

**Cross-Border Interaction Spaces Articulated by Religious Affiliation.
An Ethnographic Approach from the Socio-Religious Life of
Evangelical Zapotec Women in Ensenada, Baja California**

**Espacios de interacción transfronteriza articulados por afiliación religiosa.
Un acercamiento etnográfico desde la vida socio-religiosa de mujeres
zapotecas evangélicas en Ensenada, Baja California**

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the formation of cross-border interaction spaces articulated by religious affiliation between a congregation of evangelical zapotec women in the city of Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, and religious organizations and evangelical churches from the state of California, United States. The methodological approach is qualitative. Ethnographic data collected between 2017 and 2018 are analyzed. The original contribution of the study is the description on how cross-border interaction spaces formed based on religious affiliation can transcend ethnic identifications and connect diverse actors despite the current socio-political constraints of the United States-Mexico border.

Keywords: 1. cross-border spaces, 2. Evangelicals, 3. ethnicity, 4. religiosity, 5. United States-Mexico border.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es analizar la conformación de espacios de interacción transfronteriza articulados por afiliación religiosa entre una congregación de mujeres zapotecas evangélicas de la ciudad de Ensenada, Baja California, México, y organizaciones religiosas e iglesias evangélicas del estado de California, Estados Unidos. La aproximación metodológica es cualitativa. Se analizan datos etnográficos recabados entre 2017 y 2018. La originalidad de este trabajo reside en mostrar cómo a partir de la afiliación religiosa llegan a conformarse espacios de interacción transfronteriza que trascienden las identificaciones étnicas y vinculan a diversos actores, a pesar de los constreñimientos socio-políticos actuales de la frontera México-Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: 1. espacios transfronterizos, 2. evangélicos, 3. etnicidad, 4. religiosidad, 5. frontera México-Estados Unidos.

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INTRODUCTION

The present article seeks to analyze the formation of cross-border interaction spaces articulated by religious affiliation between an evangelical congregation of Zapotec women living in the city of Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, and religious organizations and evangelical churches from the state of California, United States².

The reflections presented herein are supported by previous studies along the northwestern border region of Mexico, specifically on migration, ethnicity, and religion. Our central purpose is to stress the importance of ethnography in the analysis of cross-border processes and the dynamics of social interactions and relations. By describing and studying the formation of spaces of interaction in northwestern Mexico involving different communities of believers from both sides of the border, we sought to exemplify one way in which cross-border social space is constructed between Mexico and the United States.

Cross-border space can be understood as a vast range of “past and present interactions emerging from all kinds of encounters, from material and financial planning, to networks of actors, from social relations to the definition of political strategies” (Durand, 2015, p. 310).

In the present article, cross-border space is approached from the analysis of interactions and social relations articulated by religiosity. The aim is to highlight the role of religiosity in the crossing of geographical borders and symbolic boundaries (Levitt, 2007).

The main contribution of this study is its method. It is based on an ethnographic procedure intended to highlight the importance of the observation and dense description (Geertz, 1996) of interaction spaces articulated by religiosity, starting from the study of the daily life of these communities of believers on the United States-Mexico border.

It is also based on observations made outside the places and times of worship of evangelical communities. Specifically, it analyzes particular events and annual interactions that take place outside the church and religious services, which quintessentially structure the collective or congregational religious practice of evangelical believers.

Based on the socio-religious life of the congregation of evangelical zapotec women living in Ensenada, which is to say their networks of social relations articulated by religiosity, we will show the conformation of different spaces of interaction that transcend the Mexico-United States border.

Without a doubt, the border region has historically been the epicenter of migratory flows of distinct profiles, trajectories, and densities, and consequently, the studies produced in the region in the area of migration and border studies are important references. However, few

²This article is derived from a doctoral thesis carried out with Zapotec women from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, who have joined evangelical groups in the city of Ensenada in the last two decades.

anthropological works have approached the connections built along the border based on religious affiliation using an ethnographic method.

Research on religiosity along the United States-Mexico border has mostly focused on understanding religious settings on the Mexican side. The most prominent themes have been, for example, religious changes over time and diversity (Hernández Hernández, 2014).

Although this research has made important contributions to understanding religious diversity in northern Mexico, there are few ethnographic works focused on religious diversity in terms of cross-border relations between Mexico and the United States. In the region, religious diversity has been examined within the context of the movement of people of diverse origin and faith as well as geographical proximity to the United States. However, few works have been interested in the connections or bridges between communities on either side of the border forged through religion. In this article, we present an ethnographic study of these subjects. This analysis should contribute to the literature on religiosity on the United States-Mexico border and generate further research interest.

