

The identity of emigrants from Mexico City*

Ricardo Sabates y Fabio Pettirino

University of London

Abstract

This paper investigates the identity of emigrants from Mexico City and its consequences for adaptation in the City of León. Specifically it describes how identities are formed, investigates the origins, uses, and possible connotations of identity names of migrants from Mexico City and locals from León. Our findings suggest that although there are common identity elements between internal migrants and locals, the interaction between them brought up differential aspects of their identity in terms of religious beliefs and work ethics. The identity name *chilango*, given to a person from Mexico City, carries a negative connotation and it can create a stereotype and a risk of prejudice. Since a person called this name might face difficulties integrating with the host society, migrants change the stereotyped behaviours attached to such a name. Therefore, the ability of migrants interviewed in this study to integrate has not been prohibited by an identity-based conflict with locals, but integration has required facing negative stereotypes and prejudice attached to a person from Mexico City.

Key words: internal migration, identity, Mexico City, Mexico.

Resumen

La identidad de los emigrantes de la Ciudad de México

El presente trabajo investiga la identidad de los emigrantes procedentes de la ciudad de México y sus consecuencias para la adaptación en la ciudad de León. En específico, describe cómo se forman las identidades, investiga los orígenes, usos y posibles connotaciones de nombre de identidad de emigrantes de la Ciudad de México y habitantes de León. Nuestros hallazgos sugieren que a pesar de existir elementos comunes de identidad entre los emigrantes internos y habitantes locales, la interacción entre ellos causa aspectos diferenciales de su identidad en términos de creencias religiosas y ética laboral. El nombre de identidad *chilango*, dado a personas procedentes de la ciudad de México, acarrea una connotación negativa y puede crear un estereotipo con el riesgo de prejuicio. Los migrantes cambian los comportamientos estereotipados asociados a tal apelativo. Por consiguiente, la habilidad de los inmigrantes para integrarse no ha sido impedida por un conflicto de identidad con los locales, pero la integración requiere enfrentar prejuicios asociados a personas originarias de la Ciudad de México.

Palabras clave: migración interna, identidad, ciudad de México, México.

Introduction

There is a rich literature on population mobility in Mexico. However, the focus to date has been almost exclusively on Mexico City: its formation, its concentration of population, and its centralization of economic and political activities, which contributed to the city's primacy over other urban areas of the country between 1960 and 1980 (Ward, 1990; Partida,

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1994; Corona and Gutierrez, 1999). In recent years, however, new economic and political forces have led to a change in both the origin and destination of internal migration. The North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the development of tourist and leisure centres, have contributed to the growth of the export oriented industry and tourism, and generated employment opportunities for individuals outside Mexico City. Decentralization reforms, which give local governments more decision-making power over the management of public resources, have contributed to the importance of intermediate cities for the development of regional infrastructure (Brambila, 1998).

As a consequence, rural-to-urban migration and in-migration to Mexico City, are not the main migratory movements in the country. Several studies (Partida, 1992; Aguilar and Rodriguez, 1995) use national level datasets to show there has been a de-concentration of population in Mexico City. There are some dissenting voices: for example, Chavez (1999) has emphasised the persistence of population concentrations within Mexico City and its surrounding area. The most striking population dynamic, however, is taking place in cities larger than 100 thousand (but smaller than one million) inhabitants, where there has been a large influx of emigrants from other cities, mainly from Mexico City (Aguilar and Rodriguez, 1995). Studies, by Graizbord (1998) and Velázquez and Arroyo (1992), demonstrate the importance of these intermediate (or 'medium sized') cities, in urbanisation processes in Mexico. On average, the populations of intermediate cities in Mexico have been growing faster than the four main metropolitan areas of the country, i.e. Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla.

Although out-migration from Mexico City is one of the main population dynamics, with nearly 32 percent of all internal migrants between 1985 and 1990 moving away from Mexico City, little is known about the migration experience of these individuals. The studies on internal migration in Mexico which use national level datasets do not contain enough details to assess in any robust way the outcomes of migration or understand the complexity of the process (Bilsborrow *et al.*, 1984). As a result, the phenomenon of out-migration from Mexico City from the perspective of migrant families remains largely unexplored.

By focusing on migrants and their experiences, this paper begins to fill this gap in Mexico's migration literature. Specifically, it describes the formation of the identity of a migrant from Mexico City and how they project or manifest this identity to locals from León, Guanajuato. It also focuses on the role of identity

during the processes of adaptation of migrants to the local society. This paper is of value in laying out empirical evidence on a seldom analysed phenomenon and contributing to the understanding of migrant populations in Mexico.

