



Labor and Globalization

Jenny Jungehülsing

Transnational migration and
international labor solidarity

On migrant union
members' impact on unions'
cross-border work



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Jenny Jungehülsing

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Acronyms

AAFLI	Asian-American Free Labor Institute
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIFLD	American Institute for Free Labor Development
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista
CARECEN	Centro para Refugiados Centroamericanos
CEP	Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union
CEPR	Center for Economic and Policy Research
CFO	Comité Fronterizo de Obreras
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CISPES	Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador
CISTUR	Committee in International Solidarity for Trade Union Rights
CJM	Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras
CLC	Canadian Labor Congress
COPE	Committee on Political Education
CROM	Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
CtW	Change to Win
CUCOM	Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos
CWA	Communications Workers of America
EMF	European Metalworkers Federation
EMWU	European Migrant Workers Union
EPZ	Export processing zone
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETUI	European Trade Union Institute
EU	European Union
EWC	European Works Councils

FAT	Frente Auténtico del Trabajo
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEASIES	Federación de Asociaciones y Sindicatos Independientes de El Salvador
FIOB	Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional
FLOC	Farm Labor Organizing Committee
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional
FOCOICA	Federation of Indigenous Communities and Organizations in California
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GFA	Global Framework Agreement
GUF	Global Union Federation
HERE	Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union
HTA	Hometown Association
IBT	International Brotherhood of Teamsters (“The Teamsters”)
ICDD	International Center for Development and Decent Work
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
ICFTU	International Congress of Free Trade Unions
IFA	International Framework Agreement
IG BAU	Industriegewerkschaft Bauen, Agrar, Umwelt
ILGWU	International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union
ILO	International Labor Organization
ILWU	International Longshore and Warehouse Union
IME	Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior
IRCA	Immigration Reform and Control Act
ITF	International Transport Workers’ Federation
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JfJ	Justice for Janitors Campaign (SEIU)
KMU	Kilusang Mayo Uno
LHMU	Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union

LIUNA	Laborers' International Union of North America
NAALC	North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation
NACARA	Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAO	National Administrative Offices
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NLC	National Labor Committee
NLI	New Labor Internationalism
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PAC	Political Action Committee
PLM	Partido Liberal Mexicano
PRI	Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
SMO	Social Movement Organization
SMU	Social Movement Unionism
SNTMMSSRM	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos, Siderúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana ("Los Mineros")
STRM	Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana
TANs	Transnational Advocacy Networks
TSMOs	Transnational Social Movement Organizations
TNC	Transnational Corporation
TPS	Temporary Protective Status
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UAW	United Autoworkers
UBC	United Brotherhood of Carpenters
UCLA	University of California-Los Angeles
UE	United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers
UFW	United Farm Workers
UIC	University of Illinois at Chicago

UMW	United Mine Workers
UMWA	United Mine Workers of America
UNT	Unión Nacional de Trabajadores
UNITE	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees
UPWA	United Packinghouse Workers of America
USLAW	US Labor Against the Law
USW	United Steelworkers
USWW	United Service Workers West
WCL	World Confederation of Labor
WTO	World Trade Organization

1 Introduction

Solidarity is the key to winning (workers') rights. We have a great advantage in this increasingly globalized world. Over two hundred million people, just about all of them workers and farmers, are part of a great migrant stream, a human bond that connects the countries of the developed and developing world. What more natural vehicle for solidarity is there than workers themselves? Who knows more about the working conditions in both halves of the world than someone who's worked in each? Who can see most clearly the operation of the global economy, and who has a greater stake in changing it? Who can help us to change our unions, which are overwhelmingly national organizations, accustomed to functioning within national borders, into truly global organizations, uniting workers across borders? Organizing immigrant workers is not a matter of taking pity on the downtrodden. (Bacon 2010)

1.1 **Research object: international labor solidarity and the impact of transnational migration**

International labor solidarity has a long history: it has been one of the labor movement's most important ideals ever since the first attempt of labor movements in Europe and the United States (US) to unite in the International Working Men's Association (the "First International") in 1864 (Novelli 2011, 149). In his inaugural address to the First International, Marx argued that the working classes could only confront the "lords of the land and the lords of capital" if they were united:

One element of success they possess — numbers; but numbers weigh in the balance only if united by combination and led by knowledge. Past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts. This thought prompted the workingmen of different countries assembled on September 28, 1864, in public meeting at St. Martin's Hall, to found the International Association. (Marx, 1864)

In the current context of neoliberal globalization, international solidarity is gaining increasing relevance for unions. Today, capital is becoming ever-more global: the number of transnational corporations had grown to 80,000 in 2007, with the same number of foreign affiliates, while foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows had reached 1,996 billion in 2007, up from 88 billion in 1986 (Bieler et al. 2016, 5). Production is increasingly organized across borders through cross-border mergers and acquisitions, the transnational ownership of capital shares and particularly the decentralization and fragmentation of production processes through outsourcing and the organization of production in global commodity chains or global production networks. At the same time, state regulation is in retreat in areas such as foreign trade and finance flows, as well as social and labor policy, and the "flexibilization" of the labor market is pushed almost everywhere (Bieler et al. 2016, 5f.; see also Coe et al. 2008; Gereffi 1994). Hence, workers across the globe find themselves in unprecedented

situations of competition with one another as their employers frequently threaten them with the relocation of production to sites with lower labor costs (Bieler et al. 2016, 5f.; for a critical view of the argument, see Evans 2010). Hence, it is often argued that if labor does not “go global”, it is ill-equipped to defend workers’ rights in view of globalizing capital and weakening nation-state regulations: while labor transnationalism is not perceived as the panacea for labor’s recovery, it is generally acknowledged that without increased cross-border cooperation, unions will not be able to confront the global “race to the bottom” promoted by location competition and transnational corporation’s strategies to pit workers against one another (Bronfenbrenner 2007b; Brecher et al. 2006; Fichter et al. 2001).

In recent decades, unions around the world and in almost all industries have been engaged in attempts at forging cross-border ties to confront corporations on an international scale. Among them are the proliferation of strategic campaigns, alliances for the implementation of Global Framework Agreements – i.e. agreements between labor unions or federations and transnational companies implementing a series of standards regarding working conditions, union rights, and health and safety provisions, among others – broader alliances with other social movements and community groups against trade liberalization, austerity and social cuts, as well as binational union collaborations.

Clearly, some of these efforts can be labeled as successes. However, overall, labor struggles to realize a considerable internationalization, and international labor solidarity remains a noble ambition rather than a lived practice. Most importantly, international strategies generally do not figure prominently in unions’ work, as unions typically continue to focus on domestic strategies, while competition and the defense of locational advantages continue to dominate unions’ relationships with workers abroad, as becomes apparent – for instance – in European unions’ as well as the US United Steelworkers’ (USW) call for protective tariffs against Chinese steel (Morning Star 2017; New York Times 2016; see also Cumbers 2004). Moreover, existing cross-border cooperation has the character of being relatively short-term, “ad hoc” collaborations for specific goals, often in the form of campaigns. After their attainment, unions often return to (domestic) “business as usual”, and alliances must be built anew when the need for support arises again. Despite exceptions such as the institutionalized cooperation between workers on the level of multinational companies within the European Works Councils (EWCs; see footnote 14), stable structures and long-term relationships that unions can build on for mutual support are lacking, thus giving most international labor solidarity a “haphazard” character (Brecher et al. 2006, 9; see also Hyde and Ressaissi 2008). Particularly in North-South contexts, cross-border labor solidarity has proved difficult to realize. Where it exists, it is often of short duration (Anner and Evans 2004; Arrighi and Silver 2001).

At the same time, the relatively new phenomenon – at least in this scale and intensity – of transnational migration could play an important role in unions’ international solidarity work, helping to overcome some of its obstacles, particularly in North-South contexts. In the context of global economic interdependence, labor markets are also becoming increasingly global (for the case of the labor market for domestic work, see Lutz 2008; Salazar Parreñas 2001b; Hochschild 2000a). Transnational corporations recruit their workforces globally and employees and executives are often deployed abroad within companies, leading to transnational employment trajectories among highly-skilled workers (Pries 2010c; Tzeng 2010; Herrera Lima 2006). The majority of migrants are less skilled workers, however, expelled from their communities by economic globalization as the internationalization of capital destroys domestic economies and livelihoods in the Global South, while at the same time fueling the demand for cheap labor in destination countries (Bieler et al. 2016, 5f.; Sassen 1988; see also Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 5f.). Today, over one billion people across the world are migrants, 244 million of whom are international migrants. While the percentage of international migrants among the world population has only slightly grown in the last decade and a half (from 2.8 in 2000 to 3.3 per cent in 2015), the absolute number has grown by 41 per cent (IOM 2016).

It has been argued that many of these migrants remain closely connected to their countries and communities of origin. They engage in transnational practices, maintain transnational social relations and networks as well as an emotional connection to those countries and communities. Rather than leaving their countries of origin behind, they are “transmigrants”, as transnational migration research has argued (Pries 2008a; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Basch et al. 2005/1994). In the context of growing migrant union membership in many destination countries, these ties, practices and identities linking migrants’ countries of origin and destination could be relevant for unions’ international solidarity.

Against this backdrop, the investigation deals with the role that transnational migration plays in labor unions’ international solidarity work. For this purpose, the investigation assumes a transnational perspective on unions and their international solidarity, focusing on the transnational social spaces that migrant union members in the US create through their transnational social ties, practices and identities to Mexico and El Salvador. The focus lies on migration in the search for work at the lower end of skill and income levels, independent of migrants’ legal status, not only because these migrants constitute the majority of the world’s migrants, but also because they are considerably more likely to be organized in labor unions than – for instance – high-skilled expats in transnational companies or students and academics completing research stays abroad.

For this purpose, this thesis brings together two bodies of literature: international solidarity research and transnational migration research.

In the realm of international solidarity research, labor's prospects for internationalizing and its efforts and pitfalls have gained considerable academic attention. Many factors contributing to the poor condition and haphazard character of international labor solidarity have been discussed. First, the workers' different positions in the global economy frequently lead to direct and indirect competition, which are actively promoted by employers and governments (Mückenberger 2011; Herod 2003). These structural divisions are arguably especially strong between workers in North and South, where the asymmetric relations in the global capitalist economy intensify existing social divisions between the center and periphery and produce tensions between relatively well-off workers in the North and those less well-off in the South (Sjölander 2011; Arrighi and Silver 2001). Hence, the interests of workers in the North and South are often argued to be antagonistic (Hoffmann 2004, 42; Bonacich 1998, 3; Johns 1998, 254). Second, unions' rootedness in national socio-political contexts and labor relations systems is discussed as a major obstacle to international solidarity, as it implies differing relationships and cultures of problem-solving with employers and the state, which frequently lead to misunderstandings and distrust across borders (Greven and Schwetz 2011; Cumbers 2004; Servais 2000). Third, the language barrier that usually separates workers in different countries makes communication costly and complicated, often producing misunderstandings (Kay 2011). Moreover, the prejudices and racism that often prevail against workers abroad lead to a reluctant attitude towards solidarity, particularly in North-South contexts (Kay 2011; see also Frank 1999; Hanagan 2003).

Two further challenges to international labor solidarity exist that are not as prominently discussed in the literature, but nonetheless strongly contribute to the problems mentioned above – not only, but particularly strongly, in North-South contexts – and hold particular relevance in the context of this investigation. On the one hand, most unions, particularly in the Global North, conceptualize international labor solidarity – and, in fact, unionism – merely around protecting workers' narrowly-defined material interests. This ignores the notion that workers have numerous interests that extend beyond material and directly workplace-related interests and that their material interests also depend on broader social and political conditions (Bieler and Lindberg 2011b; Novelli 2004; Zeuner 2004). This understanding not only limits international union cooperation to cases in which shared material interests are apparent and can be achieved through collaboration and contributes to the short-term character of most alliances as they only last until these interests are achieved; moreover, it also precludes unions' solidarity with non-labor movements and groups. These are, however, crucial to defending workers' rights in the long run, as global capitalism threatens ever-more spheres of human life, and social movements

opposing it need to join forces to have any chance of success (Nastovski 2014; Novelli 2004; Kurz-Scherf and Zeuner 2001).

On the other hand, most cross-border union collaborations lack an emotional foundation as a factor motivating solidary action: rather than acting in solidarity with workers abroad (also) motivated by a feeling of togetherness or a perceived “community of fate” (Levi and Olson 2000, 313), most international labor cooperation follows an instrumental logic, meaning that solidarity is understood as a means to an end, i.e. as an instrument employed for the attainment of a particular clearly-defined goal, only lasting until its attainment. Union memberships’ willingness to support others is usually limited to a concrete common goal, rather than (also) being based on an emotional foundation and identification with the workers abroad. Underlying differences and competition, reservations and distrust are not fundamentally overcome in such collaborations, but rather “paused”. This is particularly challenging in the context of North-South union cooperations, where prejudices and racism often add to the differences arising from workers’ position in the global economy. However, stable and lasting relationships between unions that persist adverse circumstances require that solidarity is viewed as more than a “means to specific ends” (Featherstone 2012, 35), and is based on an understanding of – and an empathy and identification with – “the others”. These constitute the bases for workers’ willingness to support each other in the long term and even in the absence of an immediate material return, despite setbacks and challenges (Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015; Lindberg 2011; Hanagan 2003; for the feminist movement, Ferguson 2011).

The second crucial strand of literature that this thesis draws from is transnational migration research. Recent migration research has shown that many migrants today can no longer be understood as “uprooted” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995): rather than leaving their countries of origin behind and undergoing an inevitable process of assimilation, migrants are often simultaneously involved in the social and political lives of both host and home societies, whereby their social ties and realities are not constrained by national boundaries (Pries 2010a; Castles 2002; Basch et al. 2005/1994).

Clearly, “the post-war period witnessed the intensification, not the creation, of transnationalism” (Weber 1998, 212), as in previous migration waves migrants also maintained transnational relationships and communicated with relatives who they left behind. However, both the “increased and more pervasive global penetration of capital” (Basch et al. 2005/1994, 26) and technological innovations in transport and telecommunications have promoted migrants’ transnational social relations and practices in recent decades, including economic, cultural, political and “civil-societal” activities (Itzigsohn et al. 1999; see also Portes et al. 2001). Through increasing economic global interdependences, the rise of modern communication technologies, cheaper and faster travel possibilities, as well as cultural globalization and media connecting

people around the world, migrants are more easily able to move back and forth and maintain close communication relationships across borders (Vertovec 2010; Portes et al. 1999). Many of them are embedded in dense networks of transnational social relations, frequently communicating with relatives and friends “back home”, visiting and participating in “home” communities’ social life. They are also engaged in transnational economic, political and “civic” practices: many migrants remain engaged in their countries or communities of origin, not only sending financial remittances and investing in businesses “back home”, but also engaging in social and philanthropic projects such as the construction of schools or churches, or supporting political movements, groups and parties. Between “home” and “host” countries, what has been called “social remittances” (Levitt 1998) circulate, with ideas, values, knowledge and information being exchanged between migrants and those staying behind. Remittances such as cultural norms and tastes, ideas of social norms such as gender roles and democracy or political ideals can have an impact on both “home” and “host” societies. Migrants often maintain a strong emotional connection and feeling of belonging to their country of community of origin, often even the second or third generation of migrants: rather than feeling a sense of belonging and loyalty to either the “home” or the “host” country, migrants often identify with both of them, showing pluri-local identities or “transnational ways of belonging” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), referring to an “identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group” (ibid., 1010). Given these developments, scholars have come to speak of “transnational social spaces” (Pries 2010a) or “transnational social fields” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) spanning migrants’ host and “home” countries or communities.

Transnational migration has social, political and cultural impacts on individuals, organizations and institutions in both host and “home” societies. For instance, the impact that transnational migration has on sending states’ migration and citizenship policies as well as destination and origin societies’ culture in terms of music, fashion and food tastes has often been analyzed (Baker-Cristales 2008; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Itzigsohn et al. 1999). Crucially, transnational migration is likely to also have effects not only on labor unions in general, but also their international solidarity work. In the past, the incorporation of migrants into receiving countries’ labor movements strongly influenced unions. For instance, the influx of European migrants from Germany, Scandinavia and Italy that brought along radical world views and action repertoires based on their previous experiences in the labor movement and socialist parties was crucial in the development of major receiving countries’ labor movements in the early-20th century, as is the case with the US and many Latin American countries such as Uruguay and Argentina (Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Montgomery 1974; Ceol et al. 2000; see chapter 2.3). In many cases, migrants’ connections to social struggles in their countries of origin have promoted support of and engagement with movements in those countries; for instance, as was the case with the

support of Mexican migrants in the US for the Mexican Revolution in 1910 (see chapter 2.3).

Furthermore, migration influences destination countries' labor unions nowadays: although most unions in migration destination countries have not been at the forefront of organizing migrants¹ and other minorities, these make up increasing shares of the union membership in many sectors and geographic areas as unions have been forced to target them as a clientele in view of their increasing numbers. Particularly in the US, a traditional immigration country in which it is considerably easier (although increasingly complicated by policies directed against migrants) even for undocumented migrants² to find work than in many European countries, migrants – both documented and undocumented – represent large shares, sometimes the majority, of the workforce and union memberships in some heavily “migrant” sectors of the economy, such as low-wage services, construction, hospitality and homecare. In the US, labor's long decline since the 1970s and the large migration waves since the 1990s have prompted many unions to spend major resources in organizing migrants, who represent large shares of members in a number of unions (see chapter 4). Needless to say, it cannot be expected that the increasing migrant membership translates into a fundamental transformation of unions' policies or culture, as migrants face many obstacles in terms of having a say. Most unions are hierarchically organized and rank-and-file participation in decision-making is limited: migrants are under-represented in leadership and staff and they are often disadvantaged in daily business, as meetings and documents are seldom translated and unions' “organizational cultures are permeated by assumptions of whiteness” (Fine 2007, 355).

Nevertheless, the increasing migrant membership clearly has an influence on unions. While research on the topic is limited, it has shown that in the case of US unions, the experiences and interests that migrants bring along lead to shifts within unions, contributing – for instance – to a refocusing on migrants' rights

¹ Although the terms “immigrant” and “immigrant workers” are used in most US labor research, I take the transnational character of migration seriously and generally do not use these terms in this thesis (except when referring to research dealing with historical migration).

² For a long time, living and working even for undocumented migrants was relatively easy in the US compared to many – particularly European – countries, as access to the labor market was uncomplicated and that to social services like healthcare and education did not depend on documentation. But this has increasingly changed in recent decades with restrictive policies at both the federal level and that of individual states. Already with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, sanctions for employers hiring undocumented workers were intensified, forcing workers without papers to buy stolen social security numbers to find a job. With the introduction of E-verify – a program that automatically compares employees' documents with that of the US government – employment has become even more difficult for undocumented migrants. Furthermore, workplace raids have become more widespread, with president Obama having deported more undocumented migrants than any other president before him. Nonetheless, approximately 11 million undocumented migrants still live in the US today (Passel and Cohn 2016; see also chapter 4).

and legal residence questions (Nissen and Grenier 2001a; Wells 2000; see chapter 2.3). Furthermore, migrants have altered unions' action repertoires and tactics. The US Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) famous Justice for Janitors campaign and the revitalization of the Californian labor movement more generally in the 1990s is a case in point (Sarmiento 2011; Milkman 2006; Waldinger et al. 1998; see also chapter 2.3).

The fundamental assumption motivating this investigation is that increasing migrant memberships could also influence unions' international solidarity work. The transnational character of much contemporary migration could hold particular importance: the transnational connections and identities as well as the skills and social remittances that migrants bring along and transmit could hold strong relevance for unions' international solidarity with unions in the Global South, which is where most migrants come from. Historically, connections between unions on both sides of the US-Mexico border have rested – to an important degree – on the presence of Mexicans in the US: in the 1930s and 1940s, solidarity with their compatriots was an important basis for Mexican unions' support of US unions and their involvement in organizing Mexican-origin workers in Texas and other Southern US states (Bacon 2011). Furthermore, migration apparently plays a role in unions' international work today, as some cases of unions show. Among others, US unions like the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE) and the SEIU have built on the skills and cultural knowledge of migrant staff to support organizing campaigns of their Mexican partner unions. In the SEIU campaign “*brillando con justicia*” to organize janitorial workers in Mexico City in 2009-2011, the “key folks in deciding” to engage in Mexico were Mexico-born then-Executive Vice President Eliseo Medina, Executive Vice President Rocío Sáenz from Mexico City and the then-president of Mexican descent of SEIU Local 1877.³ Furthermore, migrants are likely to play a role as what has been called “bridge builders” or “cultural translators”, helping not only to overcome the language barrier, but also to mediate between two different cultural contexts. As one of the few authors dealing with how migrants' transnational ties affect labor unions' international relations, Fitzgerald (2004) has found that migrant members' ties to their hometowns and the hometown associations (HTAs) that they are involved in constituted a crucial factor in inner-union politics in a US union local that he researched, leading to union leaderships' support of HTA projects in those communities.

Hence, while little research exists on the nexus of international labor solidarity and transnational migration, these examples show that transnational migration could indeed hold strong relevance for international labor solidarity and potentially contribute to overcoming some of the notorious obstacles described

³ Interviews with Elizabeth O'Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013; SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013.

above. Not only could the cultural skills and language proficiency that migrants dispose of facilitate cross-border cooperation; moreover, their transnational social ties and feelings of belonging as well as their social remittances could also promote solidarity with their countries of origin and make collaboration easier.

Against this backdrop, the investigation deals with the role that transnational migration plays in labor unions' international work. The main research question is: *What role does transnational migration play in international labor solidarity with migrants' countries of origin, and can it contribute to overcoming some of its challenges?* More concretely and applied to the specific cases studied here, this is divided into three sub-questions:

- 1.) What role do the transnational emotional connections, practices, skills and relationships of Mexican and Salvadoran migrant union members, officers and staff – where they are involved in US unions' international solidarity work with Mexico and El Salvador – play in this work?
- 2.) How do these connections, practices, skills and relationships influence the unions' work and policies regarding international solidarity?
- 3.) Do they contribute to overcoming some obstacles to international solidarity through the role that they play?

1.2 Research gaps: the missing link between international labor solidarity and transnational migration

To date, the role that transnational migration plays in international labor solidarity has not been analyzed. In fact, transnational migration studies and labor movement research more generally remain relatively unconnected, leading to a surprising lack of research at the intersection of labor unions and transnational migration. While scholars dealing with labor unions have focused – to some degree – on migration, they usually do not focus on migration's transnational dimension, while most research linking unions and migration focuses on unions' dealing with migrants rather than asking how migration influences unions. Moreover, besides a few exceptions, transnational migration scholars mostly do not deal with labor unions, and if they do, they ask – similar to the focus in labor movement research – for unions' relevance for migrants, rather than how transnational migration affects unions.

1.2.1 Labor movement research

In the realm of labor movement research, while a considerable amount of research exists at the intersection of labor unions and migration, this has rarely taken the transnational dimension of migration into account: despite the increasingly transnational work lives that many people lead – clearly, most migrants, including the transnational migrants, are workers – and despite growing migrant union memberships in many countries, how contemporary

migrants' transnational ties, practices, social remittances, skills or identities affect unions, let alone their international solidarity work, has not been a topic of research.

Rather, labor scholars connecting unions to migration have generally focused on unions' ways of dealing with migrants: given the increasing numbers of migrants comprising many destination countries' workforces, many contributions analyze unions' recent attempts at organizing these workers that unions and research previously considered to be "unorganizable". Topics discussed include unions' approach towards migration, their experiences in organizing migrant workers, the factors explaining successes and failures and the factors making migrants receptive to unionization (Kjeldstadli 2015; Greer et al. 2012; Milkman 2011).

Several contributions compare unions' approaches to organizing migrants in different countries, such as Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK) and the US, discussing factors explaining such differences (Connolly et al. 2014; Holgate 2011; Kahmann 2002). While some European unions can be found in the literature as taking a progressive stance towards organizing migrants – such as the Spanish Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and the Italian Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori (CISL) – most contributions find that European unions are still far from proactively organizing migrants, in contrast to many US labor unions (Sahlström 2008; Marino 2014; Munck 2012). Beyond regulatory structures and industrial relations traditions, some of the factors explaining differences in organizing migrants discussed are: the dominant logic guiding unions' actions such as class, race/ethnicity or social rights, unions' structure (decentralized structures give individual unions more freedom to develop policies targeting migrants adapted to their respective needs), the institutional power resources that unions dispose of, as well as national contextual factors such as national identity, legislation, political structure and public discourse (Marino et al. 2015; see also Nissen and Grenier 2001a).

In the realm of US labor movement research, the thrust of the debate somewhat differs from the European context, as migrants are frequently celebrated as a source of revitalization of the US labor movement (Milkman 2011; Ruiz Cameron 1999). Against the backdrop of impressive successes in migrant worker organizing since the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) Campaign of the SEIU in the 1990s that succeeded in organizing thousands of mostly migrant janitorial workers, several contributions have analyzed successful and failed attempts at organizing migrant workers (Roca-Servat 2009; Hurd and Savage 2006; Waldinger et al. 1998). While also here, a strand of literature analyzes factors explaining unions' different approaches to migrant organizing (Nissen and Grenier 2001a), many contributions explicitly analyze factors contributing to successful migrant organizing (Voss and Sherman 2000; Figueroa 1998).

Another strand of literature deals with the obstacles that migrants face within most unions to “get their voices heard” (or to be organized in unions in the first place). Given the lack of democratic structures and hence the notorious underrepresentation of minorities in union leadership levels, migrants have very limited access to decision-making processes in unions, which has often prompted them to organize (more or less) independently from established unionism. This is a particularly prominent development in the US, in which migrant workers are organizing in countless “workers centers” (Fine 2006b) or “poor workers unions” (Tait 2005; see also Ness 2011).

While these contributions deal with unions’ approaches towards migrants, little research deals with the other way round, i.e. the ways in which *migration influences unions*. While some historical accounts on the question exist,⁴ most knowledge on the issue in contemporary research is anecdotal. This research predominantly touches upon the previous activism experiences and political ideals that migrants bring along and that – on the one hand – are viewed to make some migrants more receptive (and others more adverse) to collective organization and – on the other – promote new topics or tactics within the union. Particularly in the US, several studies mention that migrants – especially those from Central America and Mexico – have more positive attitudes towards unions as they come from less individualistic societies and/or have previous political activism experience, leading to a stronger class consciousness compared with most non-migrant US workers. Several studies mention that many of the leaders of the labor struggles in the 1990s were migrants (Muñiz 2010; Milkman 2006; Wells 2000). This is considered an important factor accounting for the crucial role that Latino migrants played in the revitalization of the US – and especially the Californian – labor movement in the 1990s, and explains why migrants are often celebrated as harbingers of labor union revitalization and a new social movement unionism (Milkman 2000; Ruiz Cameron 1999; see also Bacon 2004).

Furthermore, several authors maintain that migrants’ militancy is a source of strength for the US labor movement, albeit most of them without analyzing what is actually migrants’ role in unions (Bacon 2010; Ruiz Cameron 1999; Acuña 1996). A small number of exceptions exist: Sarmiento (2011) and Theodore (2010) discuss how migrants from Central America alter organizing tactics in unions and worker centers by introducing elements of Paulo Freire’s Popular Education methods, while Wells (2000) discusses how migrant organizing leads to changing policies and tactics of a local union, as the union more strongly engages in the wider community, as well as an integration of migrants’ concerns into contract negotiations. However, these and a few other exceptions neither go beyond asserting that labor’s recovery since the 1990s has mainly been through the organization of migrants, nor appeals for unions to build on migrants’ ideas

⁴ For instance, the cultural and social resources that migrants bring into unions have been discussed in some contributions (Munck 2013; Fink 2011; French 2011).

and practices in confronting globalization and take migration into account in labor research (e.g. Munck 2012). Furthermore, the contributions generally deal with – if at all – the role that migrants play in unions; however, except for the action repertoires based on previous experiences that migrants bring along, they not explicitly focus on the transnational features of migration. The role of transnational social relations, emotional ties or social remittances more generally for labor unions has yet to be analyzed.

