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Natalie Hudson  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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# Growing Up With Migration: Impacts on Oaxacan Youth Culture and Identity



*painting by Luis Marcos Alavez*

Natalie Hudson  
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Dr. Poethig

## INTRODUCTION

Vacant homes line the streets of Paxtlahuaca, a small pueblo in the Mixteca region of the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Approximately half of the homes there are abandoned, left in rubles of construction. Where families once intended to use their *remesas*<sup>1</sup> to build nice new concrete homes, they now migrate to the U.S. in search of work and a better financial future. There is also a healthy river that flows by the town as well as hectares of empty fields and plots of land that lay unattended and unused. The town can no longer work the fields due to economic hardships and a market that is unkind to their domestic goods. These factors have caused the workers to leave and abandon perfectly suited homes and land. Those left in the town carry an air of pessimism and loss as they have seen so many family members and friends come and go over the seasons. When the local Oaxacan youths are graced with another returning migrant back to Paxtlahuaca, they often are handed down the clothes from the U.S., the stories, and the cool new words to kick around in their social circles. This is the situation in many Oaxacan communities where in migration is prevalent.

There was a time in my life when the word “Oaxacan” meant nothing to me. The word would pass over my ears as I looked into the person's eyes, glance over their brown skin and record “Mexican” to my memory. In the folds of my ignorant mind the meaning of a Oaxacan identity was lost in an obtuse understanding of migrant Mexican life in my isolated California community. In these relations I saw the Mexican but not the Oaxacan and that was as much as I thought I needed to know. Growing up in California, or as I now hear it referred to as “Oaxacalifornia,” I realized how evident it is that a person can

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<sup>1</sup>Money sent by Mexican workers in the U.S. to their relatives back in Mexico.

become familiar with, and even friendly with, the superficial layers of people from another country or culture (Fox, 4). Yet what I know now is that at the root of our identities it is nearly impossible to comprehend the magnitude of differences inherent in the cultural formations of another country, even one as relative as Mexico, without having experienced other cultures first hand.

In the spring of 2006 I lived in Oaxaca City and traveled across the southern state meeting people and acquiring experiences that would forever change my view of migration and the evolving identities that are developed around this reality of globalization. Many of us in the U.S. are familiar with Mexicans who have migrated and lived in the United States for some time and we are able to observe how our cultural differences are exposed, exchanged and often fused into new hybrid identities. However there are many Mexicans who have never set foot in the U.S., and yet they are also developing hybrid identities, that is, identities that have been significantly shaped by more than one point of origin, based on the Mexican-American exchanges that occur once migrants return to Mexico. The transportation of culture across national borders is often thought of as occurring only upon entry to the foreign country but what we fail to realize is that it is carried back and forth many times over in constant flux and development expanding deep into Mexico beyond those who have direct contact with the U.S.

Oaxaca is another world that on the surface appears so familiar, and indeed shares many traditions and cultural adaptations with our own, yet is completely distinct in ways of thinking and being. I am only now beginning to see the plurality of Oaxacan identities from the other side of the boarder.

As the diaspora of Mexican migrants to the U.S. grows, so too does their impact on Mexican national identity. The purpose of this paper is to explore the rarely charted cultural exchange between Mexican migrants and non-migrants. I naturally was able to develop a closer rapport with Mexican youths, who I will describe as roughly between the ages of 16 to 23. Through interactions and dialogs with them I could observe more clearly the adaptations that are occurring on a social level. I was particularly interested in the youth, who have never left Mexico, and whose identities are altered by transnationalism and result in a hybrid sense of self. The paper will focus on Oaxacan youth identities in the city of Oaxaca and position them alongside those of Mexicans who migrate to the U.S. and then return to Oaxaca. I will analyze these relations as well as the realities of migration through the lens of globalization theory.

