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Oaxacalifornia: Indigenous Transnational Spaces as Grassroots Cosmopolitanism

Oaxacalifornia: Espacios transnacionales indígenas como cosmopolitismo de base

Oaxacalifornia: Espaços Transnacionais Indígenas como Cosmopolitismo de Base

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Abstract: Paradoxically both immigration and indigeneity are common conditions for exclusion from full citizenship in contemporary settler nation-states. Marginalized populations such as immigrants and Indigenous groups, resist the homogenizing rules dictated by dominant notions of culture and citizenship deployed by settler colonial states, entailing often hegemonic practices of control from institutions, such as the school and media. This essay discusses the creation of a transborder space between Mexico and the US named "Oaxacalifornia". This "deterritorial" space was named and is maintained by Mexican Indigenous migrants from the state of Oaxaca who spend their daily lives interacting through communicative and civic practices of resurgence and solidarity. These practices enable the interaction with multiple locations and groups of people, fostering grassroots cosmopolitanism, or a worldly engagement challenging the oppressive forces of globalization, such as the state, the dominant cultural spheres, and the market; and the creation of spaces of diversity, resurgence, and solidarity.

Keywords: Oaxacalifornia, Practices of Communication, Grassroots Cosmopolitanism, Transnationalism, Indigenous migrants, civic participation, cultural resurgence.

Resumo: Paradoxalmente, tanto a imigração quanto a indigeneidade são condições comuns para a exclusão da cidadania plena nos estados-nação colonizadores contemporâneos. As populações marginalizadas, como os imigrantes e os grupos indígenas, resistem às regras homogeneizadoras ditadas pelas noções dominantes de cultura e cidadania implantadas pelos estados coloniais colonizadores, o que implica práticas de controle muitas vezes hegemônicas de instituições como a escola e a mídia. Este ensaio discute a criação de um espaço transfronteiriço entre o México e os EUA chamado "Oaxacalifornia". Esse espaço "desterritorial" foi batizado e é mantido por migrantes indígenas mexicanos do estado de Oaxaca que passam o dia a dia interagindo por meio de práticas comunicativas e cívicas de ressurgimento e solidariedade. Essas práticas possibilitam a interação com vários locais e grupos de pessoas, promovendo o cosmopolitismo de base ou um engajamento mundial que desafia as forças opressivas da

globalização, como o Estado, as esferas culturais dominantes e o mercado; e a criação de espaços de diversidade, ressurgimento e solidariedade.

Palavras-chave: Oaxacalifornia, Práticas de Comunicação, Cosmopolitismo de Base, Transnacionalismo, Migrantes Indígenas, Participação Cívica, Ressurgimento Cultural.

Palabras clave: Oaxacalifornia, Prácticas Comunicativas, Cosmopolitismo desde abajo, Transnacionalismo, Migrantes Indígenas, Participación Cívica, Resurgencia cultural

Immigration and indigeneity are often reasons for exclusion from full citizenship rights in settler nation-states. In the most recent period of globalization, Western countries are facing the incorporation of Global South migrations, caused mainly by market and political forces that were created by paths associated to the colonial social order. At the same time, Indigenous movements striving for sovereignty, human rights, and equality, have reorganized transnationally—challenging the oppressive logic of assimilation into settler nation-states at a global scale. As the so-called "developed" nations enact physical borders to deter migrants, Indigenous people from the Global South are crossing those borders, while becoming immigrants in territories that they had crossed for millennia. Despite the pressures from both receiving states and mainstream societies to "assimilate" into the dominant culture, contemporary immigrants have been able to respond by organizing transnationally, engaging in daily communicative and dialogical practices via immigrant networks. These practices are sustained by an ecology of communicative technologies, such as the Internet, mobile phones, and a myriad of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Tik-Tok among others. As more Indigenous people are being pulled into international labor markets and migratory networks, they have had to reconsider their identity in relation to their communities of origin, as well as the systems of classification imposed by neocolonial nation-state institutions. Indigenous people can become doubly marginalized as they migrate: in their own country they are seen as "minorities," and in the one they move into as "foreign immigrants." Even with this double marginality, caused by two national state orders, Indigenous migrants have developed communicative and non-normative citizenship practices that have enabled their communities to thrive by forming transborder spaces for grassroots cosmopolitan engagement, with many of these practices being communicative, linked to cultural resurgence, self-representation, and institutional advocacy. These spaces have helped to leverage their power, and influence the very national, and transnational, structures that have oppressed them.