Contributions dealing with transnational migration's influence explicitly on unions' *international solidarity work* are even scarcer. In the literature, such terms as “international labor solidarity”, “transnational worker solidarity”, “labor transnationalism”, “labor internationalism”, “cross-border union cooperation”, “cross-border labor solidarity” are largely used synonymously. Although strictly speaking the terms “solidarity” and “cooperation” do not express identical phenomena, I use the terms interchangeably to avoid constant repetition of the same term. By it, I understand – very broadly – a form of collective action of workers or their organizations with or in support of other groups or persons abroad for the attainment of a common interest.⁵

Although international solidarity and its challenges are strongly-discussed topics among labor scholars, the role that migrants might play in them has not been a focus, even less so the transnational practices, identities and skills that migrants bring along. While migrants' historical involvement with – and support of – labor or other social movements and struggles “back home” has been documented to some degree (Bacon 2016; Flores 2011; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999), contributions linking migration and international labor solidarity today generally deal with destination and origin countries unions' efforts (independently or in collaboration) to protect migrants' rights, i.e. they focus on “migration as a problem of labour transnationalism” (Greer et al. 2011, 4). Some authors discuss the possibilities for organizing migrant workers transnationally. Gordon (2009) advocates for transnational cooperation and a “transnational

⁵ While this definition is a relatively broad one, (international) solidarity in the labor context is inherently linked to action, rather than being some sort of attitude or consciousness. In contrast to forms of solidarity understood in the Durkheimian sense of the cohesion of society, where solidarity is not linked to the attainment of a common goal but rather an attitude or feeling of togetherness, in the labor movement, while a feeling of togetherness is an important element of a stable solidarity (see chapter 2.1.3), the latter's *raison d'être* is a common goal, and it thus expresses itself in concrete actions for its achievement (Fantasia 1988). A factor further distinguishing the solidarity between workers from other forms of solidarity such as the cohesion of society as well as the solidarity in other social movements is that historically the foundation of unions as the institutionalized form of worker solidarity aimed at overcoming competition between workers. The common interest was thus to take their wages out of competition and collectively enforce improved working conditions. This competition, which continues to exist today – and increasingly so particularly at an international level in the context of economic globalization – is one of the major factors rendering worker solidarity more difficult than other forms of solidarity.

labor citizenship” that would “link worker self-organization with the enforcement of basic workplace rights in a way that crosses borders just as workers do” (ibid., 5) and require cross-border structures and relationships between unions and NGOs. Greer et al. (2011) analyze the European Migrant Workers Union (EMWU), an attempt by the German construction union IG BAU to establish a transnational union organization for the organization of migrant workers in the European construction sector in 2004, albeit which eventually failed. Dealing with the Mexico-US area, Calderón and Domínguez (2008) stress that in view of Mexican labor migration, transnational labor regulation is needed, and they discuss unions’ way of dealing with the migration topic domestically both in Mexico and the US as well as transnationally, albeit finding that little practical cross-border cooperation has developed, as most of it remains on the rhetoric level. Several contributions deal with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which is to date the only organization that while based in the migration destination country (the US) uses a transnational approach to proactively organizes guest workers in the sending country (Mexico) coming to farms in the US *before* they migrate (Ness 2011; Stillerman 2003, 587f.). Some contributions mention cases of unions cooperating practically across borders for the organization of migrant workers. For instance, the Mexican Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT) has supported both the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in their organizing efforts among Latino workers in the US by sending organizers (Stillerman 2003; Hathaway 2000).

Contributions linking international labor solidarity and migration the other way round – i.e. dealing with the role that the latter plays in the former – tend to consist in appeals to take migration into account as a possibly crucial factor facilitating international solidarity, without going into detail (e.g. Munck 2012; Brecher et al. 2006; David 2002). The few contributions within this body of literature that touch more concretely upon the role of migrants – and their transnational ties – in cross-border union collaboration do so very superficially. One example mentioned by some authors is the sending of Mexican-origin organizers from the US to support organizing drives in Mexico: something that authors have mentioned for the case of UE and FAT and the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the Mexican Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM) (Gordon 2009, 28, footnote 99; Cohen and Early 1999). Another is the family relationships between United Steelworkers (USW) activists in Arizona and the Mexican Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos, Siderúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMSSRM, “Los Mineros”), which have a long history of collaboration (Hathaway 2000).

Bacon (2016; 2011) is one of the few authors to explicitly broach the role of migration in international labor solidarity. He stresses the potential that the large-scale Mexican migration to the US could represent for US-Mexico labor

solidarity. In pointing out that the solidarity of unions on both sides of the border has relied on the large number of Mexican migrant workers in the US since the 1930s and 1940s, he argues that the large number of Mexican migrants living in the US today should be viewed as a strong potential for building cross-border labor solidarity (2011). While also documenting numerous contemporary instances of cross-border cooperation of Mexican and US unions, he has not analyzed what the role of migration in that solidarity empirically looks like today.

Importantly, existing contributions touching upon the role that migration plays – or could play – in international labor solidarity (or in unions more generally) do not explicitly ask about the transnational elements of this migration, even if they do so implicitly when mentioning family ties or migrant-origin organizers sent to Mexico. Fitzgerald (2004) constitutes an important exception that explicitly focuses on the transnational dimension of migrants in unions. In a study on a California union local, he finds that Mexican-origin union members' cross-border ties to their hometowns have implications for cross-border activities: clubs from different hometowns conduct fundraising events at the union hall for projects in their respective communities, while in the run-up to union elections, candidates donate for such projects and support fundraisers. Asking about the effect that these transnational identities have for international solidarity, Fitzgerald finds that while the union engages in cross-border activities, migrants' ties strengthen nationalisms (both Mexican and American) rather than promoting labor transnationalism. This study hence offers interesting hints at the role that transnational migration can play in cross-border union solidarity with migrants' countries of origin in view of the increasing incorporation of migrants into unions.

Nonetheless, a more in-depth investigation of the role that transnational migration plays in unions' international solidarity work is lacking, as well as an explicit focus on its possible contribution to overcoming some of its obstacles: the influence that migrants' embeddedness in webs of transnational social relationships, their emotional ties and continued concern for their countries of origin, the world views and previous experiences that they bring along – their social remittances – as well as their cultural skills have on international labor solidarity (or unions more generally) has yet to be analyzed.

1.2.2 *Transnational migration research*

Compared with labor movement scholars' focus on transnational migration, the research on the latter has dealt with labor unions – let alone international labor solidarity – to an even lesser extent. The two areas of research that have come closest to linking transnational migration with labor unions are – on the one hand – the research on *organizations and social movements and their transnationalization*, which are affected by similar transnationalization processes as those leading people to migrate. This literature matters for the

present research as individual labor unions are organizations, and the labor movement more broadly is a social movement – it is the “old” social movement as opposed to “new” social movements (such as the environmental, feminist, or peace movements) – and in fact some individual unions continue to view themselves as movements.

On the other hand, research dealing with *work, working conditions, and employment regimes in the context of transnational migration* comes close to the research object of the present investigation: this strand of literature clearly places migrants’ capacity as workers in the center, discussing their working conditions, employment regimes and their regulation, as well as frequently dealing with migrants’ struggle for their rights.

Research on the transnationalization of organizations and social movements. The realm of transnational studies not only deals with the transnationalization of migration, but also organizations and social movements: not only is migration becoming transnational, but also organizations and social movements are clearly affected by economic, cultural and political globalization and increasingly connect across borders. Thus, in the last two decades a wealth of research has studied the development of transnational companies (TNCs), organizations such as humanitarian and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as social movements such as the global feminist movement or the anti-globalization movement, detecting the development of “transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs)” (Smith et al. 1994; see also Ietto-Gillies 2012; Della Porta et al. 2009; Tarrow 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

However, although both social movements and organizations on the one hand and migration on the other have been major topics in the research dealing with transnationalization processes, they are – with some exceptions – not analyzed conjunctively, and their interrelationships rarely constitute an explicit research focus (see Schwenken 2006). Nonetheless, some exceptions connecting transnational migration and transnational organizations or social movements exist, on the one hand, a number of contributions analyze how migrants rely on transnational networks in their struggle for their rights in destination countries (Francisco and Rodriguez 2014; Francisco 2014; Schwenken 2006); while on the other hand, the research dealing with migrants’ transnational political and economic practices has described – in many cases – the development of transnational political networks and “ethnic” businesses, as well as documenting the involvement of migrants in organization and movements in their countries of origin (Sequeira et al. 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Landolt et al. 1999). However, the research object of most of these contributions is migrants and their transnational practices themselves, rather than existing organizations or social movements, as well as the impact that these practices have on them and on their transnationalization.

However, some contributions also explicitly enquire about the role that transnational migration plays in the transnationalization of organizations. In the introduction to his edited volume on transstate⁶ spaces in the realms of politics, economy and culture between Germany and Turkey, Faist (2000b) argues that transnational activist networks can be reciprocally connected to migration, and that transnational organizations such as religious communities are often built on migrant communities around the world and their ongoing connections to their countries of origin. Mertens (2000) analyzes the role that transnational migration plays in the development of a transnational organization. He stresses the important role that Kurdish migration to Germany and other European countries – and particularly the development of a Kurdish collective identity and the transfer of social and cultural capital to Germany – have played in the development and consolidation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK.

Hence, a number of contributions connecting transnational migration to transnational organizations and social movements exist. However, they fail to deal with labor unions. Studies dealing with transnational migration that touch upon unions mostly discuss them regarding their role in supporting migrants' struggle for their rights (e.g. Schwenken 2006; see also further below). By contrast, how transnational migration processes affect unions – let alone their international work – has not gained academic attention to date.

Research focusing on work in the context of transnational migration. A second strand of research coming close to linking transnational migration and labor unions discusses the intersection of transnational migration and work, particularly working conditions and employment regimes. Several lines of research link migration to work. First, given that most migrants are workers, work has constituted a central topic in classical migration research from the onset. In classical (de facto *im-*)migration research, the incorporation of migrants into destination-country institutions has been major topics, among them not only educational and welfare systems, but also labor markets, employment trajectories and sometimes their labor unions (Samers 2010; Bade and Bommes 2004; Hinken 2004; Öztürk 2002). The focus in this strand of research mainly lies on institutions as a means for migrants' integration into the host society.

Second, in classical migration research, migration has (often exclusively) been conceptualized as labor migration, with its almost sole reason viewed as being migrants' search for work, as well as wage differentials between origin and destination countries conceptualized as “push” and “pull” factors driving migration (Borjas 1999; Todaro 1980; Ravenstein 1885). Sassen (1988) has linked this to economic globalization and stressed that migration is a global labor supply system fueled by the internationalization of capital that produces

⁶ Faist uses the term “transstate” instead of “transnational”, see footnote 48.

the disruption of traditional work structures, the feminization of labor and an increasing demand for labor in destination countries.

Third – and most importantly – also in contemporary transnational migration research, work is a topic to some degree. In fact, the economic processes and their consequences that Sassen highlights are seen to be at the roots of transnational migration, as the insecurity of livelihoods is understood to force migrants and those who they leave behind to rely on transnational networks as safety nets (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 5f.; Basch et al. 2005/1994). Nonetheless, these developments and the working conditions and employment regimes linked to transnational migration do not constitute a major focus in most contributions dealing with transnational migration. An important exception is the research focusing on migrant domestic workers that – coming out of feminist and gender studies – discusses migrants' employment regimes and working conditions and regulations. It explicitly views this female migration as labor migration, and has intensely dealt with migrants' working conditions, the relationship with the employers, the legal regulation of migrant domestic work, the interrelationships between migration and employment regimes, as well as migration's implications for the reproduction of power and financial asymmetries, among others (Da Roit and Weicht 2013; Husmann 2010; Lutz 2008). The debate on "global care chains" (Hochschild 2000a) explicitly focuses on the transnational dimension of migrant domestic work and discusses the chain reaction that the employment of migrant domestic workers in destination countries provokes, as their departure leaves a care gap in their families that is often filled by yet another female migrant. The main topics in this research strand are the transnationalization of reproductive and emotional work, including the transnational ties to children and other relatives and the transnational organization of education and mothering in these transnational households (see also Isaksen et al. 2008; Yeates 2005; Salazar Parreñas 2001a).

Hence, while transnational migration scholars – particularly those concerned with migrant domestic workers – have dealt with the interrelationship of transnational migration and work and employment issues, they have rarely focused on labor unions. In such cases, they mostly discuss unions' role in migrants' struggles for rights, rather than how transnational migration affects unions: in the context of the research dealing with domestic workers' (self-)organization and struggle for their labor and human rights, the role that labor unions play is a major topic, often compared with that of other community and human rights organizations in the struggle for domestic workers' rights (Jiang and Korczynski 2016; Marchetti 2012). Furthermore, although these contributions clearly link domestic migrant work to labor unions, most of them neither explicitly discuss this migration as transnational migration, nor are the transnational ties, practices or identities that these migrants bring along taken into account.

To sum up, in the realm of transnational migration research, both work and working conditions on the one hand and (although to a lesser degree) organizations and social movements and their transnationalization on the other have constituted a focus. However, despite being crucial organizations – or movements – shaping working conditions and employment regimes as well as countries’ social and political life more generally, labor unions are seldom touched upon. If they are dealt with, it is mostly either without explicitly discussing the transnational dimension of migration, or with a focus on unions’ role in migrants’ struggles, rather than asking how transnational migration influences labor unions.

1.3 Research approach: bringing together international labor solidarity and transnational migration research through exploratory research

1.3.1 Bringing together international labor solidarity and transnational migration research

This investigation brings together transnational migration research and international solidarity research to shed light on the interconnections between the two phenomena. It builds on concepts from both transnational migration research and (international) (labor) solidarity theory as well as empirical research to gain insights into the role that transnational migration plays in that solidarity. For this purpose, the investigation assumes a transnational perspective on unions and their international solidarity work. In this context, adopting a transnational perspective means not to limit the object of study to the “nation-state containers” dictated by methodological nationalism, but rather explicitly widening the view to include into the focus the existing transnational social spaces, fields or relations that migrants bring with them: the transnational social spaces that migrant union members create through their transnational social ties, practices and identities. By acknowledging that migrants’ social reality is not confined to the US or the concrete city in which they live but rather extends beyond nation-states borders to include their country of origin (or specific places therein), these transnational social spaces are included in the analysis of unions’ international solidarity work and the role that migrant union members play in it. The intention is hence to analyze how the existence of these transnational social spaces spanning the country in which the union is located (in this case, the US) and the country that its solidarity work is targeting (migrants’ countries of origin: here, El Salvador and Mexico) affects this solidarity work. Concretely, such a perspective means – while studying nationally-bound organizations (US labor unions) and their activities – focusing on migrants’ transnational social ties, practices, identities and social remittances and skills and analyzing the concrete ways in which these play a role in unions’ international work. A focus on these transnational “features” makes visible how migrants and what they bring along influence unions’ international solidarity and how – in certain areas – can help overcome some of the obstacles.

More concretely, the research focuses on three concepts proposed by transnational migration research and the role that they play in unions' international solidarity work: migrants' transnational ways of belonging, their transnational social and political practices and transnational political networks and organizations, as well as migrants' social remittances and cultural skills. In the realm of international labor solidarity and its challenges, it focuses on two problems mentioned above: the narrow conception of international labor solidarity and unionism, as well as the lack of a perceived "community of fate" among the workers involved.

By assuming a transnational perspective on unions' international work, the investigation hence bridges the gap between international labor solidarity and transnational migration research, thereby contributing to filling the gaps in both labor movement research and transnational migration research outlined above. Most importantly, it broadens our understanding of how the increasing transnational migration affects labor unions and international labor solidarity, thereby contributing to closing the blind spot that transnational migration – despite being a phenomenon that strongly affects destination countries' institutions and organizations, but also labor unions and their international work in particular, given the increasing numbers of transmigrants organized in unions – constitutes in labor movement research to date. At the same time, it also contributes to answering some of the major open questions in transnational migration research: by analyzing how transnational migration influences the international solidarity work of unions, the study contributes to closing the blind spot that unions – despite being important organizations structuring destination countries' social, economic and political life – and in fact existing organizations more generally constitute in transnational migration research.

1.3.2 Methodological approach and case selection

Given the lack of investigation into the relationship between international labor solidarity and transnational migration, the research is exploratory, which means that it is theory-generating, rather than testing hypotheses established a priori. I analyze the research question empirically in *two case studies of US labor unions' international solidarity work with the countries of origin of major migrant member groups*. The intention is to find initial hints at ways in which migrants and their transnational "features" influence their unions' international work. However, following Burawoy (2009, see also Glaser and Strauss 1967, 39), I do not enter the field as "tabula rasa", but rather base the research on a broad variety of possible – and sometimes contradicting – hypotheses on migrants' roles in their unions' international solidarity work that I hope to concretize, correct, discard or reformulate. The lack of research and testable hypotheses presuppose a high degree of *openness* in the research process and "research design flexibility" (Yanow 2014, 19) that allow responding to field situations and the adaptation of the focus and strategy to gained insights. Fieldwork is thus what Burawoy (2009, 124) has called a "rolling revisit": "a

succession of experimental trials, (...) each in conversation with the previous ones. (...) (and) followed not just by writing about what happened but also by an analysis in which questions are posed, hypotheses are formulated, and theory is elaborated – all to be checked out during successive visits.”

Importantly, the exploratory approach means that the two cases are chosen to include a broad variety of differing conditions and characteristics: the cases differ in characteristics such as migrants’ country of origin, type of union and the autonomy of the local or regional entity from the national union. However, the main intention of including different characteristics – or “independent variables” – is not to compare them in the strict sense and establish causal mechanisms regarding the outcomes of differing variables (in the sense of “condition A leads to outcome B”); rather, it aims to gain the broadest possible insight into the ways in which migrants and their transnational connections can influence international solidarity. However, on a secondary level, the intention is also to gain insights into the effect of different conditions and characteristics of migration, unions and their solidarity work on the way in which migration influences unions’ solidarity.

The investigation focuses on the international solidarity of labor unions in the US and migration from two Latin American countries: El Salvador and Mexico. It does so for a number of reasons: the US is not only the world’s largest destination country of international migration, with the foreign-born population representing over 14 per cent of the country’s total population and 17 per cent of the labor force (Passel and Cohn 2016, 7; Pew Research Center 2016). Given the history and size of the migrant population, as well as the geographical proximity of many large migration origin countries (particularly Mexico and the Caribbean and Central American countries), strong transnational ties exist between many migrants in the US and their countries of origin: in fact, early transnational migration studies mainly focused on transnational migrant communities spanning the US and Caribbean and Central American countries such as the Dominican Republic, Haiti and El Salvador, as well as Mexico (e.g. Landolt et al. 1999; Vila 1999; Itzigsohn 1995). Migrants from Mexico and El Salvador constitute two of the largest migrant groups in the US, with Mexicans constituting by far the largest group, and Salvadorans the seventh largest.

Most importantly, labor unions in the US are advanced regarding the organization of migrants when compared with most other Northern unions, as several US unions already began organizing migrant workers already in the late-1980s and the 1990s. As mentioned above, the organization of migrants into many US labor unions – particularly in low-wage services such as the hospitality and building services, but also others like construction and food processing – has led to large migrant membership shares, up to the point that migrants have been called the “vital center” of efforts to rebuild the US labor movement (Milkman 2011b, 295; see also chapter 4). While very unevenly distributed (geographically and across sectors and unions), some unions like

SEIU, the hotel and restaurant workers union UNITE HERE and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) currently have migrant membership rates of 50 per cent or even more in many regions and locals.

Furthermore, US unions have – on the whole – an at best ambivalent trajectory of international labor solidarity. Besides such exceptional cases as UE, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), they have struggled to establish stable solidarity relationships based on trust and long-term commitments with unions abroad; for instance, they have largely not been involved in such cross-border cooperation structures between workers as the EWCs or interregional trade union councils. While the situation has slightly changed in the case of some unions since the mid-2000s, US unions have particularly often been accused of pursuing a “phone call solidarity” (Brecher et al. 2006), i.e. building on ad-hoc calls for support, rather than investing in the establishment of long-term relationships (Greven und Schwetz 2011; Howard 2007). Moreover, they are usually – or were until very recently⁷ – viewed as among those with the narrowest understanding of international solidarity and unionism: it is here that the term “business unionism” has its roots and despite notable exceptions such as the IWW, UE, and the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) it most widely applies (Zweig 2016; Scipes 2010, 3).

I conducted the research in two local and regional entities of US labor unions, as it is in these levels that an influence of a migrant membership most probably materializes. Regional – and particularly local – entities of unions are responsible to their members and are often not as strictly bound to the strategic guidelines formulated by their national leaderships; thus, they have the possibility to respond to their membership much more than national unions. Given the limited influence of migrants (and other minorities) on national unions and their under-representation in national union leadership levels, as well as the highly strategic character of international work on that level, migrants are thus likely to face significantly more obstacles in terms of influencing unions’ international work than on the local and regional levels, where they are also less under-represented in leadership positions.

The cases differ in a series of characteristics, the most important of which are outlined as follows. First, I analyze different types of unions: one local of a services union, the United Service Workers West Local (USWW) of the SEIU in California – meaning mostly low-wage members and relatively little previous history of international solidarity work – and a district of a manufacturing union, the United Steelworkers (USW) in Illinois and Indiana, meaning – at least in comparison with USWW – relatively skilled and well-paid members and a

⁷ With many US unions’ turn towards organizing as well as alliances with community groups and social movements such as migrant, environmental and anti-globalization groups, this is beginning to change (López 2004; Turner and Hurd 2001).

significant history of international solidarity. Second, the degree of autonomy from the national union of the entities studied differs: SEIU is a decentralized union with a relatively high degree of autonomy of its locals from the national union, while USWW is a large, California-wide local disposing of many resources. By contrast, USW is more hierarchically organized, and its locals – most of which are much smaller (and therefore, have less resources) – are less independent from the national union. Third, importantly – and as previously mentioned – the cases differ regarding migrants’ country of origin, which goes along with a different character of the migration: in USWW, I studied Salvadoran migrants’ engagement in the solidarity activities with the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN), and in USW, Mexican migrants’ role in the union’s strategic alliance with the Mexican union SNTMMSSRM (or “Los Mineros”). This is important regarding both the specific characteristics of the migration – given their flight from the Salvadoran civil war, many Salvadoran migrants are politicized and have previous activism experience, whereas Mexicans mostly do not – and the nature and challenges relating to international labor solidarity: El Salvador holds little importance for US labor unions in terms of economic and industrial relevance, and little solidarity exists with the country, while in the case of Mexico the situation is different, but cross-border union cooperation is particularly challenging given the clientelistic and corrupted nature of official Mexican labor organizations and the prevalence of yellow unions. Furthermore, the different migrant groups also reflect differences regarding migrant generation and residence status: Salvadorans are mostly first generation and many of them are undocumented, whereas Mexicans are mostly second generation, meaning US citizens.

In each of the cases, I analyze the research question by focusing on the concrete role that the transnational emotional connections, practices, skills and relationships of migrants involved in solidarity work with their country of origin play in that work, how they influence it and whether through it they help to overcome some of solidarity’s challenges.

As I will show in the following chapters, taking such a transnational perspective on international labor solidarity reveals that in the cases studied, migrants’ transnational connections, practices, skills and relationships are relevant for overcoming two sets of obstacles facing international solidarity: the narrow understanding of solidarity that prevails in most unions and the minor relevance that international solidarity has in unions’ work as a result; and the lack of a perceived “community of fate”, which is – to an important degree – a result of the little practical character of most solidarity and the lack of rank-and-file involvement. It is mainly three “features” of transnational migration that account for this, which do so in the following ways:

First, migrants’ *transnational ways of belonging* help to overcome the minor relevance that international solidarity has in unions’ work. While international solidarity – and even more so such with most migrants’ countries of origin –

usually does not form part of unions' regular work, this investigation finds that migrants' ways of belonging can constitute the motivation to promote solidarity relationships: particularly migrants' concern for political and social developments in their country of origin and identification with political movements or groups "back home" leads them to initiate activities in solidarity with movements or organizations where they did not previously exist. Furthermore, migrants' emotional connection to their country of origin can contribute to strengthening a perceived community with workers in that country.

Second, migrants' *embeddedness in transnational political organizations and networks* that arises out of this ongoing political concern provides the practical resources for the conduction of solidarity work: where migrants are involved in a variety of political groups and networks directed at their country of origin, these constitute the connection to the organizations "back home" that solidarity activities are conducted with. They establish contacts and transmit relevant information.

Third, the *social remittances and cultural skills* that migrants bring along can promote a more comprehensive understanding of solidarity and unionism, as well as contributing to a practical solidarity work that involves the rank and file, and the development of a perceived "community of fate" among workers. On the one hand, migrants' *social remittances* – particularly the political ideas, values and convictions that they bring along – promote a reframing of what "the organization stands for" and which ones of workers' interests are seen to be worth of solidary action, in one of the cases. As has happened in the past through European migrants' incorporation into US labor unions, this leads to a conception of unionism and international solidarity that goes beyond the defense of material self-interests to include a broader spectrum of material and non-material interests as well as social struggles abroad. At the same time, migrants' social remittances secure them the necessary influence in the union to promote their view: if migrants can draw from previous political activism experiences, they are likely to have clear political goals and know how to push them through. On the other hand, migrants' *cultural skills* can contribute to developing a practical solidarity that involves the rank and file. Their language skills as well as their knowledge of the partner country and its culture facilitate the conduction of concrete solidarity activities and make communication easier, hence providing the basis for the experiencing of collective strength, common framing of situations and management of differences. Furthermore, these skills allow establishing personal cross-border relationships between workers that strongly promote the development of a perceived community, as they not only constitute an immediate emotional connection, but also lay the basis for a continuous cross-border communication.

1.4 Thesis outline

In what follows, I first present the theoretical concepts and state of research relevant for the investigation (chapter 2). The chapter begins by sketching out the main obstacles to a functioning international labor solidarity discussed in the literature, followed by a theoretical conceptualization of the two obstacles mentioned above that – despite not being as prominent in the literature – constitute important obstacles to a functioning international labor solidarity and hold particular relevance to the research question: the narrow understanding of international solidarity and unionism more generally that prevails in most labor unions; and the lack of a perceived “community of fate” among workers across borders (2.1). This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical premises of transnational migration research and the main theoretical concepts that hold relevance regarding the role of transnational migration in international labor solidarity that the subsequent empirical research focuses on: the “transnational ways of belonging” that many migrants today have, i.e. the emotional ties and transnational identities linking them to their country or community of origin; the transnational social relations and particularly transnational political networks and organizations that migrants are embedded in; and the social remittances and cultural skills that they bring along (2.2). The third section of chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature at the intersection of labor unions and transnational migration (2.3). Its first part shows that in the realm of labor movement research, while some research exists on unions’ *dealing with* migrants, research on the role that migration plays *in* labor unions is very limited, even more so when it comes to unions’ international solidarity work; moreover, this research rarely focuses on the transnational dimension of migration (2.3.1). The second part discusses how in the realm of transnational migration research, labor unions have been almost no topic at all. I first lay out that while some authors have dealt with organizations and social movements as well as their transnationalization in the context of transnational migration research, this rarely includes unions; subsequently, I sketch out that while some authors have analyzed shifting employment regimes, working conditions and work regulation in the context of transnational migration, this research strand has seldom explicitly encompassed labor unions (2.3.2).

I then present the methodological approach of the investigation, in which I will explain what an exploratory and theory-generating research approach means in practice, as well as laying out the case selection and data basis (chapter 3).

This is followed by the presentation of the empirical context of the investigation (chapter 4): I first provide an overview of transnational migration in the US, both generally and from the two countries studied (4.1), before laying out the history and present of US labor unions’ dealing with migration (4.2), followed by a discussion of US unions’ international labor solidarity (4.3). Finally, I will present the two case studies – SEIU Local USWW and USW District 7 – and their respective migrant memberships and international solidarity work (4.4).

The subsequent chapters presents the results of the empirical investigation (chapter 5 and 6). Chapter 5 deals with the case study of USWW and its solidarity work with the Salvadoran FMLN. After providing an introduction to the FMLN solidarity work conducted in the local (5.1), in the analysis section (5.2) the role that Salvadoran migrants' transnational ways of belonging (5.2.1), embeddedness in transnational political organizations and networks (5.2.2) and social remittances (5.2.3) play in that solidarity is analyzed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings (5.3).