Conceptual framework

Identity is conceptualised as a social categorisation that individuals form using models of self-representation (Barth, 1969). In other words, models of self-representation means how people think about their/others' identity and social categorisations is the result of how individuals manifest these identities externally to others. Brubaker (2004) mentions that ethnic identity is not something that exists in the world but ways that individuals see, interpret and represent their social context. The paper does not discuss ethnic identity because individuals from León and Mexico City have a common language, educational system and religion, which fosters a shared sense of national identity (Bonfil, 1987).

Barth argues that—in opposition to the view taken in early anthropological studies—identity is not a fixed set of cultural elements. He says that identity is related to contextual and relational factors and depends on the cognitive ability of the individual. In other words, identity differences among groups are not 'objective', but they are based on elements which are perceived and selected as meaningful by individuals. Barth points out that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, this is not a simple one-to-one relationship. The features considered are those which individuals themselves regard as significant.

A strict application of Barth's thought to the formation of identity for our purposes would imply that migrants act according to a knowledgeable interpretation of their social relations. A weakness of Barth's theory, however, is that it assumes that individuals know the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which social relations take place (Scarduelli, 2000). Such contexts, however, will have a significant influence over how individuals shape their (and others') identity. This means that factors like the economy, social relations, politics and religion feed into individuals' identity discourses. Therefore, the formation and the perception of identity, *the self* is influenced by historical processes and is constructed relationally with respect to *the other* (Hall, 1992).

This paper describes social categorisations, such as the identity names of *chilangos* and *panzas verdes*, as social interpretations given by migrants and

locals to themselves and to the others. Such interpretations can lead to, reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes. This paper uses these stereotyped labels as a starting point, and lens through which to explore the ways in which migrant identities are formed in relation to those of local people.

Furthermore, the paper views identity as having variable components chosen by individuals. Identity is therefore moveable; it is formed and transformed continuously as individuals relate with, respond to, and are represented in, their surrounding socio-economic, cultural, political and historical context (Hall, 1992). This lack of rigidity allows individuals to negotiate identity. The process of negotiating identity allows individuals to adapt to local conditions. In other words, individuals are willing to give up the negative aspects of their identity by modifying behavioural patterns in order to adapt to the new local conditions and maintain a more valuable asset with their transformed identity.

Berry (1992) traces four different ways in which migrant identity can define and reflect the status of their relations with the local community. First, submersion of migrant group identity with the dominant society is called 'assimilation'. Second, maintenance of migrants' identity, with minimal interaction with the local society, is 'separation' or 'segregation'. Third, the loss of identity by the immigrant group, combined with a lack of participation in society at large, can be termed as 'marginalisation'. Finally, he defines integration as participation in wider society, whilst maintaining a sense of migrant self-identity. The maintenance of self-identity is not a necessary condition for integration since identity is a movable concept. It is possible, then, to have integration with new patterns of identity, which is the conceptualisation followed in the paper.

Study methodology

The study presented in this paper takes place in one destination location for emigrants from Mexico City. Emigrants from Mexico City are very widely dispersed. However, the resources needed to gather detailed data across several different locations—and unravel the complex and diverse socio-economic and cultural processes through which migrants and locals interact—was beyond the scope of this study. Hence, it was necessary to concentrate the research in one particular city.¹

¹ Kasarda and Crenshaw (1991) recommend that research about urbanisation in less developed nations should use individual cities as units of analysis in order to get better assessments of social mobility.

There are three key reasons why the City of León was the preferred location to undertake fieldwork. First, and most importantly, as a medium-sized city León has been one of the main destination places for emigrants from Mexico City. Nearly 28 percent of all families that changed their place of residence to León between 1995 and 2000 came from Mexico City and only 8.8 percent came either from Guadalajara, Monterrey or Puebla. The number of emigrants from Mexico City in León represents 2.2 percent of total emigration from Mexico City between 1995 and 2000.² Second, León is located 420 kilometres away from the commuting range of the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City so people moving to León clearly do not commute daily to Mexico City.³ The third reason is a pragmatic one: support for our research on León was provided as part of a broader study on decentralisation in Mexico.⁴

The sample methodology for data collection was as follows. First census data was used to obtain the socio-economic characteristics of individuals living in León whose place of residence in 1995 was Mexico City. This provided a benchmark for the sampling of migrants. Then, the City of León was geographically divided by income and government officials pointed out neighbourhoods known to have a high concentration of immigrants, mainly in the periphery. Seven research assistants were scattered between low, medium and high income neighbourhoods and migrants were randomly selected using a pragmatic approach, i.e. door to door until a migrant family from Mexico City was found and willing to collaborate in the study.⁵ Once a migrant was identified, he/she was a pivot of information on other migrants in the city, his/her family, friends or neighbours.

