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Preface

This book, the culmination of a long-term research project, examines how global changes are played out on both sides of the US-Mexico border. The center of attention is people connected to Ahuehuepan,¹ a town representative of a dozen indigenous communities in the state of Guerrero. The stories of its migrants, in many respects like those of other migrants, more closely reflect those of the 20 percent of Mexico's population known as Indígenas, including those in the Alto Balsas region.² I tried to strike the right balance in my study between broad coverage and in-depth treatment, using a combination of techniques.

The intended audience is scholars specializing in the international migration of indigenous people from Mexico and Central America. At the same time, my book is geared to researchers with a broader interest in theory and ethnographic methods. It should also be of relevance to graduate and upper-level undergraduate university students. In many respects its genre resembles that of a traditional monograph while incorporating such features of ethnographic fieldwork as multi-sited fieldwork. In other ways, this book deviates from other monographs.

Ethnographic research rarely goes as planned. In 2004 I started my fieldwork in the Alto Balsas on the topic of how people make a living, with side trips to the state capital. It soon dawned on me that many of the locked-up houses I saw do not belong to vendors who travel to other parts of Mexico but rather to people living

¹ This town has the same name as another one belonging to the *municipio* of Iguala.

² Research on the Alto Balsas includes García Ortega and Celestino (2015) and Kammler (2010).

in the US. Entire families do not come back for many years. I was confronted with this fact when I saw two boys eating cornflakes and speaking English. Their parents had just returned to Mexico so that their children could meet their grandparents. In February 2007, I combined a visit to Mexico with a side trip to Morelia, Michoacán, to interview Francisco Iglesias, a retired lawyer from San Juan Tetelcingo who spent much of his life in Mexico City, where he occupied important political posts. Later that spring, I made my first trip to Houston, Texas, to meet people from Mexico. During a leave in the fall of 2008, my time was divided between archival work, interviews with government officials, and more fieldwork. I met with other researchers. In March 2010, I spent time in both Houston and Guerrero. Only then, with a good sense of the broader context, including the failed attempt to build a hydroelectric dam in Tetelcingo, did I decide to concentrate on the impact of globalization on people associated with Ahuehuepan.³

In this book, I acknowledge the voices of my research participants in two ways: through in-text quotations, with corresponding footnotes, and with excerpts of what people said, following subheadings for a person's name or a description of who they are. Both strategies give credit for their insights and to acknowledge that they are the source of information. The text is as close as possible to what people told me in their own words. Unfortunately, it is not possible to mention all the people with whom I interacted; nonetheless, what they told me, including questions to my answers, is the source of much of what I present.

THE AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND AND POSITIONALITY

My background and prior experience in Mexico shaped the way I conducted my research. I would not have been able to get information unless I could win people's trust, especially in the case of undocumented migrants. They would not have invited me to stay in their homes if I did not know their parents or other relatives in Mexico, with whom I got along well because I had lived in Mexico before. In speaking to professionals, I mentioned that I am related to the late professor of Roman law at the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico), Guillermo Floris Margadant, who once gave classes to most of them. A well-known professor originally from the Netherlands, with whom I spoke in one of my earlier trips to Mexico, he happens to be my mother's cousin.

I got to know Mexico in the seventies as one of a group of students who boarded a bus in Toronto, Canada. It took us three days to reach Mexico City before heading

3 In an earlier research project using a case study in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico, I reinterpreted the Mexican Revolution (see Schryer 1980).

off to a remote part of the Huasteca, where we boarded with families. That is when I perfected my Spanish. The parents of the Mexican students who were our counterparts, some quite well-off, thought that it was not safe for us to go to remote rural areas, "to live with those people." Canadian and American students from our group based in Mexico City were lucky that they were not killed during the 1968 massacre of protesting students in Tlatelolco. Those experiences were a revelation. We started off as naive, misguided do-gooders who thought our presence would improve people's lives. We soon realized that would never be the case. The students who were radicalized became politically involved at home, while others later ended up working for NGOs or government agencies specializing in international development. I decided to go back to Mexico for several reasons.

The low cost of living in Mexico enabled me to do fieldwork as part of the graduate program at McGill University, Montreal. For my MA, I did a study of local-level politics in Pisaflores, Hidalgo, in 1972. A priest with whom I had many conversations told me he did not consider me to be an anthropologist, because I did not study "Indians." He suggested that I do research for my doctorate in nearby Huejutla, at that time rife with land invasions. My fieldwork in that predominantly indigenous region shaped my grasp of imperialism, political oppression, and the relationship between class and ethnicity. It is where I learned the Nahuatl that I needed to communicate. Little did I expect that that I would end up going back to Mexico, this time to Guerrero to examine a movement to cancel plans for the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the Alto Balsas, a region where people also speak Nahuatl. I soon learned that its inhabitants did not have a regional identity as I was led to believe. When I became aware that most people had migrated to the US, I changed the focus of my research to the impact of globalization on one of the towns, including its migrants. From the beginning, I took part in village activities, but it was not a good idea to ask about politics and other sensitive topics until people got to know me better.

