

Chapter 4

Partners in Organizing

Engagement between Migrants and the State in the Production of Mexican Hometown Associations

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The massive historic protests in 2006 against anti-immigrant legislation in the United States have sparked renewed interest in immigrant community mobilization. Analysts have turned to Mexican immigrants in particular, not in the least because Mexicans represent the largest immigrant group in the United States by far. In this focus, many scholars and policy makers both have trained their attention on one form of Mexican civic organization that played an important, yet somewhat unanticipated role in the pro-immigrant marches of the mid-2000s: hometown associations, often called HTAs (Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006; García-Acevedo 2008; Portes, Escobar, and Walton Radford 2007). Broadly defined as organizations formed by migrants from the same community of origin (Fox and Bada 2009), they have been roundly lauded as structures that provide migrants with a wide array of support (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2010). HTAs have been characterized as organizations through which migrants not only maintain their cultural identity and sustain their affective connection to their hometowns, but also as structures through which compatriots from the same community or region of origin can provide one another with social and material backing in the United States (Bada 2011; Orozco 2004).

This recent interest in HTAs has dovetailed with the enthusiasm that economic development practitioners have displayed toward this organizational form (Aparicio and Meseguer 2008; Burgess 2008; García Zamora

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2005). For over a decade, development proponents of HTAs have described them as vehicles that enable migrants to participate in the economic development trajectories of their communities of origin, and perhaps more pointedly, they have identified them as effective funnels that direct remittances—the monies that migrants send home—toward public goods and business investment (Orozco 2004). Despite their differing concerns with HTAs, scholars of migrant civic engagement and economic development concur that HTAs are organizational structures that embody significant transnational expressions of migrant identity and engagement.

This chapter enters this research terrain and looks specifically at the Mexican HTAs that have become a central object of investigation in both migration and development studies. For the most part, the Mexican HTAs examined represent very specific constructs: with most founded over the last decade, they tend to be registered with the Mexican government as formal civic organizations brought together by their affective ties to a community of origin. In a sense, the emphasis on this brand of HTAs is understandable; registration with state authorities makes them visible as objects of analysis, differentiating them from other types of community mobilization, especially community drives that may be contingent and ephemeral, or those that are organized under the umbrella of other institutions, like a church (Vertovec 2004). By the same token, however, these HTAs are very particular organizational models. They can appear, and are actively represented in the literature, as civic organizations with clearly demarcated boundaries. They are viewed as autonomous and freestanding, even if they have extensive interactions with government authorities. Indeed, it is this supposed organizational independence even in the context of intense deliberations with the Mexican state and, for a time, with United States government authorities as well that observers have identified as critical to the political sway that HTAs have been able to exercise (Smith and Bakker 2008; Waldinger, Popkin, and Aquiles Magana 2008).

My goal with this chapter is to offer a cautionary note, and to suggest that the emphasis on HTAs as freestanding organizational structures may be incomplete. This representation of HTAs leads to an inaccurate gloss of these civic organizations as separate from the state institutions with which they interact. In actuality, they have strong ties with Mexican government actors, and their organizational boundaries are heavily crisscrossed with exchanges between HTA members, government actors, and community members. Thus, I argue that a more useful, and more accurate, way of considering Mexican HTAs is as social fields in which multiple actors negotiate both new expressions of transnational political identity and the possibilities for actions those identities allow. In other words, HTAs, rather than being freestanding civic organizations, are in

fact arenas of contestation, where migrants, state officials, and local communities on both sides of the US-Mexico border wrestle with questions of identity, belonging, political power, and resources. Even more pointedly, the HTAs that have featured so centrally in migration and development analyses have emerged as spaces where migrants and state actors together elaborate Mexican policy toward its emigrants. In this respect, HTAs act as incubators for new migration and development policy approaches that are then extended well past the limited sphere of existing HTAs to Mexican emigrants more broadly.

This perspective highlights HTAs as theaters that host a flow of transnational political practices and identities that are contingent, informed by specific times and places (Abbott 1997; Landolt 2008). The negotiations between migrants and the state, as well as the products of those contexts, are shaped by the specific political opportunities and constraints of the moment. Historical factors as broad as shifts in migration policy or changes in national leadership influence the way that migrants and state actors engage in the arenas that HTAs provide, but so too do more localized events such as the outcome of municipal elections, a poor crop, or a dispute over land ownership. In addition to external historical events, however, contests within HTA spaces are also shaped by the previous exchanges they hosted. The very local history of interactions within a given HTA supports but also constrains the possible identities and political strategies that that HTA can spark (Sewell 2008). Tending to the diversity and the historical specificity of the negotiations that occur in the context of HTAs is important, I argue, because these exchanges determine the significance and impact of the migration and development policies that HTAs help produce and enact. The same policy interventions can—and do—have vastly different meanings and outcomes depending on the contexts in which they are enacted and the HTAs that they involve.

To illustrate the role of HTAs as fields of social contest, this chapter relies on a layered research strategy. It focuses squarely on contemporary HTAs, formed within the last five years. It draws first on interviews with presidents of thirty-eight Mexican HTAs primarily constituted in 2007 or later, with the lion's share registered in the last two years, and listed on a public registry maintained by the Mexican federal government. The sample included HTAs that were located in a wide array of US states, both traditional and newer areas of Mexican immigration, and that were based on affiliation to communities of origin in diverse municipalities throughout Mexico.¹ Interviews explored how the HTAs were formed, their current projects, and their interactions with various levels of the Mexican government (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2 for summary statistics on the HTAs interviewed). These discussions were supported by interviews with current

Table 4.1. Summary Statistics of HTAs Interviewed

Mexican State		US State		Year of Creation	
Chiapas	1	Alaska	1	2000	1
Colima	1	Arizona	1	2002	1
Durango	2	California	17	2004	1
Guanajuato	13	Illinois	4	2007	5
Guerrero	1	Minnesota	2	2008	10
Hidalgo	2	Nebraska	1	2009	2
Jalisco	2	Nevada	1	2010	9
Michoacán	3	New York	1	2011	9
Morelos	1	North Carolina	1		
Oaxaca	4	Texas	8		
Puebla	2	Virginia	1		
San Luis Potosí	1				
Sinaloa	1				
Tlaxcala	1				
Zacatecas	3				
Total	38	Total	38	Total	38

officials of various Mexican states and the federal Mexican government, as well as a review of policy documents.

