

Questions of Identity

Personhood and collectivity in transnational migration to the United States

Roger Rouse

Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Over the last 15 years, the discourse of 'identity' has spread rapidly within the US academy. Indeed, by uniting discussions of many different kinds of inequality, especially those organized along lines of nationality, ethnicity, race, sexuality and gender, and by offering powerful tools for linking the processes through which people are made collective to the ways in which they develop as distinctive individuals, it has become the primary medium for understanding and engaging the relationship between the political and the cultural, the subjective and the social. Many scholars have made identity their principal object of study and many more have come to use the term quite casually in the process of analysis. At the same time, faculty and students alike have taken up the discourse to articulate a forceful sense of self and vital visions of political practice.¹

Within this discourse, there has, of course, been considerable divergence and debate. Essentialists have vied with constructionists and, while some within the latter camp have focused on the macro-level struggles through which identities are forged and made to seem compelling, others have looked more closely at the micro-level processes through which individual identities are developed and collective ties asserted and ascribed. Perhaps most notably, those who argue for the merits of single, fixed identities have increasingly been challenged by those who stress the value of maintaining multiple identities and moving fluidly between them. Yet, however much the participants in these debates may disagree, they remain united by the view that questions of identity are fundamental to the cultural politics that link personal experience to collective forms and actions.

There is, of course, a great deal to be said in favor of this view. Issues of identity clearly matter to a lot of people. Work on these issues has

commonly drawn attention to forms of prejudice, discrimination and disenfranchisement that must be openly confronted and energetically opposed. And, during a period of resurgent conservatism, the unifying language that the discourse provides has encouraged people involved in different kinds of struggle, both inside the academy and beyond, to develop a powerful sense of common cause against those striving to impose a single and oppressive standard for assessing proper forms of personhood and visions of collective life.

In this paper, however, I would like to push beyond such obvious merits to articulate a series of questions and doubts about the discourse of identity and, in so doing, prompt critical reflection about the implications of its use. There are three issues that particularly concern me. First, I am troubled by the widespread tendency to assume that identity and identity formation are universal aspects of human experience. Certainly, it is striking, given the prevalence of the discourse, how little emphasis has been given to exploring the implications of its historical and cultural specificity and, more importantly, to considering the analytical and descriptive limits of the key ideas about personhood and collectivity on which it rests. Second, I am concerned that this lack of critical self-consciousness may lead to misreadings of particular situations, either through ethnocentric and anachronistic projections of the key ideas onto the lives of people who think and act quite differently, or through oversimplified analyses in which attitudes and practices that seem to correspond to these ideas are highlighted while others that are different are ignored. Third, I am worried that such tendencies may circumscribe the scope of political analysis, diverting attention simultaneously from the politics of the key ideas themselves, the related limitations of those challenges that remain within their frame, and the other ways in which people understand and deal with their problems.

To develop these concerns and to render them more concrete, I shall focus on one area in which the discourse of identity has played a major role, the social science literature dealing with the growing (im)migration that has been taking place over the last three decades between many 'Third World' countries and the United States.² More specifically, I shall explore the relationship between the varied treatments of identity in this literature and the rather different understandings I have developed through my work on migration between the rural *municipio* or 'county' of Aguililla in west-central Mexico and various US locations, especially Redwood City, an urban area in northern California. In so doing, I shall place particular pressure on two aspects of the literature: first, the tendency to examine struggles over collective identities without reference to the related processes by which people are made individual and, second, the widespread

view that (im)migrants already possess collective identities in the places that they leave and that, in dealing with the dominant processes of identification they encounter in the United States, they invariably respond within the limits that these processes lay down. By elaborating on these aspects of the literature, then looking more generally at the history and politics of the logic of identity, and finally turning to the Aguilillan case, I hope to promote both a broader approach to the relationship between (im)migration and identity and critical reflection on the foci and the forms of radical collective politics.

Identity and (im)migration

In the literature on recent Third World (im)migration to the United States, approaches to identity have been closely linked to ideas about the kind of social landscape that the (im)migrants traverse. There have been significant debates about these interconnected issues. And, in the last few years, the range of positions has widened markedly.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, most scholars understood the new (im)migration within a familiar bipolar framework. They held that people moved between places that were fundamentally distinct, that it was impossible for them to sustain significant involvements at a distance, and that, as a result, only two basic trajectories of experience were possible. One was circular: people remained oriented to the place from which they had come and thus stayed only briefly before returning home. The other was linear: people reoriented more or less gradually to life in the United States and, in so doing, tended steadily towards permanent resettlement. Debate centered largely on which trajectory more accurately characterized a given (im)migrant group and on which was preferable, either for the source country, the United States or the (im)migrants themselves.

The assumptions underlying the bipolar framework were reflected and reinforced in the treatment of identities. Scholars assumed that identities, whether communal, regional, national, ethnic or racial, were fundamentally 'localized', that is that they developed and gained their meaning in relation to the circumstances prevailing within a single, bounded territory or place. Correspondingly, only two basic trajectories of identity were considered feasible. Circular migrants were held to retain identities associated with their place of origin, while those who resettled in the United States were seen as abandoning old identities and gradually developing new ones. Whichever the trajectory involved, multiple, multi-local identities, especially those that challenged the idea of loyalty to a single sovereign state, were treated either as markers of transitional

status or, if they persisted, as both peculiar and pathological. In this work, debate focused largely on which trajectory better characterized a given (im)migrant population and on how to make sense of those situations in which multiple, multi-local identities did not disappear.³

In recent years, however, both the bipolar model and the related emphasis on the 'localized' nature of identities have increasingly been challenged. Several scholars have drawn attention to the emergence of social spaces that transcend the logic of bipolarism. In a growing number of cases, they suggest, (im)migrants from particular places have not only established new settlements in the United States but, through continued movement back and forth and the concomitant circulation of money, goods and information, have linked the various locales so tightly that they have come to form new kinds of social space – multi-local social settings that span the boundaries of the nation-states involved. Some analysts, particularly those working on (im)migration from small Caribbean countries, have focused on the emergence of 'transnational socio-cultural systems' (Sutton, 1987) that link settlements abroad to the source country as a whole, while others, especially those working on (im)migration from larger countries such as Mexico, have emphasized the development of 'transnational communities' (Kearney and Nagengast, 1989) or 'migrant circuits' (Rouse, 1989) that link particular villages, towns and counties to the various outposts that their inhabitants establish in the United States. In both cases, however, they suggest that, for many Third World (im)migrants, it is arrangements such as these rather than any single, bounded and contiguous locale that now serve as the principal setting in which they organize their lives and orchestrate their actions.⁴

This growing emphasis on transnational social spaces has frequently been accompanied by both a shift in the approach to identity and greater recourse to the unifying language of 'identity' itself.⁵ Thus, a number of scholars have claimed that, in the light of recent developments, it is necessary to go beyond the assumption that identities are invariably 'localized' and recognize that many (im)migrants have in fact developed multi-local and transnational affiliations. In some cases, they are said to have acquired multiple identities, combining old and new in a broadened repertoire of possible associations (e.g. Basch et al., 1993:95–144); in others, to have developed new kinds of singular identity appropriate to life in the multi-local settings that now frame their lives (e.g. Nagengast and Kearney, 1990). More importantly, many scholars have come to argue that identities such as these should be understood neither as markers of transition nor as signs of pathology but as both lasting and intelligible responses to the varied pressures people face.