Many studies on immigration and transnationalism argue that "communication" is a fundamental component for maintaining immigrant activities in transnational networks (Fox, 2005; Kearney, 1995: 236, Levitt, 2001), but a detailed account of the myriad of communicative practices that are required to maintain those spaces is needed to understand how identities, attachments, cultural flows, and civic action are fundamental for sustaining these communities for long periods of time. Communication practices, discourses, and

narratives can inform us about how migrants negotiate belonging to multiple communities through transnational networks. These practices can also help to circumvent notions of civic engagement circumscribed to the national borders, conceiving the nation as a space containing culture and identity, something known as methodological nationalism, and the "national outlook" (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002; Beck, 2006), and understand intersectional complexities at play such as ethnicity, race, class, nationality and gender, to name some. For example, Indigenous migrants navigate several political and sociocultural arrangements when they cross borders, and it is through their daily practices of communication that they can sustain their systems of ancestral knowledge, and potentiate transnational spaces for the revitalization and preservation of their communities, even in conditions of spatial mobility or migration. Communicative practices are creating crossborder spaces of resurgence, hope, and survival for diasporic Indigenous communities. Those spaces challenge the superficiality conveyed by large culture and media industries obsessed with "dataism" (Van Dijck, 2014), and behavioral prediction for consumption, and they offer a perspective of globalization outside of ethnocentric and totalitarian notions of Western modernity and late capitalism (Valencia and Magallanes, 2015, p. 19-22). These practices are also important components of a more extensive cosmopolitan engagement from the grassroots.

This essay highlights the significance of transborder communicative practices by Indigenous Mixtec and Zapotec immigrants from the Mexican state of Oaxaca living in the United States, and how these practices are constructing spaces for radical democracy and citizenship (Rodríguez, 2001), where resistance and resurgence, challenge oppressive institutional orders. Indigenous Mixtec and Zapotec migrants bring their practices of communal work, or *tequio*, and solidarity (*Guelaguetza*) to transform their engagement in a transnational, diasporic, and deterritorialized space that they have named *Oaxacalifornia*, which extends from their original state of Oaxaca, passing through locations in Mexico, such as Sinaloa, Baja California, Veracruz, and Mexico City; to California, Oregon, and other spaces in the United States, which Oaxacans call their home. The reflections and observations in this essay derive from a larger multi-method and multi-sited research project conducted from the years 2009 to 2011, 2014, 2017-2019 in the states of Oaxaca and Baja California in Mexico, and different cities in California, such as San Diego, Los Angeles, Fresno, and Madera. The participation entails more than a decade of involvement with Indigenous immigrant organizations, and direct participation with different activist groups, such as *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales*, a binational organization with representations in the United States and Mexico, *Guelaguetza* festival organizers in Los Angeles and San Diego, *Familia Indígena Unida in San Diego*, and other transnational Indigenous organizations and coalitions.

Communicating *Oaxacalifornia* as a space of Resistance

Oaxacan immigrants in California started to use the name *Oaxacalifornia* to designate their migratory space across borders. *Oaxacalifornia* is a common reference to describe a symbolic and a "deterritorialized space," conceived

as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) composed by epistemologies, information, and narratives proper to the Indigenous groups from the state, that transit back and forth through the network. Anthropologist Michael Kearny used the term to refer to a socioeconomic, geographic, and political space with transnational characteristics (Escárcega and Varese, 2004; Rivera-Salgado, 1998), and Sociologist Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, defined *Oaxacalifornia* as "the transnationalized space in which immigrants articulate their lives in California with their communities of origin, more than four thousand kilometers away" (cited in Zunino, 2010). *Oaxacalifornia* offers an interesting example of hybridization, since it takes different structures and processes to establish a transborder cultural and geographic space, which is culturally "reconverted" (García-Canclini, 1995, p. 267) through communicative practices, and global grassroots engagement (Appadurai, 2001). By cultivating a daily existence in transnational migratory networks, Indigenous migrants have connected their communities of origin and destination, often across international borders, with migratory networks South to North and South to South, as the case of *Oaxacalifornia* demonstrates.

Oaxacalifornia, as a space of communal resistance, demonstrates a sophisticated engagement with the forces and structures of globalization and settler-colonial states. It illustrates how global engagement is also constructed from below, creating spaces for survival and revitalization to counter the hostile forces of colonialism that are unfolded by late capitalism, which displaced many Indigenous populations across states and international borders. Criticism about transnationalism and indigeneity, -argues that transnational spaces often lose sight of the original land-, and the specific culture and traditions of self-government that are unique to Indigenous people (Champagne, 2018). Many Indigenous migrants that have moved from the countryside through several national and transnational urban spaces, have made the effort to adapt, sustain, and revitalize their cultural and communal practices in relationship to their particular Indigenous identity, such as the organization of transnational elections, hometown festivities and mutual aid, dances, music bands, and other important aspects for community cohesion. Brenda Nicolas (2021), has called these cultural practices "*transborder comunalidad*", as Indigenous diasporas challenge practices of erasure created by settler-colonial national arrangements, both in the US and in Mexico; while revitalizing their identities in transborder networks (p. 49). However, I argue that Indigenous migrants not only have revitalized their identity and cultural practices in transborder spaces but have also organized with other displaced and marginalized groups, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in these spaces. The communicative and citizenship practices by Indigenous migrants in diasporic spaces amount to what I have called "grassroots cosmopolitanism", which refers to the individual and collective human engagement with the experience of others, a flexibility in accommodating and accepting diversity in individual and group life, and an adjustment, both in practice and discourse, to different socio-cultural environments. This entails a willingness to increase dialogue and solve conflict across social differences, such as culture, social class, racial formations, gender, and other axes of identity, without necessarily losing allegiances to their group of origin, and without making those allegiances a source of conflict with others. "Grassroots