In the second layer of research, the focus turns to HTAs from Zacatecas and Guanajuato, two Mexican states where exchanges between migrants and state actors have evolved in two very distinctive ways. HTAs anchored in Zacatecas have tended to coalesce into large and politically powerful federations, whereas those from Guanajuatan communities have engaged with the state government on a more individual basis. The governments of these two states have some of the longest traditions of crafting policies to engage with migrants in the United States, and their efforts have been robustly documented (Fernandez de Castro, García Zamora, and Vila Freyer 2006; García Zamora 2005; Ramírez 2012; Smith and Bakker 2008). The state-level analysis for this chapter includes interviews with representatives of HTAs or federations and with government officials. It also reviews the local Mexican press for exchanges between migrants and government officials.

The third layer of research situates the cases of Zacatecan and Guanajuatan HTAs in their historical contexts and draws on interviews with actors that participated in the creation of models of engagement between migrants and governments of both states from the late 1980s through the late 2000s; actors interviewed include migrant activists, current government officials, and former bureaucrats and political leaders. After opening

Table 4.2. HTAs in the Institute for Mexicans Abroad Public Registry by Mexican State

Mexican State	HTAs in Registry
Aguascalientes	13
Baja California	12
Campeche	16
Chiapas	22
Chihuahua	26
Coahuila	6
Colima	8
Distrito Federal	13
Durango	76
Estado de México	15
Guanajuato	453
Guerrero	64
Hidalgo	136
Jalisco	93
Michoacán	125
Morelos	17
Nayarit	10
Nuevo León	16
Oaxaca	84
Puebla	63
Querétaro	29
Quintana Roo	1
San Luis Potosí	66
Sinaloa	15
Sonora	7
Tamaulipas	13
Tlaxcala	14
Veracruz	12
Yucatán	65
Zacatecas	22
Total	1512

Source: See ime.gob.mx (accessed 3 May 2012).

with an overview of the analytic and policy treatments of contemporary HTAs, this chapter offers a discussion of the range of exchanges between migrants and the Mexican government that are contained in the spaces that are opened when new HTAs are founded. It follows with a review of

the historical evolution of HTAs in Zacatecas and Guanajuato to illustrate the ways in which HTAs are situated, in place and in time.

A New Brand of Hometown Association?

By and large, analysts of Mexican hometown associations have billed them as new, sometimes pathbreaking, expressions of transnational migrant political identity and as novel vehicles for engaging with the Mexican government. Other scholars, however, have cautioned that contemporary Mexican hometown associations have historical roots in the mutual aid societies that were so prevalent among Mexican immigrants in the early 1900s (Gonzalez 1990). Indeed, hometown associations have existed throughout the history of Mexican migration to the United States, and migrants have for decades donated funds for projects in their communities of origin (Gonzalez 1990; Iskander 2010). For the most part, migrants initiated these philanthropic initiatives independently, without prompting from government officials or other leadership in their communities of origin. However, as historiographers of HTAs point out, migrants often had to interact with government representatives to carry out their projects. Some note the strength of the ties that the mutual aid societies and hometown associations forged with government, coordinating with Mexican consular officials to provide material assistance and cultural support to their members (Gonzalez 1990; R. Smith 2003).

But in a technical sense, observers of contemporary Mexican HTAs are correct in their view that these groups represent a new trend. This is because they are, for the most part, migrant associations formed under the umbrella of a matching funds program that went into effect as national policy in 2002. The program, officially titled the Three-for-One Program for Migrants (henceforth 3x1), matches funds raised by groups of migrants for community projects in their towns and villages of origin. As the program's name suggests, the federal, state, and municipal governments all contribute one dollar for each dollar that migrants raise. In order to participate in the program, migrants must form a hometown association and register their group with the Mexican federal government, either through consular offices or indirectly under the umbrella of existing federations of HTAs.

On its face, the initiative is modest. In 2010, the federal budgetary allocation for the 3x1 program was approximately \$50 million. The projects funded under the initiative were relatively small overall, with 2,438 projects completed that year, at an average budget per project of about \$20,000. As in previous years, the projects included basic infrastructure projects,

such as paving roads or laying down water pipes, the beautification or restoration of cultural spaces like churches and plazas, the construction of sporting arenas, clinics, or other community venues, and, in an emergent trend, investment in facilities to support local industry. In 2010, 881 HTAs formed in 664 municipalities spread across 28 Mexican states participated in the program.

Interpreting what close to nine hundred HTAs means, however, is complicated. Some were quite small, with no more than ten members, whereas others were somewhat larger and belonged to federations from the same Mexican state. A few had membership bases that were quite strong. The HTAs that participated in 3x1 made up close to half of the two thousand HTAs registered with the Mexican government over the life of the program. Estimates of HTA membership taken as a whole vary widely but range between ten thousand to thirty thousand people. In absolute numbers and, relative to the total population of Mexican migrants in the United States, the adherents of the HTAs that have received so much attention represent a miniscule proportion of the Mexican migrant population (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior 2011).

However, as the voluminous literature on the 3x1 program has documented, the Mexican government's matching funds program and the civic mobilization it has supported has had an outsized impact (García Zamora 2005; García Zamora 2007; Goldring 2004; Kijima and Gonzalez-Ramirez 2012; Lopez 2009; Orozco 2004; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009). The program has been credited with improving the delivery of public goods in municipalities throughout Mexico (Bada 2008; Duquette 2011). Tethering projects to groups with strong interests and ties in specific communities has channeled public monies to some marginalized areas of the country that otherwise have had difficulty attracting public investment (Aparicio and Meseguer 2008). Through their involvement in project design and in the supervision of implementation, HTAs have been identified as catalysts for the emergence of new forms of administration, most pointedly new mechanisms of accountability in local governance (Burgess 2008, 2012). The most provocative outcome of the program is the increase in political influence that migrants have been able to exercise in their communities and in the states of origin (Smith and Bakker 2008). Using the HTAs, and especially federations of HTAs, migrants have created increasingly sophisticated and powerful political lobbies; they have exercised electoral sway, among friends and relatives and, more significantly, in wider political debates; and they have wrested new rights of suffrage and political representation from both state and federal legislatures (Iskander 2010; Williams 2008). So substantial has been their influence that many scholars, invoking Hirshman's (1970) triptych of avenues for political participation,

have noted that HTAs have come to embody the vehicle through which migrants exercise “voice” *after* “exit” (Duquette 2011; Fox and Bada 2008).