A total of 235 migrant household questionnaires were collected and 10 percent of these respondents were interviewed in-depth (25 interviews). The total sample is over-representative of migrants with university degree and under-representative of individuals with elementary education or lower.⁶ The

² The Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, INEGI, estimates that 376 949 individuals moved out of Mexico City between 1995 and 2000.

³ For this reason Cuernavaca, Toluca, Puebla or even in Queretaro and Pachuca were disqualified.

⁴ We acknowledge that León is not the only location where it was possible to undertake this analysis. Other cities, such as Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi and Irapuato, also satisfy our decision criteria. A decisive factor was the support received by Economic Development of León, Population Council of the State of Guanajuato and Science and Technology Council of the State of Guanajuato to undertake this research.

⁵ The participation rate was high with only two of the identified households unwilling to participate.

⁶ Census information indicates that 39 percent of people in León whose place of residence in 1995 was Mexico City have university degrees, 35 per cent high school diplomas or equivalent degrees and 25 percent elementary education or lower qualifications. The distribution of educational qualifications for our sample is 42 percent with university degrees, 42 per cent high school and 16 percent elementary school qualifications.

sub-sample for in-depth interviews was purposely balanced to have equal numbers of migrants with university degree (nine interviews), high school degree (eight interviews) and elementary education or lower (eight interviews).

One of the problems with this sampling technique is that within migrants' networks there will be homogeneity in the responses. This implies that the data risked underestimating the variability of possible responses. To overcome this difficulty we randomly interviewed a further 15 migrants in the central square of León during a national holiday. To select these migrants, individuals were approached at random, explained the aims of the study, and requested their voluntary participation. Locals were selected using the same sampling selection procedures to the ones described for migrants. Firstly, 20 interviews with locals selected from low, medium and high income areas and 30 interviews in the central square.⁷

In-depth interviews for migrants lasted one hour and for locals, 20 to 30 minutes. Based on theories of migration (Massey, 1999), the topic guide for interviews sought information regarding the identity of the migrant (local), opinions about and interactions with locals (migrants), reasons to move to León, experiences upon arrival, existence of friends and family in sending and receiving cities, and working histories. The last four of these points were only applied in interviews with migrants, hence the need for a longer interview.

On the question of identity, individuals were asked the following questions. Which factors generate a sense of identity for a person from Mexico City (León)? What is your opinion on locals (migrants from Mexico City)? If the name *chilango* or *panzas verdes* was mentioned, the interviewer let the person describe what their understanding of these labels were. If not, the interviewer directly asked the question using these terms. Adaptation and integration issues were identified using migration histories. Individuals were asked to recall their migration process from the decision-making to present day. They were asked about barriers to adaptation and if being from Mexico City had affected, in any way, their adaptation and integration on societal participation in León.⁸

Migrants and locals with whom an interview was scheduled were more open to talking about controversial issues, such as stereotypes and prejudice. Interviews that took place in the central square were shorter and were used to confirm

⁷ The process of data collection was undertaken by the principal investigator and six assistants. In-depth interviews were mainly carried out by the principal investigator with the help of one assistant.

⁸ Unfortunately, we do not offer a broader view on locals' perceptions of other migrants such as *regios* (Monterrey) or *tapatios* (Guadalajara). Such an analysis would help to describe distinctions between migrants.

previous information. During these latter interviews individuals were more concise in describing their experiences.

Building on the interviews, two discussion groups were organised. The first group contained six middle-aged, professionals, members of migrant households, who had had different migration experiences. Two of the families knew each other before migrating. The other four met in León. This group had had relatively low levels of interaction with locals and the purpose of the interview was to understand why this was so, and to what effect. The other group discussion was formed of two migrant and three local households, also middle aged, known to have a friendship relation subsequent to the migrants' arrival in León. For this group, the priority was to understand how the migrants integrated with locals. Two drawbacks emerge from the choice of these groups: (i) homogeneity in age and relatively high educational background and (ii) knowledge of social ties. Hence, results should be interpreted with care.

Two further qualitative methods used in this study were participant observation and written sources. Participant observation took place during informal meetings with migrants and locals and during two months spent by one of the authors living with a migrant family in León. Written source analysis is drawn mainly from news articles published during 2001 in León's main newspaper, called the A.M. Written sources are used as supporting material to the issues studied in this paper.

