

The Force of Devotion: Performing a Transnational Spirituality

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In this article I explore the forces that shape the social practices and subjectivities of a transnational community: the forces of devotion, mobility, and emotion. I focus on the sense of impermanence and fragmentation produced by the back and forth movement of people, objects, and practices across the Mexican-U.S. border. I seek to relate the processes of mobility and transformation in Empalme Escobedo to the history of the railroad and its patron saint, Maria Auxiliadora. The data, a fragment of my dissertation project, reflect nineteen months of ethnographic research in Empalme Escobedo, Guanajuato, Mexico.

Introduction

My research explores the role of popular religion in a transnational community by examining the performance of devotion to local patron saints, virgin mothers and sacred crosses. Annually in May, Empalme Escobedo, Guanajuato celebrates San Isidro Labrador (the patron saint of farmers), Maria Auxiliadora (the patroness of railroad laborers) and the Santa Cruz de Picacho. Following the celebrations many of the male participants in the *fiestas* travel to Texas to work in agriculture or the service industry. Consequently, devotion to the saint(s) moves with migrants back and forth across the Mexican-U.S. border.

Memory of and participation in the *fiestas* not only symbolize the force of devotion, but also serve as a connection to separated family members and place of origin. The everyday reality of the absence of loved ones and the fragmentation of the community as a result of migration amplifies the human desire for sociability and solidarity. I argue that the affective performance of devotion gives voice to the tension between the desire for solidarity and the erosion of the community by migration.

Migrants of Empalme Escobedo maintain social, political, economic and spiritual connections through the action of calls, emails and cars: moving in space; the to and fro; the back and forth; the coming and going. These processes of mobility—the active exchange of prayers, money, photographs, *chismoso* (gossip), food, and other commodities across the Mexican- U.S. border—reconfigure space and connect, maintain and reinforce wider systems of social relations and practices (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). Attention to such processes illuminates the practices of mobile subjects, the fluidity and fixity of borders, and the tension between the private and public spheres.

I explore the multiple ways in which space simultaneously connects and disconnects people, places and things. In particular, I examine the mobility brought to Empalme Escobedo by the railroad. The railroad represents the coming and going, the constant back and forth movement of people, things and ideas. Figuratively, the train offers a means for analyzing the mobility of folks in Empalme Escobedo. The narratives and performances of devotion to local patron saints, virgin mothers and sacred crosses open a space to track the flows of transnationalism and modernity through the lived experiences and transformations of people and objects. As such, I consider the intimacy of and emotion embedded

in public and private performances of devotion to Maria Auxiliadora, the patron saint of Empalme Escobedo and its railroad laborers.

The Force of Devotion

Imagine a rural town whose dirt streets are suddenly clouded with the excess dust produced by the arrival of numerous cars. These cars are not typical to Empalme Escobedo: these are big shiny new trucks with Texas or North Carolina license plates. Trucks packed full of popular U.S. electronics, clothing, medicines and foods—symbols of success in the U.S. These trucks are driven from the U.S. by migrants returning to Empalme Escobedo to celebrate their devotion to a patron saint. The town has been transformed. Overnight, families have decorated their homes or businesses for the *fiesta*. Plastic streamers, *papel picado*, banners, and lights are strung from the rooftops or across balconies. Fresh coats of paint in bright pastels stand out against the dust and trash covering the unpaved roads. Clothing vendors and taco stands pop up on street corners. Families gather outside their homes to be seen and socialize with returning migrants, relatives and friends. A sense of solidarity and camaraderie is evident in the conversations and public gathering places. The market is busy and the streets are noisy and vibrant. The sense of absence that permeates daily life in Empalme Escobedo is now obscured by the bustle of activity and happiness of folks.¹

Empalme Escobedo is located in the Bajío region of Mexico, in the state of Guanajuato and the municipio of Comonfort. In May, *fiestas* related to the agricultural cycle and local patron saints are celebrated throughout the Bajío



Tracks in Empalme Escobedo.

