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in Interdisciplinary
Perspectives

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS viii

I. OVERVIEW

Chapter 1

Introduction: Crossings:

Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives 3
Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco

II. ANTECEDENTS AND NEW DEMOGRAPHIC FORMATIONS

Chapter 2

Recent Structural Changes in Mexico's Economy:

A Preliminary Analysis of Some Sources
of Mexican Migration to the United States 53
Enrique Dussel Peters

Commentary: *John H. Coatsworth*

Chapter 3

U.S. Immigration Policies and Trends:

The Growing Importance of Migration from Mexico 79
Susan González Baker, Frank D. Bean, Augustin Escobar Latapi,
and Sidney Weintraub

Commentary: *Mary C. Waters*

III. ECONOMIC THEMES

Chapter 4

The Structural Embeddedness of Demand for Mexican
Immigrant Labor: New Evidence from California 113
Wayne A. Cornelius

Commentary: *Robert Smith*

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Chapter 5

Dimensions of Economic Adaptation by Mexican-Origin Men 157

*Dowell Myers***Commentary:** *Nathan Glazer***IV. SOCIAL THEMES****Chapter 6**Migration and Integration: Intermarriages among
Mexicans and Non-Mexicans in the United States 207*Jorge Durand***Commentary:** *Merilee Grindle***Chapter 7**Access to Health Insurance and Health Care
for Mexican American Children in Immigrant Families 225*E. Richard Brown, Roberta Wyn, Hongjian Yu, Abel Valenzuela,
and Liane Dong***Commentary:** *Felton Earls***Chapter 8**

The Education of Mexican Immigrant Children 251

*Enrique T. Trueba***Commentary:** *Gary Orfield***V. PSYCHOCULTURAL THEMES****Chapter 9**Cultural Mourning, Immigration, and Engagement:
Vignettes from the Mexican Experience 283*Ricardo C. Ainslie***Commentary:** *Peggy Levitt***Chapter 10**Ethnic Mexicans and the Transformation
of "American" Social Space: Reflections on Recent History 307*David G. Gutiérrez***Commentary:** *George J. Sanchez***Chapter 11**The U.S. Immigration Control Offensive:
Constructing an Image of Order on the Southwest Border 341*Peter Andreas***Commentary:** *Jacqueline Hagan***Chapter 12**

Immigration and Public Opinion 363

*Thomas J. Espenshade and Maryanne Belanger***Commentary:** *Michael Jones-Correa***Epilogue***Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco* 413**Index** 421