Migrant and local identities

The concept of migrant identity has been studied in detail where migrants and locals have a different ethnic background.⁹ This is not the case here. Emigrants from Mexico City and locals from León share the feeling of belonging to the same national project, which is expressed in a deep-rooted nationalism. In other words, they belong to the same imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Therefore, the differences in their identities that do exist are based on a sense of belonging to a group, placed in the particular context (social, economic, political, cultural and historical) where interactions with other groups occur. In turn, the likelihood of conflicts emerging between locals and migrants, whether over abstract issues of 'belonging' or practical ones of 'resource distribution' (jobs, welfare, services), will vary according to the precise context in which these groups meet.

⁹ An exemption is the study by Fox (2003) where he analysed the identity of Transylvanian Hungarian labour migrants in Hungary using models of self-understanding.

People from León identify themselves and their society as conservative and traditional in a religious sense, as they are more attached to Catholicism and its traditions. The group from León define this identity and reinforce it by positioning the migrant group —the *other*— as liberal. Similarly, migrants coming from Mexico City identify themselves as a more open-minded group, more mobile, and less bound to societal norms. Migrants call people from León ‘*mochos*’, which is a term used to describe a conservative person, strongly attached to her religious beliefs: “here people are very attached to the Catholic church and its norms, making the sign of the cross constantly. They get scared of things that are normal for the rest of us and, of course, daily mass is part of their routine”.¹⁰ This description makes reference to Barth’s theory in that it shows how migrants and locals delimit identity borders, in this case using religious concepts. This generates social categories, meaning groups with more or less of a religious background.

The liberal-conservative religious confrontation has a robust cohort effect. This confrontation was felt more strongly during the first waves of migration to León, which occurred in the mid-eighties after the earthquake of September 19, 1985 that devastated Mexico City. Older generations in León were less tolerant of changes in social norms and gender roles. Therefore a stronger ideological confrontation occurred between them and the migrant group. New generations in León follow a more liberal and cosmopolitan lifestyle as defined by the increasing numbers of women entering the labour market, the reduced emphasis on traditional social rules (e.g. “I do not care what others think of me!”), and greater willingness to integrate with newcomers.

The dominant discursive construction of the city of León focuses on notions of it as an industrial city. Within this discourse, those born in León identify themselves as a working population. For example, one man from León asserted (and this comment was a general trend in most interviews) ‘in León you will find hard working people’.¹¹ This discourse is fostered by the government of León which has its logo: ‘Hard Work Overcomes Anything.’¹² Strong work ethics are core to locals’ identity perceptions. This, in turn, is used as an instrument of social categorisation, with *the self* defined as hard working and *the other* defined as lazy. One way in which people from León let migrants cross boundaries and

¹⁰ Interview: 31 May 2001, migrant women, age 38, name omitted.

¹¹ Interview by Verónica Hidalgo: 28 November 2001, various interviews with locals.

¹² In contrast with this logo, the government of Mexico City uses ‘The City of Hope’ as an expression of optimism about the current social and environmental situation of the city.

share identity is by expecting a similar work ethic from them. As stated by one Leonese woman: “if migrants are willing to come and work hard, then they are welcome; but we do not like lazy people coming to León”.¹³

The vast majority of migrants who participated in this study also conceptualised themselves within this industrial discourse. They emphasised that they were highly skilled workers with knowledge of the latest technological advances. They feel that this human capital has been gained while working in Mexico City where “the core of the business activity in Mexico happens”.¹⁴ During an interview, Mr. Cantero, a low skilled worker, told me “...in Mexico City, what can’t you learn!”¹⁵

León’s society is currently undergoing a very rapid transformation, with traditional provincial values giving way towards an increasingly cosmopolitan urban lifestyle (Monsiváis, 2000). In less than ten years, the city of León has developed three major shopping centers, an international airport, a sophisticated communication infrastructure, attracted new manufacturing industries and built one of the largest expo-arenas in Latin America. These changes illustrate the rapid economic transformation which León is undergoing.