The conflicted identities of Oaxacan youth can also be seen through another valuable part of this project, a series of paintings, which were done by a group of Oaxacan art students at the Casa de Cultura in Oaxaca City. Their expressions of identity in a world of migration, with brilliant colors and evocative styles, are unmatched by any words that I could express here and I think add another dimension to this exploration of identity.

The first painting I will display here is of a seemingly stereotypical border scene but with a critical eye the artist's perceptions of migration and of both his home country and the United States can be analyzed within the subject matter. The brutality of the border is forefront in this picture, as it is in much of the media when we hear about incidents at the border. Unfortunately this is a reality many Mexicans face when unsuccessfully attempting to cross.



*Walther Pedraza*

What I think is most interesting about this picture is the territorial comparison between the modest Mexican home and family next to the United States, which appears as an empire with high walls, and emotion-less police protecting it as a fortress. The desperation of the Mexican is evident in his attempts to get over the wall by any means necessary even at the risk of such abuse. The Mexican family stands in support willing to see their loved ones leave knowing that the distant high rises represent opportunities no longer available in their own back yard. The American flag prominently displayed in the middle of the picture seems to represent the imperialist actions of the U.S. as the country continues to build walls fortifying its place on soil that was once Mexican. I will later provide some of the factors that force many Mexicans to cross this tough exterior and how the migration of loved ones can weigh on communities in their absence and also when they return. In addition, I'll explore the social and economic realities of migration

that could lead one to paint such an image of desperation and powerlessness against the austere and dominating fortress of the U.S.

## **THEORY**

There are many in the U.S. who view the evolution of American cultures as a deterioration of our traditional values. Similarly, this evolution of culture is not always seen as a positive development to those who live in Mexico. Mexicans who have stayed behind find that their loved ones return from the U.S. bearing new perspectives and ideas of how to live in the world. Globalization and the phenomena of transnational and hybrid identities has largely led to this conflict in perspectives over the ways in which our cultures are evolving on either side of the border.

Globalization theory is based on the unification of economies, political power, social standards, and popular culture around the world. It is the mainstreaming of all aspects of life that can be commodified, marketed and consumed by the masses around the globe. There is a breadth of research analyzing this concept, especially from the past decade when globalization began to surface as a perceptible evolutionary process occurring around the world. To explain how globalization propogates the existence of transnational and hybrid communities I will identify several aspects of globalization including economic globalization and socio-political globalization containing the trend of transnationalism.

William Robinson describes economic globalization as a process of capitalism during a phase of the decentralization of production, while the control over transnational capital is being centralized by a very small minority of institutions and corporations. He says that this process will inevitably result in, "...The total commodification or 'marketization' of social life worldwide" (Robinson, 159). The market-driven capitalist economy and the financial system that makes it possible, have in effect superseded the



once supreme power of the nation-state and left it open to the highest bidder no matter what form that may take. Robinson explains that this system of international trade and capital movement has also caused a great deal of movement in the labor force, i.e. Mexican migration to the United States (Robinson, 161). The form that this migration takes, has created a transnational state of people that live beyond borders and are ruled more directly by the global economy rather than their own national government. In this way globalization has expanded the political sphere to accommodate the realities of today's labor force migration patterns. This has led to an incline in the power of international organizations as well as non-governmental organizations. The transnational societies, existing within multiple states and between states, has begun to make room for itself in these alternate structures.



*Sergio Fernando ~ "Suenos que se van"*

Peggy Levitt agrees that economic globalization is the foundation on which transnational communities are built (Levitt, 929). Due to the increased economic necessity to migrate, whole communities are formed that travel and work both in the U.S. and Mexico, establishing residences, social networks and lives in multiple countries.

This is what is referred to as a transnational community. Transnational theory contends that these transnational societies can serve as actors in negotiating between the sending and receiving nation-states; acting in a new public sphere where the people have attained political and economic power through their roles in the global economy (Levitt, 928).