Yet images of bipolarism and localized identity have not been swept aside. Several scholars have maintained that apparent indications of transnational orientations and multi-local identities seem less compelling if one carefully distinguishes (im)migrants' rhetoric from their practices and their more reflective statements (e.g. Chavez, 1988, 1991). And, more generally, a variety of analysts have argued that, in many cases, (im)migrants continue to ground politically important claims in the assertion and revalorization of identities that are both singular and localized. From this perspective, those who celebrate migrants as exemplars of multiplicity and de-territorialization are guilty of *bad ethnography* because they fail adequately to listen and observe, and *bad politics* because they privilege the allure of current intellectual fashion, especially the metaphors of post-structuralist theory and the imagery of a literary postmodernism, over the practical realities of (im)migrants' lives and struggles (e.g. Yúdice, 1988).

The scope of debate about (im)migration and identity has thus broadened considerably. While, a decade ago, disagreements about the frames for understanding (im)migrant experience were largely contained within the dominant models of bipolar landscapes and localized identities, they now focus much more widely on the relationship between these models and the alternative images of transnational social spaces and multi-local affiliations. The current state of the literature has much to recommend it. Recent work on the transnational dimensions of (im)migration has made it possible to recognize arrangements that might previously have escaped attention. And across the board – among advocates of both localized identities and multi-local forms of affiliation – there has been a growing sensitivity to the politics involved in ascriptions of identity and to the prejudice and discrimination that they frequently entail. Meanwhile, increasing attention has been given to the ways in which these practices and forms of prejudice reinforce class-based inequalities, by obscuring the divergent interests of people in different classes, by restricting access to key material resources and, above all, by allocating (im)migrants to particular positions, often the worst positions, in the prevailing occupational structure. And, especially in work on the relationship between identity formation and political mobilization, there has been an admirable emphasis on moving beyond individual gestures of resistance to explore and often aid in the development of organized challenges to the status quo.

Despite these developments, however, treatments of the relationship between migration and identity in the recent literature still seem limited in several ways. Both sides focus almost exclusively on collective identities,

neglecting the inextricable ties between the ways in which people are constituted as collective subjects and the processes through which they are prompted to construe themselves as distinctive individuals. And, by describing situations in which people who already possess particular geopolitical and often racialized identities in their place of origin confront pressures to take on new ones in the course of their (im)migration, both encourage the assumption that the possession of identities and processes of identity formation are universal aspects of human experience or, at least, that they are fundamental features of quotidian experience for everyone in the countries that such (im)migration links. Correspondingly, both suggest that the problems with dominant ascriptions of identity lie solely in their prejudicial nature and in the ways such prejudice helps buttress processes of exploitation. And, on this basis, both imply that the fullest form of challenge to these problems lies in asserting and organizing around either revalorized versions of ascribed identities or new ones that the (im)migrants develop for themselves.

In the following pages, I try to stretch the range of debate somewhat further by examining the limits of these shared tendencies and offering the outlines of a third position. In particular, while endorsing the view that class relations and the politics of identity are inextricably entwined, I argue that the connection between them does not lie simply in the imbrication of forms of prejudice and the obfuscation of divergent interests but more broadly in hegemonic efforts to make ideas about identity frame the ways in which people understand what it is to be a person, the kinds of collectivities in which they are involved, the nature of the problems that they face, and the means by which these problems can be tackled. Before illustrating the ramifications of this argument in the Aguilillan case, it is useful to look more closely at the discourse of identity and the history and politics of the key ideas on which it rests.

The logic of identity

One of the most striking features of the discourse of identity in the US social sciences is the relative recency of its emergence and proliferation. While identity has been a central concern of Western philosophy since the eighteenth century and a key concept in psychology for a hundred years, and while people's relation to particular forms of collectivity such as nationality and race has been a major interest of US social scientists throughout the present century, the term itself did not gain salience in the social sciences or begin to serve as a unifying idiom until the late 1940s and the early 1950s when the work of Erik Erikson (e.g. 1950) helped move it

from the emerging field of social psychology into neighboring areas such as sociology.⁶ The term is completely absent in any analytically significant sense, for example, from both the program outlined in the 1930s by Robert Redfield and his colleagues for the anthropological analysis of assimilation and acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936) and Oscar Handlin's early post-war classic, *The Uprooted* (1951). Yet, even during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the discourse of identity remained somewhat limited in scope and, while it is easy to forget amidst the cacophony of contemporary reference, its current prevalence in both written work and quotidian speech is scarcely more than a decade old.

Any understanding of the politics that surround the discourse of identity must surely take into account this particular historical trajectory, the significant internal variations, and the important shifts in the foci of debate. Yet it would, I think, be a mistake to exaggerate the internal differences or to see the discourse as a whole as ushering in a totally new conceptual frame. Instead, with a deliberate gaucheness designed to unsettle existing conventions, I want to argue for a view that rests on three related claims. First, the varied uses of the *discourse* of identity, at least within the US social sciences, rely on certain shared ideas about personhood, collectivity and social struggle, ideas that, taken together, I shall refer to as the *logic* of identity. Second, while these ideas are themselves historically and culturally specific, especially as dominant forms of understanding, they have a much deeper genealogy than the discourse of identity itself. And, third, these ideas are by no means neutral but instead are closely linked to concepts that have long been central to the hegemonic practices of bourgeois-dominated ruling blocs. To amplify these claims, it will be useful to begin by delineating the key ideas more fully.