PART IV

Social Themes

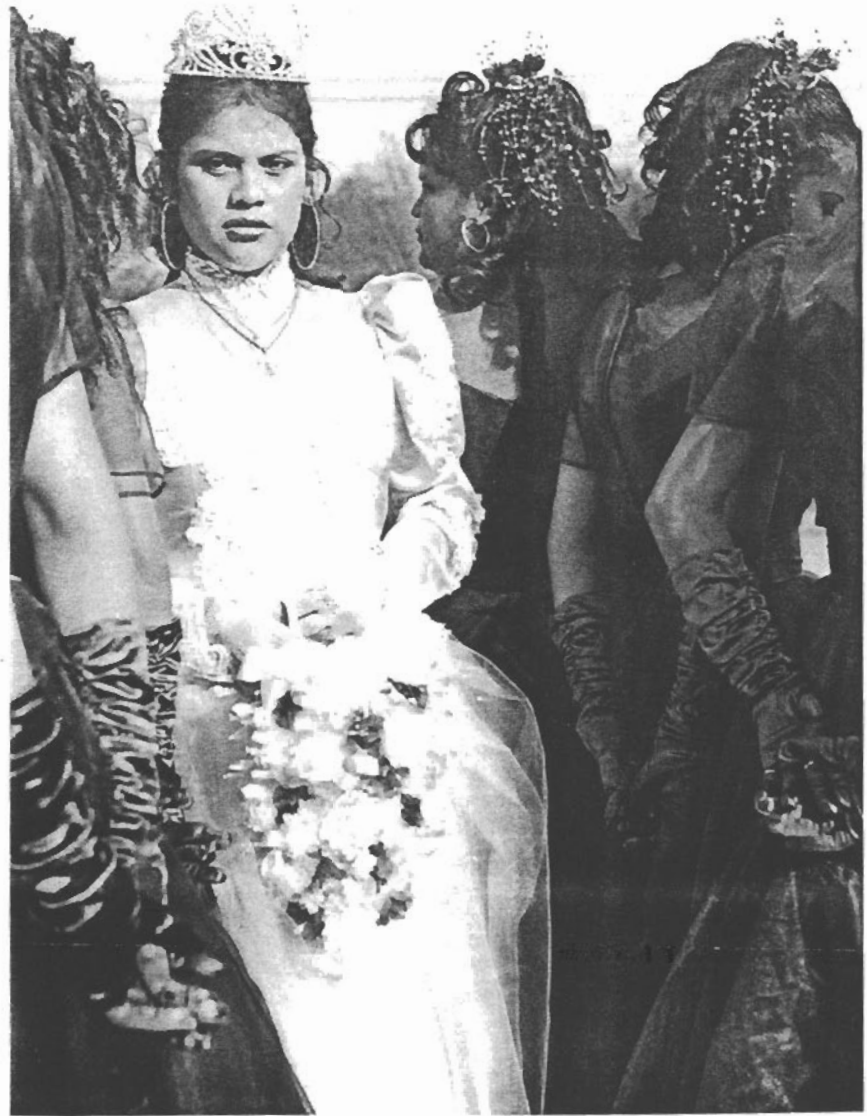


Photo by Anna LeVine

Migration and Integration: Intermarriages among Mexicans and Non-Mexicans in the United States

Jorge Durand

Desmos/University of Guadalajara

Jorge Durand My interest in issues of migration began in 1980 when Douglas Massey invited me to participate in his research project on Mexican immigration to the United States. This was the beginning of a long and productive professional and personal relationship that brought us to work in four communities in eastern Mexico, administering surveys and carrying out anthropological interviews. The results of this research were published in the book *Return to Aztlán: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico* (1987). In 1987, we decided to undertake a new project, the Mexican Migration Project, which in its methodological proposal takes off from our previous experience. From the beginning we set as a goal to carry out our work as a team, in an interdisciplinary form, so as to combine methods from anthropology and sociology. Over time, fifty communities have been added to the original four. Each year we continue to add communities and new regions to our database. In this process a large number of researchers in Mexico and the United States work with us in the collection of data in the field and use the information included in the database. As of a number of years, the database became public; it can be accessed via the Internet and allows us to have common access to information of interest to us all.

In addition to quantitative analysis, we have engaged in issues of a more anthropological nature, such as that of ex-votos with migratory themes, which resulted in the book *Miracles on the Border*. Along the same lines is the work that I present here on mixed marriages between Mexicans and North Americans, a phenomenon that, in addition to being novel, is crucial for understanding the new dynamic of migration between Mexico and the United States.

Professor of Geography and Anthropology, University of Guadalajara. Educated at Universidad Iberoamericana, El Colegio de Michoacán and Université de Toulouse Le Mirail. Publications include *Migrations mexicaines aux Etats-Unis* (1996), *Miracles on the Border* (coauthor) (1995), and *Más allá de la línea* (1994).

At the beginning of this century, two very different migrant processes coincided in the United States. In the north, the doors to European immigration were opened wide at Ellis Island. Although the settlement of these immigrants was often mediated by organizations of conationals, there is little doubt that a process of integration into American society followed their entry (Chermayeff 1991). In contrast, to the south, in El Paso, Texas, thousands of Mexicans were contracted as temporary workers. They did not settle, but came and went from the United States in accordance with the rhythms of fields and factories, following paths opened by the railroads and the advancement of highways.

This temporary and itinerant labor migration did not favor incorporation and integration into American society. On the contrary, the migration patterns that resulted from successive U.S. policies throughout the period reinforced spatial mobility and occupational instability among Mexican workers, a situation that encouraged, when all was said and done, their return to Mexico. The end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s witnessed massive deportation campaigns that repatriated nearly a half million migrants to Mexico (Guzmán 1979). Later, the Bracero program of 1942 to 1964 was created by the U.S. Congress to satisfy demand for agricultural labor in the southwestern states and deliberately structured to keep Mexican migration exclusively male, temporary, and rural with respect to both origins and destinations.

During the Bracero period, about 5 million young men from rural areas of the west-central Mexican states were imported into the United States for

seasonal work (Morales 1982). During the subsequent period of undocumented migration (1964–1986), a legal but temporary status gave way to one that denied Mexican migrants a legal means to remain and be integrated into U.S. society. Although undocumented workers could easily cross the border surreptitiously and acquire work in the United States, the threat of a possible deportation always hung over them. There were exceptions, of course, and with the passage of time and the succession of generations, some of the campesinos, and especially their children, were converted into Chicanos. Among the immigrants themselves, however, the prevailing preference was to return to Mexico. Indeed, according to data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), about half of all migrants identified in a survey of Mexico's western region made just one trip to the United States (MMP 1996).