This sphere of transnationalism fosters new sets of cultural attributes that Michael Greig describes as “new cultural fault lines,” which divide people in unexpected ways and provide sources of conflicts and disagreements (Greig, 225). He states that cultural conflicts and socio-economic inequalities can be attributed to globalization because it does not incorporate everyone into the global system in the same manner (Greig, 225). In fact globalization has been largely criticized for benefiting a few while inhibiting the prosperity of the poor majority.

Globalization perpetuates and realizes the capitalist ethos of exploitation and the resulting inequalities that are observable around the globe. Even those who were virtually untouched by the international system, are now being thrown into the global economy. Michael Kearny states that migrants who originate in a non-capitalist economy are forced to move when their means of reproduction are destroyed by imperialism (Kearny, 333). This is true for many parts of Mexico where in resources and agricultural work are being taken by foreign corporations and destroyed by U.S. free trade economic policy.

This system of vast inequality among neighboring communities and states is the environment in which transnational societies are developing. Since the U.S. and Mexico share a border yet are so extremely different in socio-economic climate many people who are unable to make a living in Mexico are forced to leave for the economic opportunities

available in the north. The migration creates a diaspora of Mexicans abroad who are constantly changing in identity apart from their family and friends at home.

The populations at home and abroad are moving in different directions and though they share similar beginnings, their cultural identities belong as much to the future as to the past. Stuart Hall explains that cultural identity is in constant transformation and, "...is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall). He also notes that groups of people, especially those put under the stresses of migration, find themselves unifying in their "new" identities by posing themselves against the "other" (Hall). In this process Mexican-Americans and non-migratory Mexicans are dramatically differentiated in how they see each other as well as themselves. It is this identification of difference that brings us back to the challenges and conflicts of cultural identity even when returning home to familiar faces who are suddenly seen as "others," unknowing of the knowledge and experiences in the U.S.

In general Mexican identities are mostly hybrids of Spanish and indigenous heritage that have been integrated into virtually every layer of society. The term *mestiza(o)* refers to the mix of indigenous and Spanish heritage. Today, however, hybridity has expanded to include Chicano(a) or Mexican-American identities. The fact that these identities exist multinationally, both in the U.S. and in Mexico, complicates an already complicated atmosphere of *mestizaje* that includes invasion, dispossession, racial violence, exploitation, fusion, augmentation and translation (Beltran, 596). According to Cristina Beltran, "...hybridity represents an attempt to legitimize or give voice to groups or individuals who lack power in society and create theoretical space for alternate epistemologies and epistemic frameworks" (Beltran, 595).

There are numerous works on migrants and the Mexican-American experience, however literature analyzing migration impacts on those who remain in Mexico is virtually non-existent, except for Yossi Shain (Hurtado, Gonzalez, and Lorey), Shain explains how the growth of migration to the U.S. has attributed to the heightened sense of awareness by Mexican political officials as they have adjusted their domestic policies to be more accommodating to the Mexican migrant (Shain, 661). Migrants have attained a certain leverage to impact the political climate of Mexico given the millions of dollars in remittances that migrants send home to their families in Mexico as well as their increased influence in the politics of the United States. This illustrates the interdependence of the global economy and the resulting political shifts and alliances that must yield to the economic realities of the twenty first century.

Remaining untouched by academic works, however, are the cultural impacts of migrants as they return home to their “left behind” friends and relatives. I will explore this missing aspect of Mexican relations to their diaspora, specifically how Oaxacan youths see themselves in a world of tremendous migration.



Javier ~ "Exclavito Mexicana"

## MIGRATION

In the painting titled "Exclavito Mexicano" the dynamic between the imperialist United States and the poor state of Mexico is depicted as an exploitative cycle of Mexican slavery to the U.S. dollar. The occurrence of migration over the border has been elevated by the ever-widening economic gap between a nation possessing so much wealth and one that varies between first, third and fourth world status. In Mexico the first world is the colossal capital city, while many rural pueblos exist in a state of poverty generally identified as the third world; also the indigenous population, given the title of fourth world, are generally overlooked by mainstream society and their own national governments.

