutions, is interpreted by critics as a populist discourse with no real impact on indigenist practice (Dietz 1995) or as an “effort to co-opt some indigenous leaders and organizations into government-aligned and funded indigenous organizations and support institutions” (Stephen 1997:17). Other authors are more optimistic and see a real break with the assimilation of the past that reflects the recent democratization of Mexican society (Hernández Castillo 2001). Still others see a deeper change towards the celebration of difference in response to internal and external pressures (de la Peña 2002).

While acknowledging the assimilationist tendencies of the Mexican state, other scholars have also noted the tension between these assimilation policies and the historical role of the state in the reproduction of ethnic differences. Judith Friedlander (1975) argued that the postrevolutionary Mexican state attempted to integrate Indians into the nation and capitalist development while marking them as different and subordinate, particularly through the school system. George Collier (1994) explored the use of ethnicity by the state and the Revolutionary Institutional Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI)¹ to create networks of clients. Although in several publications, Michael Kearney has understood the Mexican state as an agent of homogenization, he has also acknowledged that nation-states promote contradictory projects that seek cultural homogeneity while favoring the reproduction of ethnic differences over which the class system relies (1996b). Similarly, in a recent book on *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, Applebaum, Macpherson and Rosemblat claim that nation building was not simply a homogenizing process based on the eradication of difference, although sometimes it worked that way:

Though elites advocated a process of cultural homogenization that, given prevalent cultural definitions of race, implied racial whitening, they maintained the racial distinctions that undergirded efforts to stratify and control labor (2003: 6).

Building on these insights, I explore the role of two Baja Californian government agencies in the reproduction of ethnic boundaries as well as the complex

effects of neoindigenist policies. The work of the government officials interviewed here is particularly relevant because it affects indigenous migrants, a category that has grown a great deal in Latin America in recent decades (Wade 1997). Indigenist policies in Baja California targeted a population that left its community and region of origin and was characterized by its high mobility, its insertion into transnational social networks (Kearney 1995), and participation in global economic activities, such as the production of nontraditional agro-exports and tourism (Nagengast and Kearney 1990). This is exactly the kind of population that according to classical postrevolutionary indigenism would become *mestizo* and assimilate into the Mexican nation. In the following pages I will focus on three questions: What did indigenous identity, culture, and social organization mean for Baja Californian government officials in the late 1990s? What were government agencies doing to preserve or reinforce these and to convince citizens to adopt and internalize official constructions of ethnicity? What could be the intended or incidental consequences of these policies in the context of Baja California?

This study is based on fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and archival work conducted in 1996–1997. I interviewed the regional directors, mid-level personnel, and indigenous brokers working for INI and DGEI-SEP, and I conducted participant observation in the institutions. Indigenous brokers (teachers, union leaders, and other community organizers) are correctly perceived by the literature as part of the indigenous community. However, they should also be recognized as government officials because they have been trained by the state, speak the rhetoric of the state, work for the state, and carry out state policies.

In this article, I have kept individualized accounts of government officials and their points of view to show that the state here is not an impersonal institution. Individuals working for the state are not free to act as they wish, but they do apply wider state projects, adapting them to their own personal philosophies as well as to regional contexts. I find inspiration in the insights of *The Great Arch* by Corrigan and Sayer (1985), and *Everyday Forms of State Formation* by Joseph and Nugent (1994). Corrigan and Sayer argue that the state has the power to create, spread, and impose acceptable forms of social identity through laws, institutions, administrative procedures, and government rituals. I show how state definitions of ethnicity are spread through schooling, interpellation by some state institutions, distribution of resources to those who adopt state-sanctioned forms of identity, and state-sponsored social organization. Joseph and Nugent, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of looking at regional and historical variation of state formation. In this article, my objective is to show that the Mexican state and its projects are not monolithic. On the contrary, Mexican state institutions have been characterized by a diversity of tendencies that reflect institutional as well as regional heterogeneity.

Mexican Indigenism in the 1990s

The history of Mexican indigenism lies outside of the scope of this article and has been effectively dealt with elsewhere (e.g. Hewitt de Alcántara 1984; Dietz 1995; Saldívar 2002). I will only describe the more recent developments in indigenist policies in order to provide a context for the work of Baja Californian government officials in the 1990s. Their institutional effort takes place in the context of a shift that took place in the early 1970s from classical indigenism—which in general lines advocated assimilation of indigenous peoples—towards “new indigenism”—with a focus on the preservation and reinforcement of indigenous identity, culture, and socio-political organization. The promotion of cultural preservation and the use of ethnicity as a tool for political organization had been present in Mexican indigenism since the 1930s, particularly in the thought of Moisés Sáenz, Lombardo Toledano, and Chávez Orozco, but it became clearly dominant after the 1970s. The shift towards new indigenism also coincided with an international climate of strong ethnic movements and the beginning of the implementation of multicultural policies by a number of states.

According to de la Peña (2002), as indigenism shifted ideologically, the Mexican government increased INI's budget and the number of coordinating centers. This happened in the context of a crisis of legitimacy of the Mexican government after the 1968 student massacre, which President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) tried to overcome with populist policies. In addition, funds were made available for development in a period of economic boom due to skyrocketing oil prices. However, after the 1982 crisis of public finances worsened by a drastic reduction in oil prices, INI's budget was drastically cut in the context of structural adjustment policies that required the reduction of the state apparatus. INI's historical role in regional development waned and the institution focused on less costly cultural, educational, and human rights campaigns, a focus that it still retains. In 1990, INI's budget increased temporarily thanks to incoming funds from the National Solidarity Program and the World Bank. During the Salinas administration (1988–1994), indigenism worked within the framework of the PRONASOL, or National Solidarity Program (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad). PRONASOL targeted the poorest sectors of the population with development programs intended to reduce the social tensions caused by neoliberal reforms and to reinforce the legitimacy of the president (Cornelius, Craig, and Fox 1994). Indians were privileged by PRONASOL as the “poorest among the poor,” and funds were distributed to them through the National Indianist Institute (Fox 1994). Meanwhile, constitutional reforms that had contradictory effects on indigenous people were implemented in 1992. The government amended article 27 of the Mexican Constitution to end the agrarian reform and liberalize the land market. This change is at the root of the indigenous uprising in Chi-

apas as well as general discontent in the Mexican countryside (Stephen 2002). Simultaneously, article four of the Constitution was amended, recognizing for the first time the multicultural character of the Mexican nation and the right of indigenous cultures to preserve their languages, cultures, and forms of social organization. This change is used as evidence by those who interpret new indigenism as a populist discourse intended to distract from unpopular structural reforms. By 1995, INI's budget was drastically reduced again, and the agency was deeply downsized, returning to its focus on education and training (Vázquez León forthcoming). Emiko Saldivar (2002) calls the period that covers the presidencies of Salinas de Gortari and Zedillo (1988–2000) “legal indigenism.” This paper focuses on legal indigenism and its characteristic promotion of legal rights, training, and organization of indigenous communities.