Even though the City of León is experiencing this rapid transformation towards modernity, the discourse about Mexico City and León by migrants and non-migrants highlights some interesting views with respect to cultural and environmental issues. Migrants extol the cultural role of Mexico City as a leader and denigrate the one played by León. Several migrants expressed missing theatre plays, the diversity of newspapers, free recreational parks and more developed educational institutes for their children. This view was also held by some people born in León, such as Mr. Torres, who stated that “the city of León needs cultural growth; in León you will still find people with high income and low levels of culture”.¹⁶

For the vast majority of the migrants —especially those who migrated in recent years— environmental problems in León are almost non-existent when compared to those of Mexico City. Migrants find Leonese complaints about the traffic in the city, time spent in the car and other problems attached to urban growth, laughable. For example Mr. Garcia, a middle aged professional, and migrant, says: “it is unbelievable to hear my work colleagues complain when it takes them 20 minutes to drop their children at school and then get into work.

¹³ Interview: 20 november 2001, various interviews with locals at the central square.

¹⁴ Group Discussion: 14 november 2001, six migrant households.

¹⁵ Interview: 1 march 2001, Mr. Cantero Vega, age 50.

¹⁶ Interview: 26 october 2001, Mr. Torres, from León.

In Mexico City the same routine took me over one hour without traffic”.¹⁷ On the other hand, given that León is located in a dry weather zone, the Leonese are aware of issues of water shortages and pointed out that newcomers should also be concerned about this problem. Those born in León also worry that their city will become “another Mexico City” in terms of crime. In this regard, some Leonese blame *chilangos* (an identity name that will be discussed next) for the increase in crime in León.¹⁸ This point will be analysed later in the paper.

Identity names: Panzas Verdes and Chilangos

Names, or group names, are by themselves powerful symbols which express how individuals perceive their identity in relation to other individuals with whom they interact (ASSRC, 1973). These symbols can foster both a sense of sameness within the in-group as well as the otherness of the alternative group.¹⁹

People from León, regardless of gender or social class, are known as ‘*panzas verdes*’, which means ‘green tummies’. They are proud to be called this name. Locals describe two possible origins of this name. The first relates to farming, where farmers from the region used to plant lettuces and during harvest time they put the lettuces into a cloth sack around their stomachs. When they delivered the harvest, they opened the sacks and the green leaves fell out into a container. It was during this process of delivering the harvested leaves, that they were called ‘green tummies’. The other story is related to the shoe industry, the main production industry in the city, which plays an important symbolic role in the city’s identity. It is said that during the tanning process some chemicals used made the tanner’s clothes turn green around the abdomen area. These perceptions describe how individuals build the image of their identity from meaningful retained elements. In this case, the elements are related to the industrial context and work ethics. The ‘green tummy’ is, therefore, perceived as the signal of belonging to a hard working population.

Whatever the origins of the group name, its importance is reflected in the provision and maintenance of an identity to families living in León. The identity name ‘green tummies’ plays an important role in the cultural, sporting and commercial activity in León. For example, the local football team is called

¹⁷ Interview by Veronica Hidalgo: 29 november 2001.

¹⁸ Interviews by Verónica Hidalgo: 15 locals interviewed during november 2001. Also, information using the experience of locals interviewed on the 20 november 2001.

¹⁹ Other symbols can be folk music, traditional food, dances, and clothes.

'*Panzas Verdes de León*'; some small commercial and service stores are called 'green tummies', for example 'Stationery Green Tummies.' This suggests that the name carries with it a strong sense of pride.

Whilst *panzas verdes* has largely positive associations, names with negative implications can be used as a tool to impose a sense of inferiority on groups or may be used strategically to define a dominant-subordinate relationship. This links to our conceptual framework, which defines identity as a relational concept, with the sense of *the self* formed in opposition to *the other*. The majority of Leonese people assign the name '*chilango*' to any person from Mexico City.²⁰ The word *chilango* does not, of itself, have a negative connotation: the Real Spanish Academy simply defines it as a person born in Mexico City (Camargo Jr, 1999).²¹ But, in practice, the name *chilango* tends to be used with a sense of complete disdain. As mentioned by Vila (2000) the use of the identity name *chilango* is not to use an adjective corresponding to a region (a person from Mexico City) but instead to refer to the characteristics of the inhabitants of Mexico City. Therefore, calling a person *chilango* is to place her immediately beyond the boundaries of the image of Leonese identity.²²

Güemes and Jiménez (1999) argue that the way the name *chilango* is employed is extremely pejorative. The roots of such negative connotations are unclear; however two possibilities have been put forward. One story suggests that *chilango* was a name gained by temporary migrants who moved to Mexico City during the time of the expansion of the city (between 1960 and 1980). Over years of residence in Mexico City, these temporary migrants acquired different lifestyles from the people of their original, home communities. Those living in Mexico City may have shown pride and arrogance while visiting their original communities, and hence the *chilango* name gained a derogatory connotation. The other story says that it was rejected in-migrants who first used the term to describe the original Mexican dweller. Sociologist Victoria Aysa explained in an interview that "the group living in Mexico City aggressively responded to the

²⁰ The origins of the word *chilango* are mired in controversy. One credible version is that the name was given indirectly by people from the State of Veracruz, who used to call people from Mexico City Huachinangos (a red-colored fish) because their skins used to turn red after sunbathing in the beaches of Veracruz. Another version is that it comes from the word *chile* (chili) and the habit of eating chili in Mexico City.