HTAs created through the framework of the 3x1 program have been equally credited with supporting immigrant integration, advancement, and mobilization in the United States (Somerville, Durana, and Terrazas 2008). Accounts of HTA members informally providing one another with employment leads, donations for emergencies, and other kinds of material support are numerous, as are those of more formalized efforts to raise funds for scholarships and other awards (Bada 2008). More compelling to analysts, however, has been the role that HTAs have played in bolstering immigrant social movements. Mexican HTAs in Los Angeles and Chicago received particular attention because of their success in connecting to broader pan-immigrant activism and to electoral campaigns (Cano 2009; Fox and Bada 2009; Shannon 2006; M. Smith 2007).

Most of these analyses have been attentive to the exchanges between HTAs and the Mexican government, as they have occurred on both sides of the border. These interactions have been described as so intensive that they have supported forms of coproduction (Ostrom 1996) between HTAs and government actors—coproduction in the provision of public goods in Mexico, but also coproduction of the political influence that HTAs have exercised (Cano and Délano 2007; Délano 2010; Duquette 2011). Moreover, scholars have pointed out that there has been notable crossover between migrant leadership and state officials, with migrant leaders of HTAs and federations of HTAs taking elected and appointed positions in diverse instances of the Mexican government (Iskander 2010; Ramírez 2012; Smith and Bakker 2008).

Despite their sensitive observation of the quantity of interaction between HTAs and the Mexican government, however, these perspectives still maintain a separation between the migrant organizations and state actors. HTAs and government may interact, they may collaborate, they may tussle, but they still remain conceptually and actually distinct in this view. The structures that encapsulate the HTAs and their federations are represented as marking the boundary between government and migrant civil society. An examination of the processes through which HTAs are and have been created calls this characterization into question. It reveals that state actors engage in mobilizing and formalizing HTAs, and do so in an ongoing way, proactively and deliberately cultivating organizational strength and forms of political action among these migrant civic groups. This begs the question of whether it is accurate to describe exchanges between HTAs and government actors as coproduction when what is often produced is the migrant organization itself, with government often taking the lead in this endeavor.

Coproducing Hometown Associations

In a 2008 presentation in Mexico City directed at migrant leaders and various offices of government, the Mexican federal government described the 3x1 program as an initiative set up in response to migrant desires to carry out community development projects in their hometowns, but also stressed that its scope stretched far beyond this philanthropic mandate to advance additional priorities. Central among these was the organization and mobilization of migrant communities in the United States. In this vein, the 3x1 initiative was represented as providing an important platform “to motivate migrants to identify with their communities in Mexico and with their country,” and to draw on that identity to “foster and strengthen the formation of HTAs in the United States” and “strengthen the organizational capacity of HTAs and migrant organizations in their dealings with the Mexican government and with the government of the country in which they reside” (SEDESOL 2008).

As part of its efforts to further the goals it has around community mobilization, the Mexican federal government has refined the 3x1 program to mandate the formation of formal HTAs. According to program guidelines finalized in 2008, any group of migrants interested in participating in the 3x1 program must formally register with consular authorities and secure a *toma de nota*, a document that certifies their existence and their compliance with certain minimal requirements established by the Mexican federal government. These include an active membership of at least ten persons, “with common interests, living abroad, who, among other activities, carry out initiatives in favor of their communities of origin in Mexico.” Members must provide formal identification, preferably a consular identification card (*matrícula consular*), and its board of directors must provide contact information that will be verified for accuracy.

The *toma de nota* must be renewed every two years, both to ensure that the HTA continues to have at least ten active members and that the contact information for its leaders remains correct. The program regulations also lay out procedures for creating a federation of HTAs: groups of HTAs can register as federations if they can demonstrate the association of five migrant groups, and must commit to remaining a nonprofit, autonomous organization, without political affiliation of any kind (SEDESOL and Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior 2012). HTAs that obtain a *toma de nota* are encouraged to list themselves in the public registry maintained by the Institute for Mexicans Abroad. Some HTAs have been more amenable to this suggestion than others, with HTAs that join a federation preferring to be listed under the larger organization’s umbrella, rather than as individual groups.

According to officials in the federal government, the requirement for a *toma de nota* was put in place in response to migrant demands for greater transparency in the 3x1 program. Numerous migrant groups complained to the federal government that municipal presidents throughout Mexico, but especially from states where migrant HTAs and their federations were not well established, were submitting community development projects to the 3x1 on behalf of migrant HTAs that did not exist. These were “phantom clubs,” as one official termed them, created as an administrative fiction to claim additional state and federal resources under the rubric of the matching funds program.² By all accounts, the safeguards provided by the new guidelines have curtailed the most egregious abuses of this type.

Municipal authorities have long played a role in organizing HTAs, often traveling to locations across the border to convene and establish the migrant organizations. But migrant complaints to federal officials in this case represent a forceful statement of their view of what this new form of civic organization—a 3x1 HTA—should represent. Tellingly, their demand was not for full independence from government, but rather a call on government to participate more actively in safeguarding their organizational space. Migrants petitioned that they, at the very least, be the main protagonists in the creation of their own HTAs, and that their membership be robust enough to qualify as a civic group. They demanded that their identity not be co-opted by a shell organization, headed by a migrant figurehead but deployed cynically by municipal governments to pad their budgets. In this sense, these government regulations were the product of exchanges between migrants and the Mexican state over what an HTA should be in practice.

These actions were a reflection of migrants’ rejection of the somewhat romanticized notions of HTAs as groups that formed organically and independently around altruistic, if also nostalgic, goals for their communities— notions that even the Institute for Mexicans Abroad embraced in their early consideration of HTAs, portraying them, in early project memos, as “effective social networks” that “provided an excellent vehicle to strengthen the ethical, moral, and civic values of the community” (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior 2004). Migrants’ complaints were also a “realpolitik” reminder to the federal authorities that HTAs were small groups that needed protection from the instrumental appropriation of their identities by others.