In July 2001, President Vicente Fox approved new legislation on indigenous rights in the context of the negotiations between the Chiapas rebels and the first opposition president since the Revolution.² This legislation prohibits ethnic and other forms of discrimination, bases indigenous status on self-identification, gives limited territorial autonomy to indigenous groups, and states the need for affirmative action policies in order to overcome past inequalities. Critics have called this legislation a watered down version of the San Andrés accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, which the government of Ernesto Zedillo signed in 1996 with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Stephen 2002:86). In 2003, a decree by President Fox ended the long history of INI and substituted it for another institution, the National Committee for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (*Comisión Nacional Para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas*, CONADEPI). The role of CONADEPI is to advise and coordinate the policies of regular state dependencies for indigenous matters. Critics of the presidential decision to close INI argue that, like CONADEPI, INI's original function was to coordinate the work of other state agencies when they addressed indigenous peoples. However, because these agencies neglected indigenous regions, INI progressively assumed their functions (Pérez Ruiz and Argueta Villamar 2003). The creation of CONADEPI can be interpreted as a continuity in the tendency to reduce INI's functions to those of advice and coordination, with the correspondent budget cut. Again, the Mexican state demonstrates its populist character by combining progressive legislation that promotes indigenous rights with budget and program cuts in indigenist agencies.

In Baja California, indigenist institutions are new arrivals because historically, there were few native indigenous people, and they lacked political or economic importance to the state. In the early 1980s, indigenist institutions were brought to the northwest to address the problems of indigenous migrants from the southern states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, most of whom arrived in Baja California as a labor force for commercial agriculture. Migrants were hired in large numbers to work in

fields that produce tomatoes, other vegetables, and fruits for export to the United States. They were hired as well in construction in rapidly growing border cities, or joined the informal economy enhanced by border tourism. Indigenous day laborers were offered harsh working and living conditions and low wages. In the early 1980s, migrant day laborers and indigenous communities in border cities joined independent labor unions and popular urban opposition movements, some of them linked to the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD)³ (Kearney 1988; Nagengast and Kearney 1990). Significantly, this population became a priority for the federal government in the mid-1980s, when Mexican indigenism began to express an increasing interest in migrant and urban indigenous populations (INI/SEDESOL 1994). This interest turned into law in 2001 with a constitutional amendment that stated the need to protect indigenous migrants and particularly indigenous day laborers. INI's programs in Baja California in the 1990s included the promotion of the legal rights of migrants, the reinforcement of indigenous civil organizations, programs that improved the situation of indigenous day laborers, and a radio station. It is curious that INI has prioritized serving indigenous day laborers rather than indigenous migrants to cities in Baja California despite the fact that, according to the 2000 census, there are almost as many indigenous migrants in the city of Tijuana as in areas of commercial agriculture (Serrano, Embriz and Fernández 2002). This may be due to an association of indigenous people with the countryside or to the strategic importance of commercial agriculture for export to the neoliberal project.

State Institutions and Indigenous Migrants in Baja California in the 1990s

The postrevolutionary Mexican state is the result of contradictory projects: it originated in a social revolution and bases its legitimacy on the idea that the state is the advocate and benefactor of popular groups, while simultaneously favoring a project of capitalist development, particularly in the last decades of neoliberal reforms. This tension is reflected at the level of government, as some government agencies facilitate capitalist development, while others carry out advocacy tasks for the downtrodden. However, these projects are not contradictory if one of the tasks of the state in promoting capitalism is to insure a reasonably healthy and collaborative working class. In the following pages, I focus on those government agencies that advocate for popular groups.

The Instituto Nacional Indigenista in Baja California

The Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), founded in 1948, was the most important government agency administering to indigenous populations and the main institutional branch of Mexican indigenism until it was substituted by CONADEPI in 2003. Its original mandate was to coordinate the work of a variety of different state institutions (agrarian, educational, health, housing, infrastructure, and so on) in rural regions. However, because most state institutions did not reach isolated areas, INI, working through regional centers located in provincial cities, became the only representative of the state for many indigenous groups. A multidisciplinary team of professionals (anthropologists, doctors, engineers, veterinarians, agrarian experts) designed and implemented regional development projects from these centers. As noted above, INI's focus had shifted in recent decades towards training and human rights campaigns due in part to budget cuts, a focus that its successor CONADEPI has retained.

The Director

The office of engineer Suárez, the director of INI in Baja California, is located in the city of Ensenada, not far from the areas of commercial agriculture where indigenous migrants worked. Suárez, born in a small border town in Baja California, presented himself as a practical man and confessed that he was not an intellectual:

In INI we are not doing as much research as we used to do in the past. We are not researching Indian migration or acculturation. We are more interested in addressing the needs and practical problems of indigenous people (Interview with director of INI in Baja California, August 1997).

In the manner of a scientist, the engineer started to classify indigenous migrants according to the places in which they could be found, the economic activities that they performed, and whether they were temporary or settled migrants.

You may find them in an urban or rural scenario. In the city they work in construction, domestic service, and street vending. In the countryside they work as day laborers or carry out informal activities. We may also classify them according to whether they are temporary, seasonal, or settled migrants. Temporary migrants may be on their way to the United States, or they may be seasonal workers planning to return to their region of origin.

