THE PREDICAMENT OF DIASPORA.
CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL PROBLEMS
OF STUDYING PERU’S MIGRANT POPULATION

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Diaspora, diasporic or diasporization have become trendy terms among anthropologists, migration scholars and advocates of multiculturalism in the past 15 years. Among the most prominent thinkers within this trend are Paul Gilroy (1993) and James Clifford (1994) whose influential works from the early 1990s triggered a wave of new migration studies with focus on the transnational and diasporic dimensions of contemporary migrant populations. The contention of these authors is that culture cannot be examined as a geographical confined construct but must be studied as a dispersed phenomenon, a view that leads to the argument that all people are diasporic, at least potentially. Such a use of the concept of diaspora offers new possibilities of understanding contemporary social change in an increasingly globalized world. However, it also raises important methodological and conceptual questions concerning the definition of the terms we employ in our analysis and the many political and moral agendas they propel. As Axel points out, students of diaspora often produce their object of study “with a set of compulsions that not only configure our analytical work but also interact in a dynamic way with the practices of the people we study”. In effect, migration scholars face the predicament of addressing a concept that in the real world often is employed in divergent and hegemonic ways and within the academia is associated with emancipation and diversity (Brubaker 2005), which makes Amit & Rapport state that “If primordialism and essentialism are key elements in the efforts to define the ideological rationale and boundaries of diaspora, it is ironic to see cultural theorists, who have so denounced the exoticisms of the colonial and orientalist gaze, now embrace them as vehicles for subaltern political liberation” (2002: 54).

The aim of this paper is to discuss this predicament by exploring the possibilities of using the concept of diaspora to examine the global networks and identity constructions that emerge in the wake of contemporary international migration processes. My suggestion is that we use diaspora as an analytical category to study particular aspects of these migration processes rather than as a general term for all forms of hybridity and mobility in the contemporary world. In order to do this I draw on my own data on Peruvian migration, which I use to examine to what extent the conflicts, commitments, organizations and imaginaries that migrants living in the United States, Spain, Japan and Argentina create and engage in generate forms of

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1 Ong states that diasporic studies “look at the subjective experience of displacement, victimhood, cultural hybridity, and cultural struggles in the modern world” (1999: 12).
diasporic relations and identities. I develop this analysis by first discussing the conceptual and analytical problems of using diaspora as a general concept to understand social fluidity and identity construction in a globalizing world and suggesting an analytical framework that allow us to use it as a research tool to explore particular aspects of population movements. After a brief introduction to Peruvian migration I then explore four terrains of social interaction and identity construction among Peruvians in the United States, Spain, Japan and Argentina with a particular focus on the bonds that migrants in different parts of the world create to each other and the notions of belonging they give rise to. Finally I discuss the possibilities of using the concept of diaspora to understand Peruvian migration and conclude by summing up the major findings of the paper.

The History of the Concept

Unlike its twin concept transnationality, which has been coined by US scholars whose main research interest is focused on migration processes between, on the one hand, Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean and, on the other, the United States, diaspora is not an academic term. Quite on the contrary, it has a long tradition in European political and cultural history and it is only recently that migration scholars have taken interest in the concept. In its classical definition diaspora implies that people retain a collective narrative of suffering based on the experience of persecution and dispersion in their mythical homeland that continues to make up a central point of reference in their creation of identities (Safran 1991). Moreover, it is commonly understood as a people or historical collectivity defined in terms at once historical and religious such as the Jews, the Greeks, and the Armenians (ibid.). Typically, these refer themselves to a myth or origin vested with an almost sacred value, which lends the term a strong ethnic connotation (Stratton 1997). Moreover, diaspora has conventionally been associated with certain economic and social activities in the host society. One was that of the merchant and another the role of the intellectual, which both gave rise to the image of diasporic minorities as intermediaries, also labeled “middleman minorities” (Schnapper 1999). Safran (1991: 83-84) sums up the classical definition of diaspora in six points:

2 Semantically, the two concepts refer to different though overlapping social phenomena and processes, which explain their often inconsistent and confusing use in migration studies. Transnationality, on the one hand, indicates the links that migrants establish to their country of region of origin and allow them simultaneously to create new lives in the receiving society and maintain strong identity relations to the sending society (Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt 1999). Although it is true that transnational links are far from new in the history of international migration modern technology makes it possible to make more systematic use of such ties and maintain them much longer than previously (Smith 2000). Diaspora, on the other hand, means dispersion and indicates the many bonds that bring people who share same migration history but are scattered in different locations together in response to either discrimination or assimilation in the receiving societies.
1) dispersal to two or more locations  
2) collective mythology of homeland  
3) alienation from host country  
4) idealization of return to homeland  
5) commitment to the maintenance or restoration of homeland  
6) continued identification with the homeland

After 1968 the meaning of diaspora has been broadened to also include communities that scholars had once labeled immigrant, nomadic or exilic. In the words of Tölelyan, “Where once were dispersion, there now is diaspora” (1996: 3). On the one hand, this change of the use of the term is partly a result of a re-orientation of identity from within the communities themselves that increasingly embrace the diasporan discourse. As Clifford reminds us, membership in a diaspora is now viewed as a strategy of empowerment because it entails the mobilization of international support and influence both in the homeland and the host society (Clifford 1994). On the other hand, this new proliferation of the term diaspora is also due to the shift in paradigm that took place in the 1990s that has instigated scholars to explain ethnic relations and identity processes as the outcome of globalization and transnationalization. In effect, a growing number of scholars exploring migration, multiculturalism and ethnicity have recast their work as diasporic studies, which allow them to simultaneously capture the deterritorialized and fluid nature of modern life and account for the local embeddedness and particular circumstantiality that continue to shape people’s lives in the 21st century. However, precisely because diaspora is associated with origin and primordialism as much as with mobility and hybridity and therefore implies an immanent tension between belonging and travel (or as in Clifford prefers it: between roots and routes), the concept has erroneously instigated many scholars to study migrants, refugees and exiled people through the same analytical lens that anthropologists, sociologists and other scholars conventionally used to explore small scale and marginal population groups (Amit & Rapport 2002).

As a result, diaspora has become a new buzzword for culture and identity as well as a conceptual vehicle to claim rights on behalf of people who suffer from oppression or discrimination, which urges Brubaker to suggest that we “think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can be fruitfully used as a category of analysis.” (2005: 12). Indeed, unless we want to lump all forms of migrant communities and identities together in one category we need to be more specific when labeling global movements and networks diasporic and ask whether it actually helps us understand the changes that take place within the migrant communities we study or whether it leads us into what Wimmer and
Glick Schiller have called methodological nationalism (2002); that is, the reification of transnational migrant groups as homogenous or static social units and the representation of their engagements and concerns as the mere replication of national and ethnic identities on a global scale. This again raises critical questions regarding the definition of our analytical unit and, more important, how we study the process through which societies and communities emerge and evolve into self-conscious constructions. As Amit and Rapport point out, collective identities “whether defined in terms of nation, ethnicity, occupation or political movement, are all too often invoked to fill the vacuum of location once filled (literally) by place” (2002: 3). Thus, when labeling particular emigrant groups diasporic we need to ask whether we are referring to the mere demographic fact that a certain fragment of a national population live within a territory controlled by another nation state or we are implying that this group has developed its own social and political order and created an awareness of being a group in itself (Vertovec 1997).