Personhood. The most obvious meaning of identity as a definition of personhood is that of a sameness or continuity of the self across time and space. But how is this continuity thought to be secured? The dominant view within the social sciences is based on the idea that identity is a kind of property, an idea manifested most clearly in the widespread tendency to describe identities as things that people have or possess, claim, acquire, lose and search for. In these terms, continuity of the self depends primarily on the sustained possession of particular properties, a condition that applies to both the properties that mark people as individual and those that mark them as members of collectivities. Only by having certain properties or qualities that are intrinsic to the self can a person be dependably the same from one context to the next. Yet sustained possession of these properties, particularly those that make people collective in self-affirming

ways, is not thought to be a simple matter. People may lose established identities, have difficulty in getting their claims to particular identities socially acknowledged, and find themselves obliged to operate, publicly at least, in terms of the identities ascribed to them by others. From this perspective, personhood is best understood in terms of people's chronic efforts to acquire and maintain possession of properties that they value; continuity of the self is not given but achieved; and ideal personhood involves a lasting form of self-possession or proprietorship in the self.

Collectivity. Identity, of course, refers not only to forms of personhood, both individual and collective, but also to collectivities themselves and, in this regard, the most obvious meaning of the term is that of a sameness among people. In a purely formal sense, anyone who uses a collective noun suggests the image of a collectivity whose members are formally equivalent by virtue of the common possession of a given property. It is by no means invariably the case, however, that when people across history and around the world think of social collectivities, the image that most readily comes to mind is one that replicates this taxonomic logic. Yet it is precisely this image that is evoked by the collective aspect of the concept of identity. That is, the discourse of identity suggests that social collectivities are aggregates of atomized and autonomous elements, either individuals or subgroups, that are fundamentally equivalent by virtue of the common possession of a given social property. Such collectivities are fundamentally categorical and abstract and only achieve a concrete and more personal form when at least some of their members claim latent common interests and organize to pursue them. This emphasis on equivalence may seem paradoxical because the discourse of identity has primarily been used to address situations in which dominant processes of identification mark subgroups within overarching collectivities as unequal. Yet the image of equivalence remains dominant for several reasons. The members of each subgroup are thought to be internally equivalent by virtue of the common possession of a given social property and potential common interests. The very fact that these groups can be hierarchically ranked rests on the idea that they are equally susceptible to judgment according to a single norm or standard. And the criticisms that are directed at such hierarchies derive from the conviction that a true equivalence within the overarching collectivity is both desirable and possible.

Social struggle. These understandings of identity have been used in association with a wide variety of perspectives in social theory. Yet their joint use tends to both reflect and reinforce a particular set of ideas about the problems people face and the ways these problems should be tackled. They place primary emphasis on processes of prejudice, discrimination,

disenfranchisement and silencing that prevent people from gaining an adequate hearing for their views, often describing them in terms of the denial of fundamental rights. And, in so doing, they promote the view that the best way to address these problems is for people in the disadvantaged groups to seek their own enfranchisement and voice by forming concrete organizations that can make their latent common interests at once manifest and compelling. Generally, in this vision of struggle, people can only speak and act authoritatively on behalf of the identity-defined collectivities to which they personally belong.

Identity and bourgeois hegemonic projects

The great majority of social scientists who draw on the discourse of identity proceed as if the key ideas I have just outlined were universally applicable, as if they could serve unproblematically to capture people's understandings of personhood, collectivity and struggle in any historical and cultural context. Moreover, while many are keenly sensitive to the politics that surround the dominant deployment of particular identities, their failure to explore the limits of the key ideas means that they are blind to the politics associated with the logic of identity itself. Even analysts more sensitive to issues of historical and cultural specificity, including those who note the ties between dominant ascriptions of geopolitical and racialized identities and the emergence of both the nation form and colonial administration, tend to focus so intently on issues of identity that they proceed as if understandings equivalent to the key ideas regarding personhood, collectivity and struggle invariably exhaust the ways in which the people conceptualize these matters. For many, it seems axiomatic that people living within the terrains that national and colonial governments have sought to dominate are fully caught up within the logics of identity that state agencies deploy.⁷ In this section, however, I shall try to unsettle these tendencies by offering a schematic narrative that charts the historically specific processes by which the logic of identity became dominant in Western Europe and, later, the United States, the complex politics associated with these processes, and the conjuncturally specific conditions that have prompted the emergence and proliferation of the discourse of identity itself. Given that I am particularly interested in tracing the association between the logic of identity and the emergence and consolidation of bourgeois forms of rule, I shall start by contrasting the ideas central to this logic with those that were dominant earlier in medieval Western Europe.

If, as Benedict Anderson argues, collectivities 'are to be distinguished . . . by the style in which they are imagined' (1991: 6), it is striking that,

during most of the medieval period, the dominant image of collectivity was not of an abstract, categorical grouping in which an aggregate of autonomous elements is united by the common possession of a given property but instead of a concrete and organic whole made up of functionally related and interdependent parts.⁸ And it is equally striking that the members of the most important social collectivities were seen not as equivalent to one another but instead as fundamentally unequal by virtue of their differential distribution within a carefully structured hierarchy. Correspondingly, the dominant image of proper personhood did not emphasize control of the self as a form of property but instead the appropriate conduct of relationships according to one's position and attendant role within the hierarchically structured fields I have just described. At the same time, and largely as a result, the dominant emphasis regarding social problems was not on ways of realizing the effective assimilation of autonomous individuals within the rules and regulations of society but on how to ensure that people who occupied different positions within a functionally integrated whole performed the roles that they had been allotted. And, in a closely related manner, the dominant image of how people should respond focused not on the achievement of adequate representation for the views they held but the securing of proper recognition for the roles that they enacted or, more fully, for the manner in which they approximated ideal visions of the way these roles should be performed.

It was only with the gradual emergence of bourgeois-dominated social systems that the primacy of these understandings was challenged and eventually displaced. The image of functional hierarchies gave way to the claims of democratic nationalism in which, in Anderson's words, 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship . . . [a] fraternity' (1991: 7) and, in a related fashion, as C.B. Macpherson describes it, the growing emphasis on 'free' markets encouraged the idea that all propertied men, at least, were 'equal in a double sense: their value and their entitlements were equally governed by the market, and in the face of the market they appeared to be equally insecure' (1962: 89). Correspondingly, the fundamentally relational view of personhood dominant in medieval society was steadily supplanted by what Macpherson describes as a 'conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities . . . an owner of himself' (1962: 3) and by a logic in which, as Michel Foucault (1979, 1983) suggests, individuals once judged and dealt with primarily according to what they did and, more fully, according to the ways that they conducted themselves in relation to others,

were increasingly seen as the bearers of perduring personalities or identities and dealt with principally in terms of who they were. Only then, as Foucault again makes clear, were individuals and collectivities deemed equivalent in a way that made them susceptible to ranking according to a single norm or standard. Finally, as Marx (1964) suggested long ago, images of struggle based on the idea of the social as organic hierarchy in which people struggle to obtain proper recognition for their contributions to its workings gave way to understandings of the social based on a fundamental distinction between civil society as the locus of private egoistic competition between concretely unequal individuals and the political state as the realm in which impersonal rules were generated through the collective public action of abstractly equivalent citizens as well as to related images of struggle that emphasized the individual and collective search for adequate and equitable representation.