This classification perhaps helped the engineer to provide some order to a chaotic situation. Indigenous migrants are a highly mobile population, and the state does not know precisely how many there are in Baja California at a given moment. In addition, most indigenous migrants lacked birth certificates or any other official documentation. In Baja California, the temporary and settled categories were used by competing state agencies to distribute the indigenous migrant population between them. INI took care of the settled population, whereas the National Program in Solidarity with Day Laborers (Programa Nacional en Solidaridad con los Jornaleros Agrarios, PRONSJAG) was concerned with temporary workers living in employer provided camps. Suárez described INI programs in Baja California in the 1990s:

We are investigating human rights abuses against Indians in the migratory route. The police and the army often harass them. We are trying to stop these abuses. We are educating and training migrants to learn their rights and to defend themselves. We want to provide indigenous migrants with a "migrant ID" (*cartilla de migrante*), so that they are not mistaken for Guatemalan or Salvadoran Indians. Currently, they are not able to demonstrate that they are Mexicans and, therefore, they are victims of constant abuses.

Several aspects of this quote deserve comment. First, Suárez, a government official, presented himself as an advocate for indigenous migrants against other branches of the government such as the police and the army. Different branches of the government had contradictory purposes: some protected Indians whereas others harassed them. Significantly, Suarez did not plan to challenge directly those branches of the government that mistreated indigenous migrants. Instead, he organized migrants to resist government abuses. Suárez's emphasis on education and training to solve the problems of indigenous peoples reflects budgetary constraints, but also follows a long tradition within Mexican indigenism. Since the Revolution, *indigenistas* emphasized cultural change through formal education as a way to liberate Indians from political and economic oppression. A focus on education allowed, and still allows, the government to support popular groups without directly challenging the power of elites (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984). The expediting of migrant identification cards was part of a wider government project of registration of the indigenous migrant population that started in the early 1990s (INI-SEDESOL 1994). Registration helped the state to know more about this population while it helped migrants to claim their citizenship rights. Migrants needed to show official documents to have access to public education, social security, health, and other public services, as well as to be treated as Mexican citizens. Finally, as Suarez notes, registration helped distinguish between Mexican and "foreign" Indians. The first should be treated as

citizens. He does not say what would happen to foreign Indians. Would they perhaps face deportation to their countries of origin?

Suárez explained that one of the strongest initiatives of INI in the mid 1990s was the Program in Support of Civil Organizations (*Programa de Apoyo a las Organizaciones Civiles*). The federal state funded and supported organizations that fought for indigenous rights,

Indians are entitled to the same rights as any other Mexican plus an extra right: the right to difference. INI has programs to reinforce indigenous languages, cultures and forms of social and political organization. It has radio stations that broadcast in indigenous languages and funds to promote indigenous culture.

Then, Suárez admitted that cultural programs had a “secret” objective: to strengthen ethnic identity and political organization: “We would like to consolidate ethnic consciousness and organization. By financing cultural programs, we achieve a greater cohesion within the ethnic groups. Strong organization helps them fight for their rights. This is not about folklore.” Therefore, Suárez understood indigenous culture as an instrument to strengthen the group politically, which resonates with the tradition of radical *indigenistas* of the 1930s, such as Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who understood ethnicity as a tool for political organization and the liberation of popular groups (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984).

The Anthropologist

Most indigenist programs in the Baja Californian peninsula are concentrated in the San Quintín Valley, located 300 km south of the U.S. Mexican border along Transpeninsular Highway 1. Agro-export businesses have flourished in the valley since the 1970s thanks to the import of sophisticated systems for the extraction of water from the subsoil and for irrigation to an area that was historically arid and underpopulated. The region has also been characterized by a great deal of social conflict after the Independent Central of Agrarian Workers and Peasants (*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, CIOAC), a nation-wide independent union, mobilized indigenous day laborers beginning in the 1980s (Kearney 1988; Nagengast and Kearney 1990). This union, originally sympathetic to the PRD, was quite radical in the early 1980s and faced outright repression, including the disappearance of some of its leaders. In the second half of the 1980s, due to fear of repression from agrarian entrepreneurs and the government, CIOAC started to function more as an urban social movement that requested services and infrastructure from the state than as a trade union. In the same period, CIOAC became fragmented into

several organizations that were eventually co-opted by official institutions like INI due to fights among leaders that were allegedly encouraged by government agencies operating in the area (Millán and Rubio 1992).

In ways similar to other indigenist government officials, Anselmo, the INI anthropologist in Baja California, did not present himself as a bureaucrat, but as a political activist and a man of action. He claimed to have been dedicated to political activism from 1985 to 1987, the period in which the union movement flourished in San Quintín, and in which the state made efforts to co-opt it and explained that he had been forced to leave the region because of his political activities. He returned in 1994 with what he characterized as a more diplomatic and conciliatory approach. Anselmo spoke of INI as an institution that genuinely cared for Indians:

There are numerous human rights violations against indigenous day laborers in San Quintín. Indigenous culture is not respected. Sometimes, Indians are jailed because they carry machetes or because they kidnap a woman to marry her, whereas those are common practices in their region of origin. INI defends Indians in these cases and it gets into a lot of trouble for doing it (Interview with INI anthropologist, August 1997).

Then, he criticized a rival government agency, the National Program in Solidarity with Day Laborers (colloquially called *Jornaleros*), an institution that also addressed the indigenous migrant population in San Quintín. According to Anselmo, *Jornaleros* lacked ethnic sensitivity because this institution was characterized by a class-based approach⁴. *Jornaleros*, for its part, accused INI of clientelistic and corporatist practices. According to de la Rosa (1987), this kind of competition between institutions with similar goals and the same target population has been common in Mexico. Every program and agency aims to co-opt clients from whom they require loyalty and exclusivity. The allocation of state resources is done on the basis of the networks and political efficiency of the institution. Therefore, institutions with parallel aims are not interested in joining efforts, which damages the interests of those they serve.

Anselmo explained that the main goal of INI in San Quintín was to promote the education and political organization of indigenous migrants. According to Anselmo, the state could not intervene directly in the conflict between agrarian entrepreneurs and day laborers. However, government agencies could educate and secretly organize (*grillar*) day laborers to resist agrarian capitalism. INI trained indigenous leaders and a federal program financed the organizations that led the Indian movement in San Quintín. Anselmo continued: "INI has been very independent from the state. There is a rumor, for example, that INI financed the armed uprising in Chiapas. Probably a lot of that 'dough (*lana*) was used to buy weapons."