Diaspora as an Analytical Tool

In this paper I argue that although modern technology prompts a growing number of the world’s population to move and makes traveling and migration a dominant dimension of modern life, this does not imply that all societies are diasporic or that all nations or cultures generate diasporic identities. Rather than employing the notion of diaspora indiscriminately to all kinds of transnational networks and identities I propose that we follow Butler, who identifies and isolates a set of categories of analysis that are applicable to all diasporic orders and that can help us to distinguish diasporas from other movements of people (Butler 2001). Moreover, in order to identify these categories I suggest that we use Safran’s definition in a slightly revised form. To illustrate their utility I shall try to apply these categories in my own study of Peru’s migrant population and discuss to what extent Peruvian migrants have developed a particular diasporic order or awareness. I also argue that because diaspora carries strong moral and political connotations and is attached meaning by both migrants and the sending and receiving countries, scholars need to take the implications that their use of the term have for the people they study into account in their analysis.

Unlike many transnational migration networks that link specific groups of migrants living in the same host society to their homeland diasporas are constituted by migrant populations dispersed in several cities, countries or continents (Cohen 1997). In essence, it is the web of relations between several migrant communities that all feel united by the same myth of origin and shared sense of simultaneousness as well as belonging to a remote homeland that constitute the stuff diasporas are made
of (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). Furthermore, diasporas are global configurations of sites attributed particular social and cultural meanings. Or as Werbner suggests, “Diasporas need to be grasped as deterritorialized imagined communities which conceive of themselves, despite their dispersal, as sharing a collective past and common destiny, and hence also a simultaneity in time” (2002: 121). This sense of existing in a place that is neither the home nor the host society is contingent upon three circumstances (as outlined by Safran) namely that the group: a) develops bonds to emigrant communities in other parts of the world, b) resists assimilation and preserves a certain degree of economic and cultural autonomy as a minority (and thus avoid becoming an ethnic group in the Barth’s sense of the term), and c) maintains the ties (whether mythical or real) to the home country.

Whereas the alienation of diasporic communities from the host society usually is the result of historical experiences of discrimination and exclusion rather than an actively pursued strategy to avoid assimilation (Schnapper 1999), the creation of imagined or actual bonds to the country of origin constitutes an essential aspect of diasporic identities. Not only do these ties allow migrants to live in a transnational space (Pries 1999; Rouse 1991: Kearney 1996; Levitt 2001) but they serve as an important economic resource for political rulers in the home societies and constitute a critical ideological issue in their political agendas (Glick Schiller & Fouron 1999). Indeed, it is often such struggles in the sending societies over the right to control the economic and social relations to a dispersed migrant community and the claims put forward by this to political rights as minority or ethnic groups in their home land that transform “incipient” diasporas into “mobilized” diasporas and trigger diasporic self-awareness (Axel 2002; Tölöyan 1996: 20-29). In other words, diasporic identities emerge from the awareness of a distinction between the experiences of those who have been dispersed and of those who remain in the country of origin. Moreover, in as much as diasporic formations comprise a variety of social classes and ethnic groups they tend to reproduce the social hierarchies and relations of inequality of the home society. In other words, relations of power and political conflict are inherent in the social order and cultural identity that emerge from diasporic networks. Consequently, diasporas are highly contested and politicised social formations (Werbner 2001).

According to my working definition, then, diaspora is a social formation encompassing migrant communities in several destinations that, on the one hand, maintain a degree of economic and political autonomy as immigrant community in the host societies and, on the other, preserve either real or imagined ties to the country of origin hereby creating imaginaries of itself in the form of an inversion of the homeland. But how do we operationalize the concept of diaspora and apply the
above set of analytical categories in empirical research? Moreover, how do we identify those aspects of a migrant population that actually are diasporic and that are non-diasporic? In the following I examine four terrains of social interaction and identity construction among Peruvians living outside as well as inside Peru. The first involves a political conflict that was caused by a more than thirty years old labor migration chain to the United States. The second deals with the co-responsibility that propels migrants to collect money to help their fellow countrymen in Peru. The third concerns Peruvians’ representation of social identities in art and folklore and their divergent readings of these representations as symbols of national identity whereas the fourth examines migrants’ institutional organization and division in class and ethnic groups. My aim is to explore in what way the relations of exchange, power hierarchies, cultural imaginaries and identity constructions that shape these terrains of interactions and identity constructions generate a diasporic social order or prompt the emergence of a diasporic awareness in accordance with my analytical categories. More bluntly, I want to clarify exactly what we mean when calling Peru’s migrant population diasporic. Is this an analytical or merely a descriptive or political categorization? And exactly what relations, activities and forms of identifications are we referring to when talking about a Peruvian diaspora? Lastly, in what ways are diasporic relations and imaginaries activated and transformed into sources of mobilization and representation? Before going into further details let me make a brief description of contemporary Peruvian migration history.

**The Peruvian Exodus**

For centuries Peru was the destination of conquerors, slaves, refugees and fortune hunters from Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. The racial and cultural mixture that Peru experienced during the years of immigration provided the source of the country’s current out-migration and produced the diversity of this exodus. The Spaniards, Italians, Argentines, North Americans and Japanese who came to work or settle in Peru up to the mid 1950s created economic, political and cultural connections between their new country of residence and their place of origin that Peruvians have used to spread across the world in the second half of the 20th century. The recent migration is remarkable because it represents a wide range of social classes and ethnic, and age groups in Peru and because women and men emigrate in equal number. Upper as well as middle and working class Peruvians, urban professionals as well as highland peasants, police officers as well as street vendors, women as well as men, old as well as young, and mestizos as well as Indians and other ethnic groups leave the country in large numbers. Peru’s migration also attracts attention because Peruvians have dispersed to many places: Peruvians do not just one or two favorite destinations, but many. Today these
include the United States, Spain, Italy, Japan, Argentina and Chile.