²¹ Camargo Jr. (1999) mentions that some individuals mistakenly define *chilango* as a person that lives in, as opposed to being born in, Mexico City.

²² There is a very popular saying in the provinces and municipalities of Mexico, especially those in the north, that says: '*has patria, mata a un chilango*', which means 'do something for your native land, kill a *chilango*.'

massive in-migration to the city. Individuals from Mexico City created a reputation of being aggressive and not willing to participate as an integrated society”.²³

For our purposes the origin is less important than the meaning attached to the name when it is used as an instrument to attribute identity. The contemporary use of the name *chilango* relates to an attitudinal attribute of an individual, rather than to his place of origin (Vila, 2000). This is one example where identity is dynamic, where names vary in different situations and may be used to describe different individuals. For example, Mexicans who have never lived in Mexico City may call each other *chilango* if they perceive that the other person is showing some of the negative attitudinal characteristics that define a *chilango*. Or, as in one group discussion Bertha, born in León, told Lourdes, a migrant from Mexico City, “you do not look like a *chilango*, you do not behave like a *chilango*”.²⁴

Interviews with locals investigated the source of the negative connotations attached to the term *chilango*. The main attitudinal characteristic represented by the term *chilango*, regardless of gender, is an aggressive and arrogant personality. This attitude may be the result of the person living in the city where the country’s political and economic power is concentrated. A person living in Mexico City may view himself as ‘developed’, whereas the rest of the country is regarded as ‘underdeveloped’. Perceived conceited and egocentric manners of the *chilango* whilst travelling in or visiting the provinces can produce bitterness from the rest of the Mexican population. This projection of arrogance may be the result of people in the capital city experiencing a more stressful, individualistic lifestyle, with a reduced sense of ‘community spirit’ or social ties to other city dwellers. As stated by Bauman (1997), increasing individualism in the post-modern society takes the individual to interpret her social relations as aesthetic, rather than with social and ethical responsibility.

Written sources are also analysed to investigate how the term *chilango* is used. The following excerpt comes from León’s local newspaper, *A.M.* The reporter is writing about the Athletic Wheelchair Championship in León where he had an experience with a security guard, who he describes as the classic *chilango*:

²³ Interview: 11 december 2001, Sociologist Victoria Aysa de Cámara, UNAM.

²⁴ Group Discussion: 6 november 2001, 2 migrants and 3 locals.

A world class place for events: León is hosting the World Athletic Wheelchairs Championship... Even the classic “*chilango*”, the one that knows everything, ignores nothing, and lets everything bother him. The one that is unaware that the Organizing Committee offers reporters’ identification cards so that we may be able to do our job. But for this person such identification cards are useless and when you show it to him, he says “whatever you do you are not coming in because I say so”. He points at you few times, he does not cooperate or help and with all the arrogance, which he is only capable of having, says again “nobody enters here, you can do whatever you want”. Apart from the encounter with such a Super Napoleon, the rest of the event was superb...(A.M. 9-17-01).

Analyzing the language used here, we can see how the identities ascribed from one group to the other can produce stereotypes and prejudice.

Vila’s (2000) study points out that a *chilango* is usually depicted as someone to be avoided someone who is constantly trying to take advantage of others. Our fieldwork research reveals how our interviewees interpreted their relations with *chilangos*. From fifty interviews with locals, when asked their opinion about migrants coming from Mexico City (without mentioning the word *chilango* to avoid biasing their opinions), 12 percent reported good experiences and not having any prejudice against them; 20 percent were completely against *chilangos* saying that, in general, “*chilangos* feel that they are superior and are arrogant”; 38 percent were indifferent and their response was that “in Mexico City like in León there are good and bad people”; and finally 30 percent did not have a strong opinion, mainly because they said “we do not have any contact with *chilangos* in our everyday life”.