Anselmo's statements illustrate again how the Mexican state works in Baja California. It does not challenge agrarian entrepreneurs directly to force them to follow labor laws that protect day laborers and that are ignored most of the time in the valley (Garduño, García and Morán 1989). However, the state promotes organization to encourage workers to fight for their own rights. In this way, the state does not confront directly the local bourgeoisie, while it legitimizes itself as the advocate for the downtrodden. All this takes place in the context of national agrarian policies that favor commercial agriculture and exporters with credits and other privileges (Stephen 2002). Moreover, by promoting state-controlled political organization, government institutions incorporate independent social movements that were originally allied to the political opposition. Anselmo explained why INI bases its organizational strategy on ethnicity.

The work of Day Laborers is limited from the point of view of organization. It creates committees to reach a concrete goal like getting electricity or running water. When the objective is achieved, the organization disappears. INI, on the contrary, works on the basis of ethnicity. If we want to get electricity or running water, the basis of our work is ethnicity. Ethnicity provides more continuity to our actions.

For Anselmo, thus, ethnicity is a more effective and lasting banner for state-sponsored organization because he conceives this concept as more solid and permanent than other identities like class. Paradoxically, he also believes that Indian identity is endangered.

[Indian] culture is getting lost because it is clandestine. They don't want to be Indians because Indians are fucked up (*jodidos*). The day they realize they have a right to their culture, they are going to preserve it. However, we don't pretend to keep them unchanged like museum pieces. They are Baja Californian Mixtecs. It does not matter whether they migrate. They should still preserve their identity. The idea that an ethnic group is tied to its traditional territory is no longer true. Indians do not have territories or sacred places any more, but they are still Indians. Language does not define them either, especially if their language is not functional any more and it is not going to be preserved. We have to privilege consciousness and self-identification.

Anselmo is willing to redefine and expand the category of Indian to keep ethnic boundaries in a situation of migration and cultural change. Until recent decades, indigenists defined a person from an indigenous community who migrated and learned Spanish as a *mestizo*. For example, anthropologist Alfonso Caso who was head of the INI from 1948 to 1970, wrote:

If an Indian leaves his community permanently, learns Spanish and works in a factory or lives in the city, he is not of interest to indigenism. He has been assimilated to Mexican culture. But, while he remains in his community, even if he accepts some elements of Mexican culture, he is an indigenous person (1978: 80)

According to Anselmo, the new markers of ethnicity are not language and territory (the traditional markers in Mexico's censuses) but consciousness and organization, factors that, as we have seen, are being reinforced by the government agency for which he works. This interest on the expansion of the category of Indian and on the reproduction of ethnic boundaries takes place in a context in which indigenous workers are hired to carry out harsh jobs for less pay than *mestizos* and endure living conditions that would not be considered adequate for non-Indians (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Garduño, García and Morán 1989). Anselmo's understanding of Indian status has been made official by the 2001 Constitutional amendments on indigenous rights and in a context in which increasing numbers of indigenous peasants are migrating to work in commercial agriculture after the end of the agrarian reform (Vázquez León forthcoming).

The Radio Station

La Voz del Valle, the INI radio station in San Quintín, was broadcast in Spanish and in the main indigenous languages spoken in the area: Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui and Purepecha. The aim of the radio was to educate indigenous day laborers about their rights. It encouraged them to learn, organize, and be proud of their ethnic heritage. The radio, inspired by the principles of new indigenism, had a participatory orientation. Its staff members were indigenous migrants from the different ethnic groups represented in the valley. Moreover, the radio aimed to be an open space for indigenous day laborers who were welcome to visit its offices, talk about any topics of their interest on the air, and use a library that specialized in indigenous issues.

Many day laborers in San Quintín spoke highly of the indigenist radio station. Don Eugenio, for example, said, "The radio teaches us about our rights. Thanks to the radio we are becoming civilized Indians who know our rights." He had visited the radio, met its staff, and had been allowed to talk on the air. He explained that day laborers enjoyed very much listening to their portable radios while they were working in the fields. According to Eugenio, the radio was helpful to link the indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Baja California, and the United States. Through the radio, people were able to find out where relatives were and how they were doing.

An important goal of the radio, financed by the federal government, was to redefine and reinforce indigenous identity. Elderly indigenous migrants with whom

I spoke in Baja California still referred to “indigenous people” (*indígenas*) as opposed to “rational people” (*gente de razón*). An indigenous migrant told me that his wife was “*de razón*” and “*gente civilizada*” (a civilized person) meaning that she was *mestiza*. The colonial terminology that divided the world between *gente de razón* and *indígenas* was adopted by indigenous people when they learned Spanish, as this example shows. The indigenist radio made possible a new identity, the “civilized Indian,” as Don Eugenio pointed out. The radio encouraged day laborers (including women and children) to become educated, learn their rights and improve themselves. The radio also advertised the government and non-governmental programs that could help them achieve these goals.

Another form of identity that the radio helped create was that of the “indigenous migrant,” also a contradiction from the point of view of traditional understandings of “Indianness” in postrevolutionary Mexico. Erasto Rojas (1996), Mixtec producer for *La Voz del Valle*, discussed the functions of this institution. He explained that the radio’s audience was composed of indigenous migrants who arrive in the North from the poorest states of the nation. Indigenous migrants suffer a double violence: the separation from their communities of origin and the racism of the region of destination. They are treated as foreigners in their own country.⁵ The role of the Voice of the Valley, according to Rojas, was to make these experiences of discrimination known. Rojas explained that, as a consequence of racism, indigenous migrants rejected their own ethnic identity: “Precisely because [the indigenous person] suffers a constant aggression, he tries to erase the cultural elements that make him different. For example, parents do not teach their children the [Indian] language to spare them the stigmatization that they have suffered” (1996: 121). According to Rojas, the objective of the radio was to become a bridge between migrants and their communities of origin so that they would be partially spared the suffering of separation. Thus, the radio aimed to reinforce the transnational community by keeping migrants in Baja California and in the United States in touch with those who stayed behind in Oaxaca and Guerrero. A second objective was to teach indigenous people that it was fine to be Indian; that they should not be ashamed of their ethnic identity: “The radio must be a space where [indigenous] people speak their language. If we accept that culture is constantly transformed and recreated, then the radio contributes to the construction of a new cultural identity: that of the ‘indigenous migrant’” (1996: 121).