A complex politics was entailed in these shifts. Initially, when the bourgeoisie was still an emergent force, the ideas about personhood, collectivity and struggle I have just outlined served as crucial elements in the arguments its ideologues directed against dominant forms of feudal and absolutist rule, helping to concert a counter-hegemonic coalition around galvanizing images of individual freedom, parliamentary democracy, the rights attached to citizenship, and equality before the law. Indeed, these ideas were, in many ways, emancipatory and the echoes of their promise have continued to endow the logic of identity with a liberal utopian dimension. Yet, as bourgeois-led blocs grew dominant, these same ideas were increasingly absorbed within hegemonic projects meant to reproduce the varied forms of exploitation and oppression at the heart of capitalist relations. That is, through a machinery of regulation and control that I shall call a 'politics of identification', ruling blocs strove insistently to inculcate in people the understandings of personhood, collectivity and struggle associated with the logic of identity as part of their more general efforts to produce subjects suited to their interests and needs.⁹

Aimed both at changing the attitudes and practices of groups newly brought within the reach of capitalist influence and at maintaining desired habits and dispositions among populations long within its compass, this politics has supported the interests of ruling blocs in a wide variety of ways. By emphasizing the idea of a proprietorship in the self, it has helped legitimate a system based on the primacy and privilege of private property. By prompting people to think of themselves and others principally as the bearers of geopolitical and racialized identities, it has both discouraged them from developing a sensitivity to their location in the class structure and encouraged them to see their relationship to bearers of the same

identity more in terms of shared positions and imputed commonalities of interest than by reference to similarities and differences in their commitments and concerns. By privileging issues of prejudice and disenfranchisement, it has either diverted attention from questions of material inequality or obscured processes of exploitation by making these inequalities appear to rest primarily on misplaced attitudes and feelings. And by encouraging people to seek solutions to the problems that they face primarily through struggles over proper representation carried out via identity-based forms of organizing, it has impeded the development of coalitional groupings that link people across established lines of social difference, especially those groupings based on shared or overlapping commitments to radical transformations of prevailing class relations.

It is important to point out that, while the politics of identification has sought to inculcate these varied understandings partly through discursive forms of influence, it has depended mainly on the habituating effects of micro-rituals and routines. A detailed exploration of these processes is impossible here, but it would certainly have to give close attention to the proliferating activities of what I call 'the taxonomic state', among them the increasing use of censusing and mapping, the growing emphasis on the registration of births, marriages and deaths, the history of the passport, the identity card and fingerprinting, and the processes through which colonizing states pressed the colonized to conceptualize and organize themselves as members of discriminable tribes or nations with clearly defined ritual and political leaders.¹⁰ Some of these activities have been important mainly in promulgating the idea of collectivities as groups made up of people who are formally equivalent, others in promoting the primacy of a possessive individualism. But, significantly, these processes have often been closely linked and mutually dependent. Many documents that mark people as distinctive individuals, identity cards for example, simultaneously constitute them as members of specific, horizontal collectivities and, in so doing, they underline that sustained possession of a distinctive individuality depends ultimately on the kind of collective legitimation that the state claims to embody.

In many ways, the history of the politics of identification has been one of continuous expansion, elaboration and consolidation from the eighteenth century onwards, played out through a spiralling reciprocity between processes and techniques developed at the core of the capitalist system and others developed at its colonial and imperial margins.¹¹ Yet the influence exerted by this form of power has never been exhaustive. Both people newly brought within its compass and people long subject to its influence have drawn on rather different attitudes and understandings to resist and

challenge its demands. Most notably, some have developed implicit or explicit languages of class simultaneously to articulate a vision of the social that emphasizes the substantive and mutually constitutive nature of its organizing relations and to define problems in terms of the culturally mediated impact of material inequalities and the processes of exploitation that produce them. Moreover, guided by these understandings, at least some people, some of the time, have organized collectively across prevailing lines of geopolitical and racialized difference, not only with people occupying the same position in the class structure but on a coalitional basis with anyone who shares their commitments and concerns.

Indeed, when challenges such as these have grown widespread and particularly when they have been tied to broader crises in prevailing forms of hegemony, they seem to have provoked both intensifications of the politics of identification and significant adjustments in its content. Certainly, it is in these terms that I would interpret both the sudden emergence of the discourse of identity in the United States, in the academy and beyond, immediately following the Second World War and the rapid proliferation of this discourse over the last decade and a half. Put very succinctly, by largely rearticulating the central terms of bourgeois ideology and practice, the emerging discourse took a moment of incipient and potentially explosive class conflict and helped reaccommodate it within classic liberal concerns over the assimilation of the individual to society and the attitudinal factors affecting the relations between subgroups (cf. Gleason, 1983), while the recent proliferation of the discourse has not only done much the same in the context of the two deepest recessions since the Great Depression (Rouse, 1995: 380–5) but also, through its growing emphasis on multiple and multi-local identities and the capacity to move fluidly between them, at least reflected if not supported the attempt to forge flexible work-related subjectivities better suited to the volatile and fluid labor markets that characterize post-Fordist and transnational conditions (1995: 389–92).

In sum, then, the ideas central to both the logic of identity and the discourse of identity itself are by no means universally applicable and, even when they are dominant, they do not necessarily exhaust the field of possibilities. As a result, there are significant dangers in projecting these ideas onto the lives of people who may think and act quite differently and in emphasizing attitudes and practices that seem to correspond to these ideas while passing over others that are different. At the same time, given the close links between both the logic and the discourse of identity and bourgeois hegemonic projects, there is also the danger that reliance on

their organizing concepts may, however inadvertently, reinforce the terms of bourgeois influence and control.

As I indicated earlier, work on the relationship between identity and recent Third World (im)migration to the United States has often done a great deal to illuminate the ties between the political, cultural and economic dimensions of (im)migrants' daily lives. Yet, the great majority of this work remains within the frames that the discourse of identity provides. Indeed, the only major difference is that it largely passes over the links between collective forms of identification and the processes through which people are constituted as distinctive individuals. To suggest the value of a broader way of dealing with these issues, I shall now turn to the Aguilillan case and in particular to the experiences of the (im)migrants in Redwood City.