region. Each May 15, a *barrio campesino* (farming neighborhood) in Empalme Escobedo sponsors a *fiesta* to honor San Isidro Labrador (the patron saint of farmers) featuring a Catholic Mass, procession, ritual plowing of the field in invocation of fertility, and dancing performed by men costumed as lewd women.² One week later, on May 24, the *parroquia* (parish church) and railroad laborers host a *fiesta* for the patron saint of Empalme Escobedo and the railroad, Maria Auxiliadora. The *fiesta* is on a larger scale and features a carnival, a traveling *tianguis* (market with vendors from across the country), dance and vocal performances, Catholic Masses, weddings, baptisms and confirmations, and a grand procession transports the image of Maria Auxiliadora through the streets of Empalme Escobedo.

Migration and spirituality are significant components of everyday life in Empalme Escobedo. Consultants frequently discuss the power of spirituality as represented in the popular dicho, “*la fe mueve montañas y fronteras*” (“faith moves mountains and borders”). Women tell me: “Faith is a powerful force” ... “a moment of prayer centers you ... and energizes you to get back on track, to live life to the fullest ... because today might be your last ...”

To leave a family and a community in Mexico to search for work in the United States is a “leap of faith.” Fabiola, a young woman, explains: “One trip to the United States will help get our money back in order . . . my husband will work with his brothers for a few months and return for the *fiesta* to demonstrate his devotion to the patron saint.” Yet, some men do not return. Hope of the return to Mexico lingers in women and men’s thoughts and actions. Hope kept alive through spirituality: faith in God, devotion to a patron saint, the Virgin Mary, the Sacred Cross, prayer, family and community.³

Life in the Bajío is continuously punctuated by popular religious celebrations. Phyllis Correa (2001:436) argues “that popular religion in Mexico ... is continually created and re-created as traditions are transmitted both orally and through participation in rituals and ceremonies, while it simultaneously responds and adjusts to changes caused by external and internal factors that constantly restructure the relationships and patterns of participation of individuals and groups throughout the region.” I interpret popular religion as an integral and dynamic component of everyday life. The practice of popular religion often takes place in the home or on the streets as opposed to within a church. Popular religious rituals are performed in home devotionals, community *fiestas*, processions and pilgrimages.

What I call the force of devotion refers to the social processes, expressive culture, continuity and change that make up a community’s system of beliefs and practices and enable people to understand, explain, dismiss or cope with everyday life. The force of devotion is the outcome of “continuous interpretive labor,” of grappling with loss, responsibility, uncertainty, and the dissolution of a community (Harding 2000:100). As Susan Harding (2000:100) suggests, stories of spirituality “call for interpretive actions that fill in narrative gaps” and bind people together. I argue that popular religion (specifically the affective performance of devotion to local patron saints, virgin mothers and sacred crosses)

gives voice to the tension between the desire for solidarity and the erosion of the community by migration. I focus on the force of devotion as a performative and discursive social experience that shapes public emotions, memories and narratives.

People in Motion, Things in Motion

Empalme Escobedo was created by the railroad. The railroad is a symbol of mobility, history and modernity, loss and hope, impermanence and fragmentation. I observe in the movement of the train the loss, hope, absence, presence, devotion, and strength of the community. The force of mobility is analogous to the force of the train, coming and going, the back and forth movement of people, objects and ideas crossing mountains and borders.

The railroad tracks are one of the most striking features of Empalme Escobedo. The tracks crisscross the center of town, complicating entry to the main plaza. Trains are constantly coming and going, stopping and starting, loading and unloading. One cannot walk through Empalme Escobedo without confronting the railroad. A train will stop in mid-track for long stretches of time, forcing people to wait to cross into town. The amount of time spent “waiting for the train” is variable. The presence of the railroad both centers and interrupts daily life in Empalme Escobedo.

In Empalme Escobedo the railroad is a permanent fixture of the built environment, a constant reminder of mobility, of history, a representation of the back and forth movement across borders, the interruption and fragmentation of daily life. The Empalme Escobedo station and its employees are relied upon for repair



Agriculture and the railroad in Emplame Escobedo.

of both trains and rail tracks. This contributes to the trains being stopped for extended periods of time. Repair work is done on the trains directly on the tracks at the original station, which crosses the primary road leading into the center of Empalme Escobedo.