The legal vacuum that had reinforced the temporary and undocumented character of labor migration from Mexico changed in late 1986. That year the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) established a massive legalization program that ultimately allowed more than 2 million Mexican workers to legitimize their status north of the border. In this way, IRCA launched a new and entirely different phase of migration linked to legal permanent residence, yielding an increase in the migration of women and children and a wider participation of families. IRCA also increased participation by migrants of urban origin and undercut traditional expectations of return migration.

This new context has strongly affected the process of integration into United States. The ultimate mark of integration, according to demographers, is intermarriage, indicated by the share of unions formed between Mexicans and other, previously distant, nationalities. Various authors agree that the rupture of national, ethnic, racial, and religious barriers through intermarriage signals a crack in the cultural cohesion of a minority and leads the way to broader integration within a receiving society (Nostrand 1976; Murguía 1982; Schoen, Nelson, and Collins 1978).

Through a study of one Mexican community with a long tradition of migration to the United States, this chapter confirms a notable increase in mixed marriages over the past decade. This finding, however, does not indicate a unilinear process of integration into American society. Rather, mixed marriages imply the extension of social networks and cultural identities in wider and more complex ways. The change in migration patterns caused by IRCA appears to have been a crucial trigger for these new matrimonial dynamics.

This study was carried out in the small city of Ameca, Jalisco, using the technique of the ethnosurvey, which combines representative survey sampling with ethnographic fieldwork and archival analysis. In the present instance, I

not only make use of data from a special survey conducted during 1992 but also draw on marriage statistics compiled by civil and church authorities, which recorded 140 cases of marriages to outsiders between 1965 and 1996. This study forms part of the Mexican Migration Project, and draws on fieldwork undertaken by sociologist Enrique Martínez Curiel of the University of Guadalajara, one of the project research assistants.

A NEW MIGRATION PATTERN

Migration between Mexico and the United States was drastically transformed in 1986 when the United States abruptly decided to change its immigration policy. After IRCA's passage, the legal situation of Mexican migrants in the United States changed dramatically. A recent report of *Migration News* estimates that of 7 million Mexicans in the United States, roughly 1 million are naturalized (14 percent), 4 million are legal resident aliens (57 percent), and 2 million (29 percent) are undocumented (McDonnell 1997). According to figures provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which by tradition tends to inflate estimates of illegal migration, the number of undocumented migrants is 2.7 million, which means that they would constitute 38 percent of the total Mexican population.

Migrants legalized under IRCA and those who later achieved legal status through the family reunification provision faced a novel situation, with new opportunities that would have been unimaginable in their previous undocumented status: the possibility of lengthening their stay in open-ended fashion, the ability to enter and leave the country at will, the option of naturalizing, the right to access social services for which they had always paid but had heretofore been denied, the ability to look for better employment opportunities, and ultimately the freedom to move without fear throughout the United States. Whether they wanted it or not, legality allowed migrants to define new scenarios for life and work north of the border: Now they could choose their place of residence and employment, the destinations for their savings and investments, their length of stay, and the date of their ultimate return to Mexico.

The change in legal status allowed them to feel, for the first time, a proclivity toward naturalization in United States. Historically, Mexicans were the immigrant group with the lowest naturalization index: only 3 percent in comparison with 8 percent among Central Americans, 14 percent among Caribbeans, and 16 percent among South Americans in 1993 to 1994 (Department of Labor 1996). In the last two years, however, petitions for naturalization increased dramatically among Mexicans. Indeed, 1.1 million Mexicans were naturalized in 1996,

and an additional 1.7 million were expected in 1997 (McDonnell 1997). This increase in the number of aspirants for naturalization is attributed to two factors: recent legislation that limits the access of legal residents to key social entitlements (namely Medicare and Medicaid) and the racist attacks on migrants suffered in the wake of California's Proposition 187. Mexicans, feeling vulnerable in the new discriminatory climate, have opted for naturalization in growing numbers as a means of countering the attacks of politicians who have discovered anti-immigrant campaigns to be a powerful vehicle for political mobilization in states such as California and Florida.

In the new, hostile political environment, a change of nationality also reflects a change in attitude on the part of migrants with respect to potential integration north of the border. The upsurge in discrimination obliged them, as never before, to engage in political participation through electoral struggle. As a result, with each passing day the Latino vote becomes more and more of a crucial factor deciding elections in four key states: Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. The recent victory of Loretta Sánchez in Santa Ana, California, was due largely to the Mexican vote, and especially to the support of just-naturalized voters quickly organized by the *Hermandad Mexicana Nacional* (McDonnell 1997).