Chapter 6 analyzes United Steelworkers District 7 and the solidarity with the Mexican union SNTMMSSRM (or "Los Mineros"). After a description of the solidarity work taking place in the district (6.1), the analysis section (6.2) traces the role of migrants' transnational ways of belonging (6.2.1) and cultural skills (6.2.2 and 6.2.3) in that solidarity. This is followed by a summary of the findings (6.3).

The thesis ends with a conclusion and discussion (chapter 7). I first provide a short summary of the main findings in each of the case studied, before touching upon the relevance of some of the independent variables mentioned above: studying two very different cases allows drawing tentative conclusions on how such factors as migrants' country of origin and type of labor union influence the role that migration plays in international labor solidarity, which I briefly discuss. Subsequently, I reflect on the generalizability of the findings and its limitations, as well as sketching out pending research.

2 Theoretical concepts and state of research: international labor solidarity and transnational migration

By taking a transnational migration perspective on unions' international solidarity work, this research brings together international labor solidarity theory and transnational migration research. As laid out above, taking a transnational migration perspective on international labor solidarity necessitates a perspective that extends beyond the limits of "nation-state containers" to account for migrants' transnational identities, social ties and practices, as well as the role that these play in unions' international solidarity.

In this context, when researching the role that transnational migration plays in international labor solidarity and whether the former can contribute to overcoming some of the challenges the latter faces, two theoretical debates are relevant: theories of international labor solidarity and its challenges, as well as concepts from transnational migration research. In the following, I will first discuss the challenges to international labor solidarity. After providing a brief overview of the main obstacles to international labor solidarity discussed in the literature, I will focus on the two crucial challenges for a functioning international labor solidarity mentioned in the introduction. Subsequently, I will present some of the fundamental theoretical assumptions of transnational migration research, followed by a discussion of the three most important concepts in the context of the research question: migrants' transnational ways of belonging, their embeddedness in transnational organizations and political networks and the social remittances and cultural skills that they bring along.

2.1 Solidarity research: challenges to international labor solidarity

2.1.1 State of affairs: unions' limited success in building international solidarity and its reasons

Although international solidarity has been one of labor's most important ideals ever since the First International and Marx' famous call "working men of all countries, unite!", it has gained further relevance in the current context of neoliberal globalization. International solidarity is often seen as a necessary strategy for labor to confront an increasingly transnational capital and national governments' shrinking capacities – or willingness⁸ – to enforce social and labor regulations: as national organizations, it is often argued that labor unions will not be able to enforce workers' rights and oppose employers' strategies of placing workers in different countries in competition to each other (Bieler and

⁸ Of course, the global trend towards deregulation and flexibilization policies is no natural force, but rather based on conscious decisions taken by national governments. Nevertheless, in an environment increasingly dominated by financial deregulation, tax cuts, trade liberalization and a neoliberal rhetoric, it is difficult for individual national governments to implement policies strengthening regulation and raising social standards.

Lindberg 2011a; Fichter et al. 2001; Gordon and Turner 2000b; for a critical view, see Evans 2010; Castree 2000).

Unions around the world and in almost all industries have thus been engaged in forging cross-border ties in recent decades to confront corporations on a global scale. Many attempts at building international solidarity have emerged: not only have national labor unions cooperated bi- or multilaterally in transnational campaigns confronting specific corporations and policies, but also the Global Union Federations (GUFs) – the global federations bringing together unions of specific industrial sectors – have experienced a revival since the end of the Cold War.⁹ Many of them have been actively conducting campaigns against global corporations, involving member unions in a vast number of countries. In what has been called “comprehensive”, “strategic” or “corporate” campaigns (Greven 2006a; Bronfenbrenner 2007a; Juravich 2007), national unions and GUFs have targeted global corporations such as G4S, Nestlé, T-Mobile or Continental in long-term campaigns involving a series of different strategies and unions in a great variety of countries, often aiming at Global Framework Agreements in individual transnational corporations (McCallum 2013). Such campaigns try to take advantage of companies’ weak points and usually involve targeting their financial relationships and consumers (Greven and Schwetz 2011; Bronfenbrenner 2007a). A “key source of leverage” (Greven 2006b, 258) and crucial element in them is the active involvement of unions in the companies’ home country (usually industrialized countries, most of them in the US and Europe), as they often have good relations with and influence on management. The campaigns often involve dispatching staff of the union or GUF in question to other countries to exert influence on local managements, reflecting a new approach to international labor solidarity (Greven and Schwetz 2011). Moreover, broader alliances of unions with community and consumer groups and the anti-globalization movement have been formed; for instance, in the “battle of Seattle” against the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in 1999, or the joining of unions with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Clean Clothes Campaign (Anner and Evans 2004). In the context of such efforts, some unions have devoted considerable financial and personal resources to cross-border cooperation; for instance, as is the case with the US SEIU that installed a global partnerships unit in charge of promoting international collaboration around organizing, the attempts at institutionalized cooperation in Europe in the EWC – which are often substantially promoted by unions –, and corporate campaigns (Behrens et al. 2001; see also Tattersall 2007).

⁹ As political ideology also divided the global labor movement during the Cold War, its end allowed for a unification of the two global trade union federations International Congress of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) to form the ITUC in 2006.

However, while some of these cooperation efforts have been successful,¹⁰ they usually remain exceptional campaigns rather than part of unions' everyday work. Compared to unions' "everyday business" like collective bargaining and political lobbying national governments, international solidarity holds minor importance in unions' strategies, as they tend to rely on their accustomed domestic modes of action, particularly when they have been successful in the past¹¹ (Turnbull 2006, 309f., 320; Baccaro et al. 2003: 129; Behrens et al. 2001, 171; see also Keune and Schmidt 2009, 19). Despite exceptions, most unions do not – as an element of their regular work – devote significant resources to international solidarity efforts or transfer many responsibilities and resources to international union bodies, and in practice the turn towards partners abroad in pursuing their goals is mostly not an option considered by unions and their leadership. Moreover, if it is, they subsequently quickly fall back into national(ist) strategies in defending their members' interests. Hence, despite the importance attributed to the internationalization of the labor movement rhetorically, international labor solidarity usually remains a noble ambition rather than lived practice: while unions have more or less successfully eliminated competition between workers domestically,¹² in the international arena competition and the defense of locational advantages continue to dominate the relationships with workers as "international solidarity efforts are increasingly important and widespread, they still occupy only a small portion of the overall union agenda" (Baccaro et al. 2003, 129; see also Turnbull 2006, 321; Frege and Kelly 2003; Stillerman 2003).¹³

The consequence is that not only does international solidarity not figure prominently in most unions' strategies, but also where it takes place, it mostly

¹⁰ Examples are the campaign against Group 4 Securicor (G4S) in the mid-2000s, the campaign against Royal Dutch/Shell in the second half of the 1980s, and the mobilization against the "Bolkestein Directive", which aimed at the liberalization of trade in services in the EU in 2005 and 2006.

¹¹ A notable exception is the long tradition of international solidarity of the dockworkers and seafarers (Urata 2011; Lillie and Martinez Lucio 2004).

¹² This has not been accomplished entirely. Unions have often defended their members' interests against other workers such as migrants, unemployed, temporary workers, etc. (e.g. Hurd and Turner 2001; Lühje and Scherrer 1997b).

¹³ Even where conditions are favorable for international cooperation – or would even seem to demand it – unions often pursue local or national strategies. In the port sector – an industry generally viewed to be particularly prone to international solidarity – Turnbull (2006, 2000) shows that responses to globalization have recent decades been national. Although waterfront trade unions "display many of the characteristics deemed essential for international solidarity" (Turnbull 2000, 17) and the competition between most ports is limited, most dockers' strategies in recent decades have been local or national, even vis-à-vis major restructuring of the industry due to globalization. Indeed, dockers have been able to successfully exploit their structural and associational power on national levels, as "on the waterfront (...), even localised strikes can impose significant costs on operators, port users, importers, exporters, and ultimately the consumers" (ibid., 16; see also Turnbull 2006, 310).

takes the form of more or less short-term collaborations for specific, clearly delimited goals, whereby union relationships are “in most cases episodic and distant” (Tattersall 2007, 160). Seldom are stable cross-border relationships and lasting structures and long-term working relationships formed across borders (Hyde and Ressaissi, 2008, 65; Anner et al. 2006; Greven 2006a, 260). This has been criticized as the “haphazard international labor cooperation” (Brecher et al. 2006, 9), meaning that few stable alliances for the pursuit of long-term goals exist, and that most coalitions are insufficiently stable to survive adverse circumstances or setbacks.¹⁴ For instance, even in the case of one of the most advanced and institutionalized international union cooperations – that of unions within the EU – with the European economic crisis that began in 2008, unions were quick to replace their cooperation with national strategies where they seemed more promising in the short term. They did so despite their long-existing recognition that in the context of a common market, currency and financial policy, unions need to act collectively on a European level, and a history of functioning European cross-border worker collaboration in such institutionalized bodies as EWCs, the European Trade Union Confederation and the European Industry Federations. While almost all European unions and particularly the ETUC urgently called for European coordination of activities against austerity measures following the crisis, unions in many countries relied on a strategy of national crisis corporatism, activities of solidarity generally remained on a symbolic level and calls for Europe-wide general strikes and days of action had only limited effects (Dribbusch 2014; Urban 2012; Hyman 2010). For many unions, in the crisis, national governments and companies were allies rather than opponents, and their main focus lay on securing their country’s and industry’s competitiveness through bilateral deals with their national governments and employers, rather than pursuing joint strategies with European partners to confront austerity measures further eroding workers’ rights in Europe (Dribbusch 2014; Bernaciak 2013, 139; see also Glassner and Keune 2010).¹⁵

¹⁴ Exceptions are institutionalized long-term cooperation relationships as in a handful of World Works Councils, other institutionalized cooperations particularly in Europe such as those within the Interregional Trade Union Councils, the European Industry Federations and particularly the EWCs – which are, as World Works Councils, not cooperations between unions, but between employee representatives in multinational companies; but in practice, they are mostly strongly promoted and used by unions. In EWCs, the employers are obliged to pay for meetings and cross-border communication among employees, thus facilitating the establishment of cross-border networks that would be much more difficult to establish otherwise (Martin and Ross 2000, 137; see also Greven 2006b). Since the implementation of the EWC directive in 1994, over 1,000 EWCs have been created, representing 1.9 million workers, with the vast majority of them having a select steering committee and meeting at least once a year (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/netuf/2015/12/18/european-works-councils-progress-and-a-long-road-ahead/>).

¹⁵ A similar case is explained by Bernaciak (2013) regarding unions’ activities in the European General Motors crisis: despite having a long history of cooperation, unions at the various production sites negotiated concession deals with GM on a national basis, instead of

At the same time, the haphazard character of international labor solidarity implicates a “phone call solidarity” (Greven 2006a, 260): given the lack of existing relationships that unions can build on when they need support, unions often turn towards international solidarity when it is already too late, calling for support at very short notice. “(I)t is certainly difficult to respond to an emergency without previously established inter-union structures of cooperation” (Greven 2006a, 260). “Building trust requires enduring institutions capable of reciprocal commitment, as opposed to *ad hoc* alliances”, Hyde and Ressaissi (2008, 53) write. As such a phone call solidarity does not leave sufficient time to develop the necessary trust and commitment, it often provokes discontent on the other side (*ibid.*, 74f.; Lillie and Martínez Lucio, 2004, 163). Requests for solidarity often seem to be a one-way street that is only about receiving support in particular situations rather than entering into a durable mutual commitment involving giving something back, with this criticism particularly leveled against US unions (Greven and Schwetz 2011; see also Hyde and Ressaissi 2008, 74; Howard 2007; Greven 2006b, 14). By contrast, Hyde and Ressaissi (2008, 75) argue that “efficient institutions of transnational union cooperation are those which assure unions that the cooperative project is permanent, not transient; strategic, not tactical; and reciprocal, not one-sided.”

Reasons for the lack of international labor solidarity

The literature discusses many factors contributing to this predicament of international labor solidarity.¹⁶ However, speaking of a “theory” of international labor solidarity – let alone the challenges facing it – would be inaccurate. While some attempts at theorizing labor solidarity more generally exist (e.g. Hyman 1999; Zoll 2000; Kelly 1998; Fantasia 1988), the number of authors dealing explicitly with *international* labor solidarity and its challenges at a theoretical level is limited. Some theoretical contributions exist on how and when international labor solidarity develops and what its foundations and conditions are (e.g. Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015; Featherstone 2012; Novelli 2011; Anner et al. 2006; Bieler 2005; Zeuner 2004; Hyman 2002a; Dreiling and Robinson 1998), but most research on the *problems* facing international labor solidarity is rather empirical (for exceptions, see Lévesque and Murray 2010a;

jointly negotiating through the EWC and the EMF over job cuts and austerity measures. Governments’ involvement in the economy made national-level solutions more attractive than international solidarity, as state assistance “offered certain and immediate gains” (*ibid.*, 148), whereas such gains were insecure in cross-border cooperation. “(A)fter the ‘national turn’ in union politics, it is hard for unions to rebuild mutual trust and confidence in the effectiveness of cross-border strategies, which does not bode well for the future of labour transnationalism in Europe”, the author (*ibid.*, 140) finds.

¹⁶ Due to space constraints, I cannot discuss the strand of literature that deals with the factors *facilitating* international labor solidarity and the conditions under which it is more probable to develop. For interesting contributions, see Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015; Lévesque and Murray 2010a; Bernaciak 2010; Bieler 2005; Dreiling and Robinson 1998.

Herod 2003; Johns 1998; Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1996; to some degree, Dribbusch 2014). In drawing from both theoretical and empirical literature, the remainder of this section discusses four of these factors: workers' different positions in the global economy; unions' rootedness in national socio-political contexts; language barriers; and prejudices and racism.

First, workers' different positions in the global economy frequently lead to situations of direct and indirect competition, and workers at different places around the world can have different or opposing interests (Mückenberger 2011; Herod 2003; Johns 1998). Of course, the decisive factor distinguishing labor solidarity from that of other movements, groups and individuals is that workers (and unions across countries) are fundamentally in competition with each other: the fundamental rationale for workers joining together when unions were first formed was to overcome the competition that they found themselves in, as well as taking wages out of competition. This is also true for workers in different countries that often compete for jobs. Recent global developments in the context of economic globalization challenging labor movements around the world neither lead to the same problems facing labor in different regional contexts, nor are they necessarily interpreted in the same way, causing different coping strategies by unions (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1994). Crucially, in the actual context of the increasing transnationalization of production and capital, workers are increasingly placed in competition with each other. Through corporate strategies such as outsourcing and subcontracting, employers significantly challenge solidary action across borders, as does the economic nationalism rhetoric of governments, whereby companies frequently openly use whipsawing tactics that play off workers at different production sites against each other (Hoffmann 2004, 45; see also Greven 2011, 37; Lindberg 2011).¹⁷

As labor geographers such as Johns (1998) and Herod (2003) have argued, workers' choice of strategy depends on their "geographical embeddedness in different local, regional, and national political economies" (Herod 2003, 506), which determines their interests. Workers' *spatial* – as opposed to class¹⁸ – interests arise out of "their location in capitalism's spatial matrix" (Johns 1998, 253) and may diverge. Their work conditions are linked to the geographically uneven development within the global capitalist economy, which creates a hierarchy of workers at different sites: while some places are privileged with

¹⁷ Mückenberger (2011) argues that in globalization, additional to the basic competition between individual workers, two new forms of competition emerge: on the one hand, the competition between workers' respective capitals on the world market (competition for "competitive advantage"); and on the other, the competition between workers' respective countries (competition for "comparative advantage"). Mückenberger states that these structured competitions produce highly diverging answers, often including such strategies as "social dumping" and protectionism by national labor movements, which in fact conflict with the goal of an enhanced labor transnationalism (ibid., 21).

¹⁸ They view these as comprising interests such as employment, job security, living wages and health benefits, which are nearly universal around space (Johns 1998).

capital investment, job security and wages, others suffer from a lack of these (Johns 1998, 254; see also Herod 2003, 508). Consequently, workers can find themselves in antagonistic positions towards other workers within the geographical structures of production, in which workers at better-positioned places have a material interests in defending the higher living standard that they have gained. For instance, these include continued employment in a particular locale, a higher standard of living relative to workers in other places, the ability to purchase cheap imported goods, etc. (ibid., 255, 269; see also Ahlquist and Levi 2004). These structural divisions are especially strong between workers in North and South, making international labor solidarity a particular challenge. As the asymmetric relations in the global capitalist economy keep intensifying existing social divisions between center and periphery, they produce tensions between relatively well-off workers in the North and those less well-off in the South (Bieler and Lindberg 2011b; Sjölander 2011; Arrighi and Silver 2001). The interests of workers in the North and South are thus often viewed as antagonistic, as in the competition for investment and jobs workers in poorer countries have little more than cheap labor to offer, thus exerting downward pressure on workers' wages in the North (Kay 2005; Hoffmann 2004, 42; Bonacich 1998, 3). This situation has historically often caused labor unions in the US and many European countries to pursue protectionist strategies of "job security" at the national level against the cheap labor power of Southern workers, as we currently witness in the support of many US unions representing blue-collar workers – particularly the building trades – for president Trump's aggressive rhetoric against Mexican workers and the trade agreement with Mexico (Greenhouse 2017; see also Anner and Evans 2004). Rather than acting in solidarity against capital with unions abroad, labor movements in the North have often mainly complained about "seemingly undeserving workers in the global South (...) stealing jobs that 'rightfully' belong in North America or western Europe" Bronfenbrenner (2007a, 7) and have pursued aggressive economic nationalism in coalition with employers (Brecher et al. 2006, 11; Moody 1997a; Babson 2002, 34).

Second, unions' rootedness in national socio-political contexts with specific institutional and labor relations systems is considered one further important impediment to cross-border union cooperation: differences in collective bargaining patterns and workplace representation such as the dominance of sectoral or of firm-based bargaining as well as differing relationships and cultures of problem-solving with employers and the state can not only hinder cross-border cooperation in practice due to unions' diverging preconditions, but also frequently lead to misunderstandings between cooperating parties (e.g. Cumbers 2004). Differences in legal provisions and protection for workers as well as mechanisms of conflict resolution and unions' recognition as bargaining partners can further complicate cross-border understanding (Greven and Schwetz 2011, 140; Servais 2000; Ebbinghaus and Visser 1994, 235ff). Tattersall (2007, 169) cites a SEIU official who views the "most significant

obstacle to international solidarity” as “learning the language of union and industry practice” in other countries, including “anything from legal and regulatory differences to understanding the accepted codes of local union practice”. Furthermore, beyond differences in existing legal provisions regarding workers and unions, there may be significant differences in their respective implementation, hindering an understanding of problems facing workers in other countries. Particularly in many Southern countries, the main problem for workers is not labor law itself, but rather its implementation: in countries such as Mexico, labor law is very progressive and grants a high degree of protection to workers; however, very little of it is enforceable, whereby workers’ struggles usually do not focus on law enforcement. As the situation is very different in most Northern countries, where the rights that workers have on paper and in practice are usually the same¹⁹, misunderstandings can arise in North-South contexts, producing reservations and distrust against each other and reinforcing the sensation of “strangeness” of “the others” (e.g. ITSC 2009, 12).

The third important factor hindering cooperation in practice is the language barrier: as workers in different countries usually speak different languages, communication requires interpretation, which is costly and renders it complicated, as well as often producing misunderstandings. Frequently, “routine communication depend(s) on specialists and translation media, rather than the worker-to-worker interaction that builds a wider movement” (Babson 2002, 34; see also Bernaciak 2006; Williams 1999).

Finally, prejudices and racism often prevail against workers abroad and reinforce a reluctant attitude towards solidarity: particularly in North-South contexts, racist attitudes are widespread and strongly intermingle with protectionist and chauvinist approaches to international policies: workers in the “North” often view workers in the “South” as stealing their jobs, which Kay (2011, 48) calls “racial scapegoating” (see also Bronfenbrenner 2007a, 7; Frank 1999). In Northern unions, a perception often prevails of workers in the South as docile and cheap labor power willing to accept low wages and poor working conditions. Consequently, workers in so-called low-wage countries are often accused of not being willing to stand up for decent working conditions and willingly underbidding the labor standards that workers in the North have won through decades-long struggle:²⁰ a perception not seldom promoted by union

¹⁹ The US is a partial exception. Among others, the freedom of association and right to collective bargaining of workers in the US are seriously hampered by employers’ attacks on unions’ organizing efforts; see footnote 77.

²⁰ However, especially regarding the US, this is a much too simple perspective. Wages, working conditions and workers’ rights (particularly the freedom of association) are mediocre at best, the US has not ratified two of the most important ILO conventions – the freedom of association (C87) and the right to collective bargaining (C98) – and legal enforcement of labor laws is very fragmentary. Furthermore, in many industrialized countries the high labor standards that workers and unions are so proud of have largely been eliminated through the past decades of deregulation and flexibilization.

leaderships to close ranks internally and mobilize their memberships, often paired with strategies of economic nationalism and siding with “their” national industries (Scipes 2010; Williams, 1999). Furthermore, the “foreign worker myth” (Kay 2011) is often accompanied by racist ideas about Southern workers’ limited abilities to produce high-quality products and being as skilled and productive as their Northern counterparts (ibid.). For instance, US unions have traditionally viewed Mexican workers (in both the US and Mexico) as promoting the relocation of US jobs to Mexico by underbidding working standards and wages. Until the 1990s, the rhetoric in the US labor movement was thus marked by the need to protect American workers from those low-wage workers by implementing protectionist trade policies, as has been shown by the great number of “Buy American” campaigns led by US unions (Anner and Evans 2004; Frank 1999; see also chapter 4).²¹

In the following, I focus on two further problems of international labor solidarity that contribute to some of the problems mentioned above: the narrow understanding of solidarity and unionism that guides most unions’ work, as well as the lack of what has been called a “community of fate” among workers across borders (Levi and Olson 2000, 313). I suggest that a migrant membership can play an important role in overcoming these problems. I draw from empirical research as well as social movement theory and solidarity theory more generally to grasp these challenges.

2.1.2 Challenges to international labor solidarity: the narrow understanding of solidarity and unionism guiding most unions

In most unions, a narrow understanding of international solidarity prevails (Zeuner 2004; Hyman 2002a).²² For most of them, solidarity is seen as

²¹ Many more factors hindering a prioritization of international activities in unions’ strategies exist that I cannot discuss in detail here, including path dependency as most unions developed as local and then national organizations, with national governments and employers constituting their primary policy focus for more than a hundred years, and the bureaucratic character of most unions that makes them relatively inflexible for organizational and strategic innovation.

²² Hyman (2002, n.p.) writes: “the solidarity of interest representation has always been selective. It is possible to identify four main types of issue of concern to unions. The first constitutes the traditional core agenda of ‘bread-and-butter’ collective bargaining over wages and other conditions of employment. The second relates more to procedure, status and opportunity: rights limiting employers’ arbitrary authority and underwriting employment protection, ‘fair’ mechanisms for promotion and career advancement, training opportunities and so on; and the regulation of production, the allocation of work and the determination of workloads. The third addresses the role of the state: the constitution of the social wage (hence concern with social welfare provision and taxation policy), the politico-legal framework of trade union organisation and action, the macroeconomic policies which shape the circumstances of the labour market. Finally there is an agenda not directly linked to the worker’s status as employee but addressing other facets of personal and social existence: war and peace, the environment, the sphere of consumption, the institutions and facilities of the local community. While all these varied themes have figured on the trade union agenda at

comprising industry-based cooperation in the pursuit of specific – mostly short- to medium-term – material goals. Most international solidarity takes place on a “case-by-case basis” (Gordon 2009, 27) – comprising cooperation with labor unions abroad to attain concrete objectives such as better pay or the prevention of job loss in companies’ restructuring plans – and it is more often than not directed against a common employer (Nastovski 2014; Bernaciak 2010, 121f.; Gordon 2009, 27f.).

This concept of international solidarity is – to an important degree – a result of the understanding of unionism, i.e. of union’s “shared identity” (Lindberg 2011, 206), their “ideological orientation” (Hyman 2001) or “the shared definition among its members of what the organization stands for” (Frege and Kelly 2003, 14) that prevails in most unions: while to varying degrees given unions’ differences in their ideological orientations – for instance, between the three ideal types of unions that Hyman (2001) identifies in his classical contribution²³ – unionism is in most cases understood to be limited to the immediate workplace realm and not to entail a fundamental critique of existing conditions or society going beyond it. Most unions understand themselves as pursuing their members’ material interests linked to workers’ daily work context, such as better pay, improved working conditions, or job preservation: which Hyman (2002a, n.p.) has called “the traditional core agenda of ‘bread-and-butter’ collective bargaining over wages and other conditions of employment”. While what has become to be known as “business unionism” originally arose in English-speaking countries – particularly the US (Hyman 2001, 6) – it is today the most common position among unions especially in the Global North. In this understanding, Hyman (2001, 6) writes that “broader social and political objectives are of dubious legitimacy, or at best ancillary to unions’ economic functions” and the focus lies instead on “collective bargaining, enforcement of the contract, and representational and other group services (health plans, insurance, group legal services) for the union member” (Turner and Hurd 2001, 14; see also Scipes 2010, 3; López 2004, 1).²⁴

different times, however, there have often been strong pressures to avoid questions which may prove internally controversial and to highlight those on which unions can deliver results through negotiation with employers or with governments. Commonly this has reinforced unions' role as bureaucratic bargaining agents at the expense of their potential as social movements.”

²³ Hyman distinguishes between “market bargainers”, “partners in social integration” and “mobilizers of class opposition”. Particularly the latter unions see themselves as “contest(ing) the system” (ibid., 17) and pursuing broader political goals. However, today they represent a minority.

²⁴ With the increasing adoption of social movement unionism, elements such as alliances with community groups and other social movements such as migrant, environmental and anti-globalization groups as well as a stronger focus on organizing the unorganized, this is beginning to change in some countries, particularly the US (López 2004; Turner and Hurd 2001).

The focus on specific work-related and often short-term material goals is due – among other things – to unions’ limited resources, which makes the assignment of resources to longer-term goals without effects in the foreseeable future difficult to impose given that leaderships are accountable to their membership, who are often not particularly enthusiastic about international solidarity (Nastovski 2014, 220f.; Southall 1994, 179; Harrod 1972). Hence, while broader approaches to unionism that view workers’ material conditions as being linked to the broader societal context and embrace a class-based solidarity with workers across boundaries within and across nation-state borders have always existed – for instance, in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the US International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), the French SUD-Solidaires, and many “social movement unions” in countries such as Brazil, South Africa and the Philippines²⁵ – they are not the rule.

In the international sphere, the majority of unions hence only engage in their members’ immediate workplace-related benefit. The fundamental reason for solidary action is seen as the pursuit of a common material interest, and most solidarity has been limited to the collaboration in the industrial realm with unions (or works councils, union federations, etc.) facing the same employer: in the case of unions in the Global North, mostly with unions in other industrialized countries that are economically relevant and where global corporations have their headquarters (e.g. Bernaciak 2013).²⁶ Evidently, so-called strategic or corporate campaigns are based – as their name suggests – on strategic considerations regarding an immediate industrial goal and usually target individual transnational employers, and do not extend beyond a short-to-medium-term alliance for its attainment. Similarly, the many recent campaigns for the implementation of Global Framework Agreements focus on cooperation with other labor unions and federations to attain specific, workplace-related goals such as improved working conditions and respect of workers’ rights in specific transnational corporations. Regarding collective bargaining, Keune and Schmidt (2009, 19) state that “the potential merits of transnational collective bargaining are often largely evaluated in terms of the extent to which it may contribute to achieving national or local objectives”.

Dealing with Canadian and Mexican unions, Lévesque and Murray (2010a) describe cases in which the “competitive alliance with management” and unions’ acting as “a conveyor belt to convince workers of management’s competitive logic” (ibid., 231) precludes them from strongly engaging in

²⁵ For instance, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) Labor Center of the Philippines, COSATU in South Africa, and the CUT in Brazil (Scipes 2016b; Lambert and Webster 2001).