KEY INFORMANTS

There are seven Zapotec women who lead the evangelical congregation in the city of Ensenada. The congregation is composed of 21 members. The majority are Zapotec women and children, generally their own children. It is from conversations and interviews with these women, and above all, from observation of their living spaces, that this article and its results were drawn.

The congregation is located in a peripheral neighborhood of the city of Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico. This neighborhood is mostly made up of Zapotec families from the municipality of San Blas Atempa, Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca.³

In 2018, there were around 10 Zapotec families from this town in this neighborhood. There is a high level of migration, and travel between San Blas Atempa and Ensenada is common and constant. Some individuals arrive to the latter city through *paisano* and family networks for short periods of time, while others decide to settle in the city and neighborhood for the long term. Since the 1970s, there has been a history of migration connecting Zapotec individuals and families from San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca, to the city of Ensenada (Espino Torres, 2015).

The congregation was formally constituted in 2014, after these women built their own church in their neighborhood. These women have had individual experiences of religious change, commonly known as conversion experiences, after migrating to the city of Ensenada.

³To protect the identity of the informants and their families and community, it was decided to omit the name of the neighborhood and the religious congregation.

They migrated in the 1990s, where they have attended Evangelical churches and come to change their religious identification and belonging.

These individual experiences of religious change have generally been experienced as a shift from popular Catholicism to the adoption and expression of evangelical religiosity with a Pentecostal orientation. Although, for these women, these experiences have involved important identity reconfigurations, especially around their ethnic and gender identity, these are not the object of analysis of this article, as their explanation would require more in-depth analysis and discussions that they hope to have on future occasions.

Thus, the following text does not address the constitution of their religious identities, but rather, the analysis begins with the connections that these women have built through defining themselves as Evangelicals, specifically those established with communities of believers that transcend the United States-Mexico border.

In this work, the formation of three spaces of interaction will be analyzed based on one year of observation of these living spaces and the networks of relationships established by these women in connection with their religiosity. Some of these spaces are organized on an annual basis, while others are specific, one-time events.

Taking into account the origin of the individuals who participate in these spaces, as well as the organizational logics and interwoven community dynamics, these spaces have a clear cross-border dimension. In these spaces of cross-border social interaction articulated by religiosity, one can observe networks of social relations established between both indigenous and non-indigenous people, between Mexicans and Americans, between Baja California residents and California citizens, all linked by evangelical religious identification and belonging.

In this article, in addition to discussing cross-border social interactions articulated by religiosity, we describe the dynamics of religious change experienced by indigenous migrants in the Baja California region. Although some experiences have been documented, little research has incorporated the cross-border dimension running through them.

BACKGROUND

As noted above, the discussions presented herein can contribute to the documentation of a broader process that is emerging as regional in nature. Different studies such as those of Camargo Martínez (2011; 2018), Hernández and O'Connor (2013), and O'Connor (2016) have documented experiences of religious change among indigenous migrants in Baja California.

These studies have shown that the religious sphere in the state of Baja California is a privileged area of observation, enabling not only the observation and understanding of socio-cultural continuities in the individual and collective trajectories of indigenous migrants, but

also enabling a better understanding of processes and experiences of socio-cultural change. Undoubtedly,

... the analysis of the ties that migrant men and women maintain with their groups of belonging, as well as the way in which their relations are structured with the members of the receiving society, is necessary to understand processes of continuity and socio-cultural change (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015, p. 27).

The aforementioned research has highlighted that, in Baja California, indigenous migrant communities are increasingly joining Evangelical groups that transform their faith and religious affiliation. These studies have also suggested observing how the dynamics of religious recomposition experienced by these populations transcend individual experiences and impact their families and communities.

For example, O'Connor (2016), who studied evangelical Mixtecs in several sites, in particular the Mixtecs living in the San Quintín Valley, located 185 kilometers from the city of Ensenada, recognizes that, among the changes that this population is experiencing, certain new behaviors stand out, both individual and collective. These are associated with the religious recompositions that they have experienced during their migratory journeys inside and outside the country. As the latter author points out, religious conversion is one of the main options for the change and reinvention of identity available to the indigenous migrant community as part of their search for social belonging within a global context characterized by inequality.

Likewise, the work of Camargo Martínez (2011) has also been consolidated as a key reference. He has been a pioneer in discussing how the “religious field” in Baja California is an important dimension of analysis from which new networks of relationships are structured as a result of internal migration, particularly indigenous migration.