In addition to limiting the misuse of the 3x1 program, the guidelines have had two important implications for HTA organizing, shaping them as arenas when migrants and government interlocutors elaborate new forms of transnational civic identity. First, the regulations have provided migrant groups with a solid springboard for organizing and for pushing

past inertia or ambivalence among their adherents and potential adherents. One HTA anchored in a community in Durango observed, for example, that “our group was formally established in 2011 after working informally for six years. We were just a few people and then grew to ten so that we could meet the requirement for participating in the 3x1.”³ This experience was echoed by a majority of the HTAs interviewed; indeed, six out of thirty-eight organizations sampled reported that they registered with the consulate in the hopes of putting together a 3x1 project, but had not yet identified the project that they wanted to complete or were still finalizing its design.⁴ One leader of an HTA representing a community in Puebla located in the New York metropolitan area noted that he had worked with Mexican community organizations in the city for close to a decade but had found them “very disappointing ... lacking a true community base and lacking leadership, without a true representation from the community,” and it was this frustration, rather than a targeted ambition to complete defined 3x1 projects, that motivated him, with others, to start a formal HTA. As he explained, “If you don’t get people to come together here, even as they integrate into this society, you cannot achieve development [in the communities of origin].”⁵

The formal registration of an HTA or a federation of HTAs provides a critical point of contact between consular officials and migrants who might otherwise remain unknown to them. While interviews reveal that there is considerable variation among consular offices in the ways they respond to this connection, numerous HTAs reported receiving substantial and ongoing mentorship in organizing capacity. Descriptions that were articulated repeatedly in response to questions about consular offices were that the staff was “very helpful”; HTA presidents reported that their groups were “well received” and they benefited from “good orientation” about how to set up and maintain an HTA.⁶ One leader of an HTA rooted in Hidalgo recounted, for example, that she had started an HTA in 2005, but that it was through interactions with staff from the Institute for Mexicans Abroad and staff at the consulate that she learned her HTA could form a federation with other groups from the same state. “The consular office gave us a lot of support with meetings on a monthly basis to guide our experience, to register, to learn the rules ... to prepare paperwork and demonstrate the viability of our projects so that they could be approved. ... The support we received as a federation was really very good.”⁷

Based on the limited interview sample used for this chapter, it is difficult to determine conclusively how widespread the consular practice of using HTA registration as the beginning of capacity-building efforts is. Nevertheless, federal government officials report that this is an important thrust of their activities. As explained by a 3x1 official at the federal level,

the directory acts as a foundation for consular outreach activities: “The function of the *toma de nota* is first and foremost to give the consulates an opportunity to be familiar with the work of the clubs.”⁸ “Each consulate uses the directory in its own way, depending on its respective approach and work with HTAs,” confirmed an official at the IME. “Some might use it to identify which clubs are in existence in their areas and invite them to come to training at the consulate.”⁹ In this respect, the *toma de nota* process provides the Mexican government with a crucial optic onto migrant civic organization; it makes the extent and location of migrant organizing efforts visible and legible. The Institute for Mexicans Abroad does not have a census or complete database of migrant groups; indeed, by their own report, they only know how many and which groups have acquired the *toma de nota* under 3x1 regulations.¹⁰

The outreach use of the registry of the *tomas de nota* mandated by the 3x1 program points to the second function the matching funds program plays in creating spaces for the development of transnational political identities. It is no accident that the Institute for Mexicans Abroad views HTAs as “our reason for being.”¹¹ For the Mexican federal government, HTAs are doorways to the broader migrant population, but they are also spaces where migrant rights and activism around other issue areas beyond imperatives of the 3x1 program are explored. As one staff member explained, HTAs “provide us with a structure through which we can reach the community. HTAs are like ‘arms’ that extend our outreach capacity.” And the outreach that HTA networks support engages with numerous issue areas, such as “financial education, health programming, empowerment, and the protection of migrants’ rights.”¹²

Moreover, in much the same way that the topical areas the Mexican federal government has addressed with HTAs have expanded, the organizational building efforts have as well. The Institute for Mexicans Abroad has worked with HTAs and held leadership seminars in Chicago, Houston, New York, Washington DC, and San Francisco in collaboration with the American Jewish Committee to draw on the experience of Israel and its engagement with Jewish communities in the United States. It has also offered leadership training in partnership with local universities, most recently with the City University of New York. As a staff member at the Institute for Mexicans Abroad noted, the goal of these training sessions is much broader than to support the functioning of a single government program. Rather, “the aim of these workshops is to develop capacity among Mexican community leaders to create opinion leaders, local functionaries, entrepreneurs, and more skilled community leaders in general, to promote a better understanding of the contribution of the Mexican community in the US, and to advance the image of Mexico.”¹³

While the Mexican government has strengthened its efforts to provide a broader platform for migrant organizing and integration in the host society, the focus for migrants who have formed HTAs recently, however, has remained the 3x1 program. Many of the HTA leaders interviewed acknowledged that their organizations provided forms of support to its members that were ancillary to the task of carrying out a matching funds project, and they also noted that the services provided by consular offices were helpful in this respect, as well as in the general support of *el movimiento migratorio*—the immigrant movement.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the main goal of their HTAs was funding and completing development projects, however conceived, in their community of origin. Likewise, their primary expression of transnational civic identity was anchored in the towns and villages from which they heralded.

State Government Engagement with Hometown Associations

As a reflection of their interest in the 3x1 program as a vehicle to express their hometown identities, newer HTAs have been proactive in connecting with state-level government officials. Whereas their involvement with federal-level consular authorities is mandated by program design through the *toma de nota*, HTAs have actively sought out state-level authorities to assist them in submitting projects and securing their approval. While HTAs have had some success in connecting with Mexican state-level government authorities in the United States, their initial contact tends to be in Mexico, and their ongoing exchange with state government takes place in the halls of state government buildings. The physical location of HTAs' engagement with state government officials has had important implications for the leadership structure—both formal and informal—of HTAs. Traveling back to Mexico is more feasible for migrants that have the legal status and the financial means to do so. This creates a selection bias toward more established migrants, who tend to have been in the United States for a longer period of time; it also tends to favor men, for reasons that are not yet well documented. Older HTAs, and especially those that have coalesced into federations, tend to display this membership profile, with the leadership dominated by long-term male migrants with legal status (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2010). Newer HTAs, such as those sampled for this chapter, are more likely to have members that are recent and undocumented migrants, with less organizational capacity and less ability to travel to Mexico to follow up on their projects with state authorities.