In practical terms, legalization not only opened the possibility of gaining better employment and higher wages but also put Mexicans in a better position to interact with other groups in American society. It afforded them more opportunities for social mobility through changes of employment and residence, and allowed them to gain an improved understanding of the culture and language of the United States. In addition, for many Mexican migrants (and above all the young) it opened new vistas with respect to the possibility of intermarriage.

Those undocumented migrants who, for one reason or another, did not qualify for legalization face a very different situation. Recent increases in the costs and risks of border crossing have obliged them to lengthen their stay north of the border, discouraging the pattern of annual returns to which they had heretofore been accustomed. Undocumented single men who elect to remain in the United States were left with only one road to obtain legal residence papers—marriage. At the same time, meeting and establishing relations with potential mates has become easier. Patterns of living and residence have changed even for the undocumented. The male-only barracks located in agricultural areas have largely been abandoned. Now migrants rent houses and apartments in nearby towns and cities, thus reducing their vulnerability to raids and arrest by the INS.

The new ease of meeting potential mates also follows from transformations of the labor market that generally permit both documented and undocumented migrants relatively free contact with persons of the opposite sex from diverse countries. Indeed, the sexual division of labor has changed in radical ways. Previously, only men could be found in certain activities, or at a minimum there was a strict spatial separation between the work of men and women that limited regular contact. The current trend, however, is to combine tasks in ways that mix men and women within the workplace. Thus, the odds of establishing a romantic relationship have notably increased on the job as well as in residential areas. These new conditions have begun to change marriage patterns among Mexican migrants, as can be seen from the case of Ameca.

THE STUDY OF MIXED MARRIAGES

For a variety of reasons, patterns of intermarriage among migrants to the United States have received little attention in the Mexican literature. First, mixed marriages are relatively new. Until recently, migrants strongly preferred marriage with people from their own places of origin, or at least from other parts of Mexico. Second, censuses and surveys undertaken in Mexico generally offer little quantitative information on intermarriage, and qualitative research is an arduous way of obtaining data on the subject, even locally. Finally, although intermarriage is a phenomenon that affects Mexicans, it transpires in the United States, which hinders studies based on data gathered south of the border.

More attention has been paid to the subject of intermarriage on the U.S. side of the border, with several sources of statistics and analysis. But U.S. studies are at best only approximations to the subject, since most studies focus on Hispanics, Mexican Americans, or Chicanos rather than Mexican immigrants. This blurring of natives and immigrants creates serious problems of theory and definition and presents methodological obstacles to distinguishing separate nationalities, origins, and ethnic ascriptions. Indeed, the trend in U.S. research to broaden research to embrace "Latinos" as the relevant group for study impedes understanding of the internal dynamics of the different nationalities that make up that population. One need only recall that between the decades of the 1950s and 1970s there were categorical differences between Chicanos and Mexicans with respect to the demands of the job market (Santamaria 1988). For the former, labor unions provided the principal mechanism for improving conditions of work, especially in agriculture, whereas for the latter, the need to acquire dollars in order to return to Mexico

made participation in U.S. labor struggles less urgent. This difference created political tensions that for years widened the social distance between the groups, a gulf that was reflected in matrimonial patterns.

Most research to date has focused on intermarriage between Latinos and Anglos. Based on an analysis of surnames in California, Schoen, Nelson, and Collins (1978) found that during the 1970s there was an increase in the relative frequency of marriages between those with Spanish and Anglo-Saxon last names. They concluded that a narrowing of social distance between the two groups had occurred. According to these authors, the situation of Hispanics differed radically compared with African Americans, who displayed a low rate of intermarriage with Anglos. The Latino pattern generally resembled the intermarriage pattern typical of southern and eastern European immigrants one or two generations earlier. Nevertheless, the authors only asserted that this pattern characterized Hispanics in general, not Mexican immigrants in particular, who still displayed low rates of intermarriage with Anglos (Schoen, Nelson, and Collins 1978).

Murguía's (1982) computations using 1970 data found an exogamy rate of 16 percent for Chicano men and 17 percent for Chicana women. Some years before, in 1953, the rate had been around 14 percent (Nostrand 1976). Thus, according to Murguía, the historical rate of intermarriage between Chicanos and Anglos had just begun to increase in the 1970s. Exogamy tended to be concentrated in urban areas and was more frequent among second- and third-generation Mexicans than among the first. A detailed analysis revealed regional differences as well: Mixed marriages were more frequent in California and New Mexico than in Texas (Murguía 1982). Finally, the analysis reaffirmed Schoen and colleagues' finding that marital barriers between Chicanos and Anglos were not as strong as those between African Americans and whites.