Specifically, his interest in the religious connections that appear in the migratory network of indigenous populations in northwestern Mexico has highlighted the importance of taking into account the religious offer and diversity of the region in order to analyze and explain its impact on the recompositions of religious affiliations experienced by these populations. He argues that

Research shows how, in some contexts, there is greater exposure to a diversity of beliefs defined in particular spaces where the indigenous migrant population arrives. This is the case for the border cities located in northern Mexico and the cities of the southern United States. On the one hand, the border states are characterized by having non-Catholic populations above the national average; similarly, in the four southern border states of the United States, which have the highest Hispanic populations in the country, barely 40% of people are Catholic, indicating a context of high religious diversity on both sides of the border. In this way, the migration and settlement of these populations in these border

areas presupposes, *or may presuppose*, changes in the identity attachment of migrants (Camargo Martínez, 2011, p. 352) [emphasis added].

In a recent study, Camargo Martínez pointed out that, in the northwestern region of Mexico, an ethnic type of Protestantism is beginning to consolidate among the indigenous populations. The author refers to the emergence of a local religiosity that is nourished by ethnic identity and inscribed in the recomposition processes of the religious field of the country's indigenous communities (Camargo Martínez, 2018, p. 17). However, this process of religious recomposition can also be understood as part of the neocolonial logic of the United States, an expansion of its sphere of influence into indigenous populations, and there is little reflection on the capacity for agency and elaboration of meaning of indigenous populations in their experiences of religious change.

In fact, individuals who transform their faith, beliefs, and religious affiliation are not only passive recipients but also architects of their own experience. In this sense, it is important to observe and understand the importance that these individuals give to the new networks of relationships and spaces of interaction in which they participate as their religiosity is redefined.

Considering that individual religious change experiences are a process, individuals may also make use of different networks and resources available to them. This paper hopes to show how an indigenous women's congregation, which has reconfigured its religiosity through geographic mobility, has also acquired the tools for promoting leadership and developing its social and community interests.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to clarify that, although the studies referred to above are important to articulate a fundamental area of study in the northwest region of the country, these are limited to explaining the realities of indigenous migrant populations in the San Quintín Valley. This region is fundamental for the study of the processes of continuity and change faced by indigenous and migrant populations in Mexico because its export agriculture has historically relied on indigenous day laborers. Nevertheless, little is known or has been studied about similar processes in urban areas along the country's northwestern border, in particular in the state of Baja California.

It is also important to study experiences of religious change among indigenous migrants who are not agricultural workers, for example, those who work in the services sector, in the streets, in the construction industry, and those who carry out domestic work, as is the case with the interviewed Zapotec women members of the Evangelical congregation of Ensenada.

The different socio-spatial scales involved in the interactions and the socio-religious life of the indigenous migrants of the region, as well as the new religious communities to which they are integrated are another unaddressed theme.

The present article presents empirical and ethnographic material that shows the dynamics by which members of ethnic collectivities construct new frameworks of social and

community relations; these frameworks are used as tools, and they possess their own meanings based on new religious affiliations acquired through geographical mobility. The observation of the socio-religious life of a congregation of Zapotec women in Ensenada materialized the spaces of interaction and participation shaped by religiosity and highlights the networks of relationships with evangelical organizations and churches in the United States.

The following sections seek to answer the following research questions: What types of spaces of interaction are constructed between the group of evangelical Zapotec women in the city of Ensenada and organizations and churches from the United States? What characteristics do they have? What is the importance of these spaces? And, in what way does this ethnographic approach contribute to the study of religiosity along the northwestern border of Mexico?

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The methodological approach is qualitative, and the study is based on ethnographic data obtained during fieldwork carried out over 12 months between 2017 and 2018 in the city of Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico. In addition to observations and informal conversations, we analyzed narrative fragments extracted from in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The analysis included the points of view of the congregation of evangelical Zapotec women in Ensenada and testimonials by individuals and leaders of religious organizations and evangelical churches in California with whom they interact.

Three ethnographic vignettes are presented to develop the qualitative analysis, which is to say, three empirical descriptions through which we intend to show how spaces of cross-border interaction articulated by religious affiliation came to be formed based on the socio-religious life of the Zapotec women's congregation.

Evangelical individuals, groups, and churches of different denominations, specifically Pentecostals, appear in the formation of these three spaces of interaction and are defined as non-denominational, which is to say, evangelical believers who do not claim any denominational affiliation.