Peruvians’ dispersal on a global scale has two dimensions (Paerregaard 2008). On the one hand, former immigration flows in Peru have induced Peruvians to migrate to specific countries in America, Europe and Asia, as already mentioned. On the other hand, Peruvian migration can be viewed as the outcome of a population flow that prompts people from the same region in Peru to tend to migrate to the same destinations (Altamirano 2000). Thus Spain has become the preferred target of Peruvian migration from coastal cities of central and northern Peru. Whereas Madrid mostly attracts migrants from Lima almost half of the Peruvians living in Barcelona come from Trujillo, the third largest city in Peru (Escrivá 2000; Paerregaard 2002). Similarly, migrants from the northern coastal cities of Chimbote, Trujillo, Chiclayo and Piura make up the bulk of the Peruvian population in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile (Nuñez 2002; Paerregaard 2005c) while American cities such as New York, Paterson in New Jersey and Los Angeles in California together with Japan have become preferred destinations of Peruvians primarily from other coastal cities of central Peru such as Huacho and Ica and from Lima (Julca 2001; Paerregaard 2005c; Ruiz Bahía 1999; Takenaka 1999). Likewise, Milan, Rome and Turin in Italy, and Miami (Florida), and, to a lesser extent, Washington DC, New York and Dallas and Houston (Texas) in the United States have in a number of years been the major destinations of migrants from the central and southern Peruvian highlands for a number of years (Tamagno 2002; Paerregaard 2005b). Although such a mapping of migrants’ regional origin and global itinerancy cannot convey the specifics of the geographical and cultural dynamics that propel the Peruvian emigration, it does indicate broad trends, on the basis of which substantive conclusions may be drawn.³

Diaspora and Politics

Over the past 30 years more than 3,000 Peruvians have worked on North American sheep ranches on a H-2A visa and currently almost 2,000 are working as sheepherders in the United States for the WRA (Western Range Association) and other agencies.⁴ Their labor migration meets different economic needs and links

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³ I used a multi-sited strategy to conduct field research among Peruvians in Spain, Italy, Argentina, Chile, the United States and Japan over a period of four years. According to Marcus, such a strategy “is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography” (Marcus 1995: 105). Essentially, it allowed me to explore global relations and diasporic identities through ethnographic in-depth studies in selected countries and research sites.

⁴ In the United States there is a long tradition for importing sheepherders from abroad. During the first half of the 20th century American recruitment agencies primarily contracted Basque herders. Later Mexicans, Chileans and Peruvians were
distinct life worlds in the First and the Third World. At one end of the migration chain, the economic and political crisis in Peru generates a constant supply of rural workers in desperate search for alternative sources of income. At the other end, the sheep ranching industry in the United States looks for cheap labor to do work North Americans not accept. The two ends are connected through a network of Peruvian herders who travel repeatedly between the United States and Peru. In the North the ranch owners, the WRA and American immigration authorities control the flow of Peruvians that enter and leave the United States on the H-2A visa; in the South an informal network of family and household relations assures the reproduction of the labor force and provides new recruits (Paerregaard 2002).

The continuous migration of these herders has developed into an organizing practice based on networks of close kinship and household relations that regulate the recruitment of new migrants. However, the employers’ power to recommend the herders’ relatives to the WRA instigates many workers to submit themselves to a classic patron-client relationship in the United States. The search for confidence creates an anxiety for upsetting the ranchers who often use the herders’ fear to scare them out of complaining about the work conditions, quit the job or return to Peru before the contract expires. At the heart of the herders’ migration practice, then, lies a cultural economy built on trust that not only spurs Peruvians to continue working in the United States and to call upon new family members but is used by the American ranch owners and the WRA to discipline the herders to endure the harsh working conditions in the mountains and the desert and deter them from running away.

As most herders become dependent on their earning in dollars over the years, they continue working on their second, third, fourth or fifth contract. Eventually, many end up spending a significant part of their adult lives in the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains. Upon returning many they find it hard to adapt to the environment in their native villages and home country or to reunite with their families. Some even complain that their children do not recognize them when coming back. In effect, many realize that the reward of many years of solitude and hard work is to feel estranged from the families they left behind and simply drop out of their work contracts as herders and become undocumented immigrants in the United. Thus up through the 1990s Bakersfield in California had become the center for the growing number of Peruvian herders in California who overstay their H-2A visa and settle in the United States illegally. They now make up a community of more than 100 Peruvians who come together every Sunday to play soccer and drink beers. Some of them have married local women of Hispanic background, formed new families and become legal residents. Others have applied for political asylum or spend years as
undocumented immigrants looking for work in the service sector or as factory workers.

In 1995 a group of Peruvians living in Bakersfield lead by an ex-herder, Victor Flores, decided to create an organization called Unión de Pastores Ovejeros to defend the rights of the herders and to disseminate information about their situation in the United States and Peru. It received public attention in Los Angeles the same year it was formed because a Peruvian newspaper, Perú de los 90, started publishing a series of articles about the herders’ situation. The news caused an intense discussion within the Peruvian community in California about solidarity among fellow migrants and the moral and legal rights of immigrants in the United States. Many Peruvians have either entered the country illegally or overstayed a tourist visa and live and work as domestic servants, gardeners, waiters, construction workers, etc. in the big cities. To many of them it came as a surprise that herders from remote villages in the Peruvian highland were working as legal immigrants in the United States in human conditions worse than what they were used to in Peru.

The scandal increased further when the Perú de los 90 reported that the Peruvian consul in Los Angeles previously had ignored the herders’ complaints. The news also reached Peru where one of the country’s major dailies, La República, and a weekly magazine in Lima, Caretas, reported about missing and ill-treated Peruvian herders in the United States. In addition, a television channel in Lima, Canal 4, produced a documentary on Peruvian sheep herders in California in which two reporters interviewed a Basque ranch owner and revealed the conditions in which his Peruvian employers were living. The documentary sparked yet another scandal among politicians in Lima where the President of Congress, Martha Chávez, referred to the herders’ situation in a heated debate about human rights in Peru. Similar reports on Spanish television channels in the United States caused moral indignation among Hispanic minority groups and in 1996 the Peruvian Ambassador paid a personal visit together with officials from the US labor department to several ranches using Peruvian labor force.

The debate about economic exploitation and human rights abuses of Peruvian sheep herders in the United States that emerged in the wake of the formation of the herders’ union in Bakersfield and Victor's accusations against the WRA reflects the economic and social complexity of global migration networks. Once the Peruvian community in Los Angeles, the media in Peru and the United States and politicians in Lima engaged in the controversy, the herders’ situation became the concern of economic, ethical, and political interests of very different kinds. Whereas the Peruvian consul in Los Angeles was replaced, the editor of Perú de los 90 won an award for its coverage of the conflict. Meanwhile, Martha Chávez played on national

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5 The union is associated with the United Farm Workers of America of AFL-CIO.
6 Perú de los 90 9 (2, 3, 4), Feb., March, April 1998.)
sentiments in Peru accusing the American government of double standards because it criticized the human rights politics of the Fujimori government while accepting American sheep ranchers’ abuses against Peruvian herders. Reversely, the political opposition in Peru traced the cause of the tragedy to the failure of the Peruvian government in solving the country’s economic problems.

In this myriad of global and local perspectives, Victor was not the only ex-herder articulating the interests of the herders in public. Since Teodocio, who had been working on a H-2A visa in the United States for three years, returned to Peru in 1989 he had made friendship with the Peruvian engineer in charge of recruiting sheepherders in Lima occasionally offering him his advice and support in the selection of new candidates. As the WRA and the engineer came under increasing attack in the late 1990s, Teodocio and a group of ex-herders in Huancayo became worried that the Peruvian government eventually would close down the entire migration program and thus encouraged American ranchers to look for herders in other countries. In effect, they formed an association called Asociación de ex-trabajadores de la Western Ranch Association (Association of ex-workers of the WRA) that speaks in defense of the WRA and the engineer. These ex-herders claim that sheep herding in the United States represents a unique opportunity for young men in Peru looking for alternative sources of income and that it is in the herders’ own interest that the migration program continues. In 1997 Teodocio was invited to present his viewpoints at the committee for human rights formed by Peru’s congress. He also met with Victor and representatives from the Peruvian government to discuss the future of the migration program. At the meeting an informal agreement between the WRA, the engineer and the Peruvian government to respect the herders’ rights was made and it was decided to allow the migration program to continue with few changes. Within short time the public and political interest in the herders’ situation faded away and the number of herders traveling to the United States continued to increase.