cosmopolitans" openly acknowledge and recognize hierarchies of power and engage in citizenship and communicative practices to subvert these hierarchies. To illustrate this concept, I discuss how Indigenous migrant transnational communicative practices have helped to sustain systems of communal work and cooperation across borders, challenging exclusionary notions of political engagement and citizenship. These communicative practices are important components of grassroots cosmopolitanism, which is the result of a lifetime of crossing national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and political borders, within and outside, the nation-state. It is through transnational communicative and civic practices that Indigenous Mexican migrants challenge their double marginality produced by two colonial settler-states, which place them as a "minority" group in Mexico and as immigrants in the United States.

Communication is an important component of cosmopolitanism, because it is through communication that we establish our relationships with others, and build bridges of respect, dialogue, and solidarity. However, contemporary cosmopolitanism needs to be critical of the power imbalances brought about by colonial structures, such as those extractive and exploitative industries linked to the expansion of neoliberalism, which have affected most realms of human life. It is also important to explain different cosmopolitanisms as they emerge from daily practice (Mignolo, 2000, Delugan, 2010, Appadurai, 2001, Bhabha, 2001).

Indigeneity and cosmopolitanism

In traditional Western thought, Indigeneity has been discursively conceived of as "rooted in one place," as capitalize people have been placed by colonization and modernization theories as "undeveloped," non-urban, and "attached to their native land" (Delugan, 2010; Kearney, 2004), or "closer to nature" (Quijano, 2000), always in comparison to European colonizers who supposedly "discovered" and "civilized" them (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Although "attachment to the land" is still an important part of Indigenous identity, it is not merely conceived of in terms of a production system (Revilla-López, 2007), in the way that it was during colonial times. Instead, it is generally a fundamental part of Indigenous cosmology, which considers the land to be a system of sustenance and balance for living beings and nature. Processes of migration have introduced profound changes in Indigenous communities related to their productive relationship to the land, although not in their symbolic relationship, as Indigenous migrants often continue to refer to the land as Mother Earth (Doolittle, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Even if *Oaxacalifornia* is a deterritorialized space, and exists as a narrative to describe the complexities of a migratory network, the attachments to the people in the network, as they use the names of their communities of origin or towns, are very real and often invoked in the production and reproduction of their identities.

It is important to distinguish cosmopolitan projects conceived by the modern colonial order since these projects have been articulated and normatively constructed from the top-down as "global designs", with the will to control and monopolize formerly colonized subjects (Mignolo, 2000: 722). Thus, an idea of grassroots cosmopolitanism is necessary to explain the relationships that are developed horizontally, among the displaced and marginalized, as responses

to that marginality and as projects of engagement that develop "responsible ethics", which take into account human beings and the environment as parts of a holistic community, instead of the Western notion of "good life ethics," which can be constructed with individualistic and hierarchical notions of inclusion and exclusion (Bautista-Segalés, 2014, p.156). Grassroots cosmopolitanism is something in constant construction, derived from daily communication and action, and even in situations of distress, such as economic or political migration.

Cosmopolitanism appears to have been an important factor in relations between a diversity of Indigenous groups on the American continent before the Europeans arrived in the late Fifteenth Century. Certainly, during colonization, Indigenous people had to learn how to live with the difference of Western "others", who, for the most part oppressed, enslaved, and exploited them (Forte, 2010), making cosmopolitanism from the top-down a fact of life among Indigenous peoples for centuries. Regarding these debates, one can wonder: How have people affected by colonization adapted to the expansion of the nation-state and its homogenizing narratives in the past? What do marginalized groups, such as Indigenous migrants, do when the narratives and practices of their sending and receiving nations condemn them to perpetual marginality? Is communicative action, such as the utilization of media for self-representation, a tool for bridging that marginality in the public sphere? As the discussion on this paper has shown, the action and experience of Indigenous migrants in their transnational networks offers an important glimpse to begin to answer these questions.