These vignettes also show how various religious actors interact with the congregation of evangelical Zapotec women in Ensenada. These relationships and connections are built regardless of religious affiliation with a specific evangelical denomination and regardless of ethnicity or language.

Rather, these religious communities are linked by the overall religious affiliation that binds them, i.e., "Christian-Evangelical," building bridges and networks of relationships that span the geographical and symbolic border between Mexico and the United States.

It should be pointed out that, although the present article is interested in analyzing the cross-border interactions woven by religion within the Zapotec women's congregation in

Ensenada, these interactions occur at different scales. These range from the micro scale (in the neighborhood where the temple is located) to the local (in the city, with other communities of worshipers) as well as to the regional and national scale (with other communities, organizations, and churches).

However, the socio-religious life of the communities of evangelical worshipers is not necessarily limited to a specific region. In particular, evangelical groups and churches of Pentecostal orientation, as we describe below, are increasingly related to one another on a global scale or through transnational networks. Indeed, just as the local Gap clothing store is part of an extensive global corporate network, so more and more local mosques, Catholic churches, and Pentecostal temples are global operations (Levitt, 2007, p. 2).

ETHNOGRAPHIC VIGNETTES

We first analyzed the formation of a space of interaction between the evangelical congregation of Zapotec women of Ensenada and the Church on the Rock, from Woodland, California.

The connections between this church and the Zapotec women's congregation were initially forged when missionaries from the Church on the Rock visited the neighborhood where the Zapotec women lived in the mid-2000s. The Zapotec women were interested in establishing a relationship with this religious community and maintaining contact. Years later, a space of interaction was established more or less annually, in which members of the California church visit the Zapotec women's congregation and share sermons as part of the religious services and also engage in moments of lighthearted socialization. They share food and play icebreakers or games involving the children of both congregations, which further establish connections between the members of both religious groups.

The first vignette shows the interesting consolidation of a space of cross-border interaction articulated by religiosity without local intermediaries between the Zapotec women and the Californian church. We also investigated the meanings attached to the existence of this type of space as a hub that links diverse believers of different origins with diverse life experiences.

The formation of a space of interaction between the congregation of Zapotec women, a church called "Cristo Vive" in the city of Ensenada, and the women leaders of the Abundant Life Churches from San Diego and Sacramento, California, is also analyzed.

This vignette shows the formation of a unique space of interaction that involves different socio-spatial scales in its organizational processes. This space was first formed by the leadership of the Cristo Vive Church in Ensenada which, through its networks of relationships transcending the border, invited the female leaders of the Abundant Life Churches to come to the city of Ensenada to an event specifically for women. At a later point, the Cristo Vive Church invited the Zapotec women's congregation in Ensenada to be part of

the event, and in this way, they established a relationship that they hope to sustain over the years to come.

In addition to showing a space of cross-border interaction in which, due to religiosity, there are dynamics of interaction among at least three religious communities, two from Mexico and one from the United States, a space of interaction articulated around the dimension of gender is also shown. This vignette reveals the importance that women members of evangelical religious communities along the northwestern border of Mexico assign to interaction with evangelical women of diverse origins and to promoting spaces for these interactions, where they not only express their faith but also reflect on issues of common interest.

Finally, the third vignette analyzes the construction of alternative spaces that strive to obtain access to certain social services, specifically alternative health services and medical specialties, which are promoted both by the congregation of evangelical Zapotec women in Ensenada and the local church Cristo Vive that interacts with the Zapotec women on a daily basis, as well as another Californian evangelical church, the Westside Church from Placerville, California.

Ethnographic vignette 1. Annual visit of Church on the Rock from Woodland, California to the evangelical Zapotec women's congregation in Ensenada, Baja California

For some years, members of the Church on the Rock, an independent or non-denominational evangelical church in Woodland, California, have been making a more or less annual visit to the congregation of evangelical Zapotec women in Ensenada.

This visit is a key annual event in the activities of the Zapotec women's congregation. For them, this visit is conceived as a central space of integration through which they sustain and extend networks of relationships with other worshipers that transcend the border.

The visit is perceived by the different actors as an opportunity to involve diverse individuals who, because of their common religious affiliation, seek to build alternative socialization spaces.

As expressed by the seven Zapotec women with whom time was spent during fieldwork, the congregation seeks to create bonds and develop a sense of Christian community beyond that which is tacitly granted in their own reference group or congregation.

For these Zapotec women, the interaction and meeting space with the Church on the Rock is conceived as an important moment for the creation of links and dynamics of interaction with other individuals outside their congregation and ethnic group, which is important for them in terms of social belonging and recognition.