Diaspora and Morality

Many Peruvians feel obliged to contribute to the material wealth of their fellow countrymen in times of scarcity and crisis which results in organized attempts to make collections of financial and material help to the Peruvian government or to public or private institutions in Peru. This became evident in 1998 when el Niño hit...

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7 Whereas Victor was successful in calling the public attention to the matter, he failed to mobilize the support of the herders in the United States and Peru. Though many agree that the work and living conditions on the ranches are reprehensible, they also share Teodocio’s concern that the controversy jeopardized their future possibilities of working on labor contracts in the United States and save capital and create an alternative source of income. The dispute, then, not only disclosed the predicaments inherent in Victor’s strategy to organize the herders and fight the WRA and sheep herding industry in the United States through the public media and with the help of Peruvian politicians but demonstrated the complexity of economic, social and political interests involved in global migration practice.
Peru and caused huge personal tragedies and material damage. As a result, the road connection between the cities of the northern coast and the rest of the country was interrupted leaving thousands of people whose homes and fields had been flooded outside the reach of emergency assistance. The disaster caused by el Niño also jeopardized the government’s policy to spark economic growth and created uncertainty whether the recent recovery of the country’s economy would last or once again fall into recession. The news about el Niño and the pictures of its devastating effect rapidly reached the Peru’s emigrant population around the world and stirred many migrants. In effect, Peruvian associations in the United States began to raise subscriptions in aid to the victims of el Niño in Peru. Initially, individual migrants reacted spontaneously by encouraging friends and neighbors to join them in their efforts to help their fellow countrymen in Peru and soon Peruvian associations throughout the United States followed their example.

In Miami a number of Peruvian migrant associations organized a collection of cloth, food, medicine, tools and money that later was sent to Peru by Aeroperú (at that time the country’s national career) and several private Peruvian freight companies. The collection was announced in the local Peruvian newspapers that circulate in Miami and announced on flyers available at the city’s many Peruvian restaurants and shops. During the event, which took place between February 14 and 15, 1998, on a place called Plaza Perú located in Kendall, Western Miami, representatives from not merely different Peruvian associations but also the Peruvian consulate in Miami were present. Several celebrities were brought in among others a famous female Peruvian model who offered her signature to the participants in the event. According to one local Peruvian newspaper, more than twenty tons of cloth and other items were collected over the two days the event lasted. Other newspapers called the event a success because it made a broad variety of Peruvian associations and institutions in Miami which otherwise act on their own and pursue with different agendas work together for a common cause. Likewise, many participants in the event also expressed their satisfaction because Peruvians in Miami had accomplished to arrange a collection of such dimensions in collaboration with the Peruvian consulate.

Migrants’ in other parts of the United States also expressed the desire to raise subscriptions to aid the victims of el Niño disaster and on March 22, 1998, the AIPEUC, an umbrella organization embracing all Peruvian institutions in the United States and Canada, arranged a so-called telemaratón (Tele Marathon), a nation-wide collection organized locally by AIPEUC’s chapters in North America (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, New York, Chicago, and Montreal). In Los Angeles the president of the local chapter of AIPEUC, which represents one of the

8 Peru News 2, Feb. 1998
11 AIPEUC means Asociación de instituciones peruanas en los Estados Unidos y Canadá.
largest Peruvian organizations in the United States, invited a variety of Peruvian artists, musicians and dancing groups to entertain in a rented banqueting hall in Hollywood. In addition to the mandatory entrance fee of twenty dollars the participants were encouraged to make voluntary contributions. The majority discreetly dropped a ten or twenty dollar note in the boxes which the organizers used to collect money but a few participants were invited up on the stage to hand over their contribution in public. These were all successful businessmen and professionals and known members of the Peruvian community in Los Angeles who donated up to a thousand dollars. Simultaneous, other collections were arranged by independent Peruvians associations in the Los Angeles area such as the Arequipa Club in Orange County. In order to stimulate competition between Peruvian communities across North America the leaders of the AIPEUC constantly kept the organizers and participants of the many subscriptions updated of the results in other parts of the country, which created a sense of simultaneity and shared commitment among Peruvians in North America. The outcome of the many contributions was later communicated to Peruvians in different parts of the United States and Canada through local newspapers.\(^{12}\)

However, migrants’ sense of co-responsibility is not merely directed towards their fellow countrymen but also Peruvians living outside Peru.\(^{13}\) Periodically, this concern triggers debates and campaigns within the migrant communities to demonstrate solidarity with Peruvians who suffer from social injustice and discrimination in the host society or who otherwise fall victims of misfortune. In Miami a group of Peruvians formed a committee in January 1998 with the aim to support fellow countrymen who struggle to regularize their illegal status in the United States. The founders of this committee were the editor of one of Miami’s Peruvian newspapers (\textit{El Chasqui}) and the leader of an organization called Peruvian American Coalition which inspired by the success of the Cuban community in Florida urged Peruvians in the United States to use their right to vote to elect a fellow countryman for the Congress.\(^{14}\) The committee’s political message was that legal immigrants have a moral obligation to help undocumented immigrants because illegality is a universal condition that may affect the life of all immigrants. By the same token, some of the organizers who use local immigrant newspapers in

\(^{12}\) \textit{Ultima Hora} 1 (5), April 1998; \textit{El Panamericano} 5 (72), April 1998; \textit{Actualidad} 6 (82), April 1998; \textit{L.A. Peruvian Times} 7 (13), March 1998.

\(^{13}\) Peruvians also showed concern for their home country during the brief war which Peru fought against Ecuador in 1995 over the border that separates the two countries. However, rather than uniting migrants as happened in 1998 when Peruvians collected money to aid the victims of el Niño disaster the conflict with Ecuador tended to divide Peruvians in two groups: those supporting President Fujimori in his martial rhetoric against neighboring Ecuador and those in favor of a pan-American rather than a national identity arguing for a peaceful solution of the conflict.

\(^{14}\) A similar movement called \textit{La Plataforma Socio-Política Peruana Americana} (Peruvian American Socio-Political Platform) was created in California in 1998 (\textit{Perú de los 90} 9 (2), Feb. 1998).
Spanish to communicate their message contend that such a sense of solidarity should transcend national identities and include immigrants from all Latin American countries. So far, however, the resonance of these attempts to create horizontal ties across social classes and ethnic groups and incite the formation of a national identity among Peruvians immigrants in different parts of the North America has been limited.