Aguilillans and identity

The *municipio* of Aguililla is located in the southwest corner of the state of Michoacán, in a mountainous region long remote from major centers of power and wealth in the interior of the country.¹² For much of the nineteenth century, the area that the *municipio* now covers was divided into large but unproductive haciendas and its population was extremely small. Between the 1870s and the 1900s, however, there was a significant influx of 'mestizo' immigrants from other parts of west-central Mexico and, over the next few decades, these immigrants and their descendants gradually established a way of life based on small-scale ranching and peasant farming. Within this way of life, people focused economically on raising cattle, pigs and mules and on cultivating staples such as maize and beans; production was devoted largely to the satisfaction of local needs; and trade with the interior was limited. More broadly, people's lives were shaped primarily by their place within the patriarchal families that formed the basic units of quotidian experience and by their commitment to creating and maintaining independent, family-based operations such as ranches, farms and small commercial ventures (Rouse, 1988).

Migration to the United States began on a significant scale in the mid-1940s. It accelerated markedly in the mid-1960s. And, by the mid-1980s, when I finished doing fieldwork, it had come to dominate the lives of everyone, not only those who moved but also the friends and relatives they left behind. For the first two decades, the dominant pattern was one in which men went seasonally to agricultural jobs in the southwestern states but, as migration grew more widespread, the pattern also changed. People headed increasingly to urban destinations where they

worked mainly in the low-paid service sector; more women and children started moving; and, while temporary and circular migration remained significant, it became steadily more common for people to stay in the United States for extended periods and, in some cases, to resettle on a long-term basis. As a function of these developments, Aguilillans gradually established several concentrated settlements north of the border, by far the most important of which was the one that emerged in and around Redwood City, an urban area on the northern edge of California's famous 'Silicon Valley'. Started in the early 1950s, this settlement grew rapidly from the mid-1960s onwards and, in the process, extended steadily into neighborhoods long dominated by African-Americans. Aguilillans found jobs throughout the northern section of the 'valley', the men working mainly as custodians, dishwashers and office cleaners while those women who earned wages were employed as office and hotel cleaners, domestic servants and, occasionally, as factory workers. Significantly, many Aguilillans lacked the papers that they needed to live and work legally in the United States.

To understand the recent experiences of the (im)migrants in Redwood City, it is useful to tease out three related processes. In the first place, Aguilillans gradually forged precisely the kind of transnational arrangement that has been given so much emphasis in the recent literature on (im)migration. Certainly, by the mid-1980s, it was the 'migrant circuit' linking the *municipio*, the Redwood City settlement and the other outposts in the United States, rather than any one locale and its immediate environs, that served for most Aguilillans as the primary locus of their involvements and the principal context in terms of which they negotiated their quotidian experiences and thought about the future. At the same time, the (im)migrants underwent a complex process of class transformation. Most notably, of course, they became increasingly involved in proletarian labor. Yet, even as they worked for wages in the United States, a significant number remained tied to family-based operations in the *municipio* and many others hoped to create such operations at a later date. Given the difficulties of realizing this goal north of the border, most focused their hopes on Aguillilla and, largely through the dollars that people sent and brought back, the *municipio's* economy continued to be dominated by varied forms of rural petty commerce and production. Living astride the international border, then, many Aguilillan (im)migrants also strove to combine, in their practices and their aspirations, two quite different ways of making a living. Finally, as a function of these developments, the (im)migrants also experienced complex cultural shifts. Through their growing involvement in proletarian labor and also through

the growing influence of both the Mexican state and the commercial mass media within the *municipio*, they were increasingly exposed to hegemonic forces working to constitute them simultaneously as reliable workers, enthusiastic but disciplined consumers, and law-abiding, loyal subjects. Yet, given the continued salience of rural petty commerce and production, many had good reason to maintain the attitudes and understandings associated with the peasant and ranching way of life. As a result, while some long-term settlers and some who received extended state education within Mexico fully adopted the new values and beliefs that were pressed upon them, most (im)migrants either continued to interpret and evaluate the world in terms of the more established frames or developed a broadened cultural repertoire in which the two kinds of understanding were awkwardly conjoined.¹³

As part of their growing exposure to the hegemonic forces I have mentioned, Aguillillan (im)migrants were pressed increasingly to present themselves to power as the bearers of both individual and collective identities. In contrast to the situations described in much of the recent literature, however, this did not precipitate a simple shift from one set of identities that were already important to them in Mexico to others more appropriate to their lives as members of a transnational semi-proletariat. Instead, most of the (im)migrants moved – in both time and space – from a situation in which their dominant understandings of personhood, collectivity and struggle were quite different from those central to the logic of identity to another in which they were encouraged more insistently than ever before to adopt these understandings as their primary point of reference.

Personhood and collectivity

It is important to acknowledge that, within the peasant and ranching way of life, people were aware of various politicized taxonomies of social commonality and difference and referred to them at least periodically in their daily forms of speech.¹⁴ They recognized that geopolitical forms of ordering constituted them simultaneously as Aguillillans, 'Michoacanos' and Mexicans. And they also drew from time to time on long-established idioms of racial hierarchy to distinguish themselves favorably from *indios*. Yet these attributions and distinctions rarely played a significant part in their understandings of the world. Most of the inhabitants of the *municipio* did not have regular or sustained contact with either the people of the interior who identified them pejoratively or with the people they described as '*indios*'. The idea of being '*Michoacano*' was little more than a vague

abstraction and, in the absence of significant interaction with foreigners, so too was their sense of being Mexican. Most strikingly, even the idea of being Aguilillan was not particularly important. Aguililla had never been constituted as a closed corporate community by the Mexican state and its inhabitants had thus never been encouraged to develop the keen sense of collective identity that is often associated with such entities (Nagengast and Kearney, 1990; Wolf, 1955); the volatilities of life in the mountains obliged many families and individuals to move around with little heed to state-imposed administrative boundaries; and, largely as a result, people rarely either referred to themselves collectively as *Aguilillenses* or invested the term with great affect when they did. More importantly, however, even when they made use of collective nouns, the image of social collectivity that most readily came to mind was quite different from the one suggested by the logic of identity.

The dominant image of collectivity was both derived from and most vividly reflected in the basic unit of quotidian ideology and practice, the patriarchal nuclear family. That is, when Aguilillans thought of collectivities, the image that they most commonly invoked was not of an abstract group whose members were equivalent by virtue of the shared possession of a given property but of a concrete, hierarchically organized whole whose constituent parts were internally related and functionally interdependent. Every collectivity, from the local community to the nation to the cosmos, was thought to possess, in its fullest form, a dominating head or center equivalent to the patriarch, a mediating position equivalent to the matriarch, and a series of ranked dependants equivalent to the children. Within this framework, every position was asymmetrically related to the others and, given the use of hierarchical ranking by age and gender, not even appeals to fraternity could suggest equivalence.