Indigenous Mexicans in California: Civic participation through communication

Indigenous Mexicans from Southern states have migrated to the US at least since the *Bracero Program* during World War II, although their migration increased in the last four decades. However, due to a faltering economy in the US, and tougher immigration restrictions, their migration has begun to decrease in the last few years. Indigenous immigrants from the state of Oaxaca, which is the second with the largest capitalize population after Yucatán, and which has sixteen different capitalize groups, making it the most ethnically diverse state in Mexico (Escala-Rabadán and Rivera-Salgado, 2018), have followed inter-state networks within Mexico: such as to Veracruz with sugar cane and pineapple crops; to Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California with tomato and berry crops; and crossing the border to agriculture, commerce, and service jobs in California (Bacon, 2005; Kearney, 2004). The Oaxacan government estimates that there are about 1.3 million Oaxacans living outside the State, presumably most of them living in the US (El Oriente, 2016), up from 1 million in 2008 (Alvarado-Juárez, 2008: 86), although it is officially difficult to establish the exact number. The estimates of the Oaxacan population in California ranges from one hundred and fifty thousand (Kresge, 2007) to 350,000 (Escala-Rabadán and Rivera-Salgado, 2018), a variation that likely occurs because some estimates only count immigrants working in agricultural zones and undercount more mobile Oaxacans living in cities. Most Oaxacan immigrants in California are Mixtec and Zapotec, the two largest Indigenous groups in the state.

Communication Practices Across Borders

Mixtecs and Zapotecs living in the US engage in a myriad of communicative activities across borders, and, as non-Indigenous Mexican immigrants, they also form hometown associations (HTAs), which are mainly composed of first-generation immigrants who join together to complete community and productive projects both in their sending and receiving communities (Bada, 2003;Levitt, 2001). Oaxacan organizations typically join fronts and federations, to accommodate diverse Indigenous groups from the state. According to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2022, there were 74 Oaxacan organizations registered in the United States and 53 just in California alone (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, n/a).

Table 1 shows a list of communication practices that are part of everyday Indigenous immigrant life in transnational networks. These activities enable the very existence of those networks and their dialogical function, where Indigenous migrants engage with their communities of origin, those in the immigrant networks, and other migrant and non-migrant organizations and individuals. Mainly associated with generating conditions for dialogue in the public sphere, the practices include the organization of public gatherings and festivals, both in sending and receiving communities; the production and consumption of media; media outreach (either to mainstream or community media); and the array of uses of the Internet and social media, such as extensive participation in platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Tik-Tok, and Twitter, as means for communicative action for organizing local and binational community gatherings.

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Table 1
Communication Practices in Oaxacalifornia

Table 1. Communication Practices in *Oaxacalifornia*

Practices	Detail
Media consumption	Ethnic, Community and alternative Media National, state and local media (both in Mexico and the US)
Media Production (including social media)	Social Media: YouTube videos, Facebook Individual posts and sites for community organizations, Instagram, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp, Twitter. Production of songs, short videos, etc. distribution on social media (Indigenous languages, Spanish, English). Websites and Blogs Community Newspapers in Spanish language (El Oaxaqueño and Impacto) Radio and Podcasts (Mixtec/Zapotec, Spanish), Radio Bilingüe Documentaries, Movies and short stories (Mixtec, Zapotec, Mixe, Spanish) Contributions to mainstream media outlets (commentary, opinion, interviews, etc.) Physical and digital bulletin boards Newsletters Flyers
Community Events	Cultural Festivals (Guelaguetza, Day of the Dead, Hometown Patron Saint celebrations) Dances/Parades Religious Events Fundraisers and sports (basketball, pelota Mixteca, etc.)
Media Outreach	Ethnic and immigrant media in Spanish Mainstream media in English Home country media in Spanish All of these outreach efforts converging often in social media platforms as a complex ecology
Personal Communication	Smartphone/Social Media platforms (WhatsApp, Messenger, Facebook, etc.) Business communication with home country E-mail communication Social Media posts and responses, etc.
Collective Communication	Multi-site conference call (both countries) Zoom, Skype, Google Use of list serves Public community assembly (face-to face)
Other Communication	Interpreters of Indigenous languages programs Personal informants written letters, e-mailed letters, etc.

Source: Author's own classification.

In *Oaxacalifornia*, resistance activities have flourished and acquired new meanings, combining communicative, political, and cultural realms of human action. As an example of the production of media for self-representation and outreach, Radio Bilingüe, a public radio station in Spanish that transmits from Fresno, California, since 1995, has a weekly program called "La Hora Mixteca" ("The Mixtec Hour"). This program has been a very important space for Indigenous transborder activism and for the use and preservation of the Mixtec language among immigrants and their descendants in the US. Every Sunday, for approximately three hours the program connects Mixtec communities in

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California, Nevada, and Oregon; and in Baja California, Guerrero and Oaxaca, where *La Hora Mixteca* can be accessed via satellite and online through the Website. Likewise, Indigenous migrants have published at least two community newspapers in California: *El Oaxaqueño*, a bi-weekly newspaper published from 1991 to 2010, printed in Los Angeles, and distributed binationally in different cities of California, Baja California, and Oaxaca; and *Impulso*, printed since 2004, and that has successfully migrated to an online format as an ethnic newspaper with a substantial readership in California and Oaxaca. *El Oaxaqueño* was financed by Fernando López, who, as the owner of *La Guelaguetza*, a Oaxacan restaurant located in Koreatown, saw the need for a medium for the community:

> "When I opened the restaurant, I used to see Oaxacan distributing flyers and planning events while dining in the restaurant. The need for communicating all what was happening in our community was there. I wanted to contribute with the newspaper to facilitate this communication" (personal communication, December 14, 2010, Los Angeles, CA).