²⁶ In her analysis of unions’ dealing with the crisis of the European division of General Motors, in which unions turned away from international cooperation despite having a long history and structures for collaboration, Bernaciak concludes that “even in ‘most-likely’ cooperation cases, local economic interests and the availability of national strategies still delineate the extent of unions’ engagement in cross-border liaising” (Bernaciak 2013, 150).

international solidarity. The authors state that the “weak involvement rests on a narrow conception of solidarity and worker interests. Union representatives emphasize the conflicting interests between workers” (ibid., 228). Furthermore, they find that “instrumental views about the usefulness of engagement in international alliances” (ibid., 237) lead unions to pursue a strategy of what they call “selective engagement or (...) risk reduction” (ibid., 236), in which engagement in international cooperation is “strongly related to local needs” and motivated by the “gather(ing of) information that was immediately relevant to their needs” (ibid., 237). Hence, they conclude that “the strategy of risk reduction tends to stamp a high degree of instrumentalism with regard to such alliances that are conceived in terms of reducing risk and/or incremental improvement of local position, oftentimes in detriment to other sites of the global firm” (ibid., 238).

Similarly, in her analysis of three cases of German and Polish automotive unions (GM/Opel, VW and MAN) and their engagement in cross-border collaboration, Bernaciak (2010) found that these unions only engaged if they obtained immediate material gains in terms of local concessions, production relocation and production shifts. “(U)nions were cautious when engaging in cross-border activities – they would analyse the benefits and costs resulting from transnational coordination as against alternative, national strategies” (ibid., 128). She concludes that “their transnational activism seems to be explained best from an interest-based perspective” (ibid.).

In the following two sections, I will first argue that this narrow understanding of unionism and solidarity contributes to the limited existence of substantial cross-border solidarity. While goal-oriented international cooperation around specific issues or employers has, of course, often been effective and constitutes a necessary element in international labor solidarity, such a focus adds to the limited priority that international strategies have in unions’ work, and it prevents unions from allying with non-labor social movements abroad. A broader understanding, however, I will argue, is necessary to defend the whole range of workers’ interests in the long run. Secondly, I will show that while such an understanding dominates most unions, unions’ self-conception and their understanding of unionism and solidarity is not static but can be altered, and that it is, to an important degree, a matter of framing existing workers’ existing interests in one way or another.

2.1.2.1 The need for a comprehensive conception of “what the organization stands for”: understanding international solidarity, unionism and the interests motivating unionism and solidarity broadly

A narrow understanding of unionism and solidarity has important consequences. Beyond contributing to the dominance of short-term coalitions, it also is also part of the explanation for the little importance assigned to international solidarity: where solidarity is viewed as being limited to the pursuit of specific

short-term material interests, international cooperation is not a necessary (or even sensible) means in the pursuit of most of unions' goals. As Nastovski (2014, 220) has put it, "in the context of business unionism, informing dominant ideas of union goals and action, international solidarity work in general often appears out of place" (see also Scipes 2010, 3; Levi and Olson 2000, 312). In this understanding, in practice international activities are limited to cases in which material interests shared by both (or more) partners that are attainable in the short term are clearly identifiable. Given that workers across the world are often fundamentally in competition with each other – and employers (and the governments they ally with) deliberately reinforce this competition by playing workers off against one another – they often have different or even opposite short-term material goals. Common interests are thus often not easily identified, severely limiting the options for international cooperation. Moreover, with a definition of workers' interests that guides unions' work as limited to material benefits, most goals can still effectively be pursued without turning to international cooperation: short-term material goals such as improved pay or better collective contracts are often (though not always) attainable through domestic strategies of individual unions. For instance, in the aforementioned European crisis corporatism, while many unions were able to secure core their workforces' material interests through bilateral deals with their national governments and employers such as the survival of firms and employment (Bernaciak 2013, 139; see also Urban 2012; Glassner and Keune 2010), they prioritized short-term material interests over their long-term goals of a social Europe, reversing the trend of a declining wage share of GDP and increasing purchasing power (Hyman 2010, 8).²⁷ Furthermore, in pursuing spatial interests (see above), workers can still often effectively rely on local or national strategies, as collective action across borders is useless for their attainment: in order to reassert their dominance within capitalism's spatial structures (Herod 2003), it can make sense to form alliances with their employers and national capitals. In view of the persistent effectiveness of nationally-oriented strategies in the pursuit of such interests, unions thus mostly prefer to spend members' dues on company- or industry-level bargaining and lobbying domestic politicians. They are only inclined to cooperate with others abroad for a limited number of goals that they cannot reach unilaterally.

²⁷ Unions turned away from their own proposals for overcoming the crisis, such as the German IG Metall's demand for a Public Equity Fund to finance necessary structural changes (Urban 2012, 224). In the case of Germany, unions' concessions on wages further increased structural wage imbalances between Germany and other (mostly Southern) European countries. Indeed, while the strategy of securing employment through working time reductions – e.g. in Germany – succeeded in protecting workers from the worst effects of the crisis, it implied significant reductions of contract work and concessions on pay and working conditions, and in many countries, performance and health-related pressures on employees increased and wage moderation and renegotiation of existing pay and working condition agreements are common (Urban 2012; Hyman 2010).

Crucially, in focusing on limited goals, such an understanding of solidarity precludes the support of – or alliances with – non-labor social movements and broader political and social struggles (and, in many cases, even the support of workers employed by other companies). Scipes (2010, 3) states that “business unionism’s approach is to organize workers to fight for their own limited interests – separate from working people in general, and sometimes even opposed to their larger interests – regardless of the effects upon others. Hence, business unionism depends on the ability of unions to win their demands by themselves (...) (and business unions are) isolated from the community and resources outside of the trade union movement”. Where goals such as wealth redistribution, gender equality or the fight against racism and political oppression do not guide unions’ actions (although they may play a role rhetorically), the support of struggles that would not serve one’s own immediate workplace is perceived as “giving blood” (see Bormann 2018, 15), and unions allying with other social movements or supporting broader struggles for social justice or against oppression are the exception. It makes collaboration difficult particularly in North-South contexts, where the possibilities for a solidarity in this narrow understanding are limited, given that many countries of the Global South are not as economically and industrially relevant as other industrialized countries and global corporations usually have their headquarters in Northern countries.

For the case of Canadian labor unions, Nastovski (2014) documents that what she and others term as unions’ “economism” (see also Levi and Olson 2000, 312), whereby legitimate international action of unions is seen as being limited to “an extension of the limited action of trade unions as defined by the industrial relations regime” (ibid., 221); for instance, particular international bargaining efforts pursuing immediate material gains for the workers involved. This conception inhibited international solidarity campaigns against South African and Israeli apartheid: when the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Ontario supported the BDS²⁸ strategy against the Israeli regime in 2006, the conception of labor unions as limited to defending workers immediate “bread-and-butter” interests led many union members to support the public and media attacks demanding that unions should limit their activities to collective bargaining rather than engaging in international issues. Nastovski criticizes that the reason for this is the business unionism definition of unions, which relies on a narrow and “desocialized” (ibid., 221) definition of class as limited to immediate economic gains for workers, rather than conceiving of such struggles as those against racism, colonialism and nationalism – and sexism, political oppression or environmental exploitation, one might want to add – as crucial elements of workers’ struggles (ibid., 220; see also Scipes 2010, 3ff; Herod 2003; Johns 1998).

²⁸ Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions.

However, the support of and alliances with social movements and political struggles other than labor unions as well as workers not facing the same employers are necessary to effectively defend workers' interests in the long run: a narrow understanding of solidarity and unionism overlooks the notion that workers have countless broader and long-term interests going beyond "bread and butter" interests whose defense requires not only putting them on unions' agenda, but also allying with other movements (Kurz-Scherf and Zeuner 2001, 160; see also Baccaro et al. 2003, 120f.). Of course, the focus on workers' work-related interests is labor unions' *raison d'être* and what distinguishes them from other social movements. Giving it up and extending it to just any kind of interests that workers have would render unions arbitrary. Again, collaborations focusing on such specific, limited goals that are immediately linked to the improvement of workers' employment conditions are a necessary element in unions' international strategies. However, such an understanding ignores the dependence of workers' work-related material interests on the broader social and political conditions, while it also fails to acknowledge the whole spectrum of interests that workers have extending beyond the improvement of their working conditions: while also in the literature, cross-border union cooperation is often understood as taking place solely in the pursuit of material self-interests (e.g. Bernaciak 2013), this fails to grasp the totality of interests that motivate – and have historically often done so – workers' collective and solidary action. Workers do not always act in their immediate interest such as their job preservation, but frequently opt for supporting others without a clearly apparent material gain, both at home and abroad. In the long run, a narrow understanding of unionism and solidarity is thus ill-suited to defend workers' interests in a context of an increasingly global capital and diminishing regulatory power (or willingness) of national governments (Bacon 2016, 167; Zweig 2016, 187ff; Zeuner 2004). This is mainly the case for three reasons, as outlined below.

The first reason is that workers' material interests cannot – in the long run – be fundamentally met by focusing on the attainment of short-term economic goals alone, as they *depend on broader economic and social conditions* that require a focus on longer-term interests that are sometimes not as immediately visible. Bacon (2016, 167) states that a long-term view of workers' interests requires workers "to look beyond getting a contract tomorrow for their own union", whereby "solidarity means knowing that workers in one country cannot keep their contracts or jobs if workers across the border are losing theirs" (ibid.). The quality of workers' working and living conditions is strongly influenced by factors such as the distribution of wealth and social equality in society. Workers' interests thus cannot be separated from the struggle for a transformation of the existing unjust social relations and against exploitation, even less so in a context of an increasingly global capital and diminishing regulatory power (or willingness) of national governments (Bacon 2016, 154f.; Nastovski 2014; Zeuner 2004). Accordingly, labor unions have historically not only fought against employers and for workplace-related aims, but also developed as

political movements whose struggles focused on broader social and political issues such as progressive labor legislation and welfare state provisions, what Munck (2011, 14) calls “political unionism” as opposed to “economic unionism” (see also Baccaro et al. 2003). Furthermore, while in some industrialized countries, unions’ past achievements – particularly the provisions of the welfare state – have allowed them to largely abandon their political roots and focus on mainly economic goals, in many countries across the so-called developing world the labor movements’ struggle is necessarily linked to broader goals such as a more just distribution of wealth in society. The inseparability of workers’ material interests from the broader social and political conditions is particularly evident in contexts of political oppression: where authoritarian governments repress labor and other social movements’ activity, the struggle for workers’ rights becomes a struggle for human rights and against political oppression (e.g. Novelli 2004). In a context of a globalized economy and TNCs undermining governments’ regulatory power on the nation-state level, the struggle for better social and political conditions is closely linked to that in other countries: as examples such as the joint mobilization of unions across Europe against the European Union (EU) services (“Bolkestein”) Directive in 2005 and 2006 exemplify, struggles for improved labor legislation (or rather, the resistance to deteriorating legislation) can hardly be led nationally when politics are fundamentally supranational (Dribbusch 2014, 340f.). However, also in less extreme cases of supranationalization of politics, national social and economic policies are heavily influenced by cross-national competition for the lowest taxes and social and environmental regulation. Additionally, the narrow focus on the defense of unions’ *own* membership’s material interests also fails to see that these interests are increasingly difficult to defend in heterogeneous and precarious working conditions. The call for the inclusion of those not traditionally represented by unions – the unemployed, precarious and temporary workers, informal workers or bogus self-employed – is thus not only a moral appeal to unions’ sense of justice, but also born out of necessity vis-à-vis an eroding membership base and hence power to pursue workers’ interests (e.g. Zeuner 2004).

The second reason for the need for a broader understanding of solidarity is that even workers’ *material interests go beyond the improvement (or preservation) of their pay and working conditions*: union members are not just workers; rather, they are also citizens, women, migrants, etc., with interests arising out of these capacities that can motivate collective action (Bieler and Lindberg 2011b, 228; Zeuner 2004, 324; Waterman 1998, 335; see also Gunawardana 2011). This is an important factor in explaining why workers do not always act according to their immediate economic interests as workers, but also engage – for instance – in the struggle for immigration reform, against environmental degradation and the privatization of public services, for peace and disarmament or people’s rights to treatment for HIV/AIDS, as described by Lethbridge (2011; see also Novelli 2004; Hanagan 2003). Recognizing the whole range of workers’ interests

implies that unions cannot turn a blind eye to the conditions in other realms affecting workers, such as the environment, housing, community, health, gender relations, equal rights for minorities or citizenship rights (Zeuner 2004, 340ff; see also Zweig 2016; Agarwala 2013, 32ff). Fletcher and Gaspasin (2008, 194) state:

The best response to the reorganization of global capitalism is for the international working class to forge solidarity across borders. Moreover, it requires the unity of workers with others – not just workers – who are falling victim to neoliberal globalization. Insofar as the trade union movement (and the labor movement more broadly) does not advance a constructive alternative to neoliberal globalization, it opens the doors to right-wing nationalist movements.

Particularly in an increasingly interwoven world in which neoliberal globalization and global capital affect almost every sphere of human life, unions' ability to defend workers' interests are linked to other social struggles (see also Zweig 2016; Anner and Evans 2004). Workers' interests can thus hardly be seen as separated from the struggles led by social movements and organizations such as environmental, peace, women's or migrant rights movements, all of which can be important allies in defending workers' interests (Tait 2005; Zeuner 2004, 341; see also Tattersall 2007, 160ff). Novelli (2004, 165) has aptly pointed out:

Neoliberal globalisation fragments communities through processes of flexibilisation of labour, underemployment and increases in unemployment. Therefore, a key task for labour movement organizers is to reunite fragmented communities under new organisational forms. It also recognizes that in the era of neoliberal globalisation and the collapse of corporate social pacts between labour and capital across the world, labour unions no longer have “an automatic seat” at the table in negotiations, and that mobilization of members and allies, as a means of pressuring corporations and states, has now become much more important.

In such a view – and in line with what has been called “social movement unionism”²⁹ (Lambert and Webster 2001; Turner and Hurd 2001; Waterman 1993) or “social justice solidarity” (Fletcher and Gaspasin 2008, 195) – (international) labor solidarity goes beyond cooperation among unions and involves other social movements and organizations struggling for gender equality, the rights of minorities, against racism and political oppression, among

²⁹ Munck (2011, 14) stresses that the social movement unionism (SMU) that arose in countries such as Brazil and South Africa in the 1980s “recognized that workers were part of society and had to organize beyond the workplace”, and that these unions “sought alliances within the wider community, with church-based groups and with single-issue campaigns”; in the 1990s, social movement unionism extended to Northern countries, particularly to the US (ibid.). For López (2004, 10f.), who deals with the emergence of SMU in the US, it is characterized by four elements: a strong reliance on rank-and-file volunteers; an emphasis on public protest; the building of labor-community coalitions; and a political framing of demands rather than “narrow labor market goals”, which includes universal civil rights or justice (ibid.).

others (Zeuner 2004; see also Munck 2011; Tattersall 2007). This is also one of the demands that the “New Labor Internationalism” (NLI) has put forward (Waterman 1998): if labor is to effectively pursue workers’ interests in “the new capitalist disorder” (Waterman 2001, 312), unions need to be “(i)ntimately related to other non- or multiclass democratic movements (base movements of churches, women’s, residents’, ecological, human rights and peace movements, etc)” and to “other (potential) allies as an autonomous, equal and democratic partner, neither claiming to be nor subordinating itself to a “vanguard” or “sovereign” organisation”. Moreover, according to Waterman, labor needs to be “(t)aking up the new social issues within society at large, as they arise for workers specifically and as they express themselves within the union itself (struggle against authoritarianism, majoritarianism, bureaucracy, sexism, racism and so on)” (2001, 316), one of the most prominent advocates of the NLI states (see also Munck 2011; Moody 1997b). Moreover, the coalition-building literature advocates for an enhanced collaboration with social movements and community organizations as “a means of achieving new kinds of social change that could also contribute to the reinvention of unions” in view of “the rising power of capital and its increasing influence over government (...) characterized by aggressive employers, unfriendly governments, and declining union membership” (Tattersall 2010, 1f.; see also Gunawardana 2007; Frege et al. 2004). In fact, while it does not constitute the rule, labor unions in many regions of the world have allied with the struggles of “other social groups and movements that have been marginalized by processes of neoliberal globalisation” (Novelli 2004, 164), through which they have often been able to more powerfully defend workers’ interests (Frege et al. 2004; see also Featherstone 2012, 193ff, 209ff; Tait 2005). Among the examples of unions supporting broader social struggles and allying with community, immigrant rights, feminist or environmental groups are U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW), which grew out of the opposition against the war against Iraq in 2003; the alliance with environmental and consumer groups in the “battle of Seattle”; coalitions with community organizations and consumer groups in the health and education sectors; or the many coalitions between labor unions, environmental groups and other NGOs in the mobilizations against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early-1990s and later against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) (Featherstone 2012, 193ff; Tattersall 2010; Anner and Evans 2004; Stillerman 2003, 589-92).

The third reason suggesting a wider understanding of labor solidarity is that not only workers’ material interests depend on the broader conditions and extend beyond their material interests as workers; moreover, workers do not always instrumentally pursue their material self-interest, but they have also *non-material, or ideal, interests* (Hyman 2002). Even where workers are not themselves materially affected, political ideals, values and worldviews such as social justice or ending political and economic oppression – or what Lindberg (2011, 216) called “the strength of a joint ideological front” – can be powerful

motivations for worker mobilization and solidary action, or the constitution of “political imaginaries” (Featherstone 2012, 18; see also Kurz-Scherf and Zeuner 2001, 159; Offe and Wiesensthal 1980, 79). Fantasia and Voss (2004, 107) highlight that solidarity itself:

represents a potent mythic theme that carries remarkably transcendent qualities. Under certain conditions and at certain moments, demonstrations of solidarity can common powerful spiritual forces in the social world (in groups, in collective activities, and in organizational forms) that are capable of producing extraordinary degrees of selflessness and of collective identification.

As Levi and Olson (2000, 313) have argued, the awareness of sharing the same worldview and struggling for the same political cause can be an even stronger basis for solidary feelings than a mere material interest: “Rational beliefs concerning mutuality of interests can have their basis in morality or ideology as much or more than in material interests. If one set of actors cares sufficiently about another set to encapsulate their interests and act accordingly, the two parties do in fact share a community of fate” (I will discuss the community of fate in further detail in section 2.1.3.2). Moreover, they have historically done so both domestically and across borders, as individuals’ sense of justice and political values are not limited by nation-state boundaries.

“(W)e need a better understanding of the relationality between material ‘interests’ and ‘ideational’ commitments”, as Novelli (2011, 148) argues, as particularly in an international context, the “direct ‘material’ gains of solidarity (...) become more distant” and solidarity hence “require(s) more ideational justification” (ibid.). Since its inception, a strand of the labor movement existed alongside unions focusing on workers’ material improvement that viewed the construction of a more just society as one of its main aims (Frege et al. 2004, 137f.). Furthermore, recognizing workers’ political and moral interests clearly makes allying with other social movements imperative: it extends workers’ struggle beyond their immediately work-related interests shared with other employees to the broader struggles for wealth redistribution, against political oppression or for minority rights, both at home and abroad – “contesting oppression, inequality, and discrimination”, Hyman (2011, 25) claims, “implies cooperation (...) with other social movements”. An impressive example of political ideals guiding international solidarity action is the solidarity of English cotton workers with the North’s anti-slavery struggle during the American Civil War, despite the severe repercussions of the “cotton famine” resulting from the North’s cotton blockade of the South for the English workers (Featherstone 2012, 1ff). Further examples are unions around the world supporting the anti-apartheid fight in South Africa, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in the 1980s or the Chile solidarity following the Pinochet Coup in 1973, as well as the support of American labor militants for socialists and labor movements in Europe at the end of the 19th century (Featherstone 2012, 131-157; Bolsmann 2007; Bronfenbrenner 2007a, 2f.; van der Linden, 2003, 144). Such motivations

should not be misunderstood as altruism or charity: as social movement literature has extensively shown, commitment for political and moral convictions can be highly rewarding for individuals (Flesher Fominaya 2015; Melucci 1996).

2.1.2.2 The variable character of interests: framing solidarity and the role of narrative resources

Which of these countless material and ideational – as well as short- and long-term – interests are salient and motivate solidarity and guide union action is not fixed, but rather defined through negotiation and discussion. Even while workers have material self-interests such as job preservation, these need to be *perceived* as such to constitute a motivation for solidary action (Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 338; Zeuner 2001; Kelly 1998). Consequently, the solidarity of workers does not arise merely from the *objective* existence of common interests, but rather from the *perception* of such interests (Hyman 1999; see also Dribbusch 2014; Featherstone 2012; Novelli 2011). In other words, whether common interests are perceived to exist and how one’s own interests are viewed to relate to those of workers abroad is a matter of perception and – ultimately – self-definition (Johns 1998).³⁰ Hyman (1999, 96) has called solidarity workers’ “mobilising myth”. As interests are “shaped by subjective perception as well as objective situation, belief could create its own reality. ‘Solidarity forever’ became factual, to the extent that the heroic myths actually shaped workers’ understanding of their own circumstances” (Hyman 2011, 26).

It is variable which of the many existing interests constitute a union’s “shared definition (...) of what the organization stands for” (Frege and Kelly 2003, 14) and which are viewed to be deserving solidary action. Unions have always fundamentally shaped members’ individual and collective interests, creating what Hyman (1999, 96) calls “imagined solidarities”³¹: they have constructed workers’ collective interests (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980; see also Kelly 1998, 7f.; for a similar argument, see Richards 2001, 27f.). The salient interests motivating union action, unions’ “collective identities” – or what social movement theory calls “collective action frames”³² – “are constructed in part as

³⁰ Johns (1998) distinguishes between three ways in which the relationship of own interests to those of other workers can be viewed: one in which “self-interest” is equated with the advancement of workers in other countries and in which no distinction between the needs of workers at home and abroad is made; a second one in which self-interest is defined as separate from but of equal importance as the interests of workers abroad; and a third one in which self-interest is seen as fundamentally in conflict with the interests of other workers.

³¹ The overcoming of different interests among their constituency and the creation of a collective interest has always been one of unions’ most fundamental tasks. As Offe and Wiesenthal (1980, 75) explain, unions must thus “simultaneously express and define the interests of the members”, namely reshaping workers’ individual interests and creating a collective identity as a basis for collective action.

³² Benford and Snow (2000, 614) define collective action frames as “action-oriented sets of

movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change”, as the social movement theorists Benford and Snow (2000, 615; see also Tarrow 1999) argue. Framing issues in particular ways – i.e. the modification of frames or the “frame amplification” (ibid., 623) – “involves accenting and highlighting some issues, events or beliefs as being more salient than others”.

In the international realm, narrative framings are clearly crucial for broadening the conception of worker interests and linking them to those of others abroad. In an empirical study of unions’ international work, Lévesque and Murray (2010a, 240f.) conclude that local unions’ “ability to provide overarching narratives as a frame of reference for local union action (e.g. in the way that they think about commonality of interest and approach alliances within their global companies and beyond)” are a crucial factor explaining unions’ involvement in international alliances.

In the development of frames and their alteration, what Lévesque and Murray have called “narrative resources” (2010b) is crucial, as these inform the definition of problems and solutions. Narrative resources are “the range of values, shared understandings, stories and ideologies that aggregate identities and interests and translate and inform motives (...), a body of interpretative and action frames that (...) explain new situations and new contexts and point to consecrated repertoires of action” (ibid. 2010b, 339). Similarly, Benford and Snow (2000, 623) highlight the role of observed, experienced, and recorded “reality” in what they call “frame articulation”, which they understand as the connection of events and experiences so that they “hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion. Slices of observed, experienced, and/or recorded ‘reality’ are assembled, collated, and packaged”.

Beyond observed and experienced “reality”, these resources also include ideas and social beliefs (see Kelly, 1998, 4ff, 29ff) and cultural factors. Benford and Snow (2000, 629) state that the most important cultural material for framing processes are “the extant stock of meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives, and the like, all of which can be construed as part of Swidler’s metaphorical ‘tool kit’ (...), and (...) constitute the cultural resource base (...) (for) innovative collective action frames, as well as the lens through which framings are interpreted and evaluated.”

As we have seen in this section, a major problem in international labor solidarity is most unions’ narrow understanding of solidarity and unionism. Although workers have many interests in their capacities as citizens, women, migrants, etc. as well as ideal and political interests, and although even workers’ material interests cannot be secured in the long run without altering broader social and

beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns”.

economic conditions, unions' tasks are mostly viewed as being limited to the defense of workers' material, workplace-related interests. Such an understanding of unionism not only limits unions' engagement in cross-border work, as many of workers' narrow economic interests can still effectively be achieved by pursuing domestic strategies and focusing on national governments and employers, while possibilities to cooperate across borders in the pursuit of short-term economic gains are in fact limited. It is thus part of the explanation for the minor priority of international solidarity in most unions' work. Also, such an understanding also precludes unions from forming alliances with other social movements and groups that would be necessary for the defense of workers' interests in the long run and those interests that go beyond the immediate workplace realm. Which ones of workers' interests are considered to be salient, and therefore "what the organization stands for", however, is not static, but is produced through negotiation and discussion and is, to an important degree, a matter of framing.

2.1.3 Challenges to international labor solidarity: the instrumental character of international labor cooperation and the lack of a perceived "community of fate" among workers

A further factor contributing to the limited stability and duration in cross-border union cooperation is the lack of the aforementioned perceived "community of fate" (Levi and Olson 2000, 313) among workers: in contrast to worker solidarity in national or local contexts and within individual unions, most instances of labor transnationalism do not significantly rely on a mutual identification and a feeling of "sitting in the same boat" among workers. This is particularly true in North-South contexts, where an identification with workers abroad is often additionally hindered by misunderstandings arising out of legal, economic and cultural differences, as well as reservations, prejudices and even racism. International solidarity mostly takes the form of an instrumental collaboration formed for the pursuit of clearly delimited self-interests, giving little importance to an identification extending beyond them. In line with the understanding of international solidarity described above, most coalitions are punctual instrumental cooperations directed exclusively at the attainment of a (material or not) self-interest (e.g. Bernaciak 2013).³³ Rather than acting in solidarity with workers abroad (also) motivated by a sense of shared fate or feeling of togetherness, the willingness to support of others is usually limited to the concrete common goal, i.e. only where the immediate self-interest is (also) served. A perception of "sitting in the same boat" is limited to this particular goal. The underlying differences and competition between workers in different countries are not fundamentally overcome and reservations and distrust are only

³³ Clearly, examples of long-term solidarity relationships based on a shared identity exist. Among others, the decades-long solidarity relationship between dockworkers and seafarers around the world goes beyond short-term, instrumental collaborations (e.g. Lillie and Martinez Lucio 2004).

“paused”. The result is what has been described above: the notion that international cooperation is only pursued as long as it seems opportune, i.e. expedient for the attainment of these concrete goals. Coalitions are formed in a specific context in which a temporary collaboration for a common goal makes strategic sense, in “episodic overlaps of interests” (Anner et al. 2006, 22), and they usually disintegrate – or are dissolved – when this context is no longer present, the concrete goal has been reached or the campaign has failed and partners return to their (domestic) “business as usual” (Brecher et al. 2006, 14). Such coalitions are also easily destabilized by adverse circumstances such as employer strategies of pitting workers against each other. In the very next moment, workers can face each other as competitors and ally with their respective employers and/or governments *against* each other in pursuing protective policies, as they are susceptible to employers’ and governments’ cooptation.

By contrast, stable relationships of solidarity require mutual trust and long-term commitments and they require a perceived “community of fate”. If relationships of solidarity are to endure beyond the attainment of a specific short-term goal, meet membership support beyond the attainment of apparent self-interests and survive challenges such as employers’ strategies of playing workers off against each other, they require a motivational basis beyond interests (be they material or ideal): they need to involve an emotional commitment *in addition to* (not instead of) the rational motivation (i.e. the pursuit of self-interests). International labor solidarity – just like any other form of solidarity – is more than a “means to specific ends” (Featherstone 2012, 35). Solidarity theory has laid out how solidarity fundamentally rests on an emotional foundation and is clearly not limited to the rational pursuit of self-interests (Kaufmann, 2002; Bayertz, 1999; Durkheim 1893). Pensky (2008, 10)³⁴ puts it:

The status of belonging to a group in solidarity is not derivative from a calculation of the benefits that membership grants to the individual person, as in some versions of rational choice. Rather, the fact of membership, of belonging, is primary, and extends to cover both the benefits and the costs. To be in solidarity, in this sense, is to be committed, to belong fully, precisely through the consciousness of vulnerabilities, of possible harms and liabilities, that have to be assumed collectively.