As evident by the picture, the U.S. dollar is highly prized in Mexico especially in Oaxaca where the burden of poverty is the second largest in the country behind only Chiapas (Garcia). This bottom heavy poverty has dramatically changed the geography

and demographics of traditional Mexican migration that used to occur more on a regional scale and in shorter periods. The rapidly increasing migration among the indigenous poor of the southern states to the United States (150,000 Oaxacans migrate to the U.S. every year) has transformed the traditionally central valley trend into a nation wide phenomenon (Garcia). More than 30 million Mexican migrants are living in the U.S. and of the migrants living permanently in the country, one million are from Oaxaca (Garcia).

One of the forces creating this economic divide can be attributed to the crash of the peso in 1994 during the transition of presidential administrations from Carlos Salinas to Ernest Zedillo. Salinas had implemented widespread neoliberal economic policies after signing debt reduction deals with several private international lenders and opening up Mexico's stock market to the world. As part of the neoliberal approach, which was earlier identified as a form of globalization's new imperialism, he privatized many of the state's industries and cut even more social programs.

With the opening of Mexico's borders to cheap produce from the U.S., the local Mexican farmers are not able to maintain their livelihood due to their lack of subsidies. These policy changes were geared towards serving the wealthier population while leaving behind the larger portion of poor, again illustrating how globalization works differently for different levels of society. The policies also contributed to making the Mexican economy extremely vulnerable to outside influences. The U.S. seized the opportunity and adamantly supported Mexico's economic changes and was eager to strike a free trade agreement with the country, in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed in 1992 (Barry).

“Neither administration took an interest in exploring the possibilities for regulating the flows of goods and capital in ways that might benefit those

workers, peasants, and others who were already losing out under neoliberalism (although both accepted the “need” to restrict the flow of human beings)” (Barry).

## **Youth Migration**

Over the past several decades the demographics of migrants have changed dramatically to include a younger population (youths under age 18), willing to or not, relocating for work or accompanying their families. Overall 30% of Oaxacan migrants are miners, of which, about 64% are males, who as young as 16 years of age migrate on their own to the United States (Los Jovenes). In 2002, the number of youths and children arrested attempting to cross the border totaled, 35,000 (Garcia-Navarro, 1). It is more common now for youths to try and cross on their own because of the increase in female migration, many have both of their parents already living in the United States (Garcia-Navarro, 1). The parents often pay smugglers to help their children cross the border, yet since September 11, 2001 the border has been made considerably more difficult to pass through especially with false papers at the check points. This forces smugglers to find ulterior means of crossing, through the desert or rivers. The line of crosses in *Exclavito Mexicano* signifies the graves of thousands of Mexicans attempting to cross the border only to meet death between a Mexican nation in despair and the United States, represented in the picture, as a fiery red face in anger. This terrible image of the U.S. is not uncommon among Oaxacan youths and it is a perspective that I will address later on.

At times youth migrants aren't merely going along with family, or trying to reunite with family, but are instead leaving families, education and careers to pursue a job in the U.S. on their own. At the local public university in Oaxaca virtually every student has a friend or classmate who has left for the U.S. before finishing their degree. They are

allowed one year of absence before they are no longer allowed to return to the university. However most of the students don't have the intention of ever going back to the Oaxaca university.

Communities of the Mixteca, like most rural areas of Mexico, are diminishing with the rates of migration as an increasing number of families are picking up and moving their existences not temporarily, as history has generally dictated, but for several years if not permanently settling in the United States. Now the “War on Terror” is causing a tightening of the U.S.-Mexican border, that is making it less-desirable than ever to cross back and forth between jobs and lives, risking more with each passage. The newer generations of migrants are staying longer, severing many ties with their families and communities back home. The result is a generation of youths left behind in Oaxaca who are losing the community they've grown up in to an economic superpower that is drawing away many of their friends and family members.