Murguía concluded that what was operating in the case of Chicanos was a combination of ethnic and class barriers. For him, this interaction of ethnic and class barriers explained the relative slowness of Chicano marital assimilation. Intermarriage between Anglos and Chicanos can be expected to increase to the extent that the former's attitudes and behavior toward the latter improve, and to the extent that a process of social mobility occurs in the Chicano community (Murguía 1982). In contrast, for Nostrand (1976) the fact that Chicanos "are assimilated with slowness" follows from three other factors: the persistence of Spanish as a mother tongue, the lack of interest in naturalization among Mexican immigrants, and the low proportion of exogamous marriages. He argued that any change in the assimilation process would have to occur through a modification of one of these indicators.

A recent study by Anderson and Sáenz (1994) analyzed intermarriage from the viewpoint of residential patterns. For them, opportunities for contact are constrained by where one lives, a fact that directly affects the rate of intermarriage between Mexican Americans and Anglos. To the extent that Mexicans are able to move into and integrate within other neighborhoods and share neighboring activities with other groups, their probability of establishing marital relations with non-Latino groups will increase commensurately. Nevertheless, marital change seems to have evolved in a less linear manner than foreseen by prior theory.

AMECA: THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

The city of Ameca, situated in the valley of the same name, is located 77 kilometers to the west of Guadalajara, capital of the state of Jalisco. According to recent census data, the 1995 municipal population was 56,343. Since 1970, rates of population growth in the region have been slow: only 1.24 percent per year during the 1970s, 1.26 percent during the 1980s, and just 0.57 percent from 1990 to 1995. Labor force activities for Amequenses appear to be distributed evenly between two sectors: agriculture and manufacturing. In Ameca these two are interrelated, however, through the old and important San Francisco Refinery, which processes raw cane into sugar. Ameca also plays a commercial role for the broader agrarian region where it is located (Martínez 1995). Nonetheless, shops and work stalls located in commercial and service areas of the city appear to be occupied mainly by women, and indeed at the local level the occupational structure of women is more diversified than that of males.

In this context, it is not strange that migration to the United States became an important and relatively permanent labor option for Amequenses. Over time they learned to combine migration seasonally with the rhythms of a refinery that only offered work during certain months of the year. A representative sample conducted in 1992 revealed that more than half (55 percent) of all households contained someone who had worked in the United States (MMP 1996). Most of these migrants were young men who began emigrating between the ages of 18 and 35 (MMP 1996; Martínez 1995). Historically, most of this movement was temporary, with much shuttling back and forth to cities and towns in California, Illinois, and Nevada (Martínez 1995).

A basic principle of matrimony throughout western Mexico, including Ameca, is that a man should return to his community of origin to seek a wife—if not from there, at least from a neighboring village (González 1973). In the case of Ameca, of course, another extralocal option for matrimony is Guadalajara (Martínez 1995). Thus, despite widespread internal and international migration,

Amequenses turned their gaze toward home when the time came to seek a spouse. In this regard, the community's *fiesta patronal* (feast day of the patron saint) became the key moment for migrants to initiate contacts, formalize engagements, and set marriage dates. Migrant networks anchored in the countryside facilitated the persistence of endogamous ties and reinforced a sense of belonging to the community. The absent son who had begun to go astray north of the border was quickly reintegrated into the community and its obligations through marriage with a nice girl from a local family. The Catholic church, for its part, learned how to protect and watch over its people in places of both origin and destination. In this way, the disruptive by-products of emigration could be controlled with relative success over the years.

Nevertheless, a few cases showed an incipient trend among U.S. migrants to marry among themselves, even if they were from different communities. In this first phase of out-marriage, couples returning to Mexico invariably integrated socially within the community of the husband (Arias 1996). This trend toward exogamy nonetheless became progressively amplified and diversified as internal migration declined in favor of international migration during the 1980s.