Hence, action in solidarity with others is motivated not simply by the rational cost-benefit calculation in pursuit one’s own interests, but it also involves an

³⁴ For the case of social movements, Melucci (1995, 45) argues that a collective identity as the basis for collective action requires “a certain degree of emotional investment, which enables individuals to feel like part of a common unity, is required in the definition of a collective identity. Collective identity is never entirely negotiable because participation in collective action is endowed with meaning but cannot be reduced to cost-benefit calculation (...) To understand this part of collective action as ‘irrational,’ as opposed to the ‘rational’ (which in this case means good!) part, is simply a nonsense. There is no cognition without feeling and no meaning without emotion.”

emotional element that has variably been named a “community of fate” (Levi and Olson 2000, 312), “forms of identification” of those involved (Featherstone 2012, 35), “cooperative complementary identity” (Kay 2011, 180), “collective spirit of mutuality” (Hyman 2011, 67), “imagined solidarities” (Hyman 1999), “shared identity” (Lindberg 2011, 206) or “collective identity” (Frege and Kelly 2003). While the term used for it varies, all of these names refer to an understanding of – and empathy and identification with – “the others”, as well as relationships of mutual trust (see also Zeuner 2001; Zoll 2000; Bayertz 1999; for the social movement literature, see Flesher Fominaya 2010; Melucci 1996). These constitute the bases for workers’ willingness to support each other even in the absence of an immediate material return and despite setbacks and challenges, which is a crucial element of solidarity (Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015, 16f.; Lindberg 2011, 219; Hanagan 2003; for the role of trust for the willingness to support others without immediate return, see Dehnen and Rampeltshammer 2011; Kay 2011, 174ff; for the international feminist movement, Ferguson 2011; Gould 2007; Harvey 2007). As expressed in the famous slogan of the IWW, “an injury to one is an injury to all”, this sense of togetherness leads to a perception of being affected by situations afflicting others.

While it is an important element of any kind of solidarity, across borders the development of a perceived community is arguably even more important for stable solidary relationships based on mutual commitment. Here, common interests can clearly also be an important basis for solidary action, as workers in different countries are increasingly employed by the same TNCs and live within ever stronger integrating economies, thus being affected by the same industrial, employment, economic and social policies (e.g. Gajewska 2008, 109). Nevertheless, in an international context, a stable basis of common interests is not the rule: nationally (or regionally or locally), it is not only easier for unions to build upon a pre-existing collective identity of workers; moreover, they can often also rely on an immediate commonality of (material) interests among them. Interests arising out of shared conditions such as workplaces, salaries or national policies constitute strong bases for solidary action. Based on these “direct and common member interests” (Novelli 2011, 148f.), stable commitments to solidarity are more easily and permanently (re)produced. However, this is less commonly the case internationally, as a stable basis of apparent shared interests is often lacking. Hence, emotional (as well as ideational) commitments often play a more fundamental role in constituting a relationship of mutual commitments across borders (Novelli 2011). Lindberg (2011, 219) summarized the relevance of what he calls a “shared identity”, a “sense of belonging together beyond mutual self-interest” or an “imagined community” for international labor solidarity:

(it would) be completely mistaken to argue that possibilities for transnational worker solidarity can be fully answered by an analysis of mutual versus divergent self-interest. (...) [U]nion solidarity is something much more than joint action for mutually shared interest. A sense of shared identity plays just as important a role.

(...) [T]his sense of belonging together, going beyond mutual self-interest. (...) It is difficult to pin-point the exact content of this shared identity or imagined community but one element is certainly a perception of being subordinated or underprivileged, of belonging to a proud but underprivileged working class ruled by a privileged few.

As this quote makes clear, it is difficult to exactly determine what this sense of belonging together rests on. Solidarity research has shown that it can rest on a broad variety of factors – including a shared nationality, cultural background, traditions and language, gender and physical similarities – or on shared convictions (Kaufmann 2004; Zoll 2000; Bayertz 1999, 8f.; Hondrich and Koch-Arzberger 1992, 17ff; see also Dean 1996). In the case of the labor movement, further grounds constituting a perceived community are clearly the existence of a common employer, a shared place of work and residence, as well as political convictions and values (Bieler and Lindberg 2011b, 228). While the similarity of working and living conditions have historically played an important role in strengthening a shared identity among workers within national labor unions,³⁵ in the international context shared world views and political causes can be crucial in constituting a “community of fate” (Novelli 2011, 148; Lindberg 2011; van der Linden 2003, 148f.).

Despite being analytically different, in practice interests and feelings of togetherness are clearly often interwoven: an “imagined solidarity” arises out of the acknowledgment of a common interest vis-à-vis the employer and its policy of playing workers off against each other, in the struggle against trade policies affecting both partners or a shared ideational interest, such as a more just world

³⁵ For the case of unions within nation-state boundaries, it has often been argued that this sense of togetherness has historically significantly been grounded in what has been called workers’ shared “identity”: workers sharing the same social situation, a similar way of living and a consciousness of forming part of this social group, based on the experience of a common work situation, similar conditions of life, and, often, geographical proximity of workers’ neighborhoods, and, Hondrich and Koch-Arzberger (1992) stress, workers’ social proximity (“soziale Nähe”) in their living conditions, their mutual support in everyday life, and the close ties arising from their working together in teams. Hanagan (1980) argues that in the emergence of artisanal and industrial workers’ collective organization in French communities between 1871 and 1914, it was both a strong sense of occupational identity and the fact that workers usually worked together in small teams and established strong informal relations that created a sense of community. Moreover, residential patterns made them live in close geographical proximity. These commonalities are seen to have significantly contributed to providing the foundations of emotional bonds and mutual identification among workers (Zoll 2000; see also Hyman 2002; Hoffmann et al. 1990; Hanagan 1980). However, while it is unquestionable that a certain homogeneity has existed in some crafts and areas and has – where it existed – contributed to strengthening a sense of solidarity among workers, the view of a homogeneous ‘worker culture’ or identity has rightly been questioned. Zeuner (2004) argues that as unions emerged, there was at least as much heterogeneity as today, since also women, children, uprooted farm workers and artisans – among others – formed part of the workforce. Zeuner thus argues that labor solidarity has always been a solidarity of non-equals, emerging from very heterogeneous sources, and has never been “easy”.

order. In fact, it has frequently been the awareness of a common goal that constituted the basis for a feeling of “sitting in the same boat”, as shared struggles against common employers or individual policies have provided the basis for an identification of workers going beyond that specific context.

In the following two sections, I will first lay out how the development of a perceived “community of fate” among workers requires social interaction and joint action, before subsequently explaining how the little practical character and rank-and-file detachment of most international labor solidarity hinders such a perceived community precisely by precluding joint action and social interaction.

2.1.3.1 The practice character of solidarity: constructing a “community of fate” through social interaction and joint action

As I will lay out in this section, these “communities of fate” that constitute the basis for solidarity do not exist a priori, but are *constructed through practice*. While this is also the case in national or local contexts, it is even more true across borders, where a sense of togetherness among workers cannot rely on such “historically grown” exclusionary mechanisms as occupation, the same employer, other social, ethnic, gender and nationality criteria or the similarity of working and living conditions (Featherstone 2012; Hanagan 2003, 491ff).³⁶ The constructed nature of “imagined communities” whose development Anderson has documented for the case of nation-states (Anderson 2006/1983) has been analyzed by collective identity and social movement theories (Hunt and Benford 2011; Flesher Fominaya 2010; Snow 2001). Collective identities need to be understood as a process rather than a situation, as Melucci (1995, see also 1985) – one of the most important theorists of collective identities – argues in his important contribution “The Process of Collective Identity”. For him, collective identity is the “process of ‘constructing’ an action system”, i.e. “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place”. He adds that this definition “must be conceived as a process because it is constructed and negotiated through a repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals (or groups)” (Melucci 1995, 44; see also Melucci 1985). Collective identities hence involve “cognitive definitions concerning the ends, means, and field of action” (ibid., 45) and are not “monolithic” (Melucci 1996) but rather in flux and always created through practice (see also Lévesque and Murray 2010b; for

³⁶ Contemporary processes of individualization and differentiation in post-industrial societies are often considered to weaken the basis of collective worker identity based on the similarity of working and living conditions. Processes that have been called tertiarization, flexibilization and feminization of the workforce – accompanied by a more general tendency of individualization in contemporary societies – lead to the heterogenization of the workforce. However, it is a matter of debate whether the reorganization of production and the changing work patterns associated with it lead to the disintegration of solidary bonds holding workers together (Zoll 2000; Richards 2001; see also Mückenberger 2011).

an account of the construction of solidarity in the international feminist movement, see Mohanty 2003, 47).

Whether individuals identify with others clearly depends – to an important degree – on which factors they perceive to be salient in constituting a community. As Rorty (1989) has argued, individuals only feel solidarity with those who they see as similar to themselves. However, he posits that the perception of which similarities (or dissimilarities) are considered important and lead to a sense of community is historically contingent and open to changes (ibid., 194). Featherstone (2012, 22) argues that the categories considered important “are produced through active work of formatting and exclusion so that solidarities are disciplined within particular limits”. Rorty hence concludes that one needs to understand “solidarity as made rather than found, produced in the course of history rather than recognized as an ahistorical fact” (Rorty 1989, 194f.). Clearly, this is also true for worker solidarity: whether it is some “direct and common member interests” (Novelli 2001, 148f.) that constitute the basis for a mutual identification, some longer-term goal like improved social policies or a shared world view is not determined a priori, but rather it is variable and shaped through the practice of the workers involved (Featherstone 2012; Fantasia 1988). Hanagan (2003, 493) thus describes international solidarity as “a process of identity formation” through practice: it is through unions’ activities and experiences of solidarity that identifications are shaped and a sense of togetherness across borders can develop (see also Featherstone 2012, 23f.).

It follows that the *social interaction* and *joint action* of workers are crucial in the production of collective identities or perceived communities. As many empirical accounts of labor solidarity document, it is in collective action and through interaction and communication that workers come to *experience* the group, perspectives are exchanged, collective visions formed and interpersonal bonds built (Bieler and Lindberg 2011b; Kay 2011; Yates 1998, 35ff; Fantasia 1988): interaction among workers and experiences of collective action themselves influence values, convictions and perceptions and thus ultimately shape workers’ and their unions’ identifications and identities. Featherstone (2012, 23f.) argues that solidarity itself “actively generat(es) and shap(es) shared values and identifications. (...) practices of solidarity generate or negotiate such questions of difference through political action.” While collective action and social interaction are empirically closely linked and usually occur in concert,³⁷ analytically each has a specific function in the production of solidarity.

Social interaction and communication

On the one hand, social interaction and communication are crucial for the development of feelings of togetherness. It is through getting to know each other

³⁷ Clearly, joint action goes along with social interaction. However, the opposite is not always true.

and communicating about each other's respective situations, goals, perspectives and emotions that the foundations for mutual trust, empathy and emotional commitment are laid (Ferguson 2011; Harvey 2007, 25ff, 35; Tenfelde 1998; see also Hanagan 2003, 489ff). Lévesque and Murray (2010b, 338) state that unions' "internal solidarity is (...) a set of relationships" and they stress the crucial role of interaction in its formation. For Melucci (1995, 45), "collective identity as a process refers to a network of active relationships between the actors, who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions." Cross-border interaction provides "the material and emotional possibilities to form (...) empathetic connections" with others (Ferguson 2011, 17), as it enables individuals to "relate to others who are not thought of as abstract others" (ibid., 18) and form "bridge identities which allow them to empathize, bond and struggle along with those oppressed" (ibid., 18). Similarly, in the case of the emerging solidarity among the aforementioned hospital workers, Fantasia (1988, 137) found that it was through social interaction and "(b)y expressing their frustration, anxiety, and hope, (that) bonds were being built, with emotions serving as a common denominator of experience." As Tarrow (1999, 13) argues, it is social networks that "provide the interpersonal trust, the collective identities and the social communication of opportunities that galvanize individuals into collective action" (see also Turnbull 2006, 316).

Interaction as a basis for a sense of togetherness can take different forms, with personal relationships constituting a particularly strong form of social interaction providing for an exchange on situations, goals and challenges, as well as promoting trust, empathy and an emotional commitment to supporting others: The smaller and closer the solidary group and the more that its members know each other personally, the stronger the cohesion, it is often argued, as trust is easier to develop with those who one knows personally (Blum 2007). It has been argued that "frequency of interaction and social proximity" ("Interaktionshäufigkeit und soziale Nähe") are important factors in explaining solidarity (Hondrich and Koch-Arzberger 1992, 19) and close personal contexts such as families and small work teams are often viewed as the solidary community "par excellence", as they allow for close informal relations (Ostner 2004, 86f.; Hanagan 1980, 96; see also Blum 2007, 58; Göbel and Pankoke 1999; see footnote 35 above). In fact, personal relationships between individuals and the mutual trust and emotional commitments that they share often lay the basis for an increased involvement in international solidarity (Novelli 2011, 158; Tarrow 1998; see also Tattersall 2007). Regarding the creation of an emotional basis for solidary action among workers, Yates (1998, 37) thus states: "Successful unionization demands face-to-face contacts. (...) We had missed the point that the formation of a union is an emotional as well as an intellectual experience. Getting people to take actions which they have been taught all of their lives are not appropriate requires that they be moved (...). Only through personal contact is there any hope of winning the emotional commitments

without which a union cannot succeed” (see also Hathaway 2000, 7; Frank 1999, 244-46).

While personal relationships create an immediately emotional connection, physical proximity and personal acquaintance are not a necessary condition for solidarity. Social interaction promoting empathy, trust and emotional commitments can also be reached through social networks, online fora, telephone or other means, which is how it mostly takes place in cross-border union cooperation. As Turnbull (2006, 319) has shown, the internet and “electronic networks” can play an important role in connecting rank-and-file workers and creating awareness for cross-border linkages (see also Robinson 2011; Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015; Brecher et al. 2006, 15).

There are two major interrelated ways in which cross-border communication and social interaction contribute to developing a perceived community among workers: through the reframing of situations, they contribute to developing a common perception of interests; and through the exchange of information and perspectives, they help to mediate differences.

Framing situations in collective terms

On the one hand, as social movement theory has highlighted, social interaction and communication are crucial for the aforementioned framing of situations in collective terms, which constitutes the basis for solidarity. As laid out in section 2.1.2.2 above, whether common interests are viewed to exist depends – to an important degree – on the way in which problems and their solutions are perceived, while the development of solidarity and the willingness to collective action depends on the way in which these are *framed* (Novelli 2011; see also Turnbull 2006; Tarrow 1999). As union collective identities are generally constructed around domestic interests and identities, collective action across borders clearly requires “a reframing of union identities” (Turnbull 2006, 307). A crucial factor for the development of worker solidarity across borders is the reframing of previously nationally or locally defined interests as linked to workers abroad to constitute a common perception of conflicts and interests and thus a new “ego” (“us”) (as opposed to the “alter”, or “them”) (Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015, 25ff.; Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 343).

Crucially, this reframing requires social interaction: the development of collective action frames – as well as their modification and amplification – are the result of communication and discursive processes (see also Kelly 1998, 36; Tenfelde 1977). “Individuals define their interests in interactions with other actors and these interactions affect the understanding of those interests” (Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 338). Hence, Benford and Snow (2000, 623f.) write that “collective action frames are continuously reconstituted during the course of interaction that occurs in the context of movement gatherings and campaigns”.

In the context of international labor solidarity, a regular cross-border exchange of information and perspectives is hence essential for a framing in collective terms. Without an understanding of the others' situation and interests, no common narratives or interpretations of problems can develop and only through communication can both sides learn about commonalities in the first place, as well as overcoming distrust and prejudices. Novelli (2011) has shown how solidarity can be developed "through a process of dialogue that seeks to link up the interests of the different parties involved" (ibid., 148f.): he finds that the solidarity relationships between a public service union in Colombia and the TUC in Great Britain were not simply rooted in some existing "interests", but rather relied on a sense of common identity and commitment that arose out of the way in which issues were framed through that dialog, which led to a perception of common interests (see also Lévesque and Murray 2010a, 232; Frege and Kelly 2003; Levi and Olson 2000). Similarly, Kay (2011) documents how through altering previous perceptions, workers who do not – at first sight – share the same interests can develop a "cooperative complementary identity", defined as "a shared recognition of mutual interest coupled with a commitment to joint action" (ibid., 180f.; for a similar argument, see van der Linden 2003): in the case of worker solidarity in the NAFTA region, workers who had traditionally seen each other as opponents were able to develop a common identity as *North American* workers through a process of consciousness formation about common interests that were previously not perceived as such. This was made possible – among others – through yearly worker-to-worker exchanges that helped workers to "understand each other" and reach "a deeper understanding (...) of what's going on and what the realities are" that made "people's mindsets shift", as one of her interviewees explained (ibid., 178; for the crucial role that emerging webs of communication produced by industrialization and urbanization and the newly-founded urban associations ("Vereinswesen") played in the development a collective interest definition in the 19th century in Germany, see Tenfelde 1977 and 1998). Furthermore, Turnbull (2006) finds that in bringing European rank-and-file dock workers together and allowing communication across borders, international labor networks strongly contributed to the successful development of a "European identity" in the joint mobilization against the Directive on Market Access to Port Services ("Ports Package") in the early-2000s.

In framing conflicts and interests in a common way with workers abroad, Bormann and Jungehülsing (2015, 27ff) argue that both union leaderships' capacities and social interaction and a discussion culture among individual union memberships and between workers across borders hold crucial importance. While union leaderships' willingness and "discursive capacities" (Lévesque and Murray 2010a) to frame situations in cross-border collective terms (often grounded in internationalist "dispositional capital" that arises out of previous experiences, see Lindberg 2011, 213) is crucial in promoting a framing in common terms, a cross-border exchange on the rank-and-file level is

imperative for workers to alter their perception of conflicts and their solution (Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015, 28f.; for the role of union leaderships in promoting a collective framing of conflicts with workers abroad, see also Kay 2011, 21f.; Kelly 1998).³⁸ Bormann and Jungehülsing (2015, 29) conclude:

One of the main challenges of cross-border solidarity is thus the organization of social interaction and an experiencing of collective action despite physical distance. Decisive questions are thus whether possibilities exist for cross-border contact and communication, for getting to know each others' perspectives and negotiating differences, as well as discovering commonalities and developing common points of reference (own translation; see also Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 338).

Management of differences

On the other hand – albeit related to the framing in collective terms – communication facilitates the management of differences that usually exist between workers in different countries. The tensions and misunderstandings arising out of differences in organizational structures and institutional frameworks, worldviews, cultural traditions and languages – as well as the prejudices and racism that often go along with them – constitute a major obstacle to international solidarity. The mediation of these differences is thus a crucial condition for solidary action across borders: more so than within countries and unions, in an international context with ever-increasing differences and competition, solidarity needs to be what Hyman (2002a) has called a “mutuality despite difference”, i.e. it must recognize these differences rather than trying to suppress them, while finding common grounds for a feeling of togetherness (see also Hyman 2011, 67).³⁹ For this purpose, communication is essential: as the fundamental reason for tensions is workers' limited knowledge about other workers' institutional, organizational and cultural background, the first step toward establishing a sense of community is to overcome this

³⁸ Of course, this is also the case for worker solidarity in national or local contexts (or even within the same company). As Schmalstieg (2015, 148f.) lays out in her analysis of collective action among security workers in California, it is the exchange on each others' experiencing of the working conditions and the employer's behavior that workers develop a perception of not being alone and sitting in the same boat: “The union provides a possibility for social interaction that does not arise in the work situation. Personal relationships can be developed between the security workers, and in the exchange with other security officers they learn about the problems they have to deal with in their daily lives, at the work place, and beyond. In the numerous personal stories, they recognize their own daily struggle for survival. In the exchange with others, they recognize, on the one hand, that they are not alone after all, and that the security company's harassment does not only affect themselves. On the other hand, the recognition of not being alone can reduce the fear of fighting back, and the willingness to participate in actions, including the more risky ones, can be increased.” (ibid., own translation; see also Kay 2011; Tenfelde 1977).

³⁹ Hyman (2002) uses the term regarding national labor movements and their production of solidarity vis-à-vis increasing differences among the workforce regarding gender, skill, ethnicity, occupational status or other significant characteristics.

ignorance, whereby workers need to learn about the others' concrete situation, their specific conditions and the struggles that they are leading. Moreover, Bormann and Jungehülsing (2015, 32; see also Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 341) have argued that this needs to take place not only at an isolated leadership level of unions, but also it requires spaces for interaction at the rank-and-file level to bridge differences, which Zoll (1991, 391) referred to when calling labor unions "discourse organizations" ("Diskurs-Organisationen"). For instance, in her analysis of labor internationalism in the NAFTA region, Kay (2011) shows how racial stereotypes and prejudices such as the assumption of all Mexican unions being corrupt and US unions being double-sided and protectionist could be overcome through labor activists getting to know each other through close everyday cross-border cooperation and yearly worker exchanges between the aforementioned unions UE and FAT.⁴⁰ These direct interaction and discussion processes at the rank-and-file level led to overcoming the deeply grounded racism in US unions and "helped undermine the foreign worker myth as rank-and-file workers in the United States and Mexico came to develop a more nuanced understanding of the living and working conditions of their 'others' across the border" (Kay 2011, 178; for a similar argument, see Frundt 2000; Hathaway 2000). Through this, high levels of trust and mutual commitment developed, which enabled expressing criticism without misunderstandings. Similarly, Babson (2002, 35f.) documents how exchanges with Mexican colleagues reduced stereotypes among US workers and led to the realization that "the problem is not Mexican workers taking our jobs; it's corporate America and our own government".

In the management of differences across borders, what has been called "bridge builders" or "cultural translators" (Tattersall 2007, 169) often assume crucial importance: these are individuals – often migrants – who are knowledgeable about both cultural backgrounds and institutional contexts. As "bridge builders"

⁴⁰ Of course, this is true not only for workers in different countries, but also for overcoming racial prejudices within the same country. For instance, it has been shown that the incorporation of African American workers into the unions belonging to the American Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s and 1940s led to overcoming racism against Black workers among white members of these unions, as opposed to most American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions that explicitly excluded African Americans (and other minorities) (Yates 1998, 110). Fantasia (1988) also stresses the role of close contact and day-to-day interaction of workers at the workplace in overcoming divisions and racism, and creating a ground for solidarity: in one of the studied cases, the work force was racially and ethnically diverse, which – reinforced by the existing status distinctions and age differentiations – could have been a source of social distance and conflict among the workers. Similar to what had been described by Burawoy (1979, 140ff), Fantasia shows that while subliminal racism existed, the fact that workers worked closely together at the plant, combined with a humorous culture of communication and making jokes about ethnical or cultural differences, prevented intragroup conflict (ibid., 108). He concludes that "social interaction tended to create an underlying harmony (or at least minimized potential disharmony) among a relatively heterogeneous group of workers" (ibid., 80).

mediate between both cultures and in misunderstandings and situation of distrust, they “help prevent cultural mismatches from creating conflict between the parties” (Tattersall 2007, 169; see also Greven and Schwetz 2011, 146). Their knowledge of the different systems of labor relations, labor union cultures and languages are frequently deployed in according positions in transnational union campaigns (Bormann and Jungehülsing 2015, 33). However, one problem is that in the hierarchical structure of most unions’ working procedures, potential bridge builders’ capacities do not come into effect as they do not have sufficient influence (ibid.).

Both of the functions of cross-border communication that I laid out – framing situations collectively and managing differences – are highlighted by Gajewska (2008). In her analysis of the Europe-wide opposition against the Bolkestein directive in 2006 and the solidarity actions among GM Europe workers from 2000 to 2007, she shows how communication across borders can help to both frame problems collectively and overcome differences. Drawing on social movement theory and Melucci’s (1995) processual and relational concept of collective identity, she describes engagement in collective action as a process of identity negotiation that can lead to the emergence of a shared identity (Gajewska, 2008, 117; for a similar argument, see Stillerman 2003). In her empirical research, she stresses the flexible character of interest formulation in unions in demonstrating that interests and collective identities as bases for cross-border labor solidarity can be framed through communication and collective action. These allow managing differences through which even opposing interests of workers in different countries can be overcome (see also Dehnen and Rampeltshammer 2011). Whereas in the case of the mobilization against the Bolkestein directive, a division of interests between rich and poor or old and new EU member states initially existed, these could be overcome by bringing workers together on a regular basis, enabling collective learning and gradually strengthening their relationship. In the process of working together and through the existence of horizontal communication channels, it was possible “to frame common interests and indicate specific advantages for all participants” (ibid., 112; for a similar argument, see Erne 2008). Crucially, this was possible even in the case of GM workers at different sites, despite differing institutional backgrounds and cultures and although they were – most importantly – in direct competition with each other in face of the company’s plans of plant closure: although workers in other plants might have gained short-term advantages from closures at other sites, “they managed to frame management practice as playing off the workers of different nationalities and saw their interest in opposing this” (ibid., 115). This was made possible through existing institutional structures of international communication and cooperation, which “made it easier for workers to get to know each other, understand the tactics of management, and identify their common interest” (ibid., 115).

Joint action

On the other hand, it is through joint action that workers come to experience the group and – importantly – collective strength. Tarrow (2005, 178) claims that participation in transnational protest events “can be transformative for those who participate in them. The experience of marching side by side with others from different countries and areas of interest can help to create broader identities and issue definitions” – what he calls “socialization through collective action” (ibid.). The decision to support fellow workers and engage in solidarity is hence not made in isolation, but is itself strongly influenced by the experience made through it and can be strongly informed by common experiences of struggle such as strikes or singing protest songs in marches (Tenfelde 1997, 248). Fantasia (1988, 174) described this process of group formation through collective action for the case of a process of union organization among hospital workers in Vermont:

something new is created in the context of conflict. An emergent culture is created in which new values are incubated, new forms of activity generated, and an associational bond of a new type formed. (...) a collective identity was formed as well. By the end of their campaign, activists thought of themselves as a collective entity that embodied a certain vision distinguishing them from others and representing a new approach to authority, hierarchy, and relations to one another.

Clearly, for workers to be willing to mobilize for solidary action, they not only need to have a common perception of a problem, but also the conviction that this problem can be solved together (Dribbusch 2014, 339; see also Kelly 1998, 43f.). This conviction – or the *perceived* effectiveness of action (ibid.) – is often produced in the course of collective action itself. The experiencing of collective strength through these actions plays a crucial role here: in the process of union formation mentioned above, it was the “glimpse of what was possible” (Fantasia 1988, 145) that workers gained through a collective action that strengthened the feeling of unity between them and that moved increasingly more workers to join the group of workers mobilizing. He describes the “sense of collective power” (ibid., 143) that workers made as follows: “The confrontation (with the employer in solidarity with a fired coworker – author’s note) was clearly a boost to the committee. The action demonstrated the power of solidarity in a practical way to all who participated – a seemingly omnipotent authority could be overcome.” (ibid., 144f.). Importantly, such experiences of collective action and the group confidence that it creates can also persuade reluctant workers to join in and support solidary action, thus progressively increasing the number of workers involved. As Schmalstieg (2015, 148ff) lays out in her research, the “certainty of not being alone” (ibid., 150) moved previously “skeptical” workers to support a roadblock, although they strongly stressed that they are not “troublemakers” and had never done such things before (ibid., 149).

Importantly, such experiences of collective action also constitute crucial narrative resources that are required for the formation of collective action frames: As mentioned above, narrative resources include “events and experiences (...) (and) observed, experienced, and/or recorded ‘reality’” (Benford and Snow 2000, 623). These experiences and their narrations play a crucial role in creating identities, Vila (1999, 79) states: “People often develop their sense of identity by seeing themselves as protagonists in different stories (...). These stories serve to form a narrative of the episodes of our lives in such a way as to make them intelligible to ourselves and to others.”⁴¹ Lévesque and Murray (2010b, 339) echo this point when stating that frames informing workers’ collective action comprise “stories that inform the way the actors think. (...) They can relate to real stories, as they were lived, and to quasi-mythical incidents that have been told and retold (...). They are a living organizational heritage. In evoking feelings of efficacy about actions undertaken, they can exert a powerful positive or negative influence (...), providing a basis for actions in response to new situations” (see also Benford and Snow 2000, 623f.).