This imagery was used to conceptualize numerous areas of experience, at many different levels. God was understood as a patriarchal authority governing humankind through the mediation of the much more approachable, and manipulable, saints. The president of the country was expected to govern like a distant but beneficent patriarch and to do so through the mediation of a ramifying hierarchy of more or less fallible intermediaries. And this structure was replicated at the local level regarding the relationship between the president of the *municipio*, his aides and the general population. Finally, the nation was thought to be organized around a dominant center and a hierarchy of subordinate places. Thus, people referred frequently to the interior as 'el centro' and to themselves as living on the margins – as one woman put it, at 'the tail of the world'. And, once again, in local terms, the *municipio* was understood to possess a single

ruling center (or *cabecera*, literally 'head-bearer', or more simply, 'head') surrounded by a series of dependent villages and hamlets.

Correspondingly, when Aguillians thought of personhood, they emphasized not autonomy and self-possession but the occupation of a particular place within a pre-existing field of relations. More accurately, perhaps, this field was treated as conceptually prior to the individuals within it. When people made claims on others, at least on others from the area, they did so not by invoking common membership in a categorically defined collectivity but by tracing the string of personal ties that would eventually connect them. And, in these circumstances, they sought and gave respect less by reference to a single standard deemed appropriate to all or on the basis of qualities deemed intrinsic to the individual than in terms of the manner in which particular roles were performed and relationships conducted. Correspondingly, even though there was widespread emphasis on making oneself independent, this did not involve becoming individually autonomous but instead detaching oneself at least partially from one's natal family in order to form another of one's own. In sum, for Aguillians in the peasant and ranching way of life, the crucial question was not 'Who am I?' but 'Where do I stand – and how should I conduct myself – in relation to others?'

The politics of identification in Mexico and the United States

Over the years, however, Aguillians guided by these attitudes and values came increasingly under the influence of a class-related politics of identification that not only classified them and regulated their actions but also, and more profoundly, encouraged them to adopt quite different understandings of both personhood and collectivity. This politics affected them most intensely in the United States but it also had at least some impact within Mexico.

The scriptural and taxonomic activities of the state affected people in the *municipio* from at least the 1860s onwards. Processes of mapping and land registration obliged them to turn fluid and negotiable understandings of boundaries and claims on land into clear and unambiguous arrangements that aligned particular owners with clearly bounded and discriminable units of space and, in so doing, transposed the labile authority of custom and communal reckoning into the rigid, brittle logic of the document and the archive. At the same time, censuses and systems for registering births, marriages and deaths encouraged people to translate the negotiated and contested fluidities of local life into the appearance of stable individual and

collective identities. These pressures grew stronger in the 1940s and were further amplified from the 1960s onwards. The state education system, which became steadily more influential after 1960, especially at the secondary level, not only equipped people with the literacy necessary to deal with the scriptural activities of government agencies but also, and more importantly, promoted a powerful sense of national identity, a discourse of rights, and an individuating view of personhood that valued people more for the qualifications they possessed than for the nature of their ties to others. And, through the growing impact of television from the mid-1970s onwards, corporate capital increasingly promoted the idea of a distinctive individuality that people could achieve through the medium of consumption.

For several reasons, however, the impact of a politics of identification was quite limited within the *municipio*. In the first place, at least until the 1960s, state and federal agencies rarely maintained a continuous presence in the *cabecera* let alone the *municipio* as a whole and, as a result, most Aguilillans did not experience the habituating micro-rituals involved in regular, quotidian engagements with government bureaucracies. Second, even as state education and the commercial media grew more influential during the 1970s and early 1980s, their impact on the local population was markedly uneven. Only a few participated in extended secondary education and there were many, especially outside the *cabecera*, who neither owned nor had regular access to a television. Finally, the commitment of the Mexican ruling classes to the principles associated with the logic of identity was always somewhat limited. Across the many ostensible shifts in the details of hegemonic ideology and practice, they combined these principles with an emphasis on a corporate image of the social that divided the national population into functionally interdependent sectors, on the rhetorical appropriation of popular ideas about patrician hierarchies, and on the deployment of a personalist logic in both the workings of government bureaucracies and the process of electoral politics.

In the Aguilillan case, then, the simple fact of living within the boundaries of a nation-building state did not mean that people necessarily treated the logic of identity as their only or even their dominant way of understanding personhood and collectivity. Aguilillans long operated at the margins of state and corporate influence and, as a result, for most people from the *municipio*, it was only when they migrated to the United States that the politics of identification first affected them with significant force and only from the mid-1960s onwards, as they came to focus increasingly on urban destinations and to stay for longer periods, that this politics had a sustained, insistent impact on their lives.

A wide variety of factors prompted (im)migrants in the Redwood City area to think of themselves as the bearers of collective identities. From the outset, of course, they were subjected to various forms of racial and ethnic prejudice and, as they came increasingly to rival African-Americans for low-paid service work and to move into neighborhoods in which blacks were numerically dominant, US idioms of racially based difference were made more salient still. Meanwhile, from the late 1960s onwards, they faced government agencies whose formal commitment to policies of ethnic pluralism made it increasingly valuable for them to think in terms of ethnic self-identification, at least for the benefit of their US-born children. And they also encountered growing incitements from the Spanish language media and ethnic entrepreneurs who used invocations of shared identity to encourage consumer interest in the goods and services they were selling.

At the same time, a wide variety of pressures prompted the (im)migrants to think of themselves as the bearers of individual identities. Most importantly, they had to deal with the chronic obligation to identify themselves to agencies of regulation and control such as the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the police. But they also confronted bureaucratic agencies that pressed them to acquire documents of individual identity such as a social security card and a driver's licence. More subtly, both the police forces and the social welfare agencies that Aguilillans dealt with emphasized, in principle and in practice, the idea of an essentially unmediated relationship between the state and individual subjects, often intervening in families to address the imputed needs of particular members in a way that by-passed the authority of those who claimed to be in charge. And the commercial mass media increasingly encouraged the (im)migrants to define success at least partly in terms of their ability to mark themselves as distinctive individuals through their activities as consumers.

Beyond identity

Most Aguilillans who migrated to and from Redwood City, then, did not negotiate a shift from one set of identities to another but instead moved from a world in which identity was not a central concern to one in which they were pressed with increasing force to adopt understandings of personhood and collectivity that privileged notions of autonomous self-possession and a formal equivalence between the members of a group.