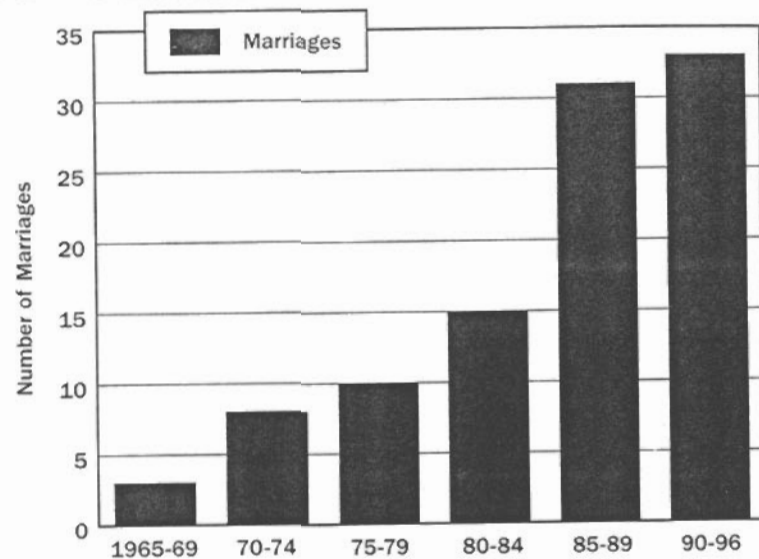
The first person to definitively break the norm against exogamy in Ameca was Guadalupe Nava, who in 1965 married Warren Blacker, an American she met in Mexico City. He was a war veteran who, like so many others, decided to retire to Mexico; unlike most others, however, he also sought to marry, have a family, and settle down. Thus, he was something of an unusual case. Over time, however, mixed marriages became more frequent, above all those between migrants who had met in the United States. But it was during the period from 1985 to 1995 that the pace of intermarriage quickened rapidly enough to constitute a meaningful change in the local marriage pattern (see Figure 6.1).

In most cases, we are dealing with migrants who married in the United States when they were illegal (74 percent). Although one of the objectives of these unions was to obtain legal papers, most remained quite stable: The index of divorce and separation is only 16 percent, just four points above the divorce rate estimated for Ameca itself. At present, most intermarried couples reside in the United States (82 percent), with Ameca coming in a distant second (just 7 percent of couples); only a small proportion try to maintain residences in both countries (4 percent). Thus, the intermarried are a population who have largely settled north of the border and whose process of integration must therefore be studied primarily in the United States.

In general, people from Ameca have married persons living in places where they arrive to work (see Figure 6.2). Nonetheless, one sees a greater proclivity toward mixed marriage in urban locations, which confirms the positive relation-

FIGURE 6.1

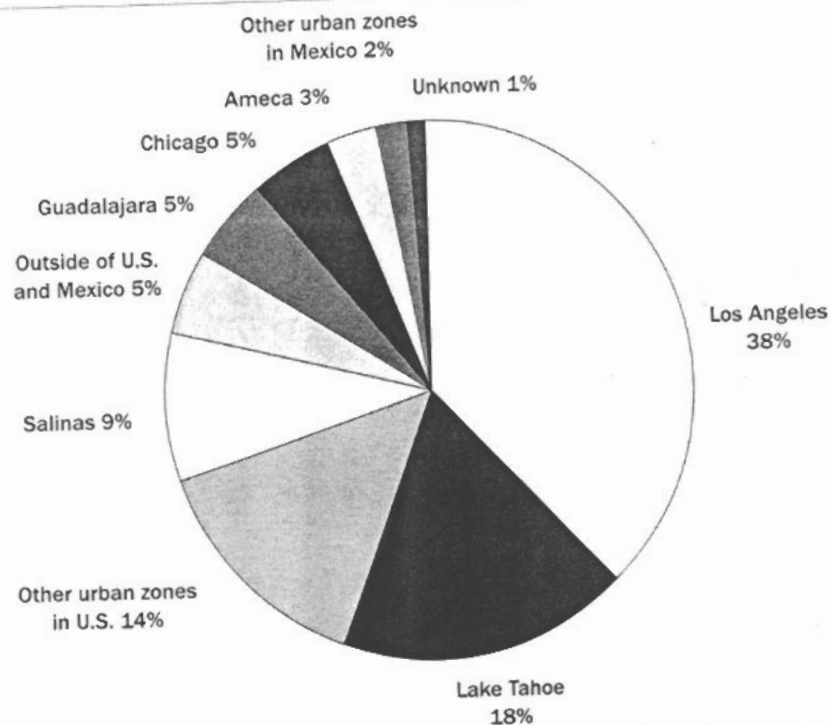
Mixed Marriages in Ameca, Jalisco, by Year of Marriage



Source: Field work.