Hence, for the development of international solidarity, workers need to have possibilities to participate in and experience solidarity activities. These experiences and their narrations constitute stories informing the development of collective frames and are one of the reasons why an “internationalist” background of union leaders – i.e. previous experiences in international solidarity and the “dispositional capital” that arises out of it – is an important factor in the development of cross-border union relationships. “(M)ore local participation, the development of new networks and training courses, and a widening of the spectrum of actors involved in international activities (...) creat(e) greater awareness of international solidarity” (Lévesque and Murray 2010a, 232).

Such experiences do not necessarily need to be conducted jointly with workers abroad; rather, they can also be “at home” in the support of others. While it is arguably experiences of practical action rather than activities like clicking a button or signing an online petition that constitute powerful narrative resources, not only joint campaigns and worker-to-worker exchanges but also solidarity rallies and marches, fundraising campaigns, political pressure and other forms of activities can constitute concrete experiences of what international solidarity means. Particularly experiences of successful actions are passed on to subsequent activist generations, becoming incorporated into the union’s

⁴¹ In fact, Vila argues that identity is created by stories when he explains, “(n)arrating, therefore, is much more than describing events or actions. It also means relating events and actions, organizing them into sequences or plots and then attaching them to a character. It is thus the narrative that constructs the identity of the character by constructing the story (...) This constant shifting between narratives and identities (between living and narrating) allows the actors to adjust their stories to coincide with their identities” (ibid.).

collective action frames and their “living organizational heritage” (Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 339).

2.1.3.2 “Letters of undying solidarity and love” hindering a community of fate: solidarity’s little practical character and rank-and-file detachment

Traditional forms of labor solidarity can be helpful, but they’re hardly sufficient. International conferences, speech making, and resolution passing by high-ranking union officials are no substitute for cross-border activity that unites workers at the grass roots. The new labor internationalism that is needed to meet the challenges of organizing and bargaining in the next century must be built from the bottom up as well as the top down. (Cohen and Early 1999, 143)

As I laid out in the previous section, the practice character of solidarity means that a perceived “community of fate” of workers is constructed through communication and collective action across borders. Against this backdrop, the lack of a perceived community of fate is – to an important degree – a consequence of international labor solidarity’s little practical character, which goes along with a detachment from the rank and file that precludes workers from acting jointly and experiencing collective strength, as well as communicating and overcoming differences.

On the one hand, beyond the minor relevance that international solidarity holds in unions’ strategies, where unions do engage in solidarity, it is mostly in a rather symbolic than practical manner. Most international labor solidarity in the post-WWII period “has been official, institutional, and diplomatic rather than substantive in nature” (Lillie and Martínez Lucio 2004, 160) and comprised “symbolic shows of solidarity” (ibid., 163) rather than practical actions effectively supporting others “that make a difference”⁴².

In fact, in the second half of the 20th and the early-21st century, the wealth of international solidarity has comprised international conferences and meetings where “everybody talks nice”⁴³ and at which non-binding declarations and solidarity addresses are passed: “letters and resolutions of undying solidarity and love”, as one of my interviewees called it⁴⁴ (see also Lillie and Martínez Lucio 2004; Waterman 2001b; Cohen and Early 1999). Such solidarity declarations and meetings are rarely linked to action and concrete activities in support of – or jointly with – others are the exception (Köhnen 2013; Zeuner 2004). “Relationship(s) based on real campaigns on the ground” (Bacon 2016, 160) such as organizing drives, strikes, rallies and other concrete action are rare in international labor solidarity. “Official internationalism (...) has often been more rhetorical than real”, as Hyman (2002b, 10) argues.

⁴² Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

⁴³ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

Clearly this type of labor internationalism is frequently not very effective: writing letters to political decision-makers and passing resolutions of solidarity at conferences is more symbolic than effective support, as politicians usually “don’t care if we’re outraged”, as one of my interview partners stated⁴⁵ (see also Hyde and Ressaissi 2008, 58f.; Brecher et al. 2006, 13; Moody 1997a). Of course, many exceptions exist, as countless bi- and multilateral union alliances and campaigns involving concrete support activities such as donations, rallies, mutual support in organizing drives or even solidarity strikes and boycotts have always existed; many corporate campaigns have involved concrete support activities; moreover, several GUFs such as UNI and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) are increasingly adopting approaches in their campaigns that include concrete organizing activities on the ground; and at the the European level the company-level work of EWCs as well as the Interregional Trade Union Councils involves relatively concrete cooperation and information exchange (van der Linden 2015, 19; Bronfenbrenner 2007b; Lerner 2007; Williams 2003). However, despite being many, such cases of practical support activities remain the exception to the rule of institutionalized and symbolic labor internationalism, although this might be in the process of changing given several unions’ and GUFs’ turn towards stronger worker and local union involvement (McCallum 2013; Bieler and Lindberg 2011; Lillie and Martínez Lucio 2004).

On the other hand, most international solidarity work is carried out by expert staff at union leaderships. Much of it takes place through international bodies such as the GUFs and the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) or the ETUC, which are far removed from union members (Thomas 2011; Waterman 2008; Moody 1997, 227ff). But also where individual unions are effectively involved in international solidarity, the development and carrying out of the international work and relationships is mostly the domain of professional union diplomats located at specialized international affairs departments of unions’ national headquarters and their federations: Hyman (2001, 27; see also Castree 2000) argues that international labor solidarity is “the preserve of the professional labour diplomat”.

“(D)ominant practices of labor internationalism (...) have bypassed workers themselves”, as Nastvoski (2014, 221) states (see also Dribbusch 2014, 343; Zeuner 2004, 335ff.). In fact, even where international labor solidarity extends beyond symbolic declarations of solidarity to involve practical support activities, union members are rarely involved. In the work focusing on the regulation of labor relations on an international scale through codes of conduct, CSR or IFAs, union members play a minimal role and the approaches involve limited mobilizing possibilities (Hyman 2002b, 10). The focus often lies on high-level political strategies of influencing managements and political bodies,

⁴⁵ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

while attempts to involve companies' workforces are often absent. Even where such concrete activities extending beyond political lobbying are conducted – such as the attempt to coordinate wage bargaining at the European level through the European Metalworkers Federation (EMF) and the ETUC – as Erne (2008) explains, this is often carried out exclusively by union experts without the involvement of the rank and file or even works councilors, and does not involve significant union mobilizations. It is mainly union leaderships and specialized expert staff who participate in the meetings of the GUFs or the ITUC, negotiating and passing resolutions and statements. Not only in bodies like the GUFs or the ITUC but also most strategic campaigns are planned and carried out by specialized experts and involve union memberships – at most – in occasional rallies, marches or petitions (Greven 2006b, 14; see also Erne 2008, 184f., 174f.). Furthermore, in the case of such institutionalized cross-border cooperation relationships as those in Europe (EWCs, ETUC, European Industry Federations), it has been criticized that their development and functioning has largely been a top-down process without strong involvement of the rank and file (Martin and Ross 2000, 132; see Gajewska 2008, 117). Waterman (2008, 152f.) harshly judges the GUFs and the “distance of the union internationals from their worker base” when he argues that they “are remote from workers on the shop floor, in the office or in the community, who, with exceptions, are unaware of their existence. (...) the unions commonly reproduce their top-down, North-South, patron-client relations”. Hyman (2002, 9) states that “the typical professional international trade unionist is a graduate with language skills, who having spent a few years as a researcher in a national labour movement has pursued a career at international level. Rarely does an international union leader today have a background, however distant, as an agitator; nor much more frequently as a front-line negotiator.” Official labor internationalism is often treated as “elite concern, that it is safer if the membership does not learn too much of policies which they might perhaps oppose” (ibid., 10).

Of course, many exceptions exist, such as the example of the rank-and-file involvement in international solidarity in the NAFTA region through worker-to-worker exchanges laid out above (see section 2.1.3.1; see also Kay 2011), cross-border organizing activities such as those focusing on Mexican and Central American maquiladora industries that combine corporate (shaming) campaigns with local organizing drives (Frundt 2000; see also Anner 2011), while some GUFs like UNI, IUF and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) have always or increasingly involve their affiliated unions' members in their campaigns, such as the ITF's mobilization against the Directive on Market Access to Port Services, which strongly relied on union membership involvement in the activities (Urata 2011; Turnbull 2006). Nonetheless, overall, most labor transnationalism remains so “remote from workers on the shop floor, in the office, or in the community” (Watermann and Timms 2004, 184) that they are often not even aware of their unions' international work. Regular members and local officers rarely have the opportunity to attend conferences or meet

representatives of unions abroad. Where they are involved in practical activities, these more often than not comprise the signing of petitions or sending protest emails and – at best – occasional rallies. Moreover, international solidarity is not an important element in most unions’ internal communication and education.

This is also a consequence of the minor involvement of union locals and regions or districts, as international work is often the exclusive domain of national unions.⁴⁶ As the local and regional levels are where members get involved, where the regular union work takes place and what constitutes “the union” for members, international solidarity is thus decoupled from members’ everyday work and union experience. Without a regular practice of direct cooperation and mutual commitments – i.e. concrete activities taking place on this level – regular members and rank-and-file activists have limited possibilities to become active and international solidarity remains irrelevant to their everyday practice (Zeuner 2004). Hence, Moody (1997b, 63) concludes that “cross-border alliances of (...) (union top) leaders will need to be pressured from the ranks and local unions to turn these top-down connections into action and grapple with the workplace crisis facing most workers” if labor is to confront transnational corporations.

In this section, I have shown that the little practical character of international solidarity and its distance from the membership – beyond having been criticized for having few practical implications and not motivating members to support international solidarity – represent a challenge for the development of a perceived community with workers abroad, as under these conditions few possibilities exist for workers to participate in concrete activities of solidarity. On the one hand, the lack of a practical solidarity involving workers makes the overcoming of differences and the framing of conflicts in collective terms difficult. These require opportunities for workers to engage in social interaction and communication with workers abroad. Without them, workers are hardly able to learn about each other and overcome distrust, misunderstandings and prejudices, while employers’ strategies of pitting workers against each other have an easy job in maintaining a perception of opposing interests. Developing an understanding of the connections of challenges and goals across borders – i.e. the common framing of situations – is highly challenging, as is the development of mutual trust and empathy, whereby they require cross-border communication and interaction.

On the other hand, lacking possibilities for collective action either jointly with or in support of others abroad impede the experiencing of solidarity and of

⁴⁶ Of course, the limited active engagement of locals and regional entities in unions’ international work has sound reasons: local and regional levels mostly have more limited financial resources, and since they are directly accountable to their local or regional memberships, it is more difficult for them to see “the whole picture” and abstract from their immediate local material member interests and the focus on their immediate workplace-related problems. Furthermore, international work requires a variety of skills, knowledge and specialization (not least language), which is also easier to pool at a centralized stage.

collective strength. Where unions' international work is not linked to the everyday union work at the local and regional levels, and where few practical activities with or in support of workers abroad take place, or where these comprise – at best – the occasional signing of petitions or sending protest cards, regular members' possibilities to get involved are limited. It is thus difficult for members to develop the narrative resources that constitute the basis for the framing of situations in collective terms. It is through the participation in solidarity activities that narrations are developed concerning what solidarity means in practice, which workers identify with and develop an emotional commitment to solidarity work and the partners. Through participating in activities, they can link solidarity to the issues and problems facing them in their everyday work and lives, whereby solidarity can acquire an everyday relevance and be incorporated into the own identity. Without experiencing what solidarity is, for them international cooperation remains some far-removed policies by national leaderships unconnected to their reality that has little legitimacy, often meeting little membership support or even being opposed.

2.2 *Tansnational migration research: transnational ways of belonging, migrant organizations and networks and social remittances and cultural skills*

Of course, the other important “theoretical” debate when dealing with the role that transnational migration plays in international labor solidarity is transnational migration research. In this realm, three concepts hold particular importance for the purpose of this investigation: transnational ways of belonging, transnational migrant organizations and networks, as well as migrants' social remittances and cultural skills. However, before turning to these, it is important to understand the theoretical premises of transnational migration research, as well as what transnational migration comprises.

2.2.1 *Introduction: transnational migration as a research perspective*

2.2.1.1 Putting transnational migration in context: theoretical premises and methodological approach

Transnational migration research is not a “theory” explaining all of today's migration, nor does it explain a completely new phenomenon; rather, it needs to be understood as a research *perspective* that intends to draw attention to processes linked to the broader processes of transnationalization that were not taken into account before but can have important impacts on migrants, non-migrants and home⁴⁷ and host societies (Pries 2008a; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Portes et al. 2002, 281). The emergence of transnational migration

⁴⁷ Of course, the term “home country” is problematic, as many migrants' “home” is in the country in which they in rather than the country they originally come from. Hence, I put the term in quotation marks and mostly use the term “country of origin”.

research in recent decades is closely linked to an increasing focus on the study of transnational processes in other disciplines and other areas of social life. In a world of increasing global interconnections, such diverse disciplines as sociology, political science, economics, cultural anthropology, law, history and communication studies – among others – have increasingly studied transnational phenomena (Vertovec 2010, 1; see also Khagram and Levitt 2008). Since the late-1990s, the academic discussion of transnationalism – or “sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states” (Vertovec 2010, 2) – has proliferated, including transnational political institutions, companies and business networks, organizations, social movements, as well as migration and communities (Pries 2010a; Khagram and Levitt 2008, 26).

The basic assumption of transnationalism research is that many social, economic and cultural phenomena today cross nation-state borders, namely they are *transnational*, no longer being confined to nation-states (Pries 2010a, 9; for a critique of the term “*transnational*” and a plea for the term “*transstate*”, see Faist 2000b⁴⁸). As Vertovec (2010, 3) explains, transnationalism “describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity”. Hence, as increasing global economic interactions, cultural globalization, cheap transport possibilities and modern information and communication technologies reduce the significance of geographical distance, social relations increasingly extend beyond nation-state borders (Pries 2010a, 15, 147; see also Castles 2002, 1158; Landolt 2001, 219f.). Transnationalism alters people’s relations to space as individuals can nowadays easily follow – and participate in – processes at different local, regional, national, transnational or global levels, given that incidents such as financial crises, environmental disasters or major sports events rapidly spread across the globe (Pries 2010a, 147f., 16). Hence, in many cases the social references for individuals, organizations or institutions are no longer limited to nation-states and people’s daily activities, identities and realities are linked to people and locations in other countries (Vertovec 2010, 12).

Researching transnational processes includes a *fundamental critique of the methodological nationalism* that has dominated the social sciences since their

⁴⁸ Faist is right in arguing that the term “*transstate*” is more correct than “*transnational*”, as the focus in transnational migration studies lies on the crossing of state boundaries rather than nation boundaries (which frequently exist within state territories, as the case of multinational states such as Canada, Belgium, or Indonesia, or in the case of minorities such as the Kurds in Turkey or Sikhs in India, but which nevertheless are not the focus of transnational studies). Still, I stick to the term “*transnational*” as it is the most widely used in the debate and research (see Faist 2000b, 13f.).

formation: the assumption that the nation-state container is the natural and logical unit of analysis for the social sciences, as it is within nation-state borders that social life takes place. Social space was assumed to naturally be identical with the geographical space of nation-states (Pries 2010a, 18). Given that the social sciences developed in parallel to the emergence of nation-states, they still – although this is gradually changing even in such ‘national’ disciplines as political science, where global and transnational governance are growing areas of study – mostly take national societies and their respective national discourses, agendas and histories as the “naturally given entities to study”, despite the current global forces of transnational capitalism and imperialism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 304). With an analytical focus reduced to nation-states, Wimmer and Glick Schiller (ibid., 307) judge that the social sciences “became obsessed with describing processes within nation-state boundaries ... (and) lost sight of the connections between such nationally defined territories”. Transnationalism research intends to move beyond the “container theory” of society, highlighting that social life is not bounded by national boundaries, namely social space is not necessarily confined by specific geographical spaces such as the nation-state (Faist 2002b, 48f.; see also Khagram and Levitt 2008). While transnational social relations have always existed, they rapidly expand in the contemporary context of economic and cultural globalization and the proliferation of modern communication technologies (Pries 2010a, 13ff; Vertovec 1999, 447). Transnational studies focus on these transnational connections to make visible how social life extends across nation-state borders.

Importantly, a focus on the transnational character of social life does not imply a disregard of nation-states. In contrast to other concepts in the social sciences such as “globalization”, “cosmopolitanism” and “network societies” (Castells 1996) – which seem to suggest that social spaces are becoming “de-territorialized” – the concept of *transnationalism* highlights the continued importance of nation-states as actors in political, social and economic processes. Transnational social relations extend from localities in one national society to another, and nationally-bound institutions such as cultures, languages and norms as well as the policies of national governments still form important parts of people’s lives and constitute crucial points of reference (Pries 2010a, 10, 15; see also Khagram and Levitt 2008). Nationally-bound social references for human life co-exist with transnational connections, as individuals’ lives are simultaneously shaped by – and embedded in – national contexts such as education and political systems, as well as transnational social spaces defined by transnational families, media or working environments, for instance (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1003, 1011). Furthermore, as Pries (2008, 13) has convincingly argued, transnational social relations, networks and social spaces are rooted in place, albeit crossing nation-state borders. Individuals or organizations engaging in transnational relations are still embedded in concrete geographical locations within bounded social environments (Wimmer and Glick

Schiller 2002, 326). In short, transnational relations are *pluri-local*, rather than “global” (Pries 2010a, 15).

Transnational “entanglements” take place on at least three levels: beyond the level of everyday life, which I will discuss in detail in the following section regarding transnational families and migrant communities, and the level of institutions – which Pries (2008b, 13) describes as “inherited frameworks of routines, rules, norms and mutual expectations, which structure specific areas of human life and offer action programmes, identities, integration and stability for relatively expansive interaction-networks” (for the case of social movements, see Featherstone 2012) – they also take place at the level of organizations. Promoted by the same developments as migration, companies and non-profit organizations as well as social movements are also connected across borders and simultaneously operate in various countries. Since the 1970s, through technological and organizational innovation many large (and – increasingly – medium-sized) firms have developed into essentially *transnational* corporations, with their direct operations extending to various countries through setting up affiliates abroad (Ietto-Gillies 2012; Sklair 2002; Dunning 1992). While many social movements and NGOs have essentially always been international⁴⁹, the increasing global economic, political and social interdependence has promoted an increasing transnationalization of social movements. On the one hand, as already mentioned in chapter 2.1, problems such as environmental pollution, land grabbing or cuts in social services have less of an isolated local character, but are increasingly linked to developments taking place in other world regions (Gould 2010, 13; Waterman 1998). On the other hand, modern communication and transport technologies as well as cultural globalization lead to an easier exchange and establishment of relationships and networks across borders, as well as enhanced possibilities for interaction that contribute to overcoming such divisive factors as geographical distance, nationalism and the multiplicity of languages and culture (Ferguson 2011; Lenz 2008; Tarrow 2006). Consequently, transnational connections of human rights, anti-globalization, environmental, development aid or feminist groups and organizations are today more numerous, embrace more geographical regions and are often more enduring, whereby essentially transnational social movements, transnational NGO networks, transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) and “transnational advocacy networks” (Keck and Sikkink 1998), “transnational political mobilizations” (Schwenken 2006, 46) and “transnational social movement coalitions” (Herkenrath 2011) have developed (see also Doherty and Boyle 2013b; Smith 2011).

⁴⁹ For instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (see Walk 2004).

2.2.1.2 Uncovering the transnational character of migration

Clearly, the developments leading to increasing transnational interdependences of organizations and social movements also affect migration. In fact, migration “is one of the important means through which borders and boundaries are being contested and transgressed” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995, 50).⁵⁰ Transnational migration research takes this perspective and highlights transnational connections and processes in the context of migration. Since the 1990s, when a series of anthropological studies first described migrant transnational practices (e.g. Basch et al. 2005/1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991), it has broadened the focus of traditional analysis of migration, which had long been *immigration* research focusing on migrants’ adaptation to host societies (Vertovec 2010, 13). Clearly, migrants’ transnational connections are not entirely new and in fact it has sometimes been questioned whether transnational migration is new at all. In fact, periodic visits to home communities as well as return migration also took place in the past and migrants have often maintained social, economic and even political relationships with their countries and communities of origin and sent remittances, often over decades⁵¹ (e.g. Portes et al. 1999, 224ff; Weber 1998; for a critique of the assumed “unprecedented nature of contemporary transnationalism”, see Satzewich 2011). Hence, an important intention of contemporary transnational migration studies is to make visible transnational migration practices that may have existed for a long time (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Portes et al. 2002, 281). However, on the other hand, this research also reveals that economic and cultural globalization have led to shifting patterns of migration and how the scale of transnational connections has increased in recent decades. Weber (1998, 212) summarizes that “the post-war period witnessed the intensification, not the creation, of transnationalism”.⁵² As Portes et al. (1999, 219) state, what is new

⁵⁰ It has been argued that migrant transnationalism constitutes a form of “transnationalism from below”, as opposed to the “transnationalism from above” of transnational capital, global media and supranational institutions (Smith and Guarnizo 1998, 3). However, as Landolt et al. (1999, 292) argue, this does not mean that migrants’ transnational practices in seeking economic, political and social reinsertion, can be understood as a “liberatory social sphere of autonomous migrant action”. Instead, the transnational social field is dominated by established structures of domination and exploitation, which are contested and altered by migrants’ activities.

⁵¹ Among others, at the turn of the 20th century, European migrants to the US invested in land and businesses and visited their families “back home”. Moreover, they supported political causes in their countries of origin, such as the support of Polish and Czechoslovakian independence (Portes 2001, 183). Male migrants also controlled their wives through written correspondence with other people “back home” and through reports of newly-arrived migrants, and they controlled their farms “back home” by sending letters with specific instructions to those “back home” (Pries 2001b, 68).

⁵² Portes et al. (1999, 227) state on the differences between early forms of transnationalism and the contemporary one: “For all their significance, early transnational economic and political enterprises were not normative or even common among the vast majority of

about transnational migration is “the high intensity of exchanges, the new modes of transaction and the multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts on a sustained basis”. Previous migrants lacked “the elements of regularity, routine involvement, and critical mass characterizing contemporary examples of transnationalism. Few immigrants actually lived in two countries in terms of their routine daily activities. While most dreamed of going back one day, this long-term goal was countermanded by the concerns and needs of their new lives and, for many, eventually faded away” (ibid., 225).

The rise of transnational migration has been promoted by two developments. First, it has been accelerated by developments such as technological innovations, particularly the spreading of communication technologies and of improved travel possibilities. Through the rise of modern communication technologies – particularly the internet, cheaper and faster travel possibilities, as well as cultural globalization and media connecting people around the world – migrants are today more easily able to maintain transnational connections. Many migrants move back and forth, engage in temporary, cyclical and recurring migrations, maintain close communication relationships across borders, while their lives are rooted in more than one nation-state or locality (Vertovec 2010, 14f.; Castles 2002, 1158; Faist 2000b, 39ff). Second, the increasing global economic interdependence and the “increased and more pervasive global penetration of capital” (Basch et al. 2005/1994, 25; see also Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 6) contributes to the shifting patterns of migration: Already in the 1980s, Sassen (1988) laid out how the increasing numbers of people migrating are a consequence of the growing global mobility of capital. Rather than curbing emigration through the creation of employment in less developed countries, FDI accelerates migration: mediated by the disruption of traditional work structures, the “generalization of market relations and the development of modern forms of production” (ibid., 17) such as the expansion of export manufacturing and export agriculture have led to the formation of labor migrations, as subsistence workers have been transformed into wage labor and the recruitment practices of foreign plants have led to a large-scale movement of young women into waged labor (ibid., 18, 115f.). On the other hand, Sassen highlights the effect of the “westernization” and the “cultural-ideological and objective links” (ibid., 19) with industrialized countries that their investment in less developed countries creates and that subjectively reduces the distance to these countries for workers, making migration an option for them (ibid., 19f.). These developments are also an important factor explaining the increasing transnational connections that migrants maintain: as Chinchilla and Hamilton

immigrants, nor were they undergirded by the thick web of regular instantaneous communication and easy personal travel that we encounter today. Contemporary transnationalism corresponds to a different period in the evolution of the world economy and to a different set of responses and strategies by people in a condition of disadvantage to its dominant logic.”

(1999, 5f.) highlight, the insecurity caused by economic restructuring, the shift toward a “more flexible” (and less secure) work force and the increasingly fragile safety nets strongly contribute to the transnationalization of migration, whereby “migrants whose livelihoods have been undercut by economic restructuring in their countries of origin often find it increasingly difficult to secure a stable livelihood in the country of immigration, a situation that is likely to result in the intensification of a transnational existence, with frequent migration in both directions, for many migrants” (ibid.; see also Faist 2000b, 39). Hence, while enhanced travel and communication technologies explain how migrants are able to maintain transnational relationships, it is the globalization of capital that explains why migrants invest so much time, resources and energy in maintaining transnational ties, as well as why these technologies bridge distances between some geographical places but not others. Basch et al. (2005/1994, 25) conclude that “it is the current moment of capitalism as a global mode of production that has necessitated the maintenance of family ties and political allegiances among persons spread across the globe” (see also Weber 1998).

The focus of transnational migration research lies on the “networks, activities, patterns of living, and ideologies that span (migrants’) home and the host society” (Basch et al. 2005/1994, 4) and the variety of transnational social relations and practices that migrants engage in, including economic, cultural, political, and “civil-societal” activities (Itzigsohn et al. 1999; see also Portes et al. 2001).

At the level of personal social relations and family ties, through constant improvements in telecommunication technologies, since the late-20th century migrants have been able to regularly communicate in real time via phone and the internet with relatives and friends “back home”. The declining costs have made it possible even for migrants with low income to communicate with their families at least once a week (Pries 2008a, 49). In most major migration origin and destination areas – even in relatively remote and poor ones – countless phone and internet shops specialize in migrants’ cross-border communication needs. Skype allows for communication that comes close to face-to-face contact and at almost no cost. Social media sites such as Facebook allow for relatively loose but constant contact with more distant acquaintances, as well as a constant information flow that allows migrants and non-migrants to be “up to date” about their friends across the border. Through improved travel possibilities, many migrants maintain transnational connections through visiting their relatives in countries of origin. Particularly seniors frequently travel “back home” on a regular basis, visiting relatives or assuming care or education tasks (Pries 2010a, 14f.). In most major migration origin cities, airlines and buslines have installed relatively affordable direct connections to the most important destination cities (and the other way round), while travel agencies have specialized in migrants’ cross-border transport abound. Accordingly, migrants can easily visit relatives

and friends in their communities of origin, which many of them do so for extended periods during holidays such as Christmas or Easter, the home communities' patron saint or for other important events such as weddings or funerals (Pries 2010a, 14; see also Guarnizo 2003, 684ff). Moreover, improved travel possibilities allow migrants from indigenous communities to remain involved in the system of rights and obligations in their communities, particularly when they are called back "home" to fulfill them (Rivera-Salgado 2002, 266). All of these developments allow for the development and maintenance of close social relations and exchange, as well as migrants' participation in "home" communities' social life, even between very distant places: in fact, these can be more intense than the social contacts between individuals living in the same city or even neighborhood. Thus, while contemporary migrant transnationalism had precedents in early migration history, these were exceptional and not common among the majority of immigrants, "nor were they undergirded by the thick web of regular instantaneous communication and easy personal travel that we encounter today" (Portes et al. 1999, 227).

Migrants also maintain economic relations to their countries and communities of origin. They not only – often even after long periods of time – send impressive amounts of financial remittances to their families as sending money has become faster, cheaper and more secure through the ubiquitous money transfer agencies than through the traditional "encomenderos" (Waller Meyers 1998).⁵³ The amount of financial remittances sent from migration destination to origin countries has dramatically increased in recent decades – remittance flows to so-called developing countries increased from 29 to 441 billion US-\$ between 1990 and 2015 (World Bank 2016) – and it is them and their micro and macroeconomical development impact in receiving communities that a large part of academic and political interest in transnational migration focuses on (Woodruff and Zenteno 2007; Canales 2006; World Bank 2006; Newland and Patrick 2004; CEPAL 2000). In addition, material goods are exchanged across borders as relatives send migrants traditional food and other products, and migrants send or bring with them gifts such as technological products or toys on their home visits. Furthermore, migrants invest in their countries and communities of origin (Orozco 2006). They invest in real estate and buy or construct houses or farming land to expand their families' agricultural businesses, either for their own retirement, for their families or as assets (Itzigsohn et al. 1999, 327f). Others – migrants and non-migrants alike – establish businesses like retail and import-export companies, or money transfer, moving, travel and insurance agencies in both migrant-sending and receiving

⁵³ Such initially informal couriers transport not only cash, but also other items such as letters and gifts, between origin and receiving countries. While they still exist, many courier services today are carried out by formal agencies that constitute a multi-million-dollar industry (Landolt et al. 1999, 297).

countries, targeted at transnational customers and often involving frequent traveling back and forth between both countries (Rieple 2000; Itzigsohn et al. 1999, 325f.; see also Chen and Tan 2009). The scale of migrants' economic transnationalism and their importance for sending states' economies – manifest, among other indicators, in the amount of remittances and their engagement in transnational business activities – is a further expression of the increased significance of today's migrant transnationalism.