The railroad was created in the name of modernity. It transports objects and people across mountains and borders, from *ranchos* to cities, from farm to market, from state to state, from ocean to land, from Mexico to the U.S. Modernity is linked to mobility and its promise of social connectedness. Richard Flores, building on the ideas of Louis Althusser, explains modernity as a “‘complex structure’ of multiple and uneven events, forces, practices, and ideologies that emerge in their own time and place and through the rhythm of their own development” (Althusser and Balibar 1979:312 as cited in Flores 2002: 2).⁴

In the Bajío changes associated with modernity are discernible in its famous and complex histories of silver mining, revolutionaries, railways, agriculture, textile production, and migration to the United States.⁵ In the nineteenth century, the Bajío’s market-oriented economy demanded trade and travel. As a consequence, the area that is now Empalme Escobedo became a prime location for a railroad. The main track of the Mexico-Laredo railroad arrived in the region in 1888. Eusebio González, who owned the lands that became Empalme Escobedo, donated his land to lay more tracks for the railroad. The new tracks were built to serve Mexico City, Querétaro, San Luis Potosi, and Laredo. The stretch through what is now Empalme Escobedo was completed in 1903.

Between 1884 and 1900 Mexico experienced profound economic, political and social transformation. The flow of foreign investments facilitated “gross national product to rise at an annual rate of 8 percent” (Bethell 1991:74). Mexico’s unprecedented rate of growth also produced unprecedented disparities. These disparities were exemplified in agriculture, between the use of modern and traditional technologies; in industrialization, between the “light” and “heavy” industries; in the varying evolution of different regions; and between domestic and foreign control of the economy (Bethell 1991:75). The United States, in addition to other foreign investors, were “granted concessions of every kind on extremely generous terms” to invest in the construction of railways across Mexico (Bethell 1991:70). In late 1880 the Mexican President, Porfirio Díaz, granted three concessions for the construction of lines by U.S. companies (Cumberland 1968:214). Fewer than 700 miles of track had been completed in 1880. By 1884, due to the impact of concessionaries, the Mexican railroads operated 3600 miles of track (Cumberland 1968: 216). Railroad construction across Mexico continued for the next twenty -five years, but with great fluctuation as it depended upon “the availability of capital and the fortunes of competitive enterprise” (ibid).

Nineteenth century railroad employment profoundly affected the movement of Mexicans North (to the Mexican-U.S. border region and into the United States). According to Barbara Driscoll (1998:19) the effect of the railroad upon the movement of Mexican people during the *Porfiriato* was significant.⁶ She writes:

Since the roadbeds passed through harsh, unpopulated desert areas, railroad builders had no choice but to recruit and transport construction workers from central Mexico; many of these individuals never returned home. Second, the completed lines offered seasonal maintenance employment to those in the central plateau who could use the work as a strategy to reach the border. Likewise, middle-class migrants with funds at their disposal could simply purchase passage to Ciudad Juárez (Driscoll 1998:19).

Scholars debate the merits of the profound changes in the economy during the *Porfiriato*, yet it is generally agreed that the late 1890s and early 1900s in Mexico were a period of dramatic modernization.⁷ Today, in Empalme Escobedo, neither agriculture nor the railroad can sustain the economy and well being of the community. The reduced employment by the railroad, the decreased reliance on farming, and an increase in migration to the United States affect the economy and sociality of Empalme Escobedo. Families are changed by the local underemployment and lack of access to higher education, quality healthcare, and institutional resources. Most often the result is poverty and a desire or need to migrate to the United States for work or survival. Opportunities for prosperity, security or prestige are viewed as outside Empalme Escobedo. Despite the changes brought by history and modernity, both the railroad and agriculture maintain their symbolic significance within this transnational community. The veneration of and devotion to the patron saints Maria Auxiliadora and San Isidro Labrador further exemplify the enduring symbolism of the railroad and agriculture in Empalme Escobedo.