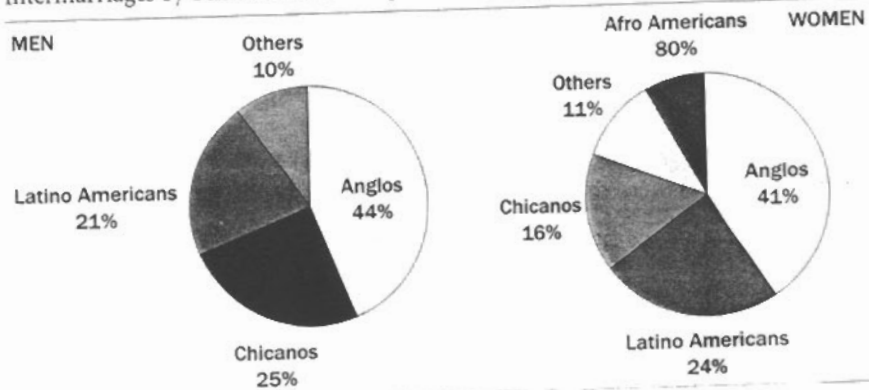
ship between urbanism and exogamy noted by Murguía (1982). The spouses of intermarried Amequenses fall into one of four broad categories: Chicanos or other Latinos (44 percent), non-Hispanic white Americans (42 percent), African Americans (3 percent), and other nationalities (11 percent). Beneath this broad grouping, the variety of nationalities represented among the spouses is rather remarkable (see Figure 6.3). Among Latin Americans, in addition to Chicanos, Amequenses have married spouses from five countries in Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), four countries in South America (Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Venezuela), and one from the Caribbean (Puerto Rico). With the exception of one Sioux Indian, all of the North American spouses were of European origin. Europe, the Far East, and the convulsed Middle East also have made marital contact with Amequenses, including spouses from Germany, Korea, Spain, England, Israel, Italy, and Poland. Finally, to complete the panorama we encounter a few marriages with Canadians and Australians. Up to now, the Amequenses involved in mixed marriages have been predominantly male (63 percent), which reflects a migration process that is still predominantly male. Nevertheless, the rate of female out-marriage is notable and indicates the growing departure of women for the north.

FIGURE 6.2
Place Where Amequenses and Foreigners Met



Source: Field work.

FIGURE 6.3
Intermarriages by Sex and Ethnic Origin



Source: Field work.

In this process of globalization, in fact, it is women who have broadened the marital horizon most significantly, an aspect already noted in studies of exogamy among Chicanas (see Murguía 1982). While men from Ameca clearly divide their preferences between Latinas (46 percent) and Anglo Americans (44 percent), women have opted for a more diverse range of partners. Although Anglos constitute the largest source for husbands (37 percent), second place (31 percent) is held by a diverse range of nationalities, leaving other Latinos relegated to third place in their affections (at 24 percent); only three women (8 percent) married African Americans.

One indication of the change in perceptions regarding intermarriage is the fact that relationships that until a few years ago would have caused irritation and social tension in the community have now come to be seen as a feather in one's cap. A much-discussed marriage between an Amequense and a Korean, for example, conferred great prestige to the family of origin. The reputation of Koreans for achieving economic success in the United States appears to have reached even Ameca.

The new tolerance for mixed marriages is also evident in rituals: Concessions have to be made for in-laws and relatives who arrive from foreign lands with very different music, food, and social customs. In a recent marriage ceremony, the fact that the wedding dinner was illuminated only by candles attracted considerable attention in the community: The bright lights of Mexico had to give way to a more tenuous and romantic light from the north.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of Ameca yields a new and fresh perspective on the long history of migration between Mexico and the United States. The emergence of a new social dynamic involving mixed marriages provides a telling indicator of a new process of settlement, but what stands out most of all is the social acceptance of intermarriages in Ameca, or at least the absence of criticism and outright resistance to the phenomenon. Traditionally communities in Mexico have been jealous and suspicious whenever someone established a romantic relationship outside the locality, or worse yet, from the northern border or the United States (it didn't matter much whether the outsider was Chicano or an Anglo). News of the liaison was enough to unleash a series of stern measures of social control that were quite effective in bringing the transgressor back to the fold. Often, intense social pressure to marry someone from the community was applied.

The new attitude of tolerance may be connected to a fatalistic acceptance of the fact that, like it or not, intermarried couples will probably remain outside the community and construct their lives in the United States. Migrant communities such as Ameca seem to have realized that they have entered a novel era when they must accept a new and distinctive migratory regime with all its consequences, including the rupture of traditional marriage patterns. Amequenses must face and analyze a series of difficult questions about how mixed marriages will be incorporated into the United States, not just Mexico.

At this point we do not know—and it is very difficult to find out from Mexico—what are or will be the nature of the various dilemmas faced by couples with respect to residence, work, education, and politics in the United States, particularly in light of the diversity of nationalities with which they have intermarried. To judge from marriage preferences, above all those of men, the social distance between Chicanos and Mexicans seems to be narrowing, perhaps because they can now unite in the shared goal of constructing a better life in the United States.