While significant differences exist regarding the intensity and institutionalization of migrants' social and economic engagement “back home”, these activities all form part of a web of transnational social practices linking countries of origin and destination, which – as Itzigsohn et al. (1999, 328) state – have a symbolic meaning and “contribute to sustaining the emotional linkage” between migrants and those staying behind. This has been the grounds for speaking of “transnational” migration or “transmigration”: given these developments, it has been argued that many migrants can no longer be understood as “uprooted” and “coming to stay” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995): whereas for decades migration research perceived migrants as either being short-term and temporary or settling in the host society, leaving their countries of origin behind and undergoing an inevitable process of assimilation to their host societies both in their practices and identities, today migrants are often simultaneously involved in the social and political lives of both host and home societies (Castles 2002, 1143; Portes et al. 1999, 228f.; Basch et al. 2005/1994, 6). The social ties that migrants maintain and the networks in which they are embedded span their “home” and “host” societies (Pries 2010a, 15). Transnational connections can persist over decades with second- and third-generation migrants, while usually less strongly, being affected by transnational ways of living and leading lives “in between”: empirical studies have documented that not only first-generation migrants engage in transnational social practices, but also that technological developments and “time-space compression” allow second-generation migrants to remain involved with the wider family in their parents' country of origin, communicating and visiting relatives, as well as maintaining an emotional connection with and sticking to cultural habits from that country. Second-generation migrants grow up in households where “people, values, goods and claims from somewhere else are present on a daily basis” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1017). Many of them return to their parents' country of origin to find partners for marriage (ibid.; see also Ostgergaard-Nielsen 2001a).

Importantly, transnational migration research does not claim that *all* migrants today are transmigrants (e.g. Faist 2000b, 20);⁵⁴ rather, transnational migration

⁵⁴ It has been argued that for the term “transnational migration” or “transmigrant” to be useful, it must add clarity to our understanding of migration, rather than merely substituting the old term “immigrant”. While broadly defined as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and

is *one* form of migration coexisting with other, “traditional” forms.⁵⁵ Clearly, not all migrants and non-migrants engage in transnational social interactions and among those who do, the intensity of the transnational interactions varies. Not all migrants communicate on a daily basis with relatives “back home”, and the transnational practices may not constitute an important aspect of their identities. Pries (2010, 29f., 157f., for an alternative differentiation, see Faist 2000b, 18-28⁵⁶) proposes a categorization of transnational social interactions according to their intensity, namely their degree of durability, frequency and their significance for people’s lives⁵⁷: he terms “transnational relationships” as the transnational social interactions of relatively low density and frequency, which have only little impact on the everyday lives of those involved. Examples are internet-based communities with specific music tastes, or the more or less regular communication between graduates of a specific elite university. At a second level, in transnational networks, exchange and communication relations are more intense; for instance, in alumni networks, transnational women’s organizations or transnational youth gangs (Pries 2010a, 29). Here, the transnational network significantly influences – or even structures – local everyday lives and the cross-border social relations and symbol systems play an important role the identities of those involved. In transnational social spaces, at the third level, transnational social practices, symbol systems and artifacts reach a degree of intensity to become the main reference point for participants’ everyday lives. For instance, transnational families can maintain strong social

settlement” (Basch et al. 2005/1994, 6), scholars have thus proposed to restrict the term “transnational migration” to “occupations and activities that require *regular and sustained* social contacts *over time* across national borders for their implementation” (Portes et al. 1999, 219, emphasis added).

⁵⁵ Especially in its beginnings, transnational migration research frequently seemed to suggest that transnational migrants were replacing previous types of immigrants: as early research generally consisted in detailed case studies documenting migrants’ transnational practices, they proved the existence of transnational migration, but not its non-existence, it seemed to suggest that “everyone was going transnational” (Portes 2001, 182). However, more recent studies have more strongly relied on comparative approaches, thus also documenting cases in which migrants do not maintain such transnational connections. While it is difficult to determine how many of today’s migrants can be considered transmigrants, surely not all of them are; in fact, presumably not even the majority (see also Vertovec 2010, 13).

⁵⁶ Faist (2000b) distinguishes four types of transstate spaces, depending on 1) the degree of their formalization and 2) their duration. Based on their formalization, he distinguishes between networks (loose formalization) and organizations and communities (high). Each of them can be of shorter or longer duration (ibid., 19).

⁵⁷ Other authors use different terminologies, such as “transnational social fields” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) and “transnational communities” (Castles 2002). While the terms place emphasis on slightly different aspects – the advantage of the transnational social field approach, for instance, is that it takes power relations into account as it is based on Bourdieu’s concept of social fields and transnational social fields are understood to be structured by power – the relevant point for the present study is the existence of such border-spanning fields or spaces, whatever their name.

ties and communication, share symbol systems such as language, specific festivities and rituals and music, as well as making use of the same artifacts such as communication technologies and food. Under such conditions, the social space connecting them across national boundaries can be more relevant to their everyday lives than the social space linking them to their immediate neighbors or relatives within the same city (Pries 2001b).

While differing in intensity, all categories of social interactions constitute relevant transnational practices maintained by migrants and non-migrants that influence the lives and identities of those involved, in both sending and receiving societies. In fact, it is argued that these transnational social formations encompass both migrants and those staying “at home”, as well as those who do not themselves maintain transnational social ties: a transnational social reality affects and transforms not only the lives of those who migrate, but also of those who stay behind, as they are “transformed by the transnational activities and ideologies among those who actually move” (Vertovec 2004, 976). These developments – as Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue – require decoupling the very concept of society from the idea of nation-states and its geographical boundaries: where social life is not restricted to these and individuals are simultaneously incorporated into nation-states and in transnational social connections, “basic assumptions about social institutions such as the family, citizenship, and nation-states need to be revisited” (ibid., 1003).

As I argue in this investigation, transnational migration can have important effects on unions’ international solidarity work and contribute to overcoming some of the obstacles discussed above, particularly the narrow understanding of solidarity that usually prevails and the lack of a perceived “community of fate” among the workers involved. In the following, I will discuss three concepts of transnational migration research that are particularly relevant regarding migrants’ role in international solidarity. I will first discuss what Levitt and Glick Schiller have called “transnational ways of belonging”, followed by a discussion on migrants’ transnational social relations and particularly embeddedness in transnational political network and organizations. To conclude, I will turn to the social remittances and cultural skills that migrants bring along.

2.2.2 Transnational ways of belonging: feelings of belonging to host and “home” countries

The first feature of migration that transnational migration research highlights that holds relevance for international labor solidarity is migrants’ continued identification and emotional connection with their countries or communities of origin⁵⁸: living in transnational social spaces and closely staying connected with

⁵⁸ Again, this is not entirely new and has existed in previous migration waves. For a historical account of the “enduring sense of Mexicanness” among Mexican migrants in the US in the 1920s and 1930s, see Weber (1998, 217f.) and Flores (2011).

countries or communities of origin, migrants' pluri-local life-world affects the construction of identities. Where transmigrants' everyday life-worlds span several places located in different national societies, through modern communication technologies, a community located in different places is imagined that constitutes the basis for a collective identity (Pries 2010a, 61f.; for a critique of the concept of hybrid identities, see Faist 2002b, 44f.). Transnational migration research has shown that – in contrast to the long-dominant assumption in migration studies that feelings of belonging and loyalty to home and host countries are mutually exclusive and that migrants' adaptation to the host country necessarily demands a complete detachment from their countries of origin – migrants can feel simultaneously connected to home and host society (Castles 2002, 1159): while naturally also identifying with the host country – or elements of it – research highlights that migrants maintain a feeling of belonging to their country of origin, whereby they feel somehow “in between”, having “double”, “mixed” or transnational identities (Aydin 2011, 74; see also Krumme 2004, 149). As migrants constantly negotiate their adaptation to – and participation in – the host society as well as their relationship with the society of origin, they adapt to – and are part of – two or more settings. The cultural practices, norms and identities of several places thus inform their feelings of belonging and identities (Castles 2002, 1159): migrants construct their identities out of multiple localities and feelings of belonging to several places and cultures and often urban spaces rather than nation-states (Caglar 2001, 608f.; see also Aydin 2001, 75).⁵⁹ Individuals can hence be simultaneously connected to both sending and receiving society and the center of their feelings of belonging often swing back and forth over time, i.e. at times they can feel closer to the “host” country and at other times to the “home” country (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1011; see also Castles 2002, 1158f.). Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, 1010) have called these pluri-local identities *transnational ways of belonging*, which they define as “practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group”.⁶⁰ The authors maintain that these ways of belonging comprise concrete and visible – not merely symbolic – actions marking belonging, such as “wearing a Christian cross or Jewish star, flying a flag, or choosing a particular cuisine” (ibid.). These are *conscious* actions expressing belonging, namely “an awareness of the kind

⁵⁹ In fact, as Caglar (2001, 609f.) argues, through migrants' practices, an entirely new form of membership and identity can emerge. In her analysis of young Turks in Berlin, she states that they “weave their collective identities out of multiple affiliations and positionings. They link their cross-cutting belongingness with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places and traditions beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-states. By challenging the existing ‘geographies of exclusion’, they attempt to alter the structure which determines the opportunities German Turks have for participation in the life of the society at large on their terms.”

⁶⁰ They contrast these to “transnational ways of being”, which they define as “the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in” (ibid., 1010).

of identity that action signifies” exists among those exerting them (ibid.). Accordingly, an action like eating food typical of their home country or worshipping certain saints only becomes a transnational way of belonging when the migrant does so conscious of the identity – or feeling of belonging – that it implies. And importantly, this not only holds true for first-generation migrants, but can also encompass second-generation migrants: growing up in transnational social spaces, the identities of children of migrants are also influenced by the cultural practices and points of reference shaping the transnational social space⁶¹ (ibid., 1017f.). An important consequence of these feelings of belonging spanning several countries or localities is that many migrants claim citizenship in both their origin and host country (Vertovec 2001, 575f.).

Several empirical studies document this continued attachment to countries or communities of origin and how migrants cannot clearly state where their “home” is. Being able to travel back and forth as well as maintaining intense social relationships with relatives abroad, they often view both (or more) countries, communities or localities as their home (e.g. Krumme 2004, 149). Moreover, cases exist in which migrants repeatedly change their place of residence, feeling at home in both sites. In fact, Aydin (2013, 67) views the “incompleteness” of the migration process as an essential feature of transmigration: migrants view themselves as living in – or between – two (or more) countries or sites, and this is a normal state for them. Accordingly, they do not view their current place of residence as simply being temporary and themselves as belonging to the other country (or vice versa), but rather both places are part of their life and identities. Similarly, this transnational feeling of belonging can lead to what Krumme (2004) has called “continuous remigration”: when retired, many migrants do not actually move “back” to their country of origin (as some may have intended to do during most of their stay in the host society), but rather develop a pattern of circular migration, whereby they move back and forth, with their lives being embedded in two (or more) localities.

A pronounced example of transnational ways of belonging is what Itzigsohn et al. (1999, 332ff) describe for the Dominican transnational community, in which migrants in the US frequently strongly identify with elements of both cultures.⁶²

⁶¹ In fact, transnational identities are not limited to migrants and their children alone: as Golbert (2001) demonstrates in an analysis of young Ukrainians, through their being part of return migrants’ social space, those “staying at home” – in this case, young Ukrainians who had spent time in Israel – can have a strong transnational identity and be engaged in transnational cultural practices and promoting a transnational imaginary (see also Vertovec 2010, 66ff).

⁶² Dominican migration is considered to be a very strong case of transnational migration. In fact, in this case, migration leads to the creation of a new, a “hybrid” identity: the authors argue that transnational migration fundamentally redefines what it means to be “Dominican”, as Domincanness increasingly encompasses both the homeland and the host society. Migrants in the US are constantly involved in the cultural production of the home country, thus shaping

Dominican migrants' transnational identity expresses itself – among others – in their music tastes: they often maintain a preference for merengue music, although they may have adapted to the host society in many other ways. In fact, as the authors explain, their musical preference is often a mix of Dominican merengue and US hip hop – “merenhouse” – thus expressing a transnational, hybrid or “in-between” identity, while the style that Dominicans adopt in the US is transmitted back to the Dominican Republic (similarly: Çaglar 2001, 607f.). Similarly, migrants strongly emphasize their origin-country-related identity, while at the same time decidedly rejecting certain elements of that country's culture, such as the dominant gender relations (ibid., 334). This is also true for the second generation: many children of Dominican migrants in New York City also maintain a preference for Dominican merengue music and express their feeling of belonging to the Dominican community, despite possibly having never been to the Dominican Republic. Although themselves not having migrated, their being part of the transnational social space spanning the US and the Dominican Republic significantly influences their identity construction (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1017f.).

2.2.3 Social and political involvement “back home”: transnational migrant organizations and political networks

Transnational ways of belonging are not limited to an identification with the country or community of origin and its culture; rather, they can extend to the political realm. For many migrants, the continued emotional connection to the country or community of origin described above involves an ongoing interest in – and concern for – social and political developments “back home”. They thus engage in social and political activities directed at origin countries and communities. While not a new phenomenon (e.g. Flores 2011 for a historical account of transnational political and social engagement of Mexican migrants after the Mexican Revolution), numerous studies have detected a spreading of transnational political and civil-societal, philanthropic or “civic” (Portes et al. 2007) practices as migrants “strive to become political and economic players in their countries of origin” (Çaglar 2006, 18, cited in Pries 2010a, 104; see also Guarnizo et al. 2003; Mertens 2000). The cross-border social relations and networks described above in which migrants are embedded thus often go beyond family and friends, extending to the political and civil-societal realm as cross-border webs of political and civic relationships and networks or “political

what it means to be “Dominican” in both societies, and redefining “Dominican” cultural definitions and practices: among others, through academic institutions in the host country dealing with the Dominican Republic, through transnational authors writing about leading transnational lives, and through the constant being in touch with what is going on “back home” through Dominican newspapers and other media in the US, Dominican migrants' identity as being part of the imagined Dominican community is reinforced (ibid.; for an account of the important role that the home countries' media plays in promoting an extended national identity in the Chinese case, see Nyíri 2001).

transnational relations” (Pries 2010a, 102) develop. Many of these political and civic activities take place within more or less formal organizations and institutionalized cross-border networks (Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Vertovec 2010, 94f.; see also Trautner 2000) aiming to influence the social, economic, religious or political development in their countries or communities of origin.

In many cases, these institutionalized groups are what has been called “transnational migrant organizations”⁶³ (ibid., 101ff), “immigrant transnational organizations” (Portes et al. 2007) or “transmigrant organizations” (Goldring 2001, 528, cited in Pries 2010a, 103), as “a broad range of organizations established by transmigrants, with the basis of membership resting on a shared identity rooted in the place or region of origin” (ibid.). They explicitly target the country of origin or both countries, and their interests, mobilization of members and other resources or focus of activities and campaigns are clearly border crossing and can be either distributed equally between both countries or focused on one of them (see also Portes et al. 2007, 252). Usually, they combine activities focused on the origin *and* the host country: they not only engage in development and cultural activities in the country of origin, but as “Turkish cultural association” or Salvadoran “comité de pueblo” (Landolt et al. 1999, 306) they also conduct cultural and social activities for migrants in the host communities (ibid., 104). In the countries of origin, they engage in activities such as the financing of community projects in their hometowns, the organization of student exchanges or lobbying for expatriates’ voting rights “back home” (Goldring 2002, 74). In analyzing the Mexican case, Goldring (2002, 64) concludes that these institutionalized cross-border relationships play an important role in migrants’ struggle for participation “back home”: “without romanticizing them, it is safe to say that for Mexicans maintaining strong ties to their places of origin, more or less formal versions of hometown clubs have become a common vehicle for giving collective and focused expression to their claims of substantive membership in their place and country of origin”. The number of such cross-border organizations with strong reference to the countries

⁶³ From these transnational organizations, Pries (2010a, 95ff) distinguishes “migrant organizations” mainly focused on the host country: associations of migrants in host countries that can take various forms and have a broad variety of functions, among them supporting new migrants’ arrival, strengthening migrants’ collective identity and their social capital through the development of networks, acting as bodies for the representation of specific interests and intercultural dialog (Pries 2010a, 96). However, he highlights that while they have mainly been studied regarding their integration function in the *host country*, these migrant organizations are also always spanned *between origin and host countries*, namely they have a cross-border character, even if the focus of their everyday activities exclusively lies in the latter: they comprise – for the most part – migrants, and the issues they deal with are in one form or another related to both host and “home” country: if an organization of Turkish-origin parents lobbies communal politicians for better education or German classes for their children, they focus on the host country, but Turkey is the starting point for the definition of collective interests (ibid., 99f.).

of origin has grown rapidly since the 1990s in Northern Europe and the US (Pries 2010a, 103).

Despite not being political transnationalism in the strict sense, the most classical expression of migrants' continued concern for their communities of origin – and the one that has gained most academic interest – is their social and economic engagement in the context of the so-called hometown associations (HTAs)⁶⁴ (e.g. Delgado Wise and Rodríguez Ramírez 2001; Moctezuma and Pérez Veyna 2006; Goldring 2002, 62ff). These organizations of migrants generally originating from the same town, state or region raise funds to promote cultural, social and economic development in their hometowns and states (Escala-Rabadán 2006, 135; Landolt et al. 1999, 306) and they are “motivated not by personal familial obligations alone, but rather by a combination of sociocultural and political factors, including migrants' identity and sense of solidarity with their place of origin (local nationalism or regionalism), reciprocity with the homeland, and often an eagerness to gain status and recognition in the place of origin” (Guarnizo 2003, 677). While still constituting a small minority of remittances when compared to family remittances, the growing amounts of so-called collective remittances (Goldring 2004; see also Morán Quiroz 2005) funding such projects such as paving roads, installing electricity, rebuilding the town plaza or supplying health clinics⁶⁵ sparked a discussion on migrants' potential contribution to their home countries' social development beyond family remittances (Goldring 2004; Lowell and De la Garza 2000; Landolt et al. 1999, 306; see also Guarnizo 2003). While initially often formed as a space for socializing and mutual assistance among the migrant community in the destination country, in recent years many HTAs have formalized their investments in and raised impressive amounts of funds for philanthropic projects in their hometowns. They do so by conducting fundraising events in their places of settlement, such as dances, dinners, raffles or other social activities, in which funds are collected for specific projects (Escala-Rabadán et al. 2006, 135). Among the most well-known organizations are the Mexican HTAs in the US: dating back to the 1970s, their number has significantly increased in recent years,⁶⁶ and their structure is becoming increasingly formalized (Escala-

⁶⁴ They are also known as Clubs, committees or comités (e.g. Escala-Rabadán et al. 2006; Landolt et al. 1999).

⁶⁵ Goldring (2004, 823f.) maintains that HTAs fund projects in their hometowns in four broad categories: basic infrastructure and communications (such as roads, potable water, electrification); public service infrastructure and capitalization (such as education, health and social security-related projects); recreation and status-related projects (sports fields, rodeo rings); and other community or urbanization projects (such as community halls, placas or public benches) (see also Escala-Rabadán et al. 2006, 145f.).

⁶⁶ No secure data exists on Mexican HTAs in the US. In the directory of Clubes de Oriundos of the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (IME), 2,479 HTAs were listed in April 2017 (<http://www.ime.gob.mx/DirectorioOrganizaciones/>). However, there are likely to be many more that are not registered with the IME.

Rabadán et al. 2006, 129, 133f.). Clearly, such organizations strongly contribute to the development of networks among the migrant community in the host country as well as across borders. As Landolt et al. (1999, 306; see also Nyíri 2001) maintain, beyond contributing to social and economic development in the countries of origin, HTAs also strengthen the networks among the migrant community: as the organizations reach out to their compatriots in reception societies, they reinforce their cultural, economic and political ties with their community or country of origin (Escala-Rabadán et al. 2006, 133f.; see also Morán Quiroz 2005). Orozco (2009, 3) argues that these organizations combine an identity-forming function with exerting a concrete impact in communities of origin:

Influenced both by the experience of transnationalism and by a desire to connect with their home and host countries, migrants often seek an instrumentalization of belonging, not just a search to define the self, through the activities of their hometown associations. Thus, belonging to HTAs has both a symbolic links with the migrant's identity, as well as a tangible impact on the community that surrounds them.

Migrants not only engage in promoting social development projects “at home”. In what Itzigsohn et al. (1999) call “political transnationalism”, they also get involved in transnational activities aiming to influence their home countries’ politics (see also Goldring 2002, 57; Portes et al. 2002, 288ff; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 6). In the “various forms of direct cross-border participation in the politics of their country of origin” (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a, 262) – which Østergaard-Nielsen terms as “homeland politics” (ibid.) – migrants use their position abroad to lobby their home countries’ governments and other institutions to politically, financially or militarily support democracy or other social movements. Such activities tend to be institutionalized in political parties and other political organizations (see Pries 2010b, 43ff). Together, migrants’ political practices range – in Itzigsohn et al.’s (1999, 329f.) words – from “broad” transnationalism comprising activities such as voting in their home countries’ elections to “narrow” activities such as engaging in specific organizations such as political groups and parties⁶⁷ (for an estimation of the incidence of transnational political activities – including by the three migrant groups Colombians, Salvadorans and Dominicans – see Guarnizo 2003). In view of such increasing transnational political practices and activities as well as the involvement of migrant organizations in their home countries’ politics, Pries

⁶⁷ Instead of distinguishing between “narrow” and “broad” political transnationalism, Østergaard-Nielsen (2001a, 271f.) distinguishes between “direct” and “indirect” forms of exerting political influence on countries of origin: direct forms are those such as voting in homeland elections or giving economic, political or military support to groups “back home”, while indirect forms comprise lobbying the host countries’ decision-makers for a particular stance towards the homeland, either working within political institutions of the host country, such as parties, or through confrontational tactics such as demonstrations, mass meetings or violent activities. For a different typology, see Franzoni and Rosas (2006, 236).

(2010a, 102) speaks of an “emerging transnational political space and increasing transnational political interlinkages” (“Verflechtungsbeziehungen”, own translation) between migrants’ host and “home” countries.

“Narrow” political transnationalism can take numerous forms. One example is Salvadoran migrants’ role in establishing and promoting the international movement in support of the guerrilla in the Salvadoran civil war in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the reconstruction and democratization process after the peace accords (Landolt et al. 1999, 295f.). Exiled Salvadorans established a dense web of support groups across the US, many of them closely and directly connected to organizations in El Salvador that lobbied political decision-makers, raised money for the guerrilla, spread information and conducted education work (Landolt 2003a, 306; see also Perla Jr. 2008, 144). Many of these groups connected with each other and the guerrilla organization Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in the US through a complex system of organizations and groups. Perla Jr. (2008, 144) details these connections: as FMLN support organizations in El Salvador were forced to operate clandestinely, they were often embedded in legal civil and political organizations with which the US-based political support groups could maintain close relationships (see also Perla and Bibler 2009, 10). Another example of such political transnationalism promoted by transmigrant organizations is that of Turkish and Kurdish organizations in Northern Europe: as Østergaard-Nielsen (2001a, 268) details, Turkish and Kurdish migrants in the Netherlands and Germany frequently mobilize in religious organizations of the Sunni-Muslims and the Alevi, as well as the Kurdish movements; for instance, the Alevi movement in Germany mobilized in the 1990s in response to the electoral victory of the Sunni party in Turkey and persecution by the Sunni majority in Turkey (ibid.). Their regular political activities in Germany and the Netherlands include inviting policy-makers and media representatives to panel discussions, seminars, lectures and meetings, distributing informational material and organizing demonstrations or even violent activities (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a, 275). Kurdish migrants have also used Germany as a platform to mobilize the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), promoting a collective Kurdish identity, organizing protest events against the oppression of the Kurdish minority by the Turkish government, lobbying for a democratization of Turkey and Kurdish autonomy and even committing violent attacks on Turkish citizens, businesses and other establishments (Mertens 2000). Frequently, migrants also engage in political and financial support for armed groups, thus contributing – as has been criticized – to the prolongation of violent conflicts (cf. Newland and Patrick 2004, 19f.). Rivera-Salgado (2002, 269-71) has highlighted the political role of the indigenous Oaxacan- American transnational organization Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional (FIOB), which – while originating from a classical HTA – developed into an organization more strongly politically oriented and supporting the struggle for indigenous people’s rights in Oaxaca.

Furthermore, migrants are involved with political parties in their countries of origin, actively support election campaigns or engage in fundraising for them (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a, 267; see also Franzoni and Rosas 2006, 235ff). As many sending country political parties and other organizations have come to view the migrant community as important actors in their homeland's politics, they have established offices in cities with major expatriate communities aiming to involve the migrant community, as is the case with Mexican, Dominican and Brazilian political parties in the US (Paarlberg 2012; see also Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, 10; 268; Guarnizo et al. 2003). Through their fundraising activities, exile political parties and other organizations can become important sources of funding for election campaigns, as well as major factors in mobilizing voters "back home" for political parties or candidates (Levitt 2001, 207; Itzigsohn et al. 1999, 328ff; Goldring 1998).⁶⁸

The involvement with political organizations and movements "back home" is not limited to first generations of migrants; moreover, second-generation migrants sometimes mobilize around political issues that did not concern their parents (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a, 266). Portes et al. (2007, 276) even found that involvement in immigrant transnational organizations is mainly carried out by "older and better-established migrants", indicating that "home loyalties and nostalgia endure and, hence, that such activities can be expected to continue as immigrant communities mature. (...) transnationalism is not a phenomenon associated with recency of arrival and destined to disappear as part of an inexorable process of assimilation". Guarnizo et al. (2003, 1229ff) found that migrants with legal residence status who have been living in the host society for a longer time and attained social and economic stability are more strongly involved in political transnationalism than recent migrants. Moreover, it is unclear whether such political engagement is stronger among "political" or "collective" migrants than among "economic migrants". While some authors argue that "political" migrants such as civil war refugees have a more active political stance towards their country of origin, others have argued that this is not always the case, claiming that "economic" migrants can also become politicized while being abroad (Landolt et al. 1999; see also Portes 1999, 465). As Østergaard-Nielsen (2001a, 266) has argued, "refugees may wish to leave political activism behind while so-called economic migrants can become politicized from afar. Migrants may become opposed to the regime of their homeland while abroad as they gain access to less biased information about political developments at home. Similarly they may grow more defensive about their homeland while abroad – not least when the homeland is constantly scrutinized, as is the case with Turkey in Western European media."

⁶⁸ It is estimated that in the case of the Dominican PRD party approximately 10-15 per cent of campaign funding is raised among the exile community in the US (Itzigsohn et al. 1999, 328ff.). Levitt (2001, 207) estimates that as much as 50 per cent of the funding for the 1994 Dominican presidential election campaign came from migrant contributions.

Migrants' continued and increasingly institutionalized economic, social and political engagement in their countries of origin has transformed them into "critical agents of social, political, and cultural change" (Landolt et al. 1999, 296), which makes them interesting partners for origin-country political actors. It has thus not only led political parties and other organizations to target them for political support; for instance, by extending election campaigns to major migrant-destination countries.⁶⁹ Furthermore, governments have implemented matching funds programs⁷⁰ to take advantage of collective remittances and other policies specifically targeted at exile communities, as they increasingly acknowledge the important role that expatriates assume in their countries' economic and political development (Ahn Paarlberg 2012; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a, 268f.).⁷¹

2.2.4 *Migrants' social remittances and cultural skills*

People don't carry only dreams of a better life with them when they cross the border. Their culture, traditions, and forms of social organization accompany them as well, as they travel and create new communities in the North. (Bacon 2004, 251)

⁶⁹ Politicians of countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Haiti and the Dominican Republic regularly campaign in the US, as is the case with many Turkish parties who campaign in Northern Europe (Paarlberg 2012; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1022; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 7).