El Oaxaqueño became the virtual meeting point of the community, running stories that even other Spanish language media were not interested in publishing. *El Oaxaqueño* had a short-lived physical distribution in the city of Oaxaca, where it was sold for five pesos in local news-stands, and was widely read by the community in Los Angeles and other cities in California (Mercado, 2015). Unfortunately, *El Oaxaqueño* did not migrate to an online platform, and was printed for only a decade, but its short-lived circulation did not preclude it from being an influential outlet for the community. Its distribution in several cities, including Oaxaca, speaks to the importance of these communicative transborder practices.

A much more ambitious project is needed to detail all the different communication that currently takes place in social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Tik-Tok, Instagram, Twitter, and others. Particularly notorious are those accounts engaged with the organization of Oaxacan cultural festivals, many of them related to hometown patron saint festivities, the celebration of the Day of the Dead, and, the most notorious of all, Guelaguetza Festival which is considered a very important platform linking different Indigenous communities across borders (Escala-Rabadán and Rivera-Salgado, 2018), and as a crucial constitutive element of Oaxacalifornia. Guelaguetza, in Zapotec, means "the reciprocal exchange of gifts and services between households", and it is a tradition of cooperative activities between indigenous Oaxacan communities through relationships defined by reciprocity (Cohen, 2004: 45). Yearly Guelaguetza festivals have been organized by the Oaxacan government and regional organizations since the 1930s and most capitalize Indigenous groups from the state participate, although the celebration has often been used by state authorities to attract national and international tourism to Oaxaca. However, Guelaguetza celebrations organized by immigrants, in places such as California, are part of that space where relationships of reciprocity are transformed into transnational political action and further spaces are created to foster a transborder communal identity among young Oaxacans who were born in the US, and whose participation as performers, and dancers has been fundamental to define their identities as Oaxacans in diaspora (Nicolas, 2021).

In Los Angeles, the Regional Organization of Oaxaca (ORO) has organized yearly *Guelaguetzas* since 1987, sometimes with partial sponsorship from the Oaxacan government, which has grown interest in connecting with *Oaxacalifornia* as more immigrants influence civic and political life back in Oaxaca. The celebrations, nevertheless, are mainly supported through community fundraising and transnational systems of communal work, known as *tequio*, where people donate their time and money as contributions (Escala-Rabadán and Rivera-Salgado, 2018). Several candidates for the Governorship of Oaxaca have attended these celebrations trying to secure the favor and vote of Oaxacans who live abroad so they may influence the outcome of their political career. For example, Gabino Cué visited California several times as an opposition party candidate in his 2010 campaign. While attending *Guelaguetza* festivals in the US, he asked Oaxacans living abroad to convince their family members in Oaxaca to vote for him. Cue's successor, Alejandro Murat, used Guelaguetza festivals in the US to promote the export of arts and crafts and mezcal from the state (Rodríguez, 2017). In *Guelaguetza* festivals, it is also not uncommon to see information booths from immigrant rights organizations, local businesses, coalitions for immigrant health and job safety, advocacy groups, or even the US government passing information to attendees, such as census volunteers asking Indigenous immigrants to register during Guelaguetza celebrations in Los Angeles. *Guelaguetzas* are currently celebrated in nine different cities only in the State of California (Escala-Rabadán and Rivera-Salgado, 2018), plus other US and Mexican states and territories constituting Oaxacalifornia.

In Fresno, the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB) has organized a yearly *Guelaguetza* since 1997, and in San Diego, the Coalition of Indigenous Communities from Oaxaca (COCIO) has organized *Guelaguetzas* since 1998. Other Guelaguetzas are celebrated in cities such as Oxnard, San José, and, even most recently, in Seattle and some cities in New Jersey. For the yearly organization and promotion of these festivals, a whole ecosystem of social media sites representing dancers, costumes, food vendors, and other organizers has been created, and is growing, as more people join both virtual and physical spaces. *Guelaguetza* festivals, thus, are dialogical spaces for exercising citizenship.