For the most part, state government authorities have been responsive to migrant outreach around the 3x1 program and have met such outreach

with their own efforts to connect with HTAs under the 3x1 program's rubric. However, there has been a notable distinction between state-level instances of federal offices, especially the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL), the federal office responsible for the 3x1 program, and the governments of specific states. SEDESOL has three satellites north of the border, one in Los Angeles, one in Chicago, and a recently established one in New York, but runs training programs around the United States, with most outreach efforts targeting migrants from single hometowns or municipalities. Its exchanges with migrants have hewn closely to program mandates, addressing how to establish and run an HTA within the context of the matching funds program. Recent outreach by state government officials, in contrast, has tended to rely on the 3x1 program as a means of establishing contact with migrant constituents. In a manner similar to consular authorities, state officials have expanded discussions about 3x1 projects to include larger political considerations. This has been especially true of representatives from traditional migrant-sending states in northwest and central Mexico: state governments and political parties in or out of office.

Partly as a response to these political overtures, newer HTAs have joined or consolidated into federations. As several interviewees pointed out, HTAs in a group are more effective at resisting political influence and pressing for the funding and implementation of the projects they propose. "We established a federation," said a federation president from a traditional migrant sending state, "because it gives us the opportunity to have a more official relationship and work directly with our state government." All of the federations from our state send a secretary [representative] that travels back to Mexico to secure funds for our projects through a meeting with the [state] government. The process is like an open negotiation between the secretaries and the state government: "This is how much we bring to the table. So now, how much are you going to put down?"¹⁵ And in this endeavor, HTAs have often received tutelage and support from SEDESOL and consular officials. Indeed, HTA presidents reported connecting with other HTAs from their state at training sessions provided by their local consulate.¹⁶ Not infrequently, state government officials have also played an important role in bringing HTAs into federations, in order to access or strengthen the political constituency that supra-HTA organization can represent (Ramírez 2012; Rivera-Salgado, Bada, and Escala-Rabadán 2005; Williams 2008).

In a reflection of the negotiating power that this arrangement affords, federations from numerous states, particularly those with well-established ones like Zacatecas, Michoacán, and Jalisco, among others, have instituted regulations that are informal but binding in practice for all HTAs to par-

ticipate in the 3x1 program. With tacit agreement with state officials, only projects sponsored by a federation are considered for funding. But as federations have expanded and their political heft has grown, they too have expanded exchanges with state government past the narrow confines of the 3x1 program. They have pressed for legislative changes, including suffrage in national and state elections, and the allotment of state delegates. They have also wrested financial commitments from state governments to increase funding for various projects spearheaded by migrants but that fall outside of the parameters of the 3x1 program. Newer HTAs, while maintaining their keen interest in the 3x1 program, have joined these political efforts. As one HTA president interviewed commented, "Migrants advance through struggle and demands—a *través de luchas y exigencias*. It is a matter of how motivated we migrants are to improve our lives and how we learn how to achieve this."¹⁷

Municipal Government Engagement with Hometown Associations

Unlike the ongoing exchanges and political negotiations between HTAs and state government, interactions at the municipal level appear far more mercurial and tense. In interviews, a common complaint regarding municipal authorities was that they were nakedly partisan in their selection of projects and were obstructionist with projects that did not improve their political party's political standing. "HTAs receive much more outreach from municipal presidents during an election year. It is a political exchange," said one HTA president. "Our relationship with the municipal government has been antagonistic. It has been really hard to get the mayor [municipal president] to give political support to the project, but a new mayor took office in January so it might get better," reported another.¹⁸

Because municipal authorities implement the actual project, handling construction and coordination, HTA presidents observed that local authorities often have influence that is greater than the proportion of funds they contribute to any given project. "The municipal president determines the project we do. ... In our view, the [municipal] government is charging us for what each project costs, and we as the HTA are 'contracting' the project with them. ... When a project does not fit within the 3x1 program, our HTA pays the cost of the project in full, depending on what the municipal government asks for," said an HTA president representing a Guanajuatan HTA.¹⁹ Similarly, an HTA president from Michoacán reported that 3x1 projects were "controlled" by municipal government and complained about price inflation. "The companies that are hired are affiliated with the

local government political party.”²⁰ Other interviewees echoed this concern about corruption, voicing frustration that municipal governments were playing fast and loose with 3x1 project budgets. In an account of a paving project, one HTA president explained that the migrant group contributed their portion “in full, but only part of the paving was actually accomplished and the municipal government kept the difference.”²¹

In order to exercise greater control over the project budgets and project implementation, many HTAs now work with “mirror committees” — *comités de espejo* — made up of residents in the community of origin. HTAs and federations in states that have a longer and more intensive history with the 3x1 program, like Zacatecas, Jalisco, and Michoacán, have formed citizen supervisory committees to monitor projects, often taking the protective measure of creating an account for 3x1 funds that is separate from any municipal accounts. In 2005, the federal government took up this innovation and sponsored the formation of “mirror committees” as a means to address the problem of “phantom HTAs” created by municipal authorities (Shannon 2006). The HTAs sampled had a favorable view of these committees, considering them essential to effective project implementation. Indeed, for some HTAs, the “mirror committees” did more than increase accountability: they served as an indispensable bridge for migrants to their communities of origin, especially when travel back to Mexico was complicated by migrants’ lack of legal immigration status, and facilitated deliberation with local residents about project choice. “We now have a mirror committee,” explained one president from an HTA rooted in Hidalgo. “The committee has been indispensable and without it, it would not be possible to do the projects.”²² Some also observed that the mirror committees have taken on their own initiatives to push for improved government service and to author social change, a claim echoed by scholars who have analyzed the effect of the 3x1 program on local mobilization in Mexico (Bada 2008; Duquette 2011).

Overall, presidents of the newer HTAs viewed the 3x1 program as a work in progress. According to them, it has provided migrants with a springboard from which to organize, and has opened up channels for them to engage with the various instances of the Mexican government. “Though there are problems with the program, it is really important because it is the only thing we have,” summed up one HTA president. “The concept is excellent, but the structure is deficient.”²³ The HTAs, along with the federations that some have joined, have provided a space for the elaboration and strengthening of program structures. In an iterative fashion, the programs have also shaped HTAs and the form and actions they take. Today’s HTAs enter an existing flow of forms and actions, with histories, in some cases, that are now decades long.