In other parts of the world similar movements have been formed to create a collective consciousness of constituting a separate demographic unit and to mobilize Peruvian migrants for political purposes. In Argentina a movement called Movimiento de Peruanos en el Exterior (Movement of Peruvians in the Exterior) was established in 1999 in collaboration with other emigrant communities in the United States and Canada with the aim to promote an emigrant at the elections for the Peruvian Congress in 2001. The movement’s politically message is that because of migrants contribute to Peru’s economy through the remittances they send to their relative at home the Peruvian government has a moral obligation to support their struggle against the discrimination and marginalization they suffer as immigrants in their new countries of residence. Such a message encourage migrants to think of themselves as a politically homogenous group who share same interest independent of where they live or who they are. Other Peruvian organizations in Argentina are also concerned with the welfare of their fellow countrymen though of very different reasons. In 1950s and 60s hundreds of young Peruvian males went to Argentina to study. Many returned to Peru but others stayed and married either Argentine women or brought their wives from Peru and settled in Argentina. Some of these women who today are well established and integrated in Argentine society have formed an institution called Asociación de Damas Peruanas, which does charity work among newly arrived Peruvians in need of help.

Unlike the United States and Argentina Japan has only recently opened its borders for immigration. Hence Peruvians who started to arrive on a major scale in 1990 are still struggling to create migrant institutions and form an organized immigrant community. Moreover, because Japan’s immigration policy only grants stay and work permit to Latin Americans of Japanese descent, the Peruvian community has for a number of years been divided into two groups according to migrants’ ethnic origin. On the one hand, Peruvians of Japanese descent who enjoy the legal right to work in Japan for periods of one to three years and, on the other, Peruvians of non-Japanese descent who either are married to Japanese Peruvians or live in Japan on

17 One of the leaders of the movement is a brother of the current President of Peru, Alejandro Toledo. The candidate promoted by the movement as candidate for Peru’s congress was the owner of the biggest Peruvian remittance agency in Argentina (Argenper).
18 Similar institutions exist in most cities with major concentration of Peruvian immigrants in the United States.
fake identity papers or as illegal aliens (Takenaka 1999). Because Peruvians have been slow to form their own institutions the Peruvian Consulate in Tokyo has played a central role in mobilizing Peruvians in Japan. In 1999 the Peruvian Consulate in Tokyo in cooperation with several migrant leaders launched a campaign to improve the image, which many Japanese have of Peruvians and other Latin American immigrants as potential criminals. The target group of the campaign called Campaña de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia and made public in Spanish newspapers was the Peruvian community in general which the Consulate urged to respect Japanese law and stay away from crime. However, rather than uniting Peruvians by claiming a right to be heard in the host society (as in the United States) or gaining influence in Peruvian politics (as in Argentina) and hereby furthering (undocumented as well as documented) migrants’ integration in Japan and improving their image in Japanese society, the campaign tended to divide the Peruvian community by turning one group of migrants (those without legal status) up against another (the rest).

**Diaspora and Aesthetics**

The emergence of a market for Andean music and folk art in the western world has been accompanied by a growing interest in Peruvian migrant communities in identifying customs and practices that appropriately express what migrants find typical or representative of Peruvian culture and history. This is particularly evident in Miami, where the presence of Andean migrants is more visible than other places in the world. The following case study illustrates how these identity processes are negotiated and contested among Peruvian migrants.

Nicario Jiménez was born in Alqaminka, a Quechua-speaking peasant community in the department of Ayacucho. As both his father and grandfather were retablistas, Nicario learned to make retablos or rectangular wooden boxes with two painted doors, which contain small figures representing people and animals engaged in social and ritual activities, such as agricultural work, cattle-herding, trade and exchange, and religious celebrations of mostly Christian events. In the early 1980s the political violence in Ayacucho forced Nicario to migrate to Lima. In 1986 Nicario was invited by a North American historian to lecture about his work as a folk artisan at one of Miami’s universities. In the years that followed he continued traveling to United States to participate in academic events. However, he also started to show his works, which he produced at his workshop in Barranco, at local art exhibitions in Florida, and when he was granted a temporary residence visa in 1997 he decided to move permanently to Miami together with one of his daughters.

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20 This is reflected in the broad spectrum of regional institutions, including associations for migrants from Cajamarca, Ancash, Huanayo, Ayacucho and Arequipa, which arrange activities such as carnaval, corta monte, festival folklórico and pachamanca. Although they recruit members on the basis of regional origin, migrants from all over Peru, including Lima, join in these activities.
While lecturing in Miami, Nicario changed his notion of it means to be a *retablista*. He learned that the distinction between folk art and true art is very fuzzy and that his *retablos* are valued not only because he manufactures them according to an Andean folk art tradition, but also because of his own individual ingenuity and creativity. In other words, he discovered that the *retablos* he makes are not just a reproduction of an inherent tradition (folk art), but a unique creation, the value of which only can be determined by its individual quality, namely art. This reconceptualization of his own identity as an artisan encouraged Nicario to engage in what he considers a personal struggle to win recognition as an artist, not only within the Peruvian community in Miami, but also at the official art exhibitions throughout the United States. In 1997 he established a workshop in a rented flat in Miami, which served as his main base for producing *retablos*. He later moved the workshop to Naples in West Florida, where he currently lives with his daughter. Periodically he travels all over the United States to display his works at art festivals, which over the years has won him numerous prizes and opened the doors to the North American market. Yet Nicario does not feel that his works have won the recognition they deserve. When I interviewed him in Miami in 1998, he said “They always try to place me in a special section of folk art and they gave me all those prizes. But I wanted them to recognize my work as real art. So I ask them to place it in the section for art. Sometimes they let me do it. See, they think I’m a folk artisan because I’m Peruvian and make *retablos*. But I want them to understand that I’m an artist.”

Nicario’s struggle to win recognition as an artist is reflected in his search for new motifs of the *retablos* he creates. Originally the *retablos* were called Missa Mastay or Cajón de San Marcos, and provided religious protections of the cattle belonging to the hacienda owners in Ayacucho. Later use of the Cajón de San Marcos became a local tradition among the Indian population in Ayacucho, who redesigned box and separated the figures on two floors, upper and lower, one symbolizing the world of the hacienda owner and the other those suffering from his tyranny, that is the Indians. Today the *retablos* have become the object of commercialization, and contemporary artisans mainly sell their products at Peru’s tourist markets. In this modern version, the *retablo* is a colorful and vivid illustration of the social and ritual activities related to the agricultural calendar of Peru’s peasant population. Indeed, to many urban Peruvians, as well as Peru’s growing tourist industry, the *retablo* has become a romantic and nostalgic emblem of the Andean world. However, instead of using the dual opposition traditionally employed in the *retablo* to reproduce conventional interpretations of the Andean world as being divided into an upper part inhabited by either the European and *mestizo* power elite or the religious forces that control human life and a lower part populated by Peru’s marginal Indian
population, Nicario portrays the relationship between the dominating and the dominated in situations of social injustice and discrimination in the contemporary world. Among the most spectacular motifs of his retablos are Miami airport divided into an upper world of legal travelers and an lower world inhabited by undocumented immigrants, who are detained by airport officials; Tijuana pictured divided into an upper world occupied by helicopters policing the US-Mexican border and a lower world belonging to the undocumented immigrants trying to enter the United States; New York City divided into an upper section inhabited by people either walking or driving on the streets and a lower section populated by the commuters who use the city’s subway; and Peru’s bloody civil war, pictured as a dual opposition between the victims of violence, that is the civil population, and the aggressors, that is the country’s military and rebel groups.