What is clear is that this new situation will expand the range of labor and social demands for Latinos more broadly than before. The diverse nature of the marital options chosen by the women from Ameca is especially noteworthy. In a way, one would expect from them more traditional behavior in the selection of a spouse, but this does not seem to be the case. To date, female Amequenses have shown remarkable audacity and originality in their choice of partners. This attitude suggests that the women of today have already begun to break the bonds of traditional society, the repository of the mores and values of rural Mexico. Their new openness toward intermarriage and a diversity of marriage options will inevitably open windows on cultural worlds very different from those of Mexico, suggesting that if something is to be preserved from communities of origin, it must be the task of all, not simply of women.

Intermarriage ultimately implies a fissure in the cultural cohesion of migrant communities within Mexico. At the same time, however, it reinforces a wider Latino identity through pan-Latin intermarriage. The predominance of mixed marriages between Mexicans and Chicanos and between Mexicans and other Latin Americans suggests that the Latino identity that is currently being nourished in the United States with the blood of many veins will ultimately produce a cultural identity richer and more complex than anything we can now imagine.

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Commentary

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Jorge Durand's study of migration and marriage as experienced and understood by migrants and those who remain behind in the village of Ameca provides rich insight into the meaning of demographic trends. He explores the relationship between changes in the rules that regulate immigration and citizenship and changes in social behaviors such as the choice of marriage partner and the locality of residence. Moreover, he argues, changes in marriage patterns and residence affect the social and cultural norms of the sending community as well as the political behavior and attitudes of migrants in the receiving country. Ultimately, Durand suggests, we might expect important changes in economic development trends in both the sending and receiving communities. He cites the potential for increasing identification of migrants with labor issues and organizations in the receiving community and decreasing flows of remittance income to the community of origin.

Durand reminds us of the importance of ethnographic studies in the field of migration research. How else can we explore the relationship between the choice of marriage partners and the emergence of cultural tolerance in Mexican villages, or the link between local rituals and globalization of labor markets, or the political consequences of intermarriage between Chicanos and Mexicans? This study of Ameca and its marriages can help us see ways in which conventional wisdom about Mexican migration to "the other side" may have to be revised to accommodate subtle changes in individual and household behavior. His microlevel study, writ large, could carry significant implications for the process of assimilation to the dominant culture of the United States, settlement patterns of mature households, social norms on both sides of the border, and political alliances among Latino citizens.

Yet this study also demonstrates a problem that continues to characterize migration studies: the paucity of middle-range research that could help bridge the gap between macrostudies based on large data sources such as national censuses and microstudies that generate data from local ethnographies. Macro studies are essential for understanding the dynamics of population changes over time, but always suffer from the inability to get behind the data

to consider what is really going on in terms of the lives of real people. Microstudies, in contrast, respond to our need to put flesh and bones on the numbers and to explore hypotheses about causality and consequence, but necessarily suffer from the possibility that they capture idiosyncrasies rather than regularities.

In part, the division of the field into those who focus on macro trends and those who search for fine-grained micro understanding could be the result of disciplinary training, with economists and demographers naturally tending to migrate toward the use of large data sets, while anthropologists gravitate toward the richness of village- or regional-level studies. Professor Durand's work suggests the need for middle-range studies that draw on both macro- and microlevel work to generate hypotheses and find acceptable ways of testing them. In the case of his own work in Ameca, comparative community studies drawing on a sample of migrant sending villages, for example, could bolster the significance of his work. In the case of statistical analyses of large data sets, focused household-level surveys and community-level studies to explore the meaning of the numbers for real human beings and their localities is essential. Both kinds of studies are possible; the paucity of such research may be a result of professional myopia on the part of researchers or the lack of funding for middle-range research. Whatever the causes, the field of migration studies is diminished by the failure to focus more energy on bringing macro- and microlevel research together more fruitfully.

Research at the middle range might also illuminate a question that is raised by Durand's study of Ameca. In the conclusion, he suggests that the cultural changes following from intermarriage between undocumented immigrants from Mexico and members of other Latino groups in the United States as well as those with other sociocultural backgrounds is part of a process of defining new ways of being Latino in the United States. Through the gradual melding of different sociocultural groups, he finds cultural vibrancy and creativity in how communities define themselves as individuals and as groups. In an era in which McDonald's spans the world and Mickey Mouse watches appear in the remotest regions, however, it is worth questioning whether in fact the trends that Durand points to are really new ways of being Latino or evidence of cultural homogenization brought about by globalization. Is the trend toward richer and more complex identities or the slow sapping of distinctiveness through the pervasive impact of globalized sameness? I would like to believe that Durand is right; my fear is that he is not.



Photo by Anna LeVine