When *Guelaguetza* festivals started to be organized in the United States, almost four decades ago, the highlights of the celebration were shared through VHS home videos that Oaxacans would bring on their trips to their hometowns to show their families. Later, with the availability of YouTube, videos of the festivities taking place in the United States and Mexico and performing artists who participate have proliferated. A systematic and careful study of these digital archives is needed, but it is out of the scope of this paper.

Nonetheless, Indigenous migrants have historically dealt with the discursive and epistemological exclusion from mainstream socio-political communities, both in Mexico and the US. However, to counter this exclusion, they have leveraged and expanded the once limited communicative spaces dedicated to the exchange of ideas about their knowledge and experience in contemporary political communities across national borders, particularly with the use of the Internet and social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and, Tik-Tok. These are used to enhance their presence in public plazas, rallies, festivities, and other gatherings across borders.

Communicative activities offer an important dialogical space and opportunity for civic participation in immigrant networks. They provide means of bonding (community formation) and bridging (outreach) social capital (Putnam, 2000). Indigenous migrants have the chance to connect to other migrants from Mexico, Native Americans, and migrants from other countries. Organizing across borders has allowed migrants to turn their networks into spaces for dialogue, activism, and solidarity. Bringing communal organizing into these networks is an enriching and creative way that Indigenous Mexicans have used to exercise political, civic, and cultural activities across borders, thus creating a cosmopolitan engagement from the grassroots with several groups and political communities.

Transborder Citizenship Practices

Zapotec and Mixtec migrants have brought to their places of destination their communal organizing practices based on systems of *tequio*, and *usos* y *costumbres* (uses and traditions), which are organizational systems of direct democracy with open suffrage and consensus-building. Practices of *tequio* come from Indigenous practices of communal cooperation, and they usually entail working for a collective project, such as organizing a saint's festival, an infrastructural or other construction project for the community either in their home state or in the receiving town. Sometimes *tequio* involves donating money for a project, but people prefer to donate their time and work, as service is a source of respect and connection to their communities, and often associated with social status and belonging (Cohen, 1999, 114), since communal service is a precondition for occupying leadership positions (López-Bárcenas, 2004). *Usos* y *costumbres* are a mixture of both colonial and Indigenous elements, since the colonial order imposed upon indigenous organizations Spanish systems of political and social division, such as municipalities (López-Bárcenas, 2004). Paradoxically, systems of direct democracy have been epitomized as ideal in Western societies, while, for Indigenous societies, they have been deemed as "traditional" implying a lack of development. Most transnational Indigenous immigrant organizations use systems of *tequio* and *usos* y *costumbres* as governing principles. For example, The Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB), a well-established, multi-sited transnational organization, has published an advocacy journalism magazine, for more than 20 years, named *El Tequio*. Honoring its name, the magazine was supported with the same system of communal work sustaining other activities and citizen journalists, artists, photographers and sometimes small business owners donated their work to the project, since it did not have any ad revenue (Mercado, 2015).

Usos y Costumbres across borders

It is common to hear in Oaxacan communities in the US that someone was summoned by their hometown's authority to serve in a post (*cargo*) back in Oaxaca (Flores-Quintero, 2004), as representatives of the town assemblies eventually find them through the immigrant networks. This was the case of

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Leoncio Va#squez, a Mixtec who served in his town in Oaxaca afterer 25 years of living in the US (personal communication, Madera, CA February 6, 2010). With migration, the system of cargos itself has changed, opening up spaces for women to participate in town committees when the men have emigrated. Indigenous women have also followed men into migratory networks, becoming economic and political actors in their own right. Women are increasingly joining immigrant organizations both as participants and leaders and as communicators, a realm formerly reserved to men. Some authors have implied a certain level of parochialism and characterized cross-border activities only as "bilocal" and not global or transnational, because many of these activities are centered around immigrant sending and receiving communities (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 8). Considering that working-class Indigenous migrants have developed, maintained and often substantially increased these long-lasting crossborder social networks, is remarkable, given the sometimes limited material resources to keep the connections and the pressures from both nation-states to "assimilate" and adopt mainstream narratives (Shah, 2003).

Civic Life as a Practice

Nation-states are the result of a constant effort of identity construction, since "shared identity in political communities" require both sustained and intensive efforts (Held, 2002, p 52; Gellner, 1983). Michael Schudson has argued that one of the measures of "good citizenship" is the formation of civic associations (1998); certainly this practice has not declined among minority and immigrant groups in the United States in the way that has happened among White upper-middle classes, who are increasingly "bowling alone", according to Robert Putnam (2000), who laments the decline of membership in bowling clubs and other civic American middle class organizations. To better understand how grassroots cosmopolitanism works, I suggest building upon Gershon Shafir's characterization of citizenship, not as a definition, but as an intellectual and political tradition involving a range of concepts and practices, including dialogical and communicative ones, since it is true that "in most societies alternative discourses of citizenship coexist with and constrain one another" (1998, p. 2).