Debe ser Afectivo y Efectivo

Maria Auxiliadora is the patron saint of Empalme Escobedo. Because Empalme Escobedo’s origins center on the railroad, the railroad laborers adopted Maria Auxiliadora, *Auxilio de los Cristianos*/Help of Christians to represent their struggle and hope. Maria Auxiliadora is not celebrated only on May 24, but every day of the year. Three images of the Virgin Maria Auxiliadora exist and circulate in Empalme Escobedo. The primary image is housed permanently in the *parroquia* (parish church) in the center of Empalme Escobedo. Two secondary images travel to every neighborhood and desiring household in Empalme Escobedo and the surrounding *ranchos*. According to the Catholic Church:

Maria Auxiliadora rescues children who are in danger and consoles those that are suffering. She is there for the people to ease sorrows and wash away tears. Because there is no place immune to pain and crying, Maria Auxiliadora will be carried to each domestic dwelling. Carrying her to the home is like taking her to her throne, her own house. The opportunity for this domestic family worship of Maria Auxiliadora cannot be greater or more obvious. Most of the fruits that this spiritual devotion is called to produce will not be known, because not even the soul that receives the operations of grace are often aware of it. But you can already guess what will happen within each family. (Translated from the Spanish Culto Domestico a Maria Auxiliadora *Parroquia* de Empalme Escobedo, Gto. Primer Centenario)

On Monday, December 5, 2005, I participated in *la visita domiciliaria de Maria Auxiliadora*. In late November I accepted the invitation for the Virgin Mary to visit my home. Therefore I had time to learn of my obligations and necessary preparations. By talking with the women in my neighborhood and observing several “home visits”/devotionals for local saints I understood the importance of creating a special location (*nicho*) in which to place the image. I was aware the devotees would need a space within my home to pray, talk and sing to the image of the Virgin Maria Auxiliadora. Additionally, it is customary for the host family to provide refreshments to the devotees.

At 5:30 pm a procession of ten devotees arrived at our home carrying the image of Maria Auxiliadora, fresh and plastic flower arrangements, candles, a donation box, and a handful of prayer and song sheets. After the image of Maria Auxiliadora was placed in her *nicho*, the flowers arranged and the candles lit, I was asked to read a pamphlet from the church that welcomed the Virgin Maria Auxiliadora to our house. Over a period of an hour, three *cargueras* (caretakers) led the devotees in a rosary, song and prayer specific to Maria Auxiliadora. Following the prescribed devotionals, individual personal prayers are recited: women ask the Virgin to bring their husbands home safely from the United States, to bless their sons working in Texas or to protect their relatives crossing the border with a *coyote* and without papers. I share one of the written prayers:

El amor para ser verdadero no solo se debe sentir sino que se debe demostrar.

Debe ser Afectivo y Efectivo.

Como el fuego en las entrañas de la tierra, irrumpe en su encierro, abriéndose paso para salir al exterior con desahogo.

Con esto queremos decir que los amantes de Maria Auxiliadora no se contentan con amarla en su corazón, sino que sienten la imperiosa necesidad de explyar su querer y su devoción.

Love, in order to be true, not only should be felt but also must be displayed.

It must be Affective and Effective.

As the fire in the core of the earth breaks through its confinement, opening its way to its exit, to its outside relief.

By this we mean that those who are affectionate of Maria Auxiliadora do not merely love her in their heart, but feel the urgent need to expound their love and devotion.

(Culto Domestico a Maria Auxiliadora, Parroquia de Empalme Escobedo, Gto. Primer Centenario)

The composition of devotees changed over the course of the hour, but consisted primarily of seven children and nine young and elderly women. My husband and three young boys were the only male participants. At the end of the organized hour of devotion to Maria Auxiliadora, I served cookies and hot cider. The majority of the devotees promptly left, while a few, including the *cargueras*, stayed to pay personal respects to the Virgin or to socialize.⁸

For twenty-four hours the Virgin Maria Auxiliadora is a guest in our home. She occupies the center of our room and the center of our house. A public icon enters our most private and intimate space. Upon being left alone with Maria Auxiliadora my husband and I are uncertain what to do or how to act. My

husband kneels quite naturally in front of her image. Perhaps he is praying, asking something of her, welcoming the Virgin Mary to our home, thanking her for his health and well being, asking for forgiveness or to bless our families (far away in the United States). I observe. How do I perform devotion without an audience? In public, I participate. I recite the prayers, make the sign of the cross, and kneel in front of sacred images. In private, I am skeptical and still.