Hometown Associations: Zacatecas and Guanajuato

In early 2012, the opinion pages of the main local newspaper in Zacatecas were bursting with commentary about political maneuvering by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to dominate the organizations that migrants had created. Editorials decried “the attacks against migrant organizations in an effort to maintain and consolidate control over the migrant community—and their leaders—to harvest electoral votes for contests over position in the federal government now and for contests at the state level later” (Columna Reloj de Sol 2012). At issue was the fracture of the Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos del Sur de California, the largest and longest-standing federation of Zacatecan hometown associations in the United States, into two rival federations, one of which displayed a stronger affinity with PRI, which had swept into power at the state level with the election of Miguel Alonso Reyes as governor in 2010.

This was the second instance of a well-established federation breaking apart in as many months: the Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos de Fort Worth split into two factions for similar reasons at the end of 2011. The sense of alarm in the editorial pages of the local daily was bolstered with accusations of vote buying “left and right” in elections by PRI-affiliated migrant groups to determine the governance of these federations, blatant bias by the state agency that vetted potential 3x1 projects in favor of those in municipalities governed by the PRI, and widespread corruption by politicians who were awarding 3x1 construction contracts to weave a clientelistic web.

By contrast, coverage in Guanajuatan dailies of the 3x1 program and of migrant organizations was sparse and staid. The main story during this same time period on the 3x1 program, buried in the back of the local section of the main state newspaper, concerned the matching funds scheme that supported the restoration of the stained glass windows in the state capital’s cathedral (Flores 2011).²⁴

The contrasting press coverage reflects the difference in significance that migrant hometown associations and the 3x1 program have in both states. In Zacatecas, federations of HTAs have become powerful political actors, shaping the outcome of electoral contests at the local and state levels on both sides of the border. In the state’s projected budget for 2012, the 3x1 program represented fully half of the state’s funds for public works.²⁵ In Guanajuato, on the other hand, HTAs remain largely unaffiliated with federations, and the few federations that exist are nascent and weak. In 2012, the 3x1 program represented a smaller fraction of the state’s budget for public goods, and, in an indication of how marginal the program is, government officials were hard-pressed to provide even a rough estimate

of the contribution the matching funds program made to the state's budget.²⁶ The new HTAs created under the rubric of the 3x1 program enter these two contrasting political and organizational landscapes.

When Zacatecan HTAs form, they also simultaneously join a federation. Federations have effectively enforced this fusion by insisting that HTAs can only participate in the 3x1 program through federations, a stipulation by which all levels of government abide, even though it contravenes federal guidelines. In an environment where competition for 3x1 program funds is fierce and only 40 percent of all projects submitted are approved, projects that are not vetted and actively pitched by federations receive no consideration whatsoever. When a group of migrants want to form an HTA, the first point of contact is the local federation. The federation files a *toma de nota* with the relevant consulate, and if the federation has non-profit status in the United States, which all the major Zacatecan federations do, it extends this to the newly created HTA. It then acts as a liaison between municipal authorities and the new HTA, mediating the process of defining a viable 3x1 project that the new migrant group can sponsor.

Federations also provide a platform for knowledge sharing among HTAs, holding yearly plenary meetings where insights about strategy are exchanged. Furthermore, in recognition that the membership of newer HTAs is more likely to include undocumented migrants, and that travel thus represents risking deportation, federations are increasingly fostering knowledge exchange through telephone calls and email. Thus, for Zacatecan HTAs, their primary contact with any instance of Mexican government is through the federations. As one federation president summed it up, "The federation is really our universe of operation."²⁷

To support these activities, it has been common practice among federations to charge member HTAs an annual fee, which appears to be proportional to the political clout that the federation possesses in Zacatecas. The Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos de la Costa Oeste, which was created in 2003, "specializes" in HTAs in places like Utah and the Carolinas that are geographically isolated from major federations. It charges \$150; in contrast, the Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos del Sur de California, which was, until early 2012, the most powerful federation, levied a fee of no less than \$2,000. The argument articulated by federations is that this fee and the mandated membership in federations for HTAs is a means to enhance migrant influence. "What this rule is really enforcing is the affiliation of clubs with federations in order to make federations more politically powerful," explained one federation president interviewed. "The federations are the mediators (*vínculo*) between the US government and the Zacatecan government. They serve to strengthen the political power of the Zacatecan and the Mexican state vis-à-vis the US government."²⁸

In Guanajuato, HTAs and their emergent federations carry little political weight in either side of the border, and the process through which HTAs are formed both reflects and cements this reality. Groups of migrants from Guanajuato keen on participating in the 3x1 program have tended to organize on their own initiative, relying on the same kinds of assistance from the consulates and, occasionally, from municipal authorities from which HTAs rooted in communities all around Mexico have benefited. Interestingly, Guanajuatan migrants have been exceptionally active in the formation of individual HTAs: of the 1,512 HTAs currently listed in the public registry of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, 453 claim affiliation to a community in Guanajuato.

This growth reflects in part the proactive stance of the state government in promoting the registration of new Guanajuatan HTAs, designed to create the appearance of collective migrant strength. As part of this effort, the state actively distributes information about registering with the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, publishing on its website contact information of advisors in different regions of the United States who provide one-on-one assistance on how to register (Faret 2004).²⁹

Beyond this initial encouragement, however, the state government has offered little additional support and no guidance to HTAs in launching a 3x1 project. It has instead opted for a state-focused outreach strategy, technocratic and top-down, through its Dirección de Atención a Comunidades Guanajuatenses en el Extranjero (DACGE). The centerpiece of this strategy has been creation of Casas Guanajuato, groups of migrants with which the state government works to secure nonprofit status in the United States. The Casas Guanajuato program was designed to create identities among migrants that were fixed on their state of origin rather than on the town and villages from which they came. As the governor who initiated the program in 1994, Carlos Medina, explained, "We wanted [migrants] to look toward Guanajuato and its government for their future. And that's why we decided that the Casas Guanajuato should have a larger state identity, rather than be identified with a given municipality. And anyway, how much can a municipality really do for migrants in any case?"³⁰