Table 2 summarizes citizenship practices, taking into consideration Marshall's three constitutive elements of citizenship (political, social, and civic). However, while in Marshall's model the elements of citizenship are "rights" that individuals have within a state, I use his classification to describe citizenship as a set of collective and individual practices, as Renato Rosaldo (1994) has characterized a form of citizenship he deemed "cultural." For example, social citizenship under Marshall's model is the set of welfare provisions that a state offers to its citizens. Social practices of citizenship are activities that Indigenous immigrants engage in to protect community members or other immigrants, as a response to insufficient protection by institutional orders of settler colonial states that discriminate against them. Cultural and economic practices of citizenship were also added to the classification, sometimes overlapping with previously discussed communicative practices. These are called "practices" because they transcend the condition of citizenship as a status conferred by a nation-state, and because the

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term acknowledges the agency and dignity of Indigenous migrants and other groups who practice citizenship even without the sanction of dominant colonial settler state institutions.

Table 2
Citizenship Practices in *Oaxacalifornia*

Table 2. Citizenship Practices in Oaxacalifornia

Practices	Detail
Cultural Practices	Cultural & Religious Festival Celebrations (patron saint, Guelaguetza, Day of the Dead, etc.) Local & Hometown celebrations Parades National holiday celebrations (in both settling and sending communities) Beauty Pageants Sports (soccer, baseball, pelota Mixteca, etc.) Food Festivals (Oaxacan food, mole, etc.) Arts and crafts fairs
Social practices	Community Education, not attached to school system, such as decolonization, human rights, community knowledge workshops Scholarships sponsored by immigrant organizations Funeral fund-raisers (for burial in hometown, crossborder transportation) Medical Emergencies fundraisers (accidents, illness) Food drives & Food Banks
Civic Practices	Practices of communal work or tequio (influence most of other practices) Civic Organization (mutual aid, common interest, ethnic or religious, political, class, etc.) Workshops on immigrant and human rights Participation in demonstrations, rallies Contact with people in positions of power Contacting media to voice opinions Creating coalitions and alliances with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and groups Media Production
Economic Practices	Establishing local businesses in settling community (related to ethnic goods or services) Food vending and ethnic product development Acquisition of property (in either sending or receiving communities) Sending money remittances Establishing binational businesses connecting sending and receiving communities
Political Practices	Usos y Costumbres (Direct Democracy) Serving in communal posts either in hometown (Mexico) or immigrant organization in the US Organizing mobilizations, rallies, protests, etc., in both sending and receiving communities Voting if possible (absentee voting in home country, naturalization) Running for Office (local, national or home country) Representing transnational political posts (Oaxacan Institute of Migrants

Source: Author's own classification.

This table shows the complex practices developed by Zapotec and Mixtec migrant organizations across borders. Most of these activities take place in

the imagined *Oaxacalifornia* space and combine local, national, regional, and cross-national contexts, which are fundamental components of “grassroots cosmopolitanism”. Some of the categories may overlap, as many communicative practices enable the organization of citizenship practices (Tamayo-Gómez, 2012), and some practices may be unique to particular Indigenous organizations and groups. The typology elaborated on Table 2 is useful for visualizing and explaining the cosmopolitan engagement of Indigenous migrants and their descendants. For example, migrants who join hometown associations usually participate in projects in both the sending and receiving communities, such as fundraisers, transborder cultural festivals, construction projects (such as roads, churches, etc.) in their hometown, etc. Although the concept of citizenship as we know it has been linked exclusively to a single political community, Indigenous migrants have been able to interact with members of several political communities, at the same time, and leverage space for agency and transnational action, such as joining local and international social justice organizations and other diasporic communities, bringing communal organization systems that shape their communicative and citizenship practices.

Cosmopolitans from the Grassroots?

Cosmopolitanism in Western societies is usually associated with mobility and wealth, the transfer of cultural and social capital across privileged networks (Wallerstein, 1996; Beck, 2006), and official diplomatic relationships between political and economic elites. With the formalization of international relations, cosmopolitanism became a staple of identification with elites, as with the idea of “cosmopolitanism” in Immanuel Kant’s writings (1795/1991). With the modern nation-state, ambassadorships have been the realm of the educated or the political, but non-elites continued encountering and communicating with members of other national, ethnic, racial, social, class, or cultural groups even within their own nation-state. In recent years, some authors have established a connection between increased migrant transnational communication and cosmopolitanism, proposing that: “transnational experiences foster people’s openness and tolerance” and the “capacity to mediate between different cultures, and the recognition of interconnectedness of political communities” in the world (Delanty, and He, 2008; Mau, Mewes, and Zimmerman 2008, p. 2). Transnational migrant practices have been defined as sustained political, social, and cultural activities linking places of origin and settlement (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt, 1999). Recognition of other cultures, increased dialogue with others, self-transformation, and inclusiveness, are often mentioned as conditions for cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2012, p. 340-41), as is the experience of Indigenous Mexican migrants, who have lived in constant contact with other capitalize groups, and who have been exposed to a diversity of peoples and languages within and outside the nation-state. “Indigenous cosmopolitanism” has been also proposed as reference to the cultural depth of capitalize peoples and their vast knowledge contribution for the rest of the world—a world that not always welcomes or acknowledges the value of this contribution (Delugan, 2010, p. 92).