Intimacy and emotion influence the processes of constructing, telling, receiving and deriving meaning from narratives. Emotion and intimacy, privacy and community not only shape how stories are told in Empalme Escobedo but also the way I, the outsider ethnographer, interpret and construct their meanings. According to Lauren Berlant (2000:1), “to intimate is to communicate with the sparsest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity.” She explains further . . . “the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness” (ibid). Berlant seeks to reframe intimacy in order “to engage and disable a prevalent U.S. discourse on the proper relation between public and private”—spatial categories that are “considered by many scholars to be archaic formations, legacies of a Victorian fantasy that the world can be divided into a controllable space (the private-affective) and an uncontrollable one (the public-instrumental)” (Berlant 2000:3). Ethnographic research suggests that sites of emotion, memory and affect transcend space and time and challenge boundaries between private and public spheres, subjective and objective (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Behar 1996).

The prayer tells us our devotion to Maria Auxiliadora must be affective and effective. It is urgent that we perform our public and private devotion to the Virgin Mary. Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod (1990:7) write of the importance in considering the close involvement of affective performance and emotional discourses with issues of sociability and power: the “politics of everyday life.” Relating individual experience to an affective performance of devotion reaffirms that the ordinary of everyday life makes sense with an overarching framework of meaning. Emotion, memory and narrative are primary elements in the reconstruction of the personal past and meaning making in the present. As Richard Flores argues (1995:12), memory does not serve as a reproduction of the past, “but as an active process of re-membering”—a connection of “the traditional past with the present social concerns through the mode of performance.” Affective performances of devotion serve to authenticate a past and ameliorate the present (Flores 1995).

Maria Auxiliadora and the prayers and songs performed out of devotion to the saint circulate throughout the community: starting and stopping, like the motion of the railroad. The force of devotion (just as do the people and objects) moves back and forth across the Mexican-U.S. border simultaneously linking and fragmenting lives and places, memories and emotions. *La visita domiciliaria de Maria Auxiliadora* exposes and sets in motion the desire for sociability (experienced through enacted devotion) and the erosion of the community by migration (experienced as absence and fragmentation).

Impermanence and fragmentation

Migrants in Empalme Escobedo are moving back and forth across the Mexican–U.S. border to make money, fulfill a *manda* or *promesa*, realize goals, please a wife, mother, or child, to carry out their vision of the American dream. According to Alphonso Lingis (2000:29), “the speeds, slowness, and turns of our movements come from movements we meet about us.” Movements are durations. Movements shift, settle, collide with other things or set things in motion (Lingis 2000: 29–30). The constant movement of the train, the changing seasons, movements of hands kneading corn for tortillas, churning the milk of the cow to create cheese, forming the sign of the cross, the movement of Maria Auxiliadora from house to house collide with the need to work, the need to eat, the desire for play, pleasure, and the planting of crops.

The migration of folks from Empalme Escobedo to the United States creates an actual loss, a gap, an absence. The circulation of loss, the persistence of absence and the gaps in logic pop up in sites of impermanence and fragmentation throughout the community: The railroad tracks, the abandoned railroad station, the place where an image of Christ appeared in the dampness on a wall left over from a rain storm. The makeshift shack on *Calle Acambaro* filled with empty liquor and beer bottles and an abandoned mattress—where Picho can often be found. The dilapidated market—stuck in a semi-permanent state of reconstruction. The unpaved roads and unfinished houses, and the opening and closing of small businesses—an internet café, a clothing store, an ice cream parlor, a vegetable stand, a bakery and a taco shop.