For them, it is not necessary to cross a geographical border to weave these interconnections or to feel like members of a community that extends beyond the border

region. Here, religiosity is presented as a vehicle that has enabled these women to create new relationships in the city of Ensenada as well as beyond the United States-Mexico border.

Previous studies have reflected on how religious communities come to cross geographical and symbolic borders in different directions through their networks. Levitt (2007) studied communities of believers who built transnational links based on their religious affiliation. Meanwhile, Smith and Guarnizo's (1998) proposed contemplating the logics of transnational articulation from the margins, or in other words, examining "transnationalism from below."

For the evangelical congregation of Zapotec women in Ensenada, similar to Levitt's (2007) statement that God needs no passport, no passports are needed to relate and link their congregation to other individuals and religious communities whose logics of recognition and membership operate on a transnational scale.

On their behalf, the members of the Church on the Rock also recognize the evangelical Zapotec women as vital members of their religious community.

They view their relationship with this women's congregation as a key aspect of their socio-religious life. They want their community of believers, composed almost entirely of United States citizens, both men and women and boys and girls of different ages, to develop connections with other religious communities, both in their home community and elsewhere.

Through informal conversations held during the visit of the Church of the Rock to the Zapotec women's congregation in June 2018, it became evident that most members of this community consider these moments of interaction as part of their social duties and vocation. Although a theological reading can be made of their actions, or a religious meaning can be assigned to their social interaction with the Zapotec women based on, for example, their desire to share "the word" of the Gospel, or "spread the word", it is important to note that there is also a reflective process in regard to their social interactions with other religious communities outside their place of origin, and they perceive these interactions as community-building practices.

The Church on the Rock members are also critical actors within United States religious groups and missions that provide material assistance to individuals in precarious situations on the Mexican side of the border, even though they do not necessarily sustain long-term spiritual, community, or friendship relationships with those they encounter during these missions. Thus, from their perspective, a Christian believer is also a committed social and community servant.

For example, the pastor of Church on the Rock believes that, from the faith present in Christian religious communities, which revolves around the figure of God or Jesus, there is power to articulate social bonds and carry out community service. In his words, living a religious life of faith means a life devoted to social service, from which one tries to break down the social barriers present in our societies:

Do you know what this is about? Jesus. When Jesus came, he broke all kinds of barriers and boundaries. He basically said, “I came into the world for the sick.” He came into the world for people suffering and broken, so that he could heal them... What is the difference today? True Christianity is that you live for someone, you serve, you esteem others better than yourself. You prefer others to yourself, that’s what Jesus did. Jesus came to build the bond and connect us. He taught us that we have to serve, to serve people (Pastor of Church on the Rock, Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, personal communication, 18 June 2018).

Likewise, there are discursive and theological reconstructions of these types of experiences by the Zapotec women's congregation, where biblical passages are reinterpreted in connection with everyday life:

Go and make disciples of all nations, says the Bible somewhere. But, well, if I cannot go out to the nations, let the nations come to me (E. Toledo, personal communication, 4 May 2018).

Ethnographic vignette 2. Evangelical women: Shared spaces of participation and gathering among Zapotec women, Ensenada women, and leaders of California evangelical churches

In May 2018, in the city of Ensenada, an event organized by the Cristo Vive Church took place, bringing together several religious communities. Among these communities were the women leaders of the Zapotec women’s congregation in Ensenada, whose experiences were the basis for the present study. In this event, the Zapotec women established connections with different Christian women in the city of Ensenada and with leaders of the Abundant Life Evangelical Churches from Sacramento and San Diego, California.

This event was organized on Mother’s Day and brought together various Christian women from Ensenada and California. A religious service was held in which Bible readings and testimonies were shared, both in English and Spanish, and different workshops and games were carried out throughout the six-hour event.

As part of the dynamics, topics of general interest to the women gathered were discussed, for example, family, current challenges for single mothers, and common values as Christian women, as well as challenges to the education of their children and living in a world where many social inequalities are present.

Through the observation of this event, it was possible to understand that, within religious communities, and specifically within evangelical religious communities in northwestern Mexico, it is common to organize spaces of interaction between different communities of believers. In these spaces, they seek to share experiences and discuss aspects of common interest with other individuals who share the same faith, transcending religious practice or worship. This common religiosity structures social relations and alternative ways of imagining, organizing, and creating spaces of participation and gathering.