Locals that are manifestly more tolerant to migrants couch their support in the industrial discourse and work ethics mentioned above. As stated in various interviews, people from León stated that as long as migrants are willing to work then they will be always welcome in the city. Public Accountant Delgado, a local adult woman working for a headhunter agency, states that “our open and receptive view of immigrants from Mexico City is also defined by a common identity based on an agrarian origin and the urban-industrial development; also both places share a cosmopolitan lifestyle”.²⁵ Those locals who appear less tolerant perceive that “*chilangos* are stealing the jobs from local people” or “*chilangos* are criminals or involved in criminal activities”.

²⁵ Interview: 2 october 2001, Ms. Delgado, Leonese, General Manager of a headhunter agency.

The derogatory nature of the term *chilango* has made migrants from Mexico City unwilling to be identified as such. In a group discussion, Oscar, a permanent migrant, mentioned that “not only do people from León look down on *chilangos* but we also differentiate ourselves from a *chilango*. Person X from Mexico City never cooperates with anything occurring in our neighbourhood. He is what I will call a true *chilango*”. Oscar’s point provides evidence of how people change their identity according to circumstances. Furthermore, not only he, but many other migrants from the city shared this view. Oscar added in the same interview “we want to delete the pejorative meaning of the term by joking about it with our friends from León”.²⁶

Another relevant identity name, which is tied to a form of social classification, is that of *provinciano*, which literally means a person that does not live in the capital city of a country (Camargo Jr, 1999). Some people from Mexico City may arrogantly refer to someone from another city, such as León, as *provinciano* or *pueblerino* (which means a person from a small town). The meaning of this reference is related to a wide range of lifestyles associated with modern ways of life. For example, through its strong industrial base and particular work ethics people from León tend to conceive free time as resting time in order to prepare for the next day’s work. For people from Mexico City, used to more abundant services, free time is oriented towards leisure and consumption activities. Hence, a person from Mexico City may say “you do not have restaurants or theatres in your little town; or you, *pueblerino*, do not understand our modern ways of life”.

Consequences of identity for the adaptation of urban migrants

The adaptive process of immigrants, its rhythm and degree of difficulty depends on the prevailing attitudes of the host community towards them (Libercier and Schnieder, 1996). Even though only 20 percent of people interviewed were biased against migrants from Mexico City, the meaning of being a *chilango* is in essence derogatory. In general, people moving from Mexico City are aware that they may be rejected by the local population simply because of the place where they come from. Alejandro and Arturo, both working class migrants, along with most of the migrants we interviewed, emphasised this point: “we

²⁶ Group Discussion: 14 november 2001, six migrant households.

were conscious that people from León may not like us just because we were *chilangos*".²⁷

Due to the highly income stratified society, migrants are more likely to encounter problems with other income classes in León, particularly those in a higher income bracket. In one interview, a woman from León states that "it is poor people coming from Mexico City that are here just creating problems, robbing, and taking job opportunities away from people in León. They only do bad things in the city, there is nothing good about them".²⁸ Another local from León says "it is the 'new-rich', uneducated, with bad manners, the *chilangos* that we do not like here".²⁹

Locals also tend to blame *chilangos* for recent insecurity issues in León. This criminal stereotype of people from Mexico City —and specifically, the *chilango*— appeared in general comments made by locals and in media articles. The excerpts below show how media images construct and reinforce locally held stereotypes and prejudice:

Legalised for 80 US dollars: In New York, when you walk into 82nd street there is a Mexican, whose name is Armando, selling fake U.S. identification cards for Social Security and Green Cards. Everything that Armando learned in Mexico City by selling false documents is now being applied in New York City... another person, also with accent from Mexico City, helps Armando in such illegal activity... (A.M. 9-26-01).

A so-called policeman was chased and stopped: A person, supposedly a member from the Federal Police of Jalisco, stole a vehicle and did not surrender even after the local police from León chased him... Once the person was arrested, the Head of Police (*Ministerio Público*) discovered that the man was from Mexico City... and that the man was under the effects of drugs... The man's nickname is "El Chilango"... (A.M. 6-8-01).

Workers being assaulted by five armed men: Workers from a local business called Mexico's Warehouse were assaulted by five armed individuals... The victims said that they heard the voices of five individuals, whose accent was *Chilango* because they used words typically spoken in the Federal District (A.M. 7-20-01).

The existence of barriers to adaptation and especially of stereotypes and prejudices attached to a person from Mexico City, have caused migrants to attenuate behavioral patterns with respect to security. Locals mistrust migrants

²⁷ Interview: 7 march 2001, Mr. Suárez and Mr. Vázquez, migrants.

²⁸ Interview by Verónica Hidalgo: 16 november 2001, various interviews with locals.