In my research, I was interested in doing an in-depth examination of people from rural Mexico, in part because I am myself an immigrant, born and brought up in the Netherlands. My parents ended up living in a small town in rural Ontario, Canada, where I finished my elementary schooling. I was thus already acquainted with, and had experienced, the cultural assimilation and changing identities that are part of international migration. However, I had to take my positionality as an outsider into account, plus to think about the implications of my research in Mexico. In this book, the theories and methods used in my earlier studies were expanded, culminating in an approach that treats the perspective of an outside researcher and that of insiders as complementary (see the introduction).

ETHICS AND REPRESENTATION

My research presented ethical dilemmas. Research funders require investigators to give proposals to show how their work meets the guidelines for research on human subjects. Modeled on medical studies and psychological experiments, the protocol of asking people to sign consent forms is not well suited for open-ended questions, collaborative research, or archival work. An ethnographer is in a quandary; if we had to ask people to sign a consent form before talking to them, participant observation would be impossible (Hellman 2008, 233). Nevertheless, when doing interviews with schoolteachers and other professionals, I did obtain written consent. Most of the other people with whom I interacted received a document outlining the nature of my research and how they could contact me. I signed that and left a copy. I explained in Nahuatl to people who do not know Spanish who I am and what I do.

Another ethical issue was anonymity. Anthropologists typically use fictitious names for individual people, but they rarely disguise places. In contrast, historians handle names mentioned in the archives, as well as those of people still alive. I use a mixed strategy that strikes a balance between the anonymity expected in the academy and meeting the wishes of people who would like researchers to tell their stories. I present real names for all places and anyone who is no longer alive in 2022,⁴ as well as for people who are in the public domain. I assume that the people I got to know would want to be acknowledged as the source of facts and insights. In that regard, I follow the example of the French researcher Aline Hémond (2003), who reveals the identity of artists of a town where she did her fieldwork. The American economist Tyler Cowan (2005) likewise uses the names of the people he interviewed in his book on Nahua artists. To keep what I write as genuine as possible, real names appear when presenting well-known facts about where people went and what occupation they had; yet I disguise the names of undocumented migrants, plus names supplied by other people, by assigning pseudonyms drawn from local surnames that disappeared decades ago. The names of those individuals are shown in italics.

INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

To do research in Mexico, one must have an affiliation with an institution of higher learning. Prior to my first trip, I went to the Colegio de México for a letter of introduction. For a longer stay in 2008, I used a document from the Institute of Social Research (IIS) of Mexico's National University (UNAM). During the last stage

4 I name most individuals by their paternal surname, unless more than one person has the same two surnames (paternal and maternal), in which case I add their maternal surname.

of my research in 2016, I set up a connection to BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla). Their introductory letter made it possible to find documents in Iguala, but it did not help me in Xalitla, where I wanted to consult records about elementary school students in an office that had not been open for three months. It turns out that there were two district supervisors—one belonging to the ruling party, and another to a dissenting faction with its own union—but the one in charge gave me access.

SPELLING CONVENTIONS

In most of the literature, the word *Indian* is capitalized while *mestizo* is not. In this book, I capitalize both *Indian* and *Mestizo* as well as the Spanish words *Indígena(s)* whether referring to individual people or specific groups. I do not capitalize *mestizo*, *indigenous* and *indigeneity* (or its Spanish equivalent, *indigenismo*), or the term *indigenista*, when those words refer to communities or towns, government programs, or languages in general.

When it comes to the spelling of surnames that are shared by individuals who are not related, I use numbers (e.g., Villalba1 vs. Villalba2) to distinguish different unrelated families.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book, with five parts, consists of twenty chapters, not counting this preface, the introduction, a conclusion, and an appendix. The introduction outlines the theory and methods used in my case study as well as the logistics and trajectory of my research. I define four key terms used throughout the book (duplexity, field, layers, and clusters). One can visualize the organizational structure of the rest of the book in terms of a lens that zooms in and out to reveal how social forces at different times and at various levels shaped people's lives, going back and forth between Ahuehuepan and other locations.

Part 1 has two chapters. Chapter 1 gives a more detailed introduction to the town through impressions and memories, while chapter 2 is an overview of the Alto Balsas and its towns. Part 2 ("The Broader Context") includes a review of the relevant literature: chapter 3 presents an overview of indigeneity, racism, class, and *mestizaje*, and chapter 4 summarizes the research on Mexican migration. Part 3, with three chapters, covers the region's history going back to the arrival of people prior to the Spanish conquest. Part 4, which switches gears, consists of seven chapters that delve into diverse aspects of life, from daily routines to cosmology. Starting in part 5, with six chapters, I go beyond the local level to encompass the region, then

the rest of the North American continent, including children of migrants on both sides of the border plus patterns of geographic and social mobility: first through multigenerational case studies (chapter 18), then the presentation of the findings of my census (chapter 19). The last chapter before the conclusion covers transnationalism. An appendix offers detailed information on the technical aspects of my census.