However, according to the station’s director Juan, a young man from Mexico City, the radio also needed to adapt to the acculturation process that indigenous migrants were going through or it would risk losing its audience. Migrant Indians, according to Juan, preferred Northern Mexican music to music from their own region. Juan added that Oaxacan migrants perceived everything Northern as a symbol of modernity and status. Judging from a number of programs that I had the

opportunity to listen to, the radio did not have an essentialist understanding of ethnicity. For example, it encouraged indigenous women to get educated and struggle against domestic violence and sexism, even if this meant a transformation in their traditional way of life. Another example occurred in a public service announcement on human rights that presented a case in which a husband forbade his wife to go to school to learn to read and write. The radio stated:

Perhaps he does not know that a woman is equal to a man. That she has the same rights and opportunities. That she deserves respect. Besides, International Labor Organization Convention 169 and the Constitution state that women and men have the same rights. "This is what I tell Doña Rosa, but she says: 'What can we do? This is the custom that we indigenous people have always had.'" "Yes, it is important to respect our traditions, when they are good, but we have to start to understand that you, women, also have the right to take decisions" (transcript from radio broadcast, August 1997).

An additional function of the radio was to connect the indigenous migrant population with the state and to mediate between social groups. Juan told us that the radio was originally used by the state to get in touch with isolated populations that could not be reached by other means. In San Quintín, it was an effective tool to publicize government programs and institutions. Juan explained that the radio had an important political function: to mediate between social groups in conflict. It was most often used by day laborers to denounce the daily abuses of agrarian entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs, according to Juan, kept their distance from the radio. However, Juan assured, entrepreneurs had supported the radio on occasion and were welcome to participate. "The radio makes possible a conversation between workers and employers," he said. Despite these diplomatic intentions, the radio was generally perceived as an advocate, and a quite radical one, of day laborers. When I was conducting fieldwork in San Quintín, the radio stopped working properly due to technical problems. There was a rumor among day laborers that entrepreneurs had sabotaged it. Even engineer Suárez, the director of INI in Baja California, said that these rumors might be well-founded. Some programs were actually quite radical: They opened with revolutionary anthems and then encouraged agrarian workers to strike against agro-export entrepreneurs, a remarkable statement to be made by a state institution!

The General Directorate of Indigenous Education of the Secretary of Public Education

While doing fieldwork in a popular neighborhood in the city of Tijuana shared by indigenous and *mestizo* migrants, I observed that the indigenous public school was the most influential state institution for indigenous migrants. The principal and the teachers were Mixtecs from Oaxaca who were leaders in the community as well as in Tijuana's indigenous movement. Since the 1920s, the Secretary of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*, SEP) has been in close contact with indigenous populations. The postrevolutionary state aimed to make public education universal to form proud Mexican citizens ready to participate in a modern economy that required literacy skills. SEP became one of the first representatives of the state in rural indigenous areas because it was believed that the problems of poor indigenous populations could be solved primarily through education (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984). However, as Lynn Stephen (2002) has shown, the implementation of the public school system was uneven in different regions. It is often argued that the public school system promoted the cultural assimilation of indigenous populations (e.g. Bonfil 1990; Díaz Polanco 1997; Hernández Castillo 2001). Judith Friedlander (1975), on the contrary, has argued that public schools had a mixed impact on indigenous identity. According to Friedlander, schools taught Spanish and Western values to Nahuatl speaking peasants, while marking them as different through school festivals for outside authorities where they were encouraged to dress as Indians and perform Indian dances. In addition, teachers produced knowledge that conveyed sharp ethnic differences to urban *mestizo* audiences. Since the 1970s, the General Directorate of Indigenous Education, a section of SEP, has claimed to be interested in the preservation of indigenous languages, cultures, and forms of social and political organization, following the spirit of new indigenismo (SEP-DGEI 1996). In 1992, article 4 of the Constitution was reformed, acknowledging that Mexico was a multicultural nation. Public education tried to measure up to this statement as the ethnic and the national projects were perceived as complementary by SEP. According to SEP publications (SEP-DGEI 1996), public education should "balance the ethnic and national dimensions," and should teach students love for their nation and appreciation for national history, symbols, and institutions while reinforcing and protecting Indian languages and cultures. Despite SEP's multicultural and pro-ethnic discourse, indigenous education has been plagued by contradictions. For example, a pamphlet advertising indigenous education had illustrations of archeological remains placing indigenous peoples in a remote past. SEP asserted that indigenous languages should be used during the first three years of elementary school, and then be combined with Spanish in subsequent years. This statement did not translate into daily practices in indigenous public schools in Baja

California. In the school where I conducted fieldwork, Spanish was the only language used for teaching after kindergarten. Indigenous languages were used occasionally either to communicate with monolingual parents or to exchange a few words with a child who was still monolingual. In fact, SEP documents acknowledged that there were many obstacles for the implementation of bilingual education. First, educators had to come to terms with a legacy of assimilation policies and practices. Second, according to SEP, most indigenous parents wished their children to assimilate and speak only Spanish. Third, a number of indigenous languages were not standardized but fragmented into dialects that were not mutually understandable, and in some cases, each community spoke its own dialect. Finally, in Baja California, indigenous children from several ethnic groups shared the same classroom and did not speak the same dialect as their teachers. Indigenous teachers may have protected indigenous children from discrimination by *mestizo* educators, but they did not secure bilingual education for them.

The Director of DGEI

Licenciado Rodríguez, director of the DGEI in Baja California, started his interview by explaining that he owed his job to his political skills. He had successfully negotiated a conflict between *mestizo*, migrant indigenous, and native Baja Californian teachers. Migrant indigenous teachers argued that only Indians should teach indigenous children and that they were the only ones prepared to teach in indigenous languages. Rodríguez acknowledged that most education took place in Spanish anyway due to the problems already noted. He believed that migrant indigenous teachers were struggling for their jobs more than for indigenous languages or cultures. Despite his cynicism, Rodríguez, following neo-indigenist SEP guidelines, believed that indigenous cultures and languages should be preserved. However, he did not believe that indigenous culture was something that indigenous people possessed and that the school system would pick up from them. On the contrary, he argued that public schools needed to teach “indigenous culture” to the grassroots, “We want the teacher to merge into the community and assume its leadership. We want to train community leaders. We need to take their traditional culture to the community and teach them Indian culture” (Interview with head of DEGEI-SEP in Baja California, August 1997). This quote also illustrates how SEP, like INI, linked the promotion of indigenous culture to state-sponsored political organization. This approach worked well in Baja California because the Mixtec teachers brought by SEP from Oaxaca in 1982 have been the organizers and leaders of the state’s indigenous movement.