Sites of fragmentation invite affective investment. These neglected structures symbolize the past, the present and the future. They produce emotional discourses and conjure up images of the excess of the *Porfiriato*, the heyday of the railroad, times of poverty and ruin, the excitement of the Mexican Revolution, and the unease of the Cristero Movement. Engagement with these structures enables a sense of a shared history (Szmagalska-Follis 2008). This transnational community desires a collective history, public structures and annual celebrations that create sociability and solidarity. As Kathleen Stewart (1996:95) writes, “In the image of a trembling space, then, a reality that exceeds the constraints of history is born of the very remembering of unfulfilled possibilities. The arresting image provokes the participation of an audience as if collective survival depends on the contagious spread of a melancholic poetics of place.”

Places in the Bajío landscape are more than constant reminders of mobility but also tell the stories of history and modernity, of ancestors and the miracles of local patron saints, virgin mothers and sacred crosses. Places capture the emotion, intimacy and memory of the relationships between people and their place of origin. I am not talking about migrant “nostalgia for home” but the practices of re-remembering, emotional discourses, the fragmentation of community and the subsequent desire for sociability and solidarity. The participants in the performances to honor saints, virgin mothers and sacred crosses in Empalme Escobedo view their devotion against the reality of migration, which though it

does not explain it in a causal sense, places it in a cognitive and affective sense (Geertz 1973).

Through ethnographic research and oral testimony, my research offers a new understanding of the lived religion and public culture of a transnational community, particularly as they negotiate change and experience emotional, physical, or financial loss as a result of migration. Quoting Bruno Latour, Nigel Thrift writes, “Space is no longer seen as a nested hierarchy moving from ‘global’ to ‘local.’ This absurd scale-dependent notion is replaced by the notion that what counts is connectivity and that the social is ‘only a tiny set of narrow, standardized connections’ out of many others” (Latour as cited in Thrift 2004:59). Emotions, words and memories circulate and produce effects. People and objects move with them.

I track mobile subjects, objects and narratives in order to examine the forces that shape the social practices and subjectivities of a transnational community. The impermanence and fragmentation (“deterritorialization”) of the current historical moment invites speculation on the future of transnational migration. Ethnographic research provides me the opportunity to detect the sites, discourses, and social practices in which such reinscriptions of space (“reterritorializations”) unravel or fail to encapsulate experience (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994:34). The voices and practices of migrants expose not only the losses and pain but also the hope and the desire inherent in the process of transnational movement. By focusing on the lived experiences of transnationalism I hope to evoke a reaction that also moves beyond borders and barriers.

NOTES

Acknowledgements. I thank the TPP editorial board, particularly Jeannette Vaught for her insightful suggestions in the revision of this article, Mathangi Krishnamurthy for her consistently valuable feedback and Scott Webel for his commitment to TPP. I am grateful to my husband, Campbell LeFlore, for accompanying me to the field, becoming a part of the community of Empalme Escobedo, and providing “insider” knowledge on daily life in the Bajío.

1 Mexican migration to the United States has a long and complex history that I cannot and do not intend to discuss in detail in this article. Due to the extensive histories of Mexican migration to the United States, layers of resources and strategies for settlement have developed and continue to expand. Social circuits provide access to knowledge about successful migration, and communities in the United States that provide support, jobs, and housing to many migrants (Rouse 1989). As a function of these circuits, folks from Empalme Escobedo have established concentrated settlements in the United States. One of the largest of these settlements is in Grapevine, Texas (located between Dallas and Fort Worth). Migrants from Empalme Escobedo have also settled in Southeast Texas (Giddings, La Grange and Houston) and North Carolina. See Roger Rouse (1989,1991) for his explanation of “transnational migrant circuits.”