To Nicario, however, the artistic value of his retablos consists in their quality and originality rather than their motifs and symbolic meanings. A good retablo can depict North America’s modern urban world and Peru’s political history as well as the rural life of the Andes. He conceives the retablo as a genre of art that is constantly changing and that can be adopted to new environments, and he believes that its transformation from a sacred object used for ritual purposes into first a commercial folk product symbolizing Andean culture and now an individual art project revives rather than jeopardizes the folk art history of Ayacucho. Similarly, he thinks that the folklore tradition of his family endorses his attempts to win recognition as an artist. Whereas his grandfather was a local producer of the Cajón de San Marcos, his father mainly manufactured modern retablos. And just as his father trained him as a retablista, Nicario has instructed his son and daughter in the production of retablos as a folk art. To Nicario, then, the struggle to be acknowledged as an artist embodies the artistic spirit of his father and grandfather, a vision to which he gave testimony in an exhibition he arranged displaying the works of his family’s four generations of retablistas.

As a recognized retablista who symbolizes what to many represents an authentic Andean folk art, Nicario is periodically invited to display his work at cultural events arranged by Peruvian migrant organizations in Miami. However, his retablos often create confusion about not only what folk art means, but also Andean culture and identity. In 1997 he participated in an exhibition put on by a Peruvian organization in Key Biscayne, an island on the outskirts of Miami mostly populated by upper-class North Americans and wealthy Latin American immigrants but he felt disappointed by the response of the visitors. He recalls, “Many of those who came to see my work were Peruvians, but they asked me if I was from Guatemala. And when I said that I come from Peru, they seemed surprised and asked, ‘Which part of Peru?’
You know, many Peruvians in Key Biscayne come from Miraflores and San Isidro. They don’t know anything about Andean culture. But they think they know better than I what Andean folklore is.” Nicario was also asked to participate in an exhibition of Peruvian culture at the Peruvian consulate in Miami arranged by an organization called the Centro Peruano de Cultura y Historia. However, the organizers first refused to accept the works that Nicario wanted to display because they were different from what they expected of the conventional Andean retablo. He recalls that one of the organizers exclaimed, “How can you do that, Nicario? That’s not a retablo. Retablos show nice things about people in Peru. Not these kinds of things.” To Nicario, upper-class Peruvians have no knowledge of the culture and history of their own country, particularly where its indigenous population are concerned, and he feels frustrated that Peruvians from Lima who ignored Peru’s indigenous cultures before they migrated now claim to know what retablos should look like and even correct him for not creating proper Andean folklore. He says, “I make art, not folklore. Who are they to tell me what to do?”

Folklore and other forms of cultural representation constitute an important means for immigrants in a multicultural environment to forge imaginaries of not merely a national identity that they can use to not only distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups but also a diasporic awareness of constituting a section of the national population dispersed outside the home country. Nicario’s struggle to be recognized as an artist rather than a folklorist and the conflicts that the exhibition of his works at the Peruvian Consulate in Miami generated is a case in point of how Peruvians living in the United States reinterpret local and regional folklore traditions in Peru as symbols of a shared feeling of being Peruvianness that may be claimed by Peruvians in the United States to mark the boundaries to other Latin American immigrants. However, the struggle also reveals the difficulties of using Andean indigenous folklore traditions to create collective identities that try to include migrants from all of Peru’s social classes and ethnic groups particular when those promoting these identities come from Peru’s urban middle class of mestizo origin.

**Diaspora and Social Class**

The power relations and cultural and ethnic identities that divide Peruvian society into economic and social classes are reproduced in the social order that emerges from Peruvian emigration. This is evident from the many migrant organizations and associations that Peruvians create in their new countries of residence. Some of these institutions arrange soccer tournaments, dance and music shows and other social and cultural events and are open for all Peruvians. Others are based on faith and religion and take the form of Catholic brotherhoods while yet others recruit their
members according to either regional origin or class and are therefore more exclusive.

Because geographical identity in a Peruvian context usually is synonymous with indigenous culture, regional associations mainly attract migrants who identify themselves in ethnic terms. This kind of organizations are primarily found in Miami, Los Angeles, Paterson, New York, the United States, Madrid, Spain, Milan, Italy, and Ashikaga, Japan. They can be divided into two kinds: associations based on migrants’ attachment to their native village and to their home province or department. Village based associations are most of all committed to migrants’ place of origin and often these are engaged in an intense relations of economic and social exchange with their fellow villagers in Peru. The organizations based on migrants’ attachment to their home province or department, on the other hand, tend to attract a more heterogeneous group of migrants with an urban as well as a rural background.

Throughout the world Peruvians establish religious brotherhoods to honor Peruvian Catholic saints in the countries where they settle (Paerregaard 2008). These brotherhoods allow Peruvians to at once identify with a specific place in the world and feel at home anywhere else and thus claim a particular identity as Peruvians and simultaneously redefine its symbolic meaning to a social order that exists outside Peru and is based on a sense of co-responsibility and solidarity between all Peruvian emigrants and potentially also other non-Peruvian migrants. Often Peruvians’ engagement in the brotherhoods is prompted by a concern for the marginalization that Third World immigrants experience in many western countries, which prompts them to use religious symbols as a common point of reference to mark distance to the host society. However, occasionally conflicts break out between the members of the brotherhoods, sometimes even leading to their split, which indicates that migrants tend to reproduce the political and ethnic relations of power that cause inequality and social exclusion in Peru within the brotherhoods. In places such as New York City and Miami where most of Peru’s social classes and ethnic groups are represented within the migrant communities disputes mostly occur because of tensions between the better off sectors of the Peruvian community and the majority of migrants, living on the margins of the dominant society. By contrast, in countries such as Spain, Italy, Japan and Argentina that have only recently begun to attract Peruvian immigration on a large scale, the followers of the Lord of the Miracles are

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21 Not all ethnic communities and associations are Andean though. Thus nikkei organizations recruit their members from Peru’s Japanese Peruvian community.  
22 In Japan most Peruvian institutions are based on ethnic affiliation. The biggest called Kyodai recruits its members from the Peruvian nikkei (Japanese Peruvians) community in Japan. This institution is organized as a transpacific organization with offices in both Tokyo and Lima. Other Peruvian nikkei associations exist in North America (the biggest in Los Angeles) but these are not connected to the Peruvian Japanese community in Peru or Japan.  
23 This division of regional associations is reflected in migrant institutions that evolve from rural-urban migration practice in Peru (Paerregaard 1997: 65-70).
still struggling to form stable religious institutions. Here many newcomers join the brotherhoods to establish contact with other migrants, affirm their sense of belonging and negotiate their identities as Peruvians and immigrants, which generates disagreements about the icon’s symbolic meaning.