I asked Rodríguez what did he understand by “indigenous culture.” He spoke

first about *tequio* (communal work obligations). He said, “Indians do not like modern individualism. They feel that they have the right and the duty to share with others. They are governed by the principles of generosity and the common good.” Rodríguez reflected on the importance that the Mexican government gives to *tequio* in its definition of Indian culture. According to Collier (1994), the concept of unpaid communal work has been used by the state to extract labor from indigenous communities for public works from the colonial period to the present. In the same way, in the neighborhood of my fieldwork, fathers of school children worked in the construction of the public school in their spare time. If somebody was unable to fulfill his duty, he was expected to pay somebody else to work for him. Mothers worked in school maintenance and in the organization of school life. Communal work and community participation often meant that unpaid labor was extracted from the community. Yet, the estate took credit for providing these services. Unpaid communal work was also expected from poor *mestizos*. However, when addressing an indigenous population, the rhetoric of *tequio* was deployed to encourage people to participate.

Rodríguez had a folkloric and romantic understanding of ethnicity and claimed to love Indian celebrations because everybody participated in them and they were beautiful and colorful. These “Indian” celebrations were enacted periodically in every public school. Folkloric holidays were used to promote nationalism through the celebration of ethnic difference. Indigenous dances from different states of the republic were selected and performed making a colorful Mexican pastiche. As SEP pamphlets have done, Rodríguez placed indigenous cultures in the past as he compared indigenous languages to Latin and Greek “that are still important even though they are dead.” He claimed, nevertheless, that Indians should not be kept frozen in the past and that the role of the public school was to introduce them to modernity. Like INI officials, Rodríguez claimed that indigenous languages should not be the criteria of Indianess: “Even if a child does not speak an Indian language, he is still an Indian. Indigenous education should take care of him. It is not fair that Indians jump to *mestizo* and then to Indian again (*no se vale que estén saltando de indio a mestizo y luego a indio de nuevo*).” If “Indians” do not speak a different language, why should they need special education? What makes them different in Rodríguez’s eyes? Is it their culture (e.g. communal solidarity, celebrations, *tequio*) or their physical make up?

The Indian School

The principal and teachers of Valle Verde’s indigenous public school were Mixtecs from the state of Oaxaca who arrived in Tijuana in 1982 when they were hired by

SEP to serve the indigenous migrant community. SEP wished Mixtec educators to teach Spanish and help Mixtec migrants assimilate to Tijuana's urban society. Nevertheless, indigenous teachers have been instrumental in the reproduction of ethnic boundaries in Baja California. Since 1984, they have been the leaders and organizers of Tijuana's indigenous movement (Kearney 1988; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Velasco 2002). In addition, they have marked the migrant community as Indian when they have taken population censuses to demonstrate the need for new indigenous schools in the city.

As an example of the organizational history of these teachers, I will summarize the background of the principal of the school. He was born in a small community in the Mixteca region and was trained by INI in a boarding school as an indigenous *promotor*⁶. He worked for INI for a few years and was later hired by SEP as a bilingual teacher. He joined several organizations affiliated to PRI like the Juvenile Revolutionary Movement (*Movimiento Juvenil Revolucionario*) and the National Peasant Confederation (*Confederación Nacional Campesina*, CNC). When he arrived in Tijuana, he founded the Association of Mixtecs Living in Tijuana (*Asociación de Mixtecos Residentes en Tijuana*, ASMIRT) with other Mixtec teachers and a *mestizo* anthropologist and, later, a Community Planning Committee (*Comité Comunitario de Planeación*, COCOPLA). The first was a relatively independent popular urban movement sympathetic to the PRD, whereas the second was created after president Miguel de la Madrid (1982–88) encouraged indigenous people to organize in such committees in order to put into effect participatory indigenism. Later, the principal collaborated with PAN through a committee and he was fond of the work of this party at the neighborhood level. The principal did not perceive the collaboration with rival political parties as a problem. On the contrary, he claimed that the poor cannot afford to be faithful to a single party as they should look for benefits from different politicians.

The history of the creation of Valle Verde's school shows that indigenous education is not treated like regular education in Baja California. An article in *Comunidad Educativa* explains how the principal founded the school (Montiel Aguirre 1995) after first taking a census of the indigenous population to show SEP that there was need for such a school. Then he organized indigenous parents in a committee to pressure the authorities. Julio, the principal, and the committee of parents visited several state institutions to ask for support for their project. The institution that administrated public land in Tijuana (Promotora de Desarrollo Urbano de Tijuana S. A., PRODUTSA), donated the lot over which the school was to be built. SEP donated construction materials. Tijuana's City Hall donated \$800, INI donated \$250, and a nongovernmental organization donated \$325. Teachers and parents contributed with their labor to the construction of the school. The classrooms were made of cheap construction materials. The school still lacked bathrooms, running

water, drainage, and furniture when I was doing fieldwork. Then Julio and the committee of parents went to regular schools to ask for old furniture and SEP gave them some chairs. Authorities from different state institutions, however, presided over the inauguration ceremony of Valle Verde's school and took credit for its construction. Several aspects of Julio's account deserve comment. First, Indians do not seem to receive public education as a citizenship right. They have to visit offices and institutions to ask for favors to gain access to their constitutional right to education. These favors leave the community indebted to particular authorities. Indian education also seems to present itself as a form of charity: Indians were given old furniture to equip their school. Community participation meant that indigenous people had to volunteer to provide for themselves what the state should have provided. Nevertheless, once the school was built, it joined the statistics of official achievements.