The Casas Guanajuato program has a mixed track record, with many of the Casas Guanajuato groups collapsing into shell organizations with minimal or no membership (Faret 2006; Iskander 2010). Of late, however, the Casas Guanajuato program has seen increased migrant participation; HTAs have appropriated it to tap into the organizational support that the state government offers and to take advantage of the privileged access to government authorities that the program can afford. Similarly, there has been an incipient movement to forge federations of Guanajuatan HTAs, and new federations report working in conjunction with the Casas Guana-

juato program. As one federation president explained, several HTAs can come together under the banner of a single Casa Guanajuato.³¹

The difference in organizational strength between Zacatecan and Guanajuatan migrant groups and the intensity of exchanges with state actors is the product of distinct historical trajectories. In Zacatecas, HTAs along with their federations and the 3x1 program developed together. Both the migrant groups and the program around which they organized emerged out of exchanges between migrants and state officials, and both continued to evolve as that engagement matured and refashioned them. The origin of the 3x1 program was an informal 1x1 matching funds agreement, sketched out on a piece of notebook paper, when a newly elected governor, Genaro Borrego, traveled to Los Angeles in 1986 to meet with Zacatecan migrants there. Said the then governor, "If they contributed a dollar ... well, it just seemed fundamental to me in terms of equity that I contribute a dollar [as well]."³²

The governor anointed the new state-based federation as a privileged interlocutor and representative of Zacatecan migrants on both sides of the border. He did this in part through various symbolic gestures that migrants found enormously validating, including publicly honoring each of the existing Zacatecan HTAs with a Mexican flag at a large sporting event that the governor attended (Iskander 2010).

This reciprocal recognition, exchange, and collaboration continued over the next twenty-five years, peaking in intensity during each state electoral contest. During the electoral campaign of the next state governor, Arturo Romo, a pledge was made—and kept—to ratchet up and institutionalize the informal 1x1 agreement to a 2x1 program, drawing in an additional dollar from the federal government. The following gubernatorial candidate, Ricardo Monreal, likewise made a promise in 1998 to increase the matching funds ratio from 2x1 to 3x1, drawing municipal funds into the equation, and this trend continued in subsequent campaigns. As the program expanded, so too did migrant organizational activity, and both federations and their membership increased in number and in strength. At times, this growth in migrant mobilization occurred through the direct involvement of state bureaucrats: under the Romo administration, for example, staff from the state planning office traveled to US cities precisely to create one or more HTAs, bringing shovel-ready projects in a briefcase. According to some of the staff members who carried out this organizing north of the border in the mid-1990s, this was done strategically to provide the new HTA with a task around which its members could mobilize, and thus reinforce the group's nascent structure.³³

These efforts cultivated the ability of federations and state government to coordinate politically, but more importantly, they sharpened the skill

of Zacatecan federations to mobilize and lobby in varied political arenas. And mobilize they did: they soon wrested from the state and national legislatures new rights of suffrage and political representation, and secured unprecedented access to presidential administrations in both countries. Until migration reform became an issue too volatile for the presidents of both the United States and Mexico, Zacatecan migrants—émigrés from a poor state in Mexico of a little over one million inhabitants—had audiences with Presidents Fox and Bush (Iskander 2010).

The 3x1 program that originated in Zacatecas became national policy in 2002, illustrating another aspect of the interaction between migrants and the state. The rich and intensive exchanges between migrant and state actors have turned Zacatecas into an incubator for new programs directed at Mexican migrants. They allow for negotiation and incremental refinement of program strictures, such that, once polished, they can be easily extended to other states or to the nation as a whole. There is no more compelling example of this today than the Comité de Validación y Atención a Migrantes (COVAM). According to the rules of operation of the 3x1 program, the COVAM is the committee responsible for the prioritization, allocation, and validation of projects for each state (SEDESOL and Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior 2012). Mandated in 2005, COVAMs have been convening regularly in practice only since 2009.³⁴ In Zacatecas, however, some version of this oversight committee has been meeting since 1995, and the COVAM itself is largely patterned on the plenary meetings where municipal, state, and federal bureaucrats quarreled openly and vociferously with Zacatecan federations over the allocation of 3x1 monies.³⁵

Moreover, in Zacatecas, the COVAM, on its face a bureaucratic instrument to ensure accountability in program implementation, continues to be adapted by migrant and state actors for uses that exceed its technical mandate. Several idiosyncratic practices have been put in place in Zacatecas to ensure that the COVAM acts fairly: for example, one of the four municipal seats on the committee is given to each of the four parties that are most active in Zacatecas, regardless of the number of municipalities they govern, in order to prevent party capture. Likewise, the four seats granted to the federations rotate among the federations (currently seventeen) that are registered with the federal government. The COVAM meetings, held quarterly, either in the United States or Mexico, also act as critical convenings for the federations, regardless of whether they have a seat on the committee that year. At moments of political tension with the state government, federations view a show of strength at the COVAM meetings as important. During the April 2012 COVAM meetings, a federation president commented that all the federations were going, “as a block, to

defend everyone's projects" and "to defend the autonomy of the federations [from the government] and from the designs of its [political] party."³⁶

The COVAM in Guanajuato could not be more different in structure and in process than the 3x1 committee meetings in Zacatecas. In Guanajuato, the COVAM hews very closely to its technical function, as dictated by the 3x1 program guidelines, and its proceedings, which are more perfunctory and occur seven times a year, are administrative in tone. Moreover, participation in the committee is assigned, with little contestation. Federal and state functionaries responsible for the implementation of the 3x1 program sit in the COVAM, and municipal presidents are selected based on their level of emigration. This representation changes from year to year as out-migration rates fluctuate. HTA and, more recently, federation representatives are selected based on the "level of productivity" that each candidate organization displayed in fund-raising over the previous year. "If they become less productive," explained a state official, "they are asked to step down."³⁷

This emphasis on productivity in Guanajuato's policy toward its migrants has historical roots, and new HTAs enter a logic to which migrant groups have long been subject. Like Zacatecas, Guanajuato has some of the longest-standing state-level outreach efforts. Alongside its outreach efforts to migrants through the provision of services and the support for the Casas Guanajuato program, the state government has strived to make remittances more "productive." Rather than having them spent on uses that the government views as consumption, including expenditures on housing, food, and schooling, the state wants to direct a larger proportion of the monies migrants send home toward business investment.