One of the aspects, for example, discussed among the Christian women who met at this event was the social inequalities that they observe in their societies. In fact, the organizers of the same event, according to women from Cristo Vive Church, suggested this theme of discussion to promote links between Christian women in the city of Ensenada and beyond regardless of their origin, language, denomination, or congregation.

In conversations with different women, specifically women from the evangelical Zapotec women's congregation in Ensenada, we could confirm that this vision is shared. These types of events are valued not only because they promote interactions and generate networks of relationships with other and different Christian women, but also because they articulate a space for interaction that is specifically for women.

According to discussions with four Zapotec women at and after the event, these initiatives promote the leadership capacities of Christian women regardless of social class, ethnicity, or congregation. In addition, in the conversations with these women, the promotion and organization of unique spaces where they can share experiences and establish communities of support was important to them, whether or not these women were Christian.

For example, during a conversation with one of the recent members of the Zapotec women's congregation, she explained that she likes to attend this type of event because she values the process of becoming part of this group. She indicated that the congregation and the links that she has formed throughout the city through this group allowed her to listen to other women's experiences and to share and receive advice concerning their daily lives. In reference to the Cristo Vive Church, prior to the event with the Abundant Life Churches, this woman explained the following:

Sometimes, we are invited to the Cristo Vive Church. On Mother's Day, we are invited, and we go. I like to go to the church there [...]. There are other people who can give you advice, good people, and I like it [...]. One day, a sister came from far away, and here she gave conferences, also in Cristo Vive, she is Mexican, but lives far away. I remember very well that I liked her talks very much. That's what I like, to be talked to, to hear the experiences... (M. Reyna, personal communication, 28 January 2018).

In general, among the interviewed Zapotec women, the shared reflections about these types of events as spaces for meeting and participation in the city stand out. Some of them say that they have learned from these events and that they have been able to establish connections outside their neighborhood and their everyday relationships with others from Mexico or their families.

The Zapotec women who participated in the event of the Cristo Vive Church also value the creation of bridges and connections with other people with whom they were not previously connected through their religious affiliation. Also, they attribute value to their socio-religious networks because they believe that, through these networks, they have

strengthened their leadership abilities, which now extend beyond the religious sphere as they try to replicate them in their private and collective living spaces in their communities.

These women, in addition to being leaders of their own congregation, are transforming the dynamics within their homes and positioning themselves as community leaders. Through their religious affiliation, they seek to belong to a broader community that is not limited solely to their ethnic group or congregation.

As part of this, these women hope to continue the relationships they establish through these events. In particular, most Zapotec women who attended the Cristo Vive event hoped to keep in touch and organize other spaces for meeting with other women leaders of the evangelical congregations they met there. They especially hope to meet again with the leaders of the Abundant Life Churches from California. Despite the many differences, they believe that they share common interests, both personal as well as those concerning the form and model of society that they imagine and want to live in.

For the leaders of Abundant Life Church, the theme of transcending social barriers and connecting with individuals from different backgrounds is seen, from their perspective, as a common trait among churches and individuals who promote the Christian faith.

In a semi-structured interview with the preacher of the Abundant Life Church from Sacramento, California, she indicated that the importance that should be given, from her perspective, to the social role of churches and Christian organizations that, although from a theological basis, aim to transcend class, ethnicity, and national origin barriers. She defends the importance of the role that churches can play as “social breakers”:

The Gospel is good for everyone. It doesn't matter if you are poor or rich. Money doesn't make people happy. We love money, it buys things, but money can't make you happy. What is life all about? I believe that if you can bring a message of hope, that is the purpose of life. We have social differences, we have different languages, we are different all around, but Jesus makes us equal, he makes us a family. We are family. That's what we want, we all need to belong, to each other, to feel that we belong, to feel a purpose. Because we are children of God. We are a family of different kinds of people, but God loves us the same, he has a plan for us. You have to go and find people without social or economic barriers, no barriers! That's not something you just learn, it's good to learn from sociology, but we need a little more. We believe that those who really are the social breakers, are the people of God. In the world you can do a good job and that changes things. In fact, we need doctors, we need social programs, we need all that, but the only thing that can change the hearts of women and of men is the spirit of God, and that's why the church is powerful in social issues, because it is understood that we are all equal. That is not understood anywhere. Not through social programs, not on social science campuses, only through Jesus... (Preacher from Abundant Life Church, Sacramento, Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, personal communication, 5 May 2018).

In summary, the women's event organized by the Cristo Vive Church in which the congregation of Zapotec women from Ensenada and the leaders of the Abundant Life Church from Sacramento and San Diego, California, participated, concretizes a space of cross-border interaction articulated by religiosity and gender that also links different women from both sides of the United States-Mexico border with common socio-religious interests.