The philosophy of the school was contradictory. Principal Julio explained in an interview taken in September 1996 that he aimed to strengthen indigenous languages and cultures in Valle Verde. When I first arrived in the neighborhood, Julio showed me beautifully-illustrated textbooks that he planned to use in his classes. They were edited by SEP and written in a dialect of the Mixtec language spoken in the mountains of Guerrero, the region from which most of the children in the neighborhood came. Later, I determined that these luxury editions were never used in the classroom because Valle Verde's teachers spoke a different dialect of the Mixtec language and were unable to use the books and those children who did speak the dialect in which the books were written did not know how to read or write in their own language. The books were used exclusively to show visitors (like me) that indigenous language and culture were taught at the school. In an article published by Arthur Golden (1996) in *San Diego Union Tribune*, Julio presented himself as a leader who fought for the preservation of the Mixtec language. Golden compared bilingual education in the United States and Baja California. He argued that, in the United States, bilingual education was used to assimilate children to the English language. In Baja, in contrast, it meant teaching children in native languages to secure their linguistic survival. Despite these good intentions, all classes in Julio's school were taught in Spanish. Daily communication between teachers, children, and parents took place in Spanish unless somebody was unable to understand it. The only exception was a workshop in which Julio taught children the Mixtec alphabet, the Mexican National Anthem translated into the Mixtec language, and some scattered words in Mixtec. This workshop was originally scheduled twice a week, but it took place only a few times while I was in Tijuana. Julio acknowledged that parents were not enthusiastic about his project. He wrote:

Last year, many parents did not like the fact that their children were taught the Mixtec language in school. They argued that their language was not good and they

showed contempt for their own culture. The loss of these values is due to lack of consciousness and to the influence of North American culture (Proposal for a Workshop on reading and writing the Mixtec Language, Valle Verde school, September 1996: 1).

Julio added that indigenous migrants should be encouraged to remain indigenous even against their own will. The preservation of native languages becomes a nationalist project as Julio warns about the danger of their replacement with North American cultural elements.

Like Friedlander's (1975) description for an earlier period, Indian identity was performed in Valle Verde's school in festivals and celebrations. In these events, children were encouraged to dress as Indians and to dance for outsiders, especially local politicians and government officials. Valle Verde's children, however, were not dressed as Mixtecs (their own ethnic group) but as Aztecs or Yaquis. They were encouraged to assume a "generic" Indian identity that had little relationship with their particular experiences or traditions. This generic identity was part of a larger repertoire of Mexican national symbols, illustrating another instance in which the ethnic and the national complemented each other.

Julio asked me to collaborate with him in a cultural recovery workshop that he was planning to carry out in Valle Verde. Our work was to gather and record the experiences and traditions of Mixtec elderly and children. He wrote a proposal for SEP stating that he had a commitment to recover and publicize the culture of his forefathers and that he wished to raise consciousness in Mexican society about the existence of native peoples while convincing Mixtec children about the importance of their own culture, so they would not be ashamed any more of being Indians. However, the topics that he proposed for discussion in the workshop had little relationship to the specific experiences of Mixtec children or the elderly in Valle Verde. They were: "The Day of the Dead," "The Mexican Revolution," "Christmas," "The National Symbols" (the flag and the anthem), "The Life of President Benito Juárez," "The Panamerican Day of the Indian," "Labor Day," "Mother's Day," "Women as the Basis of the Family," "The Education of Indians," and the "Day of the Teacher" (Proposal for a workshop on indigenous literature, Valle Verde school, September 1996). Most of these were themes celebrated in public schools throughout Mexico and not issues specific to the Mixtec ethnic group. Some had an indigenous flavor, but they were part of a generic representation of the Indian for national consumption.

Julio started his cultural recovery workshop by explaining the meaning of being Mexican to indigenous children. He continued arguing that Indians had the right to be treated as real Mexicans. Then, he referred to the reform of article 4 of the Mexican Constitution that defines Mexico as a multicultural nation:

In Mexico, there are many cultures and languages, but only one official language that

is Spanish. With this language you can communicate with all Mexican children. But you should also remember that each culture has its own language. We should learn to respect them. We want them to respect us. We want them not to laugh at those of us who do not speak Spanish well. We should be conscious that the nation is multicultural and that we should respect the children who speak poor Spanish or who do not read well. The compromise is that they should learn, they should improve themselves everyday.

Like other government officials, Julio combined the ethnic and the national project. His aim was to integrate Indians into the Mexican nation as citizens. However, as Friedlander (1975) argued for Nahuatl speakers in Morelos, Julio understood indigenous culture as a “lack,” for example, a lack of proficiency in Spanish and reading ability rather than something positive that indigenous people had. Interestingly, in the quote above, Julio identifies himself and his audience first with *mestizos* who should respect Indians, later with indigenous people who demand respect, and finally with *mestizos* again, reflecting the contradictions and complexities of his discourse as well as the need for children to identify simultaneously with *mestizo* Mexico and disadvantaged indigenous people.

Conclusion

I have shown that some government officials—including indigenous brokers working for the state or collaborating closely with it—in Baja California are interested in, and working for, the reproduction of ethnic boundaries. However, there seem to be two different indigenisms at work. *Mestizo* government officials easily identify with the government, although this is not without contradictions as they also claim to be working “against the government.” Indigenous brokers do not tend to present themselves as part of the government, but as the voice of the indigenous community. Perhaps, as Emiko Saldívar (2002) has noted, *indigenista* work automatically suggests an unspoken *mestizo* identity, which makes difficult for indigenous government officials to assume an “indigenista personality.” Whereas, some (but not all) *mestizo* government officials are paternalistic and hold an essentialist view of Indianness, indigenous leaders working for the state seem to have a more fluid understanding of their own and their community’s distinctiveness, which is not free from the fear of stigmatization and the wish to belong to the nation as equals. However, on occasion, they also encourage children to perform mainstream stereotypes. State sponsored ethnicity is often understood as a grassroots product because the voice of the teachers and other leaders trained by the state is interpreted as a grassroots point of view. That these leaders work for the government and promote government agen-

das as well as their complex intermediate position is not sufficiently acknowledged.

I argue that those who articulate identity more aggressively are principally those who have a vested interest in bureaucratic positions which require or reward the articulation of indigenous identity. As in the past, this official interest on the indigenous may be related to the need of colonial nations like Mexico to demonstrate their distinctiveness, a purpose that the indigenous serves. According to government officials, the reinforcement of ethnic identity is done against the will of a community that would like to assimilate to the mainstream in the north of Mexico to move up the socioeconomic ladder or, perhaps, to articulate themselves to the "modern," as they perceive it. This finding differs from other cases discussed by influential literature on indigenous peoples and the state in Latin America. According to a number of authors, indigenous communities resist the efforts of the state to assimilate them. In these cases, the reinforcement of ethnicity is interpreted as a liberating project (e.g., Stephen 2002; Van Cott 2000; 1994; Díaz Polanco 1997; Stavenhagen 1994; Urban and Sherzer 1992). In the case of Baja California, some agencies of the government strengthen ethnic boundaries in a political-economic context in which indigenous migrants are exploited as day laborers in commercial agriculture. In addition, the reinforcement of ethnicity is not liberating when it does not recognize the real experiences of a particular community.