²⁹ Interview: 20 november 2001, various people interviewed at the Central Plaza.

who come from Mexico City, which has the country's highest crime rates, and therefore migrants may be the ones committing new crimes in León. From participant observation it was found that migrants are more aware of protection, alarms, locking doors and other security systems than people from León. After living in Mexico City, migrants carry a feeling of insecurity, which is transmitted, even unintentionally, to the population of León. Some people from León described the security systems inside migrants' houses, such as bars across the windows and censoring alarms. However, after living in León for some time, and as part of their adaptation, migrants tend to modify their initial behavior towards security and start to live a more relaxed life.

Even though there are many interactions between migrants and locals in the market, some migrants perceive that the population of León is too closed and avoids socializing with newcomers. This can have a negative impact on processes of adaptation and integration. Migrants report two conflicting views with respect to what they call natives distrustful behaviour towards new arrivals. Some migrants understand that it is troublesome for local people to socialise with them since the Leonese already have their own social life and family commitments, and that it is hard to integrate newcomers. Other migrants are frustrated by this lack of openness. These migrants define people from León as "not very open, keeping their distance, and in general very suspicious".³⁰ Whatever their view, migrants overcome this difficulty by clustering with other migrants and using kin and friendship ties to form the basis of their social life in León.

Finally, it is not just the attitudes of the host population, but the attitudes of the migrants themselves, that determine the success of integration. Even though some migrants have argued that being a *chilango* could represent an obstacle, these migrants have either assimilated or integrated into host society. In fact, for migrants it was not difficult to reformulate their identity, abandoning the *chilango* to allay themselves with the identity of *panzas verdes*; testimony of assimilation. For example, a number of migrants stated that, when asked their place of residence before León, they tend to avoid saying Mexico City to avoid biasing opinion against them. Swami, along with others, says, "I did not mention that I was from the Federal District, I told them that I came from Torreón, which was the city where I first migrated from Mexico City".³¹ Additionally, during

³⁰ No names of migrants will be given in this point to maintain strict confidentiality.

³¹ Interview with Swami two time periods: 2 march 2001 and 15 october 2001.

some random interviews undertaken in the central square, some individuals first stated being locals and latter on in the interview admitted “actually, we are migrants from Mexico City”.

Conclusions

The last few years have seen growing concern about the size of Mexico City's population and its economic, social and environmental sustainability. Specific policies have been designed to shift production and services away from the city. Many individuals have left Mexico City in response to its deteriorating social and environmental conditions and in search of a better quality of life. However, there is a lack of research on the experiences of these individuals, their integration to a new environment and the potential difficulties they face. This paper provides evidence on the migration of individuals away from Mexico City.

The paper describes the identity of the migrant and of the local. Research results suggest that although there are common identity elements, the interaction between migrants and the Leonese brought up differential aspects of their identity. In general migrants are viewed as more liberal whereas locals as more conservative in the religious sense. People from León are proud to host the main shoe production of Mexico and they perceive themselves as people with strong work ethics living in an industrial city. The Leonese allows migrants to cross boundaries and share their identity as long as migrants are willing to work hard under a similar work ethic.

The identity names of ‘green tummies’ for the Leonese, and ‘*chilango*’ for migrants from Mexico City, have been analysed. The name *chilango* is perceived by locals to carry with it the negative connotation of an arrogant and aggressive personality. This interpretation creates a stereotype and risk of prejudice. Therefore, a person called this name might face difficulties integrating with the host society. As part of their adaptation process, migrants overcome the difficulty of being *chilango* by changing the stereotyped behaviours attached to such a name. A *chilango* is perceived in the media and by some locals as a troublemaker, hence the need of migrants to change attitudes in relation to security. Another behavioral change that has had positive outcomes for migrants is in relation to time. To overcome the lower speed at which the economy works in León, migrants tend to be more tolerant with local businesses and use their rapid speed of response as a valuable asset. Migrants, therefore, are willing to

give up the negative aspects attached to a *chilango* and transform their identity to gain trust and integration to the local society.

Results from this research suggest that, in general, these migrants have either assimilated into, or integrated with, Leonese society. Assimilated migrants adopted León's traditions and even change the negative aspects of their identity to become closer to the *panzas verdes*. Other migrants are integrated into León's society, but still share positive elements of identity with other migrants. As a concluding remark, the ability of migrants interviewed in this study to integrate has not been prohibited by an identity-based conflict with locals, but integration has required facing negative stereotypes and prejudice attached to a person from Mexico City and in some cases facing a minority opposition based on place of origin and rooted on constructed stereotypes and prejudice.

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