Ethnographic vignette 3. Itinerant cross-border spaces mobilize access to social services among evangelical religious communities

The studied congregation of evangelical Zapotec women in Ensenada interact at different times of the year with different churches and religious actors, both local and foreign, in order to create spaces for offering alternative social services to individuals in their neighborhoods who have limited access.

Specifically, these women mobilize their networks to provide health services and medical specialties to their community. Individuals and organizations from both sides of the border between the United States and Mexico are involved in the organization of these events. One exemplary case is the organizational dynamic between these women and the local Cristo Vive Church mentioned in the previous section and the Westside Church from Placerville, California. The last health campaign, carried out in the neighborhood where the Zapotec women live in March 2018, is detailed as follows.

The campaign lasted for one day. Medical professionals from the United States came to the city of Ensenada through their contact with the Westside Church in Placerville, California. This church has been in contact for several years with the Cristo Vive Church in Ensenada. This group of Zapotec women in Ensenada, contacted by the pastors of Cristo Vive church, was the third religious organization that joined the medical campaign. The women were in charge of organizing and disseminating the event in their neighborhood and managed to gather many people outside their congregation.

In discussions with the interviewed Zapotec women, they explained that this type of event is key for this group since they recognize that, among their members, there are individuals in precarious situations who find it difficult to access social services or go to the doctor. Through organizing this type of campaign, the Zapotec women gain a space of legitimacy for their congregation and work in their neighborhood.

In this specific campaign, participants were asked to check their blood pressure and sugar levels, and basic medicines were provided to those who requested them to treat minor ailments, such as headaches. On other occasions, the medical campaigns that the Zapotec women have co-organized with the Cristo Vive and other churches and groups of doctors from California have offered specialized consultations with gynecologists and ophthalmologists.

In carrying out the present campaign, different actors on both sides of the border were united by their interest in community action. Although the evangelical churches are at the forefront of organizing these events, not all who participate in these meetings share the same faith. The doctors, for example, who go to Ensenada are not necessarily members of religious organizations. Rather, their interest in the campaign is to attend to diverse individuals in precarious situations regardless of whether they form part of a religious congregation.

It is worth noting that the network of cross-border relations established to carry out this campaign did not follow a north-south unidirectional logic. In this case, the medical campaign was made possible by the agency of the individuals and organizations who articulated this cross-border community interaction and recognized needs in their communities. It required the operation of the networks of the members of both the Westside Church and Cristo Vive Church in their home environment and the deployment of Zapotec women networks in their neighborhood and city.

The wife of the Cristo Vive Church's pastor describes the arrival and organization of this cross-border team of solidarity established to provide health campaigns in the city of Ensenada. In the following quote, she describes how the medical campaign carried out in March 2018 reached the congregation of Zapotec women in Ensenada:

In March arrives a team of doctors. They come from various churches, from Virginia, from Carolina, from Westside. They organize there to bring this service to the community, and we here co-organize [for example, with the congregation of Zapotec women]. They bring medications, doctors, gynecologists, etc. We've already started here, it's going to be on March 6, 7, 8, and 9. They are going to be in Ensenada, and these brothers and sisters are coming, they are part of this family to which we belong. The brothers and sisters from Placerville are just like family, sometimes they have come just to visit, just as friends, other times during summer school, or they come to prove their strong support for the health campaigns (Wife of the Pastor of Cristo Vive Church, Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, personal communication, 26 January 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

The present article sought to answer the following research questions: What types of spaces of interaction are constructed between the group of evangelical Zapotec women in the city of Ensenada and the organizations and churches from the United States? What characteristics do they have? What is the importance of these spaces? And, how does this ethnographic approach contribute to the study of religiosity on the northwestern border of Mexico?

The types of spaces constructed between the group of evangelical Zapotec women in the city of Ensenada and the organizations and churches from the United States are diverse. Their commonality is that, beyond being formed for the expression of faith and religious practices,

they are formed by social and community interests. The characteristics of the formed spaces also differ.

Some of these spaces are places for lighthearted socialization between religious communities. They promote the integration and recognition of transnational religious communities, as was the case during the visit made by the Church on the Rock to the Zapotec women's congregation in Ensenada in June 2018.

Other spaces of interaction are articulated by religiosity and gender. This is the case for the event organized by Cristo Vive Church in which the Zapotec women participated and interacted with different evangelical women, in particular those from the Abundant Life Church from California.