In contrast to social, cultural, regional and religious institutions organizations that are based on class normally recruit their members from Peru’s urban middle or upper classes of mostly mestizo or European descent from Lima’s and other major cities in Peru. These institutions can be of different kinds but are usually private clubs, professional organizations, chambers of commerce or charity organizations. They exist in places with more established Peruvian communities such as New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Barcelona, Buenos Aires and Santiago that have been the destination of Peruvian emigration for almost half a decade. Thus during the 1950s and 60s hundreds of young men from Peru’s middle and upper class families traveled to Spain and Argentina to study medicine, law, agriculture etc. at the universities in the two countries. Many later decided to stay and married local women, got good jobs as lawyers, medical doctors or veterinarians and became part of Spanish and Argentine society. However, most of them maintained their Peruvian identity by forming associations. During the late 1980s and early 90s Spain and Argentina received a new wave of Peruvians headed by a large number of working class migrants from Peru’s urban shanty towns who emigrated at a time of economic and political crisis. Today many of these newly arrived live on the margins of the host society, forming an emergent proletariat of immigrant workers in Spain and Argentina. Hence their migration and livelihood experiences are radically different from those of their predecessors which often lead to strife within Peru’s immigrant communities in these countries. Thus migrants from the 1950s and 60s are referred to as profesionales and described as sobrados (arrogant). In reverse, many old timers deplore the recent immigration because it has altered the former more favorable image of Peruvians in Spain and Argentina.

The division of Peru’s emigration population in economic and social strata has important implications for migrants’ possibilities of establishing diasporic identities. Thus migrants from Peru’s rural areas and urban shanty towns tend to organize in regional and ethnic associations which serve as vehicle to sustain ties to their place of origin and engage in transnational relations of exchange with their relatives in Peru. However, they rarely develop links to migrant communities in other parts of the world, and, if they do, these bonds are usually secondary to the relations that link them to the homeland. Migrants from Peru’s better off strata, on the other hand, are more likely to create relations to other migrant groups because their social and
professional status in Peru ease the problems of obtaining stay and work permit in the host countries and because they suffer less from social and cultural prejudices than other Peruvians. Their privileged position enhances their mobility and allows them to establish migrant institutions based on class and profession and create networks to Peruvians from their own strata in other parts of the world. This is clearly evident in PAMS (Peruvian American Medical Society), which is one of the oldest migrant institutions in North America formed by Peruvian medical doctors who migrated the United States to work during the Vietnam War. Today this association has around 1,500 members with its own office in Chicago and a number of local chapters in the United States. Similar institutions were created by Peruvians who studied at Spanish and Argentine universities in the 1950s and 60s and later stayed and established families in Spain and Argentina. In Spain migrants formed an organization called Convención Nacional de Médicos Hispano-Peruanos which embraces approx. 800 Peruvian doctors and has seven chapters in the major cities of Spain. In Argentina, on the other hand, Peruvian doctors are organized in Asociación Peruano-Argentina de Médicos also divided into local chapters. The main chapter in Buenos Aires represents 2-300 Peruvian doctors. Apart from the annual meetings that these institutions organize nationally for their members, a global gathering for all Peruvian doctors living outside Peru has been arranged on a number of occasions.

In several North American cities an exclusive group of male Peruvians have formed associations for ex-students of Leoncio Prado, Peru’s most respected military school located in Lima who have continued studying either in Peru or abroad. These associations function as institutional anchors of a global network of ex-students of Leoncio Prado who today are architects, engineers, doctors, bank directors, businessmen, etc. and live in the United States, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and different parts of Europe. They also serve as a means to help ex-Leonciopradinos who want to emigrate in finding jobs and getting adjusted to their new environment. Because of the support they receive from the network many ex-Leonciopradinos feel as much at home in their new countries of residence as in Peru. As one such ex-student explains: “We are very well organized because we are all professionals with good jobs. We use the internet and communicate by e-mail. We help each other whenever there is need. They helped me finding a job and later I help somebody else”. Truly, this exclusive sector of Peru’s emigrant population have created a stable network of

PAMS also has a few Peruvians dentists on its member list.

Some members of PAMS deplore that the fact the institution receives few new members, a fact that is attributed to the growing difficulties which Peruvian doctors who have studied in Peru and later emigrate encounter when trying to revalidate their academic degrees in the United States. In effect, PAMS is increasingly becoming an institution for middle aged or senior doctors which over the years will fade away.

One several occasions this global meeting of Peruvian medical doctors has been held in Lima to support the development of medicinal science in Peru.

In Los Angeles two such institutions exist: Asociación de ex-Cadetes de Colegios Militares del Perú and Asociación Leonciopradina Internacional.
diasporic connections that allow migrants to feel Peruvian without sustaining active ties to their homeland.

Discussion

In this paper I have explored four terrains of social interaction and identity construction among Peruvians in the United States, Spain, Japan and Argentina that potentially may generate a diasporic social formation. In the first case I examined a political conflict among Peruvians outside as well as inside Peru concerning the economic exploitation they experience as labor migrants in the First World and the critique of the Peruvian state that this exploitation generated for its lack of support to Peruvian citizens who are exposed to physical abuse and need legal and moral assistance. Although many migrants are familiar with similar forms maltreatment in Peru and tacitly accept such relations as the condition of transnational labor migration, the news about the situation of the sheepherders in California triggered a scandal within the Peruvian community in Los Angeles and caused the dismissal of the Peruvian Consul in this city. Moreover, it provoked a debate in the Peruvian Congress about human rights in Peru as well as in the United States and caught the attention of the Peruvian press and media. In effect, the revelation of the herders’ conditions in California prompted politicians and reporters in Peru to address the risk that Peruvians face when they travel to foreign countries in the search for a better income and hereby expose themselves to exploitation and ill treatment. However, it also demonstrated that the Peruvian government was more interested in using the fate of the country’s emigrant population to improve its own political image at home than actually trying to better migrants’ life and working conditions in the host counties. In a similar vein, it showed that far from making up a homogeneous group the herders were divided internally and conceived labor migration and risks it implies in very different ways. Hence, while lending emigrants a notion of constituting a separate group of Peruvians the conflict also recalled them that they pursue different interests and that the support they may expect from Peruvian government is highly dubious.

The second case focused on Peruvians’ sense of co-responsibility to help their fellow countrymen in Peru and other places. This morality propels Peruvians to organize collections of aid to help the victims of natural disasters in Peru and to arrange campaigns to support fellow migrants who struggle to regularize their illegal status in the host society. Such activities generate a feeling of solidarity with Peruvians not merely in Peru thus reinforcing the ties to the homeland but also in other parts of the world and provide migrants with a notion of simultaneity in time and homogeneity as a social group thereby prompting the emergence of a diasporic consciousness.
Yet, at the same time, the awareness of constituting a global social unit is susceptible to the vicissitudes of politics and dominating rhetoric of nationalism in the homeland. Thus during times of political conflict in Peru the Peruvian government often plays on the patriotism of the country’s migrant population and its loyalty to the homeland which tends to lead to its division rather unification. In effect, migrants’ feeling of unity and shared national identity seldom lasts long and although many support the campaigns that Peruvian organizations from time to other launch to collect aid to and show solidarity with their fellow countrymen in need with great enthusiasm tensions often break out once the aid and solidarity become object of political controversy.