## IDENTITY

The ebb and flow of friends and relatives leaving and returning to Oaxacan communities leaves feelings of internal conflict wherein Oaxacan youths struggle to identify themselves among the American cultural infusion introduced to them by migrants returning from the U.S. The youths who have remained in Oaxaca are proud of their Oaxacan heritage yet they can see before their eyes that major changes are occurring in their communities. Cultural influences from the U.S. are growing in volume and societal perceptions of migrants, that were historically negative in Mexico, are becoming more favorable. Do the youths of Oaxaca embrace these changes? These new found ideas, clothes, words, etc. from a country they have never seen? Or do they reject them and with it their family and friends who bear them? These are a couple of the central questions surrounding the conflict of youth identity in Oaxaca.



*Marina Avely*

In her painting displayed above, the artist Marina Avely has captured a sentiment of frustration felt by many Oaxacan youths. The youth is rooted so deeply in his Mexican heritage that he shares roots with the maguey plant and has tattooed the Virgen de Guadalupe on his back. He struggles with the U.S. imperialist who has enslaved him in chains from the very symbol of liberty that is exalted here in the U.S. It is the frustration of a youth in a world where he is able to control very little. It is not only economic conditions that bind him, it is also the lack of control over his own identity that has spurred his rebellion. With the spray can he hopes to change society by imprinting upon the national symbol his own idea of art and liberty. The chains of repression can be economic but also psychological or ideological suppressions of one's natural identity by the oppressor. For many it is a struggle to be recognized as uniquely Mexican in their traditions, appearances, and many identities, whether they are in the U.S. or in Mexico.

### **Mexican Perceptions**

As neighbors, enemies and allies, the U.S. and Mexico have shared a long history of struggle over identity and sovereignty; a history that has been dominated by the more powerful U.S. state in the relationship. However given the factors of globalization discussed earlier, a looming dependency exists between the two nations each needing the other for various reasons. One result of their dependency is the large diaspora of Mexican migrant communities traveling and living trans-nationally between the U.S. and Mexico; approximately 98.5 percent of Mexican diaspora is within the U.S. (Gutierrez, 545).

With all that the two neighboring countries share, mutual acceptance is not usually among them. In fact Mexican public opinion has been fairly negative towards the

U.S. in many regards. In a February 2006 poll 52 percent of Mexicans were found to have an unfavorable view of Americans in general and 65 percent felt negatively towards the U.S. government, while 62 percent feel that U.S. wealth is due to the country's exploitation of others. Discrimination is also a factor in the negativity, as 79 percent said that Mexicans are discriminated against in the U.S. (Stephens, 1).

When it comes to their own flesh and blood Mexicans throughout history have held mixed views of those who migrate north to work in the U.S. The term "*pocho*" was popularized in the 1970's during a large outpouring of Mexican migrants leaving to work in the U.S. Meaning spoiled, the term is used by Mexicans in disdain of migrants who go to the U.S. or for people who imitate U.S. Americans (Gutierrez, 551). The term is used infrequently now, if at all, yet public sentiment seems to remain relatively negative towards migrants. A 1997 poll found that 47 percent held a bad or very bad opinion of Mexicans who work in the U.S. while only 27 percent had a good or very good opinion of them (Gutierrez, 552).

Amidst this negative attention Mexican migrants have attempted to regain a voice and identity, which most have proclaimed to be a hybrid identity. The idea of hybridity first arose in the 1960's, a period during which rigid groups of identification were being drawn as the civil rights movements struggled to gain recognition for racial, ethnic and cultural differences (Torres, 329). In the defining moments of these identity categories, many Mexican migrants found themselves cast out of the groups of Americans as well as those of Mexicans. Their solution was to claim a hybrid identity transcending nationality, one that could more realistically portray their real-life status of migration.