In addition, there are spaces of interaction formed by diverse actors from both sides of the border who, based on a common religiosity, manage to deploy their networks of relationships to link individuals and medical professions with a vocation for social service. This is the case for the health campaign co-organized by the local Cristo Vive Church, the Zapotec women's congregation, and the California Westside Church in Ensenada.

In some of these spaces, interethnic and interclass relationships are strengthened, which is important for the different religious communities, such as during the annual visit of the Church on the Rock and the women's event organized by Cristo Vive. On the other hand, one of the central characteristics of the spaces discussed herein is that they show networks of relationships between individuals and evangelical religious communities of different denominations.

In addition, the three spaces described in the present article show the general willingness and organizational capacity of individuals and religious organizations on both sides of the United States-Mexico border to meet up and establish alternative ties of solidarity despite the geopolitical constraints of the border. Through the formation of these spaces, the different actors involved showed their willingness to address common issues and, specifically, to be part of religious and social communities that are not limited to a single region and to jointly provide to one another different kinds of services and resources.

The ethnographic vignettes further highlighted how the socio-religious life of a congregation of Zapotec women in Ensenada is permeated by different networks of relationships at different scales. The socio-religious life of these women revealed the formation of different spaces of transboundary social interaction articulated by religiosity. This work demonstrates the richness and potential of the ethnographic method to document, study, and understand experiences of religiosity and the formation of networks and spaces of interaction through religious ties among individuals and religious organizations in both Mexico and the United States.

Although some of the interactions analyzed in the ethnographic space may be perceived as assistance-oriented, since it is only the American citizens who are able to cross the

geographic border and meet with individuals and religious communities on the Mexican side, these interactions call for a reflection on the different individual and community interactions. These spaces of interaction are viewed by the different worshipers as moments in which bridges are built and bonds are formed, allowing them to connect and discuss themes of common interest with others who are different from them.

These logics lead to a reflection on the process of constructing religious identity and socio-religious belonging which, along the northwestern border of Mexico, can transcend dimensions of class, ethnicity, and/or national origin.

The ethnographic space provides hints for the reflection on a form of cross-border Evangelical religiosity articulated around faith and shared beliefs, but also in relation to social vocation, community service, and the search for social belonging. The socio-religious affiliations of the described populations and the community ties that they establish transcend specific ethnic identities and territorialities.

On the other hand, this article also helps to show how religious affiliation, in the case of indigenous migrant communities, can provide networks of relationships and a central space for participation in cities, as in the case of Zapotec women in Ensenada, who have redefined their religiosity through geographic mobility.

Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen (2006) have explained how religious conversion experiences within Christianity can also be a key part of the dynamics of incorporating migrants into destination societies.

In addition, religious communities are central in promoting spaces of interaction between different individuals with a wide range of capacities to organize and mobilize different types of resources. In this regard, these spaces can also be spaces for participation and leadership development. These resources are not only symbolic and spiritual, but also social and capital-related. Several authors even look at faith-based organizations as social organizations from which individuals can also fulfill their necessities and/or develop political tools. This situation is particularly visible in the case of migrant communities.

Levitt (2007), who studied different groups of migrants assimilated by religious communities in the United States, analyzed and showed how religious membership can provide these populations with important social capital and tools that sometimes become political. It can also play an important role in their process of insertion to society or in the improvement of their social and community life. The author notes that even when religious institutions lacked explicit political agendas, people learned about fundraising, organizing, and leadership by participation, which they applied to other settings (Levitt, 2007, p. 152).

This is the case with the studied Zapotec women's congregation. These women have begun to make connections with diverse individuals in their city outside their ethnic group by mobilizing their networks of relationships established through religious ties. Furthermore, these women have accessed and built spaces of interaction and social participation in the city,

which by other means would have been impossible. Through these spaces, they mobilize diverse resources, organize themselves, and improve their leadership capacity.

Finally, using the ethnographic descriptions as a central element, this article hopes to reposition the importance of observation in the field and the concrete practices or interactions of individuals as important for the identification of social dynamics and processes that transcend the specific geographic realities and contexts where they are found.

Ethnographies of religious communities in Mexico that connect diverse actors and scales of social interaction in local contexts at, for example, the cross-border scale, can greatly contribute to the understanding of contemporary religious scenarios. The spaces analyzed in this study showed that evangelical religious communities on the northwestern Mexican border reach beyond specific locations or similar populations. Rather, different individuals, communities, and evangelical churches cross this border, geographically and symbolically, to relate with one another and pursue common interests.

Translation: Miguel Ángel Ríos Flores

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