2 The focus of my dissertation research is devotion to and celebration (fiesta performance) of San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of farmers. My relationship with the community of Empalme Escobedo began in 1999 while I was conducting research for my MA thesis centered on the social organization and sponsorship of the fiesta to honor San Isidro Labrador and the male participants’ construction of gender in their performance as

women. Relationships with consultants were maintained and enhanced through telephone and mail correspondence, visits to Empalme Escobedo, and contact with migrants from Empalme Escobedo working in Texas. In our conversations about devotion to San Isidro Labrador, consultants increasingly explained and evaluated actions in terms of the impact of migration on their lives, families and communities. As a result, in 2004 I established ethnographic rapport with migrants from Empalme Escobedo living in Giddings, Texas. I began exploring the roles that religious narratives and practices play in migrants' daily lives in Texas and the changes experienced in the processes of migration. From May of 2005 until December of 2006 I conducted ethnographic field research for my dissertation project in Empalme Escobedo, Guanajuato. My primary goal in writing the dissertation is to accurately translate and centrally locate the voices of the consultants with whom I am collaborating in this research project.

3 In daily conversations and by inviting me to participate in home devotionals and pilgrimages, my consultants teach me that spirituality is not centered on devotion to one saint (i.e. San Isidro Labrador), nor attending Mass in Church. Rather, it encompasses praying to, asking favors of (*mandas*), and making promises (*promesas*) to several patron saints, sacred crosses and virgin mothers.

4 An in-depth theoretical analysis on modernity, its effects on Mexico (in general), and the Bajío (in particular) are beyond the scope of this article. On the subject of modernity, see among others: Appadurai 1996, Berman 1982, Latour 2004.

5 David Brading (1971:224) argues that by the eighteenth century the Bajío had come to "form a prosperous intermediary zone quite distinct" from others in the north or central valleys. He explains: "In the first place, its population was both heavily and mainly mestizo. Moreover its towns were industrial: Querétaro and San Miguel el Grande were New Spain's leading centers for the manufacture of woolen textiles; Celaya and Salamanca wove cotton; León made leather goods; and Guanajuato had become the chief silver producer in all Mexico. Then again, with such an extensive town market to supply, the region's agriculture greatly prospered. It was precisely this combination of urbanisation, textiles, mining, and agriculture which made the Bajío an area exceptional not merely in Mexico but in all of Spanish America" (Brading 1971:224). The state of Guanajuato has been a major producer of gold and silver for the world mining system (Ferry 2005). The railways of the nineteenth century increased the profits of the mining industry due to its transformation of transportation and export-oriented sectors of the economy. Furthermore, it benefited the production of non-precious metals such as copper, zinc and lead.

6 Not only did the United States invest in the construction of Mexican railways, but also the U.S. railroad industry recruited Mexican migrant workers for track construction and maintenance. According to Barbara Driscoll (1998:17), the systematic recruitment of Mexican immigrants for U.S. railroads began in the 1880s. Driscoll argues that a second phase of the migration of Mexican railroad workers began in the 1900s: employment in the U.S. Southwest. She writes, "Even if larger absolute numbers of Mexicans were hired by southwestern agriculture, the largest proportion of Mexican immigrants in 1900 were found among southwestern track crews. More specifically, in 1900 Mexicans constituted 15.1, 35.5, and 14.6 percent of the section crews in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. Twenty years later, the percentages had increased to 32, 81, and 48" (Driscoll 1998: 20).

7 Some scholars argue that the great transformations of the economy during the *Porfiriato* "created the basis for the evolution of Mexico into a modern, independent state on the model of Western Europe or the United States" (Bethell 1991: 81). However, other scholars maintain that Mexico emerged from the *Porfiriato* as a country that depended heavily on foreign interests. The demise of the *Porfiriato*, the outbreak of the 1910 Revolution, the global economic depression, the *bracero* programs, Mexico's long-term shortage of

capital, political dominance of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), powerful railway strikes, development of Northern *maquiladoras*, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), immigration, drug wars, a change in political parties with the election of Vicente Fox of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), the "age of terror" and U.S. immigration policy "reform," and the contested election/ "parallel presidency" of Felipe Calderón and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (to name only a few factors) have dramatically affected the economy and modernization of Mexico.

8 The image of Maria Auxiliadora remained in our home until 5:30 pm on Tuesday when the *cargueras* and a procession of devotees returned. My husband and I were charged with carrying her image to the next home, where we stayed for the hour of devotion following the same pattern of prayer, song, a rosary and refreshments as the previous night.

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