Hybridity by definition and in people's introspections of self is constantly

changing in how identities are incorporated, altered and made anew. As our cultures and peoples become more interconnected and interrelated we have an increasing need for a more expanded view of hybrid identity in the twenty first century. Edward Said would even go so far as to say that, “Cultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically quintessentially hybrid” (Torres, 402).

### **Oaxacan Youth Culture**

The youth culture of Oaxaca is a distinct blend of modernity incorporated through globalized western pop-culture and the traditions of indigenous and colonial roots firmly planted within both the city and surrounding pueblos. Migration can be traced as a subterranean current of new ideas, icons and ways of living, remaining inconspicuous at times and at others rising to the surface declaring cultural changes in the appearances and attitudes of Oaxacan youths. There exists a heavy flow of migrants returning from the states carrying experiences and altered attitudes that influence a great number of people with whom they relate or coexist upon returning home. These newly introduced ideas are spread most rapidly within the youth culture, the majority of which, is already tuned into the global empire of MTV or the stream of American blockbuster films constantly appearing in theaters.

Oaxaca City is the destination of many interstate migrants and therefore has a large diversity of inhabitants that have arrived throughout many generations of migration. The affect is a vibrant, diversified city of indigenous, *campesinos*,<sup>2</sup> *mestizos*,<sup>3</sup> rich and poor. The societal mix also includes the presence of western tourists and students, adding yet another dimension of class and race. This amalgamation of races, ancestries and

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<sup>2</sup>People from rural farm areas

<sup>3</sup>People of Spanish blood origin

classes complicates at times the identities of youths depending on the social and historical baggage they themselves carry.

Racism is unfortunately, still very prevalent in the society, though this fact is denied by most. Its existence is obvious in the light skin color valued by media and advertisements posted around the city as well as the fact that many schools refuse to recognize indigenous languages, enforcing Spanish instead and later on English classes. At times the internalized racism is evident in youths who don't wish to be in the sun too long in fear of becoming darker or who hesitate to speak their native tongues in public for fear of criticism.

Part of this internalized racism is a product of the many influences and ideals of white middle-class America. Clothes are obvious indicators of cultural exchange as brands like GAP and Diesel appear regularly in the crowds of Oaxacan youths. Feet are usually fitted with Chuck Taylor Converse or Vans shoes and the strong Oaxacan sun is often blocked by Ray Ban or Oakley eye wear. Also common among most middle to upper class youths are cell phones and I-pods filled with Madonna tunes, just as you would find in the U.S. These cultural appropriations are just as much a product of migration as they are of the globalization of media and economy; however the increased migration can be seen as a product of globalization in the fact that Mexico has entered into the global economy, creating in part, a vacuum of the poor and unemployed migrating to the U.S., its economic oppressor.

Migration doesn't seem to have as direct an impact on the city of Oaxaca as it does in the pueblos of Oaxaca state, particularly the Mixteca region because the proportion of those who migrate from the city is much lower than in rural areas. The

youths of Oaxaca City are also more likely to stay in school and less likely to migrate in need of a job because of the higher availability of education and work. Still, though there are more jobs in the city, the pay remains far below that in the U.S. resulting in youths from the city who are also forced to migrate. It is a little more strenuous to encounter migrant youths of the city who have been to the U.S., though it is still very common to find people with family members in the states and there is no escaping the fact that everyone has at least friends or classmates who have migrated. It has become such a part of general Mexican culture that you can find migration from every corner of the country. The artist Talina Fernandez's father has migrated to the U.S. to work. Her view of migration and her father's crossing to the U.S. is represented in the painting below.