To that end, the state created its own version of a matching funds arrangement for small firms. The scheme, called *Mi Comunidad*, was launched in 1996 and functioned as follows: the state government encouraged migrants to raise start-up funds for small firms in their hometown—chiefly clothing *maquilas* on the forceful suggestion of government bureaucrats—which one or more migrants would return to manage. In return, the state promised to match their investment with in-kind contributions of installations, machinery, training, and wage subsidies. Thirteen firms were established under the program, and as the governor of Guanajuato at the time, Vicente Fox, ascended to the presidency in 2000, he pledged to start one hundred *Comunidades* firms in his first one hundred days in office (Iskander 2010).

Unfortunately, the program was a spectacular bust. Firms were located in isolated communities, far from industry supply chains, and hampered by deficient road and communication infrastructure, with landline telephones that worked sporadically. Within five years, all but one firm had

failed, with the owner of the remaining firm contemplating migrating back to the United States to raise capital for his failing enterprise (Iskander 2005).

The case of Guanajuato illustrates that without state participation in the development of migrant organizations—without its coproduction of HTAs and their federations—the mobilization efforts of migrants are likely to stay underdeveloped. HTAs remained small, atomized organizations that posed little political threat to the state government and its neoliberal vision of development. By the same token, the HTAs that emerge today through the 3x1 program are less likely to gather the required political strength and exercise the necessary sway.

The Road from Guanajuato to Zacatecas

In Zacatecas, in Guanajuato, and, indeed, in all Mexican states, hometown associations rooted there have not been simply groups of migrants who came together around local identities. Rather, they have been, and continue to be, produced by intensive exchanges between migrants and government interlocutors. It is this interplay between migrants and government actors that gives HTAs their organizational structure, and opens them up as spaces for collaboration and contest over the articulation of transnational civic identity. Attention to the way that HTAs have been produced—and coproduced—shows how variegated the practices are that define their contours and their influence. They differ by level of government, by geographic location in the United States and in Mexico, and by the political controversies within Mexican states.

The evolution of so-called migrant productive projects, supported through matching funds schemes, captures this analytic urgency. In Guanajuato, an early adopter of this kind of project through the *Mi Comunidad* program, the experiment not only failed, but also caused financial harm to the migrants that participated. Zacatecas borrowed and adapted the underlying idea of supporting small businesses through a 3x1-style initiative. Since 2005, migrants and state officials have been experimenting with various models. A first attempt was a 4+1 program, sponsored by Western Union, where the company would top off 3x1 funding with an additional matching portion for small business investments (Orozco and Diaz 2011). The effort displayed mixed results, suffering from the same issues of value-chain integration and technical capacity that were the downfall of the Guanajuato program. Nevertheless, the program was expanded nationally, and in 2009 was adopted and adapted by the federal government as a 1x1 program for business investment, officially called

Proyectos Productivos para el Fortalecimiento Patrimonial. This federal program matches—at a one-for-one ratio—the investment that a single migrant family makes in a business initiative. The program essentially acts as a vehicle and a subsidy for microcredit, in a credit market that is tight for small and rural entrepreneurs. Ironically, the 1x1 program is favored by migrants from Guanajuato, the state that supplied the original conceptual framework for this policy, precisely because it allows them to bypass municipal and state levels of government and deal instead directly and solely with the federal government.

In Zacatecas, however, the program has taken a new shape: as of the last electoral contest in 2010, it has become the 2x1 program, with additional contributions from the state government. Projects are vetted by the migrant federations, which, in most cases, extend ongoing technical support to the new entrepreneurs. Moreover, through the involvement of the state government, the projects (mescal factories, cybercafes, hair salons, pig farms, dehydration of specialized chilies, etc.) have entered development planning discussions at the state level.

In this instance again, diminutive Zacatecas emerges as a dynamic incubator for innovative policy. This effervescent creativity is the product of the same exchanges that produced HTAs and their federations. In other words, not only do interactions between government actors and migrants coproduce HTAs, but they also coproduce new development trajectories at the local and national levels. Consequently, attention to the quality of these exchanges is vital: they can support the elaboration of new development approaches even as they support migrant mobilization on both sides of the border, or they can hobble, sometimes definitively, migrant efforts at organizing and collaborating with one another and with their governments.

As Mexico now faces a situation where migration has crested and is currently at a steady state, with net migration at zero (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012), it also enters an era where the benefits of emigration to the country will come less in the form of remittances and more through the ingenuity of its migrants. Looking beyond the organizational boundaries of HTAs to identify which among the many varied and contested interactions that occur within these organizations support creativity, and which have caused migrants instead to retreat from failed exchanges with government and from top-down clientelistic interactions, is arguably more important now than ever.

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Notes

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1. Interviews for the chapter were all conducted in Spanish. Interviews in 2012 were conducted over the telephone, but earlier interviews were conducted in person. While some information is provided about the affiliation of the interviewees, identifying information is withheld in order to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewee's identity.
2. Interview, April 2012.
3. Interview, March 2012.
4. Interviews, March–April 2012.
5. Interview, March 2012.
6. Interviews, March–April 2012.
7. Interview, March 2012.
8. Interview, April 2012.
9. Interview, April 2012.
10. Personal communication, April 2012.
11. Interview, April 2012.
12. Interview, April 2012.
13. Personal communication, March–April 2012.
14. Interviews, March 2012.
15. Interview, March 2012.
16. Interviews, March 2012.
17. Interview, March 2012.
18. Interview, March 2012.
19. Interview, March 2012.
20. Interview, March 2012.
21. Interview, March 2012.
22. Interview, March 2012.
23. Interview, March 2012.
24. Newspapers surveyed for this chapter include: *El Sol de Zacatecas*; *El Mirador*; *El Sol de Leon* (Guanajuato); and *Reforma*.
25. Interviews, April 2012.
26. Interviews, April 2012.
27. Interview, April 2012.
28. Interview, April 2012.
29. Interviews, April 2012.
30. Interview, July 2003.
31. Interview, April 2012.

32. Interview, May 2003.
33. Interviews, March–May 2003.
34. Interview, April 2012.
35. Interview, April 2012.
36. Interview, April 2012.
37. Interview, April 2012.

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