Throughout the world Peru is associated with Andean music and folklore art, which was the theme of the third case. This identification of Peruvians with a particular indigenous culture and aesthetic tradition has generated a new economic market for musicians and handicraft producers from Peru and other Andean countries that not only provides migrants with alternative sources of income in the First World but also prompt many Peruvians outside Peru to rethink their own cultural heritage and to recognize Andean folklore as emblematic for what they regard Peruvian history and identity. Thus in their search for national traditions and customs that can be used to represent their national culture numerous migrant institutions in the United States and Southern Europe organize events and arrange exhibitions that present indigenous music and handicraft as distinctive of Peruvian culture. Although this recognition of indigenous culture as emblematic of what migrants conceive of Peruvianness creates a strong feeling of shared history and national identity it also causes contention within Peruvian emigrant communities regarding the exact definition and meaning of folklore art tradition. Consequently, music and folklore art become new ammunition for old conflicts between social classes and ethnic groups in Peru as much as a uniting emblem of diasporic awareness.

The fourth case examined migrant institutions and the social class relations that transcend them. Whereas many social and cultural organizations recruit Peruvians according class, ethnic and regional affiliation and therefore divide rather than unite migrants religious brotherhoods emerge from a notion of collectivity that is shaped by the sufferings that potentially all Peruvians living outside Peru feel they share because of the discrimination they face as aliens and undocumented immigrants.

However, such a diasporic consciousness is extremely fragile because it only materializes momentarily in the settings where Peruvians reside and because the social order that shapes it periodically is disrupted by social conflicts within the brotherhoods. In fact, the only groups of migrants that have developed a self-
awareness of constituting a separate social unit that exist outside Peru and yet claim a particular Peruvian identity are the associates of the professional migrant organizations such the medical associations in the United States, Spain and Argentina and the more confined and exclusive networks of former students of Peru’s elite schools and military academies. In other words, to talk of a Peruvian diaspora implies to recognize that migrants reproduce the economic and political power structures that divide Peruvian society into social classes within the communities they create in North America, Europe, Japan and other places and that diasporic networks and identities remain a privilege in the hands of the most powerful sectors of the country’s migrant population.

Conclusion

Although it is common for Peruvians to maintain multiple relationships with Peru and their home region or village, the impact of these links on their everyday lives is limited. To the majority, monthly or bimonthly remittances sent to relatives back home make up the principal, and in some cases the only, link with Peru. Indeed, their lives are deeply grounded in the host societies where they reside or work. Their daily struggle to make a living, deal with the local authorities, and find a place to live is shaped by economic and social forces in the host society rather than by transnational relationships with their country of origin and must therefore be analyzed within this context. Moreover, to many leaving Peru is just another challenge in a life-long struggle to achieve social mobility, which urges them to look for new horizons and engage in new relations and identities rather than holding on the nostalgic ideas about the past and clinching to old relations and identities. Even migrants who think of themselves as exiled in the sense that they have escaped political violence or otherwise been forced to leave Peru often assert that the principal motive to migrate is to achieve social mobility. Considering that the majority of Peruvians who have emigrated in the past 20-30 years belong to an emergent working class of immigrants in the First World, this observation underscores Schnapper’s point that “proletarian populations are undoubtedly less likely to maintain themselves as a diaspora” (1999:33). Finally, but not least important, diaspora is not a native term in the world of Peruvians. In fact, I have never heard migrants employing the term or other similar terms or expressions to articulate the idea of an a separate demographic or social group of Peruvians living outside Peru united by a dream of returning to their homeland.

There are, however, a few exceptions. A small group of economically well-off Peruvians are directly involved in diasporic networking on a major scale. They participate or work in institutions with transnational links, travel frequently to Peru,
communicate (such as by e-mail and the Internet) with Peruvians in other places, or otherwise engage in activities that are contingent on or imply a transnational connection. These migrants belong to a small elite of Peruvians who either play the role of migrant leader or exploit the market that is emerging among migrants for Peruvian products, courier and remittance services, legal counseling, visa and travel arrangements, video conferences, and so on. Indeed, to this small group of trained professionals and economically well-off Peruvians it may be argued that the idea of diaspora exists in the form of a cosmopolitan identity (cf. Hannerz 1996: 102-111). However, this notion of a dispersed ethnic community united by a shared loyalty to the homeland is based on the exclusion of the vast majority of fellow migrants. In other words, it is the identity of an urban elite from upper-class neighborhoods in Lima, who often claim descent from European immigrants.

The fact that Peruvian emigration not has developed strong diasporic relations and identities can be attributed to several factors. First of all, Peruvians tend to disperse in many countries and cities, which undermines their ability to establish organized migrant communities in the receiving countries and to create firm economic, social and political ties with their country of origin or between different migrant settlements. A second factor is that, with the exception of the United States, which has been the destination of Peruvian migrants since the mid 1950s, Peru’s exodus has only recently gained momentum. In addition, Peru’s migrant population is extremely heterogeneous and includes migrants of both sexes, as well as from almost all social strata and ethnic and regional groups. Moreover, unlike some governments in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America that put migration on the top of their political agenda, the Peruvian state shows little concern for its emigrant population, which only rarely makes it into the headlines of Peru’s public media. In fact, the flow of information between the country and its migrant population is surprisingly thin, and except for recurrent estimates of migrants’ remittances and their impact on the country’s development, the only news that appears in the Peruvian media are occasional reports about migrants who have been caught by the police or immigration authorities because they have broken the law or traveled illegally.

It is pertinent, then, to return to the opening question of this paper and ask whether a diasporic order and awareness may emerge from the many migrant communities that Peruvians have created in such countries as the United States, Spain, Japan and Argentina. The material discussed indicates that Peruvian migration contain few if any diasporic features and that these are restricted to the exclusive activities and representations of a small group of migrants. In essence, my material demonstrates that migrant communities often constitute extremely heterogeneous populations divided by class, ethnicity, education, gender and age, which provides support for
Brubaker’s suggestion that rather than essentializing the term “diaspora” by giving it a specific meaning “we should think of diaspora not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity, but rather as an idiom, a stance, a claim.” (Brubaker 2005: 12). Finally, the material reminds us that as scholars we should be careful not to use the term diaspora to portray the life of contemporary migrants in ways that pull the wires of a political discourse which serves the interests of exporting companies, remittance agencies, politicians, development planners and journalists rather than those who actually are referred to by the term: the vast majority of migrants who daily struggle to cross national boundaries, legalize their papers, find jobs and create new lives in foreign places.

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