Baja Californian government officials do not perceive the national and the ethnic projects as contradictory, but as complementary. For example, INI and SEP use ethnicity to sponsor more durable forms of state-controlled political organization. Indigenous teachers recover indigenous cultures teaching about the Mexican Constitution, the flag, Benito Juárez, and the national anthem, which they translate into the Mixtec language.

Ethnicity, as conceived by some government officials in Baja California, is neither a way to recognize nor hear the voice of the other. A generic and stereotypical identity is often imposed on migrant communities. SEP aims to teach indigenous culture to the grassroots instead of learning it from them. Mixtec children are encouraged to dress as Yaquis or Aztecs in official school celebrations that mark them as Indian without recognizing the specificities of their Mixtec origin or migratory experience. INI officials in Baja California, however, had a more fluid understanding of "Indianness," one in which some elements would be preserved or reinvented whereas others would be transformed. This selective understanding of Indian culture in which "positive" traits are encouraged and "bad" traits are discarded is also a tradition coming from classical indigenism.

The government officials who participated in this study feared that ethnic boundaries might dissolve with migration to the border region. They were willing to redefine and expand the category of "Indian" to keep migrants indigenous. For postrevolutionary indigenism, an "Indian" was a person closely affiliated to a com-

munity defined as indigenous who spoke a native language. A migrant who learned Spanish automatically became a *mestizo*. Some Baja Californian government officials redefined Indian status as a matter of consciousness and organization and de-emphasized the importance of language and territory. Others just claimed that an Indian is an Indian and will continue to be so, regardless of cultural transformations. This latter interpretation perhaps suggests an unintended return to the earlier concept of race. This finding contrasts with Stephen's (1997) study of Chiapas in the same time period. According to her, during the 1990s, the Mexican state made its definition of Indian less inclusive to avoid exceptions to the process of privatization of communal land, from which communities defined as indigenous were excluded, as well as to contain the indigenous movement.⁷ Perhaps, as Knight (1990) has noted, the state has been working with two definitions of Indian status, one more restrictive than the other, and one or the other has been used strategically depending on the circumstances. For instance, Hernández Castillo (2001) argues that a broader definition of Indianess—one that did not take into account whether people spoke a native language or wore Indian outfits—was used by government officials in the southern Chiapas border, a region where indigenous languages and dress had been lost due to earlier aggressive assimilation practices. As in Baja California, this was also an area where Indians worked as peons in coffee plantations for meager wages. In a later work, Stephen (2002) notes that the Mexican state still uses "objective criteria," particularly language, but also territory, dress, and custom to identify a person as indigenous,

Concepts of ethnicity used by the Mexican government continue to rely on trait recognition and the certification by experts of indigenous legitimacy. Obviously this method is about forty years behind anthropological concepts of ethnicity, which focus on the expression and practice of ethnic identity in action and on the process of identity construction (. . .). Language is still a significant, but not necessarily the primary ingredient of ethnic identity in eastern Chiapas, particularly in areas where indigenous and peasant organizing has grown over the past twenty years. Second and third generation Tojolabales may not speak Tojolabal, yet they have a strong sense of ethnic identity (p. 87).

Unlike Stephen's findings for the south of Mexico, some government officials in Baja California are up-to-date with what she characterizes as current anthropological understandings of ethnic identity. They rely less on language, territory, and other visible traits and more on self-identification, consciousness, and organization, factors that a number of government agencies are reinforcing. It is interesting that President Fox, who as an agrarian producer has a vested interest in commercial agriculture and the figure of the indigenous day laborer, has transformed this broader

understanding of Indian status into Constitutional law.

Corrigan and Sayer (1985) argue that the state has the ability to construct and impose certain identities through its laws, institutions, and routines. The Mexican state encourages the adoption of certain forms of ethnic identity through the distribution of jobs and resources to leaders and the grassroots. INI finances ethnic civil organizations. SEP provides jobs for indigenous teachers that work on the reinforcement of ethnicity. The media, publications, and public performances are additional ways to promote ethnic identities. For instance, the indigenist radio station plays a key role in the construction of new indigenous identities in the Mexican border region as well as in the reinforcement of transnational and transregional identities.

Alan Knight (1998) has characterized Mexican populism as a political style, a variable mixture between pro-people rhetoric and more or less limited redistribution practices. The discourses and practices of government officials in Baja California help to understand one of the ways in which the populist state works. Different government agencies carry out what seem to be contradictory tasks. Some repress indigenous migrants whereas others defend them. According to advocate government officials, repressive agencies of the state have more power and resources than activist branches, particularly after the 1995 budget crisis (de la Peña, 2002). In addition, activist branches of the state do not confront repressive branches or elites directly, but train popular groups to resist on their own. The state is understood as a space for the mediation of social conflicts, but the unequal power of different state institutions guarantees that the government will serve primarily the interests of elites, while legitimizing itself as the advocate for the downtrodden. On the other hand, the state, through its progressive institutions, absorbs revolutionary energies, co-opting radical intellectuals and grassroots leaders who are disciplined and channeled through the state apparatus. In this way, even those who genuinely fight for the rights of subaltern communities may still contribute to the reproduction of the status quo. Or, in words of *mestizo* government officials, those who represent official institutions may be “fighting against the government.”

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Notes

¹The party that ruled postrevolutionary Mexico for seven decades, until the election of President Vicente Fox of the Partido de Acción Nacional, PAN, National Action Party, in 2000.

²The 2001 legislation on indigenous rights in the Mexican Constitution can be found in www.ini.gob.mx.

³A radical spin-off of PRI.

⁴According to Luis Vázquez León (forthcoming) Day Laborer's has been characterized by a pro-ethnic approach in other regions of México and has closely collaborated with INI. The situation in Baja California seems to be an exception related to the background and political beliefs of its director.

⁵Racism and discrimination are associated on the Mexico-US border with the treatment of Mexican immigrants in the US. Interestingly, North American discrimination against Mexicans is used as a metaphor to talk about internal racism. This supports Teun van Dijk's (2002) idea that racism is often placed elsewhere in dominant discourses.

⁶Community organizer and developer.

⁷This happened in the context of the reform of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992 that allowed the privatization of *ejido* lands and in the context of the Chiapas uprising that started in January, 1994.

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