How did they react? Their responses were in fact both complex and quite varied. Many certainly came to place more discursive weight on various forms of collective commonality and difference. Through the marked

intensification of their quotidian engagements with people cast as different from themselves, they became much more inclined to refer to themselves as Mexicans, as 'Michoacanos' and as Aguilillans, and to contrast themselves collectively to blacks. Meanwhile, many (im)migrants invested time and effort in trying to acquire documents that marked them as distinctive individuals. Yet these practices did not necessarily represent an abandonment or attenuation of earlier understandings of personhood and collectivity. While some long-term settlers and some of those who underwent extended education in Mexico may have come to think solely in terms of the understandings central to the logic of identity, most people in these categories were influenced by their transnational location and their hybrid class position to develop a cultural bifocalism that enabled them to draw on whichever view seemed more appropriate at a given moment (Rouse, 1992). And, the majority of (im)migrants, both lacking lengthy exposure to the politics of identification in either Mexico or the United States and preferring petty commerce and production in the *municipio* over wage-work north of the border, continued to place primary emphasis on the ideas of personhood and collectivity associated with the peasant and ranching way of life. As a result, while they often accommodated in some ways to the pressures that they faced, their main reaction was to refuse their logic, elude their impact, and operate primarily by maintaining and reworking techniques already well-developed in the *municipio*.

Although most (im)migrants were critical of at least some aspects of life north of the border, few construed the difficulties they encountered in terms of prejudice and discrimination or, more abstractly, by recourse to a language of rights. While, to me, it seemed obvious that they were victims of racism, ethnic prejudice and other kinds of discriminatory treatment, they rarely spoke in these terms, even when I prompted them to do so. Their criticisms focused instead on two main issues. One was the failure of Americans to appreciate how hard they worked, that is, how well they were performing the particular role they had been given. Indeed it was on this basis rather than by reference to inherent racial qualities that they most commonly distinguished themselves from African-Americans. Arguing that they deserved better treatment because they were harder workers and more loyal employees, they suggested more abstractly that dominant evaluations should privilege these considerations over more impersonal criteria such as legally defined membership in the national collectivity. The other issue that concerned them was the way in which the conditions that they faced as proletarian workers in the lowest reaches of the regional economy made it difficult for them to meet their standards concerning what it meant to be a moral person and, in particular, to maintain desired forms

of family life. Men and women frequently complained, for example, about the difficulties they encountered in their attempts to act as good parents, given both the greater freedom and autonomy available to children and the tendency of state agencies to intervene in family problems without proper reference to the mediating authority of family heads; men often expressed anxieties about their ability to act as good husbands under conditions in which their low-paying jobs made it difficult to support the other members of the family and to keep their wives and daughters in the home; and women often underlined the problems that they faced as mothers given the frequent need to take on work outside the home. These were not political complaints about inadequate representation and the lack of rights but moral reservations articulating a class-related critique of proletarian wage-work and its social and cultural ramifications (Rouse, 1992).

Meanwhile, in dealing with the varied institutional practices that worked to inculcate a sense of distinctive individuality, many (im)migrants simply tried as far as possible to elude the machinery of identification or to neutralize its impact. In so doing, they drew heavily on techniques already well-rehearsed within the *municipio*. In the 1910s, when the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution had made it possible for a series of local scores to be settled in Aguillilla, the first thing that people from the ranches and hamlets had done after gaining control of the *cabecera* was burn the government archives, the primary implement of the scriptural and taxonomic state. And subsequently, it had been common for local people either to avoid census-takers altogether or, more often, to provide them with information that was deliberately misleading. Extending and reworking these tactics in the Redwood City area, Aguillillans frequently did their best to avoid the reach of agencies seeking to identify them and gave elusive answers to anyone who seemed official. Moreover, at least some of those who lacked the necessary papers obtained false documents, living for varying periods with other people's social security card numbers and under other people's names.

At the same time, when Aguillillans sought to address particular difficulties that they saw themselves as facing, they almost never formed or joined voluntary associations of any kind, let alone ones based specifically on commonalities of geopolitical or racialized identity. Instead, drawing once again on techniques already well-rehearsed within the *municipio*, they placed primary emphasis on developing and maintaining personal ties with other individuals. Significantly, in building these networks, they gave little heed to questions of identity. Indeed, while such networks were generally made up primarily of close friends and relatives, most (im)migrants placed a premium on being connected to some people who, in

identity terms at least, were different from themselves. Supervisors at work, managers of apartment buildings, teachers, social workers and members of the police were often cultivated as allies or patrons and, while these were sometimes fellow Latinos, they were just as often Anglos, and occasionally blacks. Particular relationships, of course, did not always pay off, but the failure of one relationship simply led to recourse to another.

Finally, in the one instance of which I am aware in which Aguillan (im)migrants organized in a publicly collective manner, it was this logic of pragmatic affiliation rather than commonality of identity that shaped the ways in which they acted. For several years, people from the *municipio* dominated the workforce at a sheet metal factory in the city. The work was ill-paid and, above all, dangerous and quite a few employees were seriously injured while operating the machines. Moreover, while the workers were represented by a union, they felt that it was both insensitive and ineffective. Despite the fact that a significant number of workers lacked papers, they decided to take on the employers more aggressively. In pursuing this project, however, they did not organize by reference to identity or by appealing to identity-based groups in the area. Instead they sought to bring in a new union that could act more aggressively on their behalf and, in so doing, they forged alliances with anyone that they thought was both sympathetic to their cause and capable of helping them. Put more broadly, instead of appealing to people who were linked by categorical equivalence, they entered into a heterogeneous grouping that was organized around shared or overlapping commitments and concerns. Although the employers called in the Immigration and Naturalization Service to disrupt the organizing process, this approach eventually enabled the workers both to remove the old union and to elect the new one that they wanted.¹⁵

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried not only to critique the discourse of identity but to present, at least schematically, a series of alternative possibilities. Let me close by briefly highlighting some of the implications of my argument.

In the first place, it is important to stress that, in focusing on the details of the Aguillan case, my aim has not been to suggest that the empirical situation I encountered in this instance should constitute a new exemplar for studying recent Third World (im)migration to the United States, both undermining the validity of the empirical analyses done by others and providing a better basis for the development of different generalizations. It

is obvious that the play of identity in people's lives can vary considerably from one case to the next. My concern, instead, has been to encourage the development of an interpretive frame broad enough to recognize as much of the variation as possible and thus lay the grounds for explorations of the factors that have shaped the differences.