Immigrant transnationalism entails a form of "grassroots cosmopolitanism" in the sense that immigrants compare and are exposed to multiple communicative, cultural, social, and political arrangements. This cosmopolitanism is conceived not as an elite but a grassroots practice, similarly to what Smith and Guarnizo suggested when referring to "transnationalism from below" (1998), and Appadurai's "grassroots globalization" (2001), and it includes sustained cross-national and cross-cultural communication practices conditioning people to construct deterritorialized discursive and dialogical spaces, such as *Oaxacalifornia*. These encounters allow the extension of the "imagined collective community" beyond national, ethnic and territorial boundaries, and they develop solidarity links through communication networks, recognizing a diversity of identities that link individuals and groups to different cultural heritages inside and outside the nation-state (Stephen, 2007).

Conclusion

The acceleration of global communication has clearly made it more and more common for non-elites to meet and communicate with people from other cultures and countries, and begs the effort to theorize about these encounters and discuss the experiences of both privileged and non-privileged cosmopolitans, such as working-class migrants and refugees (González-Ruibal, 2009; Homi Bhabha, 2001; Appadurai, 2001). Contemporary Mexican Indigenous migrants, such as Mixtecs and Zapotecs from Oaxaca, have been doubly marginalized by two settler colonial states. This marginalization builds upon previous exclusionary practices that grew out of centuries of Western colonization, including racialized citizenship and assimilation projects experienced as Indigenous people in Mexico and as immigrants in the United States. However, Indigenous migrants have used the existing structures of citizenship, modernity, coloniality, and elite cosmopolitan projects (globalization and neoliberalism) to engage in global action, constructing a transborder leverage to address their territorial, cultural and political agendas through daily communicative and citizenship practices.

Paradoxically, this double marginality has allowed Indigenous migrants to compare and openly confront the exclusionary nature of mainstream settler national-state narratives and myths and to organize to create dialogical spaces and engage other marginalized groups in conditions of equal dialogue. These communicative and citizenship practices offer hope to create *fissures* in the overwhelming global system of extractive capitalism and markets. An example of Indigenous leverage in these transborder spaces is when Mexican state authorities seek the political support of Oaxacan immigrants in places such as Los Angeles or Fresno, California, even though they may have considered these groups as their subordinates in Mexico; or the increasing notoriety and success of Oaxacan culture recognized by the City of Los Angeles with the "Oaxacan Heritage Month" (Tapia, 2013). Through communication, Indigenous migrants have been able to break the limited citizenship experience that settler colonial nation-state arrangements have prescribed onto them. Indigenous migrant spaces, such as *Oaxacalifornia*, constitute places for global community action and re-composition of Indigenous identities in diaspora,

often understanding the relationship to Indigenous land "through collective memories and practices" (Nicolas, 2021, p. 64), constructed through the co-creation of experiences in the transborder network, connecting places of origin and destination.

For the most part, contemporary settler colonial states have turned its policing functions towards chronic problems of inequality, responding with practices of coercion and violence. The fact that states are now more concerned about securing their borders and building walls does not mean that cosmopolitan values are suddenly outdated. On the contrary, many cosmopolitan principles, such as cooperation, solidarity and empathy, are very much needed for conflict resolution and ensuring the sustainability of human life in the contemporary world. However, the question is how to make these principles part of a human disposition and not an imposed normative project from the colonial state. Grassroots cosmopolitan practices may enable a transformation of a limited tradition of citizenship based on the dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion into a richer one based on diversity, flexibility, individual and group self-reflection, empathy to the experience of difference, respect for the rights of others, and global communication. Maybe here is where grassroots cosmopolitanism can act as a "transformative political project" (Weenink, 2008), bringing hope to a dominant capitalist global order that sees people and nature as disposable. Dialogical practices can help to develop spaces that cultivate hope, dignity, and solidarity to engage in conflict resolution without coercive assimilationist projects.

By a process of hybridization, spaces, such as *Oaxacalifornia*, have become places to promote a worldly citizenship rooted in transnational communicative and civic practices from below. Indigenous communities have built systems of direct democracy and active communicative and civic involvement with other groups both inside of the state and through transnational networks. Therefore, there is a pressing need to decolonize the way we conceive cosmopolitanism with a normative, top-down imagery of wealthy elites or Western countries being the only ones exercising world citizenship.

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