*Talina Fernandez*

### **Oaxacan Youth Relations**

In the current social climate of Mexico, the negative sentiments of non-migrants

and the increased financial and political power of migrants is coming to a head with one side or the other needing to give way. It is apparent on a political level that the influence of migrants will not subside anytime soon, even if a wall is built along the border, the *remesas* that migrants send home will always have a considerable economic impact in Mexico. Therefore it seems that the sentiments held by non-migrants are due to change. The next generation of Mexicans are in a transition that is becoming visible in the eyes of many Oaxacan youths whose feelings toward migrant peers, as well as their own evolving culture, is becoming more convoluted and indefinable. They share some of the negative attitudes of their parents yet have many peers who are migrants that are rapidly becoming more “Americanized” from U.S. influence. This process of cultural adaptation is gradually seeping into the lives of Oaxacans who have not chosen a transnational life, yet are faced with its consequences anyway.

Within a traditionally reserved Mexican youth culture it is obvious that many migrants have been liberalized from their experiences in the north, bringing back with them practices of staying out later, going out with friends and having more open discussions in public about sex and other previously taboo subjects. Many youths feel their social circles becoming more liberal, even when they're not directly associated with migrants, the osmosis of trends in youth culture is very much dictated by the influences their peers bring home from the U.S.

Interactions among youths are also laced with stories from some of the outlying pueblos who are now without men, or are completely abandoned. They circulate among youths as eerie myths that are spoken in hushed or somber tones. These painful truths of Oaxacan migration have become the clandestine knowledge held only by the Oaxacan

residents and citizens because the government refuses to acknowledge these widespread and ominous changes.

One example of the decimation of Oaxacan pueblos is that of Paxtlahuaca. There over half the population, about 200 people, have migrated, leaving nearly every other house abandoned, fields unattended and livestock uncared for. Some families never return and those who do typically return every few months for holidays and parties or for acquiring new means of re-entry, with visas or without.

Most of the migrants who leave and return again seasonally are young men. They enjoy using the English they've learned in the states and all of them have stories and relations of places, sports or other popular pastimes in the U.S. There is an obvious influence of *American* lifestyle as many icons of the U.S. appear on clothes, signs, or in homes, evidence of ventures across the border. Not all of these symbols of the north are adorned by migrants though, they are also passed down to other family members or friends who have never migrated but are imprinted with these influences anyway. The cement houses in the pueblo appear to be the products of Mexicanized-American obsessions with size and conformity. From the accounts of those who remain living there in the remesa-built houses, migration to the U.S. is what keeps the community alive, if only as a shell of what it once was.

In the environment of a depleted population and dramatically altered culture, most of the youths who are left behind either react dishearteningly at the loss of their community or are envious of the migrants who get to go to the U.S. In Paxtlahuaca it appears that many youths have yet to adjust to the pace of migration. They have all lost so many friends and family members that their absence is difficult to express. As



migrants return home and migrate again, they seem to leave a growing number of houses empty, further depleting their pools of loved ones.



*Fortino Lazoro Peralta and Luis Marcos Alavez*

## **CONCLUSION**

The global economy's hand in the state of poverty in which Oaxaca currently exists is a harsh reminder of the influence we all have on the lives of others that we may see as distant and unconnected. Globalization has ensured that we are all indeed connected, therefore making it necessary for us all to become aware of the situations in communities that we effect.

The U.S. impacts in Oaxaca are both obvious and subtle as the social remittances weave their ways into social circles, habits, conversations and many other activities of life. The Oaxacan youth populations both in the urban area and in rural pueblos are greatly influenced by the returning migrants, some of whom are family members, friends, peers and classmates. There is a wide variety of reactions from youths to the changes occurring in their Oaxacan communities, ranging from positive and optimistic to extremely negative. Traditions are at times pushed aside in favor of new and modern

cultural imports, causing excitement in some and concern in others. As long as the labor force continues to migrate from Mexico to the U.S. in mass, there will be social remittances brought back that lead to cultural adaptations within Oaxaca, upholding the fact that the search for cultural identity is, "...a continual and sometimes painful process of confrontation where there is always another side with which to contend" (Torres).

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