Correspondingly, I am not arguing that the term 'identity' should simply be abandoned. It is clearly significant both empirically and analytically. What I am advocating, however, is much greater attention to the history and politics of both the term itself and the ideas associated with its use. The efforts that I have made in this regard can only be suggestive but they do at least offer several propositions that might stir up further thinking. There are three in particular that I would like to underline. The first is the idea that the discourse of identity draws on a logic that sees personhood as ideally involving a proprietorship in the self, collectivities as ideally homogeneous and horizontal, and struggle as focused primarily on issues of prejudice and disenfranchisement best dealt with through the self-mobilizing activities of the groups that suffer from these problems. The second is the suggestion that these ideas have been closely tied to the hegemonic projects of bourgeois-dominated ruling blocs by rearticulating in more abstract form not only the imagery of the bourgeois nation but more generally the primacy of private property and idealized visions of the relationship between citizens and the state. The third proposition is that the emergence and consolidation of the discourse of identity itself, both in scholarly writing and in quotidian speech, derives less from oppositional challenges than from dominant rearticulations of these key images and ideas in the face of recent crises in hegemonic influence and control.

This leads me finally to some broad reflections about radical perspectives on political mobilization. In arguing that there are problems with conceptualizing mobilization solely in the language of identity, my aim has not been to challenge every kind of politics conducted in its name but instead to argue for an approach that remains equally attentive to other actual and potential forms of practice. At the same time, while I have suggested that people may define social problems not only by reference to prejudice and disenfranchisement but also in terms of material inequalities and the conditions that sustain them, it is important to stress that they rarely if ever articulate their concerns in such bald and abstract terms. Instead, as I implied in noting Aguilillans' anxieties and concerns, they commonly draw on culturally specific idioms associated with the complex and contingent relationship between ways of making a living and broader ways of life. Understood from this perspective, class consciousness is much

more widespread than it might initially appear, though it is equally important to stress that it should be understood not as the consciousness *of* a given class – an idea forged from the refraction of class-related thinking through the logic of identity – but as a critical consciousness *about* class and, more fully, class relations. And this, in turn, has crucial implications for imagining how class-related politics can be organized and carried out. Put simply, it encourages the thought, raised briefly at the end of my analysis of the Aguilillan case, that radical challenges to the status quo may ultimately be more significant if they reach beyond identity to involve coalitional, cross-class collectivities of shared and overlapping commitment and beyond prejudice and disenfranchisement alone to focus on their chronic intersection with forms of exploitation.

NOTES

This paper is primarily a product of a continuing exchange of ideas with Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, Michael Kearney, Carole Nagengast and Cristina Szanton Blanc. I would like to express appreciation for both the importance of their work on recent (im)migration and their comradely approach to dialogue and debate. I am also grateful to the Inter-American Foundation, which funded the ethnographic research on which the paper draws. Earlier versions of the argument were presented at the 1991 meeting of the American Anthropological Association and to members of the Department of Anthropology at New York University, the Affiliations Seminar at the University of Michigan, the Minority Discourse Group at the University of California, Irvine, and the Hemispheric Studies Group at the University of California, Davis. I have been helped considerably by the comments I received in these contexts and by the engaged responses of individual readers, especially Sherry Ortner, Silvia Pedraza, John Stiles and Ann Stoler. Above all, I would like to thank Lauren Berlant for both her insight and her support.

1. Given that the discourse of identity is manifest as much in people's quotidian speech as in scholarly writing, references to the latter can only give a partial sense of its ubiquity and its content. For recent collections that reflect and often struggle with the centrality of the discourse, however, see Bammer (1994), Danielsen and Engle (1995), Ferguson and Gupta (1992), Keith and Pile (1993) and Lash and Friedman (1992).
2. I use the somewhat awkward term '(im)migration' (and the associated term '(im)migrant') because, as I indicate more fully below, it is becoming increasingly important to unsettle the apparently self-evident distinction between 'immigration', suggesting unidirectional movement, and 'migration', with its intimations of continual circulation.
3. For fuller discussion of these tendencies, see Basch et al. (1993: 1–48) and Rouse (1991).
4. For collections that emphasize the transnational dimensions of (im)migrant

- experience, see Glick Schiller et al. (1992a) and Sutton and Chaney (1987). Other important contributions to the development of a transnational perspective on (im)migration include Appadurai (1990, 1991, 1993), Basch et al. (1993), Glick Schiller and Fouron (1990), Goldring (1992), Kearney (1991), Leonard (1992), Nagengast and Kearney (1990), Rouse (1991, 1992) and Smith (1994).
5. Analyses of transnational (im)migration that privilege questions of identity include Appadurai (1993), Glick Schiller et al. (1992b), Glick Schiller and Fouron (1990), Kearney (1991), Nagengast and Kearney (1990) and Sutton (1987).
 6. For informative histories of the spread of the discourse of identity in the US social sciences, see Gleason (1983) and Weigert et al. (1986).
 7. See, for example, Basch et al. (1993) and Nagengast and Kearney (1990).
 8. My understanding of medieval concepts of personhood, collectivity and struggle is drawn principally from the work of Gurevich (1985).
 9. Other scholars have used the phrase 'politics of identification' rather differently. Hall (1988), in fact, employs it to describe precisely the coalitional forms of mobilization that I believe are obfuscated and undermined by hegemonic practices built around the logic of identity.
 10. My thinking on these matters has been particularly influenced by Anderson (1991: 163–85), Corrigan and Sayer (1985) and Foucault (1979, 1983).
 11. For a detailed analysis of the colonial dimensions of such processes, see the recent work of Ann Stoler (e.g. 1989).
 12. The analysis that follows draws on both the intensive ethnographic and historical research that I carried out in Aguililla and Redwood City between October 1982 and December 1984 and on more casual involvements with Aguilillans in the United States between 1981 and 1987. I refer to their experiences during these years in the past tense as a way of acknowledging the specificity of the moment in which my work with them was done.
 13. A fuller account of these processes can be found in Rouse (1991, 1992, and especially 1989).
 14. By the time I arrived in the *municipio*, in 1983, the peasant and ranching way of life had already been affected heavily by (im)migration and other changes. My account of the attitudes and understandings associated with it thus depends partly on a reconstruction that is guided mainly by the lengthy oral histories that I obtained from older people in the area.
 15. Sadly, their success was short-lived. Soon after their victory, the company left Redwood City for another part of northern California, where it was able to start up again with an un-unionized workforce. For a more detailed case of union organizing among undocumented Mexican and Central American (im)migrants, see Delgado (1993).

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