⁷⁰ Among the first was the Mexican state of Zacatecas, which already in 1992 established the "Two-for-One" matching funds program (in 1999 replaced by the "Three-for-One" program), in which every dollar invested by HTAs was matched by the state and federal (from 1999 additionally by municipal) governments (Escala-Rabaldán et al. 2006, 137, 143; see also Goldring 1998). The program has been transformed into an official federal government program for all Mexican states in 2002, and in 2005 a total of US-\$66.5 million were spent (ibid.). Since then, it has been complemented by other programs such as the "Mexico Four-for-One Program for Community Development", in which investment in basic infrastructure and economic development projects are matched (ibid., 144). Similar programs have been established by other major sending states, such as the "Unidos por la Solidaridad" in El Salvador.

⁷¹ In fact, many sending states have extended their boundaries of citizenship to those living abroad and engaged in a new construction of the national identity. Some have extended political rights in the form of citizenship or nationality to expatriates, in some cases including voting rights abroad (Vertovec 2010, 86ff; Nyíri 2001). Moreover, many states introduced a series of programs and policies directed at migrants, such as extending consular services and state protections to nationals living abroad, introducing investment programs for migrants and conducting campaigns to inform their expatriates on their rights as their home country's citizens (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1021; see also Newland and Patrick 2004; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001b, 9f.). Even below the nation-state level, some regions of large countries implement policies directed at their expatriates, as is the case of some Brazilian, Indian and Mexican regions or states (Escala-Rabaldán et al. 2006, 147). Some states have adopted such a broad range of embracing policies towards their emigrants that Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, 1023) call them "Transnational Nation-States".

The third relevant concept is social remittances. Migrants have specific ideas, values and skills that they bring from their countries and communities of origin to host societies. The transnational migration literature speaks of “social remittances” (Levitt 1998) when referring to the concepts, values and information exchanged across borders: in transnational social spaces, not only material goods such as gifts and money circulate between migrants and those staying behind. Through the regular communication with relatives and acquaintances “back home”, return migration as well as migrants’ and non-migrants’ traveling back and forth, non-material goods such as ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital are also remitted from receiving to sending countries (ibid., 927; Faist 2000b, 18f.). These “local-level forms of cultural diffusion” (Levitt 1998, 927) take place when migrants – through the contact with the host society – adopt new behaviors, knowledge and ideas that they communicate to their communities of origin, through their return migration or home visits, personal communication via phone, Skype or letters or by sharing information such as newspaper articles and other news such as music and photos through social media (Pries 2010a, 47). Social remittances include personal values, ideologies and tastes, as well as ideas about democracy, politics, health, equality or community organization (Levitt and Nyberg-Sorensen 2004, 8). Levitt (1998, 933ff) distinguishes three types of social remittances: by *normative structures*, she understands ideas, values and beliefs, with examples including norms for interpersonal behavior and intrafamily responsibility, notions of identity and standards of gender appropriateness, as well as expectations of organizational performance by the state or the church (ibid., 933). *Systems of practice* refer to the actions shaped by normative structures, such as household labor, religious practices and patterns of civil and political participation. Within organizations, systems of practice include “modes of membership recruitment and socialization, strategies, leadership styles”, among others (ibid., 934); for instance, specific campaign strategies used by political parties adopted from the host country of migrants (ibid., 935; see also Faist 2000b, 19f.). Finally, *social capital* points to the prestige and status that migrants acquire or lose in receiving countries (ibid., 935).

Social remittances are not only exchanged between individuals, but also within organizations by individuals in their organizational roles, as well as through informally organized groups and social networks linked to the formal organizations (Levitt 1998, 936; Faist 2000b, 19). What Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011, 13) call “collective social remittances” are “exchanged by individuals in their role as organizational members and are used in organizational settings such as hometown associations, church groups or political parties” (ibid.). As the authors maintain, such collective social remittances alter – among others – people’s ideas of and aspirations for their community, notions of development, community institutions and business ventures that are influenced by transmitted skills and know-how (ibid., 13ff).

Transnational migration research as well as policy discussions on the development impact of migration have increasingly detected that social remittances can have important impacts on the social and political life in sending societies (Kessler and Rother 2016). Migrants influence cultural norms such as music, fashion and architectural styles “back home”: as empirical studies have shown, these are often altered through the new tastes that migrants bring along on their home visits (Levitt 1998, 932ff). In fact, through circulating social remittances within transnational social spaces, “hybrid” forms of music, fashion and other norms develop as mixtures of those in the sending and receiving communities; for instance, as Levitt (1998, 932) details, young women in Dominican migrant-sending communities – influenced by migrants’ styles – combined US and Dominican elements such as wearing boots they had observed on migrants, but combined with shorts (ibid.; see also Itzigsohn et al. 1999, 333f.). Moreover, patterns of behavior and action repertoires of organizations can be altered: Dominican political parties adopted some of the vote-winning strategies that migrants brought back from the US, such as political advertising strategies (Levitt 1998, 935). Authors frequently argue that social remittances can shape broader social and political norms such as ideas about gender roles, democracy or corruption in sending societies, thus contributing to development in those countries (cf. Kessler and Rother 2016; Newland and Patrick 2004, 18f.). In a study about Bangladeshi migration to Malaysia, Dannecker (2006) found that female migrants adopted new ideas about gender roles that they brought back with them after returning to Bangladesh. Through experiencing wage labor abroad, they developed a sense of their own money, criticized the lack of employment opportunities in Bangladesh as well as their husbands’ lack of participation in household chores and began dressing differently. The new gender practices that they introduced were subsequently adopted by non-migrant women (ibid., 667f.). Similarly, Levitt (1998, 934) describes how Dominican women migrants – who were more actively engaged in the workplace and public sector in the US than in the Dominican Republic – transmitted their experiences “back home”, leading to the creation of “new versions of womanhood” (ibid.) among Dominican women (see also Vertovec 2010, 64ff; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992). It has also been argued that social remittances can promote democratic processes at home. For instance, they can support a different view of politics and the political process in sending societies, as is the case when migrants transmit new ideas about questions such as the separation of powers or having certain rights as tax-paying citizens (Levitt 1998, 941f.; see also Kessler and Rother 2016). Moreover, the existence of politically-engaged migrants abroad may strengthen democratic control at home (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001b, 18). Furthermore, it has been argued that social remittances can influence health-related indicators such as health knowledge among mothers, lowering smoking rates and increasing exercise rates among pregnant women and enhancing knowledge about contraception, as well as contributing to lower birth rates through the transmission of ideas of smaller family size (McKenzie 2006, 130f.;

for an overview, see Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2001). Finally, return migrants are seen to bring back human, social and technological capital, which allow them to more successfully initiate entrepreneurial activities in their countries of origin (Drori et al. 2009, 1005).⁷²

Crucially for the research presented here, social remittances are not unidirectional: while academic and political interest has almost exclusively focused on social remittances' impacts on migrants' societies of origin, they also flow in the other direction.⁷³ Clearly, based on their background and previous experiences, migrants dispose of ideas, practices and skills such as language, knowledge of their cultures of origin or “meaning patterns” (Amelina 2008) and social networks. “Migrants bring a set of social and cultural tools that aid their adjustment to their new lives”, as Levitt (1998, 30) writes. In fact, the social remittances flowing to sending countries can themselves not be understood without taking account of these “social and cultural tools” that migrants bring along: as Levitt (1998, 930ff) explains, social remittances to sending societies are a function of the norms and routines that migrants are used to from their sending society, as they “make sense of their experiences using the interpretive frames they bring with them” (ibid, 930). Clearly, the cultural and social resources that migrants bring along determine – to an important degree – the way in which they interact with their new surrounding, how they adapt to it, whether or not resources are transformed through contact with the host society, as well as what they remit “back home” (Levitt 1998, 930ff; see also Amelina 2008).

While research dealing specifically with what could be termed “reverse social remittances”⁷⁴ is scarce, it is evident that they exist. It has often been said that

⁷² However, the impact of social remittances on sending countries is not always positive; in fact, several of the aforementioned findings are strongly debated, as the impact of social remittances – and migration in general – on areas such as gender roles, educational attainment or democracy are often quite ambiguous (McKenzie 2006). Among others, it has been documented that children in Mexican migrant household have lower levels of schooling, given that the return on education is much higher in Mexico than in the US, lowering the incentives for high education levels among children who are anticipating migrating (McKenzie 2006, 125). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that social remittances can sometimes reinforce traditional gender norms and import a culture of violence, like that of returning gang members (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, 5f., 19; see also Vertovec 2010, 64ff). Furthermore, social remittances are sometimes criticized more broadly for promoting consumerism and individualism (Levitt 2005).

⁷³ Moreover financial remittances flow in both directions. For instance, families “back home” often support migrants at the beginning of the migration process in obtaining legal papers, or paying tuition fees for students (e.g. Faist 2007).

⁷⁴ The existing research on reverse remittances – i.e. “remittances that flow from home communities to migrants” (Mazzucato 2011, 454) – usually focuses on material, particularly financial, remittances and services such as childcare and help with housing investments provided to migrants by those staying behind, while it only rarely deals with social remittances. An exception is the discussion on “brain drain”, which acknowledges that highly-

migrants have a different understanding of community and social relations than the dominant one in the host society, which is reflected by the organization of many migrant communities in destination countries that largely builds on close networks and strong community relationships (e.g. Milkman 2006, 118; Necochea Gracia 1998; Weber 1998, 229f; see also chapter 2.3). Flores (2011) describes how Mexican migrants in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s brought along radical political views and promoted the Mexican Revolution's ideas such as education and rejection of the church and – later – a radical culture advocating for working-class empowerment among the Mexican migrant population through newly-founded associations. Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011, 8ff) found that Dominican migrants bring a series of cultural and associational practices with them when migrating to the US, such as a strong tradition of political and civic activism. Their research indicates that the people they studied brought a wealth of prior experience with community-based projects to the US, as well as a strong sense of responsibility for the community. This “culture of participation and conscientiousness” led them to starting community development organizations “back home”. Moreover, their experience shaped migrants' encounters with the receiving society and their interaction with city and state government actors. Migrants' social norms of collaboration, volunteering and labor-sharing were skills that they brought with them to the US. These skills constituted resources that they built on when organizing community organizations (ibid., 9f.). In a historical analysis and dealing specifically with the cultural norms workers brought with them, Necochea Gracia (1998) describes how Mexican workers in Chicago between 1910 and 1930 maintained the labor culture that they had brought from Mexico, as well as how this clashed with the one present in US industry. “The social networks and work attitudes that immigrants brought with them from Mexico challenged the established practices of the Chicago labor market. Relationships within the working groups, where veterans mingled with the Mexican minority, merged the inherited experience with a new one” (ibid., 204). Drawing from their social networks, which were fundamental in the organization of labor relations and the labor market in Mexico, they “follow(ed) traditional customs of finding work” (ibid., 189). Regarding resistance to employers, the “cultural dimension” of their discontent is apparent: as they were not used to – and had difficulties adapting to – the processes of industrial work, “they perceived mistreatment at work as discrimination because management, without knowing it, attacked the customs that defined them as Mexicans”, which provoked a protest against specific issues not very common among other workers (ibid., 202). He concludes that “(b)eing Mexican defined the terms of the conflict and legitimized the behavior to be followed” (ibid., 204).

skilled migrants bring specialized skills with them that benefit host countries, but constitute a drain for sending countries (cf. Faist 2008).

In this context, it is important not to indulge into an essentialist and static understanding of social remittances linked to some *national* background or identity, which Erel (2010) calls the “rucksack approach” to cultural capital: the social remittances that migrants bring along are not necessarily bound to some national characteristics, but rather contain “elements of cultural practices and resources that are subcultural” within the country of origin and its migrant groups, as well as “non-nationally defined forms of cultural capital” (ibid., 651). I.e., the social remittances that migrants bring along do not simply reflect their belonging to a nation-state: it is usually not “Mexican”, “Filipino” or “Dominican” cultural skills, ideas and norms that migrants bring along, but rather those of subnational cultures based on experiences gained – for instance – in specific regions, communities, sub-cultures or groups, or even movement or workplaces. Moreover, after arriving in the host society, these social remittances change through the contact and interaction with the culture – or rather, cultures – in the host society. Like culture in general, migrants’ cultural skills, ideas, norms and practices need to be understood as being in flux and constantly negotiated, altered and created through interaction with the host society. New cultural patterns are constantly developed and what Amelina (2008, 3, 7f.) calls “cultural overlappings” constantly produce new social practices and action patterns. Although social remittances should thus not be understood as arising from migrants’ *national* background but rather as resulting from their concrete experiences in sub-cultures, as well as being influenced by experiences in destination countries – for instance, highly-skilled expats are less likely to show the aforementioned close networks and strong community relationships – the important point here is that migrants can bring specific ideas, knowledge, attitudes or practices that differ from those in the areas to which they migrate.

Most research on the flow of “social and cultural tools” from sending to receiving societies focuses on how migrants’ cultural skills, cultural or “ethnic” capital as well as their social capital help migrants to insert in the host society, access the labor market and gain economic and social status⁷⁵ (White and Tadesse 2008; Zhou and Lin 2005; Light 1972; see Tseng 2010 for a discussion

⁷⁵ The notions of “cultural capital” and “social capital” should not be understood strictly in Bourdieu’s terms. While some authors explicitly refer to Bourdieu (Erel 2010; Patel and Conklin 2009; Portes and Landolt 2000), they usually do so without Bourdieu’s attention to power relations within social fields and his criticism of the functionalist human capital school (see Bourdieu 1983). In migration research, the terms “cultural capital” and “social capital” usually refer more generally to social networks, as well as cultural resources or skills. For a critical stance toward the turn towards “social capital” in the migration and development discussion, see Faist (2008). The term “ethnic capital” is used differently by different authors. Cutler and Glaser (2002, 4) define it as “the set of individual attributes, cultural norms, and group-specific institutions that contribute to an ethnic group’s economic productivity”. Zhou and Lin (2005, 261) state that “ethnic capital is not a thing but involves interactive processes of ethnic-specific financial capital, human capital, and social capital.” For a less static conceptualization of ethnicity, see Waldinger et al. (1990).

of the cultural capital of western employees' in Taiwanese firms; for an analysis of the role of cultural capital and norms on women's participation in the host country's labor market, see Blau and Kahn 2011). Erel (2010, 653) analyzes how "migration-specific cultural capital" such as "left-wing and feminist organizing principles and political ideas" that female Turkish migrants in Great Britain and Germany bring from their experiences in Turkey allows them to access information for settling and occupational mobility. However, she insists that this cultural capital is not a repertoire of skills and practices that migrants simply attempt to "fit" into the host society: while they indeed bring along cultural capital such as language skills, knowledge about customs and lifestyles, professional qualifications, etc., migrants renegotiate and adapt these practices and skills once arrived in the host society, as well as creating new forms of cultural capital.

Particularly the research on so-called "ethnic entrepreneurship" (Zhou and Lin 2005) stresses the cultural skills and social networks that migrants bring along. Such skills as "knowledge of home country-markets, language, preferences, and business contacts" (Gould 1994, 302) as well as information on the country of origin are seen to play a crucial role in shaping migrants' probability of engaging in self-employment, the success of their businesses as well as non-economic effects of ethnic enterprises such as social status and – ultimately – community formation, the creation of social capital and migrants' social mobility (cf. Zhou 2004, 1065f.; see also White and Tadesse 2008). Clearly, it is this ethnic capital such as language skills and knowledge of the specific cultural demands that allows migrants to successfully engage in entrepreneurial activities targeting the migrant community in the host country. Waldinger et al. (1990, 21) hence state: "the immigrant community has a special set of needs and preferences that are best served, and sometimes can only be served, by those who share those needs and know them intimately, the members of the immigrant community itself." Knowing the "specialized and distinctive consumption tastes" (ibid., 24) and the cultural norms and customs of their fellow migrants as well as the language facilitates building up successful businesses such as restaurants, bakeries and clothing stores targeting these communities, selling products such as food, music, handicraft or offering services such as hairdressing or the organization of specific festivities. Businesses providing "ethnic consumer products" such as food and "cultural products" (newspapers, recordings, books, clothes, etc.) are usually the first to arise, and "the important point about both types of activity is that they involve a direct connection to the immigrants' homeland and knowledge of tastes and buying preferences – qualities unlikely to be shared by larger, native-owned competitors" (ibid., 23). Furthermore, "ethnic enterprises" focus on the specific problems that migrants face related to arrival and settlement in the host society, which are often aggravated by "their distance from the institutionalized mechanisms of service delivery" (ibid.) and related to the uncertain legal status of migrants, which

makes trust a crucial element of the provision of such services. Such businesses include – among others – travel agencies, law firms and accountants (*ibid.*).

In transnational entrepreneurship – i.e. migrants' entrepreneurial activities spanning the host and sending society⁷⁶ – migrants draw on their “bicultural skills and preexisting binational ethnic networks” in establishing and maintaining such businesses (Zhou 2004, 1059; see also Faist 2008, 70f.; Rieple 2000, 90). Portes et al. (2002, 287) define transnational entrepreneurs as “self-employed immigrants whose business activities require frequent travel abroad and who depend for the success of their firms on their contacts and associates in another country, primarily their country of origin”. Sequeira et al. (2009, 1024) regard them as “unique in that they are socially embedded in both their home and host environments, allowing them access to network, class, and/or national resources in both environments”, all of which are “resources (that) aid these entrepreneurs in opportunity recognition, start-up, and maintenance of new ventures” (*ibid.*; see also Zhou 2004, 1055f.).

The same is true when companies specifically employ migrants to take advantage of their cultural capital for their international activities: as described by Tzeng (2010) for the case of Taiwan, Taiwanese employers frequently hire western migrants to draw from their language skills, as well as from their “knowledge of a society and its ways of doing business” (*ibid.*, 140), namely their knowledge of western cultural values and other useful information for marketing strategies in those countries. He argues that this cultural capital can often even compensate for lacking social capital (for an analysis of the role of migrants' skills in US exports to migration origin countries, see Light et al 2002).

In sum, it is safe to say that migrants bring along a series of social remittances and cultural skills and knowledge, whether they are nurtured by some national or – in most cases – subnational background, and that these remittances have an impact on receiving societies. They are not only relevant to migrants and their communities themselves, but migrants also contribute – by introducing ideas, skills and cultural practices into the host culture – to transforming host societies and their institutions, and they have historically often done so. Migrants have brought different cultural, social, political and religious ideals and practices with them and introduced them into the receiving communities and societies. The influence of migrants is clearly visible in the spreading of a variety of religions in host societies, manifest in countless Catholic churches, synagogues and mosques throughout countries such as the US or in the development of new,

⁷⁶ Wong and Ng (2002, 514) define a transnational enterprise as “a business in the ethnic economy which entails separate operational components of the enterprise being located in different countries and the transmigration of the owners in order to operate it.” Sequeira et al. (2009, 1026) concretize that transnational entrepreneurship – unlike international entrepreneurship – is “culturally oriented, culturally derived, and reliant on the specific community and relationships within which the immigrant is embedded.”

often “hybrid” styles in music, fashion or food that spread throughout host societies (e.g. Portes and Rumbaut 2014).

2.3 State of research: On the limited research linking transnational migration and labor unions

The role that transnational migration plays in unions’ international solidarity work has not been analyzed to date. Research on the topic is virtually inexistent due to a general disciplinary disconnect between labor movement and transnational migration research: while migration plays a role to some degree in research dealing with labor unions, scholars seldom explicitly focus on the transnational dimension of migration; in the realm of international solidarity research, the topic of migration is mostly neglected; and in the realm of transnational migration research, most scholars – besides a few exceptions – do not deal with labor unions.

In what follows, I will lay out the major research gaps regarding transnational migration’s impact on labor unions in general and international labor solidarity in particular. First, I discuss how (transnational) migration has been dealt with in the realm of labor movement research generally and international labor solidarity research in particular, before subsequently discussing how labor unions have been a blind spot in transnational migration research to date.

2.3.1 Research gaps in labor movement research: research linking labor unions to transnational migration

In the realm of labor movement research, little attention has been devoted to the ways in which transnational migration affects labor unions, and even less so to the role that it plays in unions’ international solidarity work. As I will show in this section, two major gaps exist in the research dealing with unions and migration on the one hand and international labor solidarity and migration, on the other: On the one hand, while a wealth of research connecting labor unions to migration exists, it usually focuses on unions’ dealing with migration and their policies towards migrants, rather than analyzing how migration influences them, with few contributions asking how migration influences these organizations’ strategies, action repertoires or structures. Moreover, this research rarely considers migration explicitly as *transnational* migration, i.e. besides some contributions touching upon migrants’ cultural and social resources, migration’s transnational aspects are seldom considered: the impact that the transnational relationships and emotional connections, the practices and identities that migrants bring along have on unions has yet to be studied. This is also a consequence of most labor movement research having a focus on nation-states, as it is within national boundaries that unions developed and that scholars have analyzed them (Fink 2011; exception: van der Linden 2003). Hence, although most migrants are workers and many of them maintain strong transnational connections, labor union scholars dealing with migration generally

focus on the implications that migrants' presence have for labor unions within nation-state boundaries, while rarely exploring the transnational implications that it entails. On the other hand, there is a disconnect between international labor solidarity and migration research: while much research dealing with international labor solidarity exists, migration is rarely discussed in this context. As Greer et al. (2011, 4) conclude: "There are rich literatures about union responses to migration, and union transnationalism, but these have developed separately".

2.3.1.1 (Transnational) migration in labor movement research

A considerable amount of research exists concerning the relationship between migration and labor unions more generally. Particularly since unions have begun to actively organize migrant workers in many major migration destination countries in the last two decades, many labor movement researchers have analyzed unions' policies towards migrant workers, stressing migrant workers' "organizability" and focusing on unions' efforts, strategies, successes and failures in organizing migrant workers, as well as migrants' efforts to self-organize (e.g. Connolly et al. 2014; Marino 2012; Ness 2011; Dziembowska 2010; Gordon 2005; Ford 2004; for an account of the preceding decades from the 1960s to the 1990s, see Choi 2011; Martínez Lucio and Perrett 2009; Schwenken 2006; Penninx and Roosblad 2000; the volume edited by Milkman 2000; for unions' dealing with undocumented workers, see Kip 2016; Luce and Bank Muñoz 2008; Schmidt and Schwenken 2006).

Research on unions' responses to migration

Numerous contributions deal with unions' approach towards migrant workers and some compare unions' policies towards migrants across countries. In comparing different European unions' approaches towards migrant workers, Sahlström (2008) finds some innovative models – such as those of the Spanish Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and the Italian Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori (CISL) – that have created networks for advising migrant workers. However, he contends that unions in most European countries are still a far cry from proactively organizing migrant workers, claiming that they need to transform themselves to effectively do so (see also Munck 2012, 133f.; for a similar analysis of unions' policies towards migrant workers in South Africa, the US and Spain see, Kahmann 2002). Similarly, Holgate (2011) discusses the successes and challenges facing labor unions in organizing the growing number of migrant workers in countries such as the UK, US and Germany and advocates taking into account migrant workers' lives in their totality – i.e. to also organize them outside the workplace and take their concerns going beyond work seriously – as well as the need to cooperate across borders to organize migrant workers.

Labor movement researchers have also intensely dealt with the factors explaining unions' responses to migration. In a recent study of the Norwegian Construction Workers' Union, Kjeldstadli (2015) analyzes the circumstances under which unions opt for an inclusive approach towards migrant workers (ibid., 84). He finds that in this case the choice for an inclusive stance towards migrant workers was a learning process promoted by four factors: the union and construction workers more generally having previous experience with labor migration; a favorable employment situation; a good financial status of the union that allowed organizing work; and most importantly an active, progressive core of unionists that promoted inclusive ideas and which formed what Kjeldstadli calls – in reference to Gramsci – a “collective intellectual” (ibid., 95).

Several contributions compare unions' different responses to migration and analyze factors that explain these differences. In a comparison of union strategies towards migrants in the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, Connolly et al. (2014) explain differences in these strategies through varying regulatory structures and industrial relations traditions as well as through the dominant framing logic guiding unions' action, paralleling Hyman's three classic union identities of class, race/ethnicity or social rights. This framing logic also determines the way in which they deal with the topic of migration: the class logic considers migrants as part of the wider working class and thus common interests of migrant and other workers; the race or ethnicity logic concentrates on migrant workers' distinctive situation, arguing that general policies are insufficient to meet migrants' concerns; and the logic of social rights views migrants not merely as workers but rather as citizens, hence focusing on issues extending beyond their workplace-related concerns. Marino (2012) particularly stresses internal union structure in explaining differences between Dutch and Italian unions' responses to migration: the decentralized structure and the strong workplace presence of Italian unions gave these unions sufficient autonomy to design and implement their own initiatives adapted to the organization of migrant workers; by contrast, the centralized structure of Dutch unions and their weak workplace presence inhibited the implementation of special measures and the establishment of close contact with migrant workers (ibid., 15f.). In determining factors that account for differences in unions' responses to migration in seven European countries from the 1960s to 1990s, Penninx and Roosblad's (2000) work finds four sets of factors: the institutional power resources that unions dispose of; economic and labor market factors; national contextual factors such as national identity, public discourse, political structure and orientations; and characteristics of immigrants. In a later study, Marino et al. (2015) review Penninx and Roosblad's heuristic and conclude that it remains valid today in changed contexts of migration patterns and labor markets and industrial relations. However, they advocate for taking into account internal union dynamics as an additional factor, given that union identity, internal structures, communication and decision-making processes can significantly

influence unions' stance towards migrant workers (see also Marchetti 2012; Krings 2009; for a perspective on the Asian experience, see Ford 2004; for an analysis of labor leaders' and employers' "unlikely alliance" regarding immigration-friendly policies in Spain, France, Italy and the US, as well as the role that the acknowledgment of the effects of globalization limiting states' capacities to control migration and threatening unions' ability to organize play in the alliance, see Watts 2002). Analyzing local unions towards migrants in Miami, Nissen and Grenier (2001a) find four factors accounting for differences in the approach towards migrants: unions' structure, its external environment, the leaderships' vision and ideology and unions' internal "cultural" practices.

In North American labor movement research, unions' strategies towards migrant workers have gained particularly strong attention. This is a consequence of US unions' towards actively organizing the growing migrant workforce since the 1990s and the frequent success of these organizing campaigns. In this body of work, the thrust direction is somewhat different compared with the European context: after unions' turn towards viewing the previously thought "unorganizable" migrant workforce as a potential clientele in 2000, promoted by the US labor federation American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization's (AFL-CIO) "New Voice" leadership under president John Sweeney since 1995 and the impressive successes in organizing migrant workers particularly in California since the late 1980s, in the literature migrants are often considered as the harbingers of the US labor movement.

The first intense dealing with unions' approach to migration began with the famous "Justice for Janitors" organizing campaign of the SEIU beginning in the late-1980s, which targeted largely migrant janitorial workers in large office buildings (e.g. Choi 2008; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Lüthje and Scherrer 1997b; Hurd and Rouse 1989). Several studies discuss the factors contributing to this success. An important factor is seen in the combination of top-down and bottom-up elements in the campaign, which – despite the local rank and file being strongly involved – was ultimately imposed and carried out by the national union and the organizers it deployed. Further factors include is the abandoning of the traditional NLRB election process⁷⁷, the strategy of targeting building owners rather than building services contractors and the emphasis that the campaign placed on strategic research (Milkman 2006; Savage 2006; Waldinger et al. 1998).

Since then, numerous contributions have dealt with unions' efforts to organize migrants, analyzed countless organizing campaigns targeting migrant workers in a variety of sectors and stressed migrants' role in revitalizing the US labor

⁷⁷ In the US, workers need to win a representation election filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to win the right to being represented by a union. As employers usually wage huge anti-union campaigns to convince workers to vote against the union, unions lose many of these elections.

movement (Roca-Servat 2009; Kirshner 2008; Milkman 2006; Jayaraman and Ness 2005; Nissen and Grenier 2001a; Zabin 2000; Ruiz Cameron 1999). While unions' different approaches to migration are also an important topic in the US literature, (see above), here the factors explaining organizing successes and failures among migrant workers also constitute a major focus. Figueroa (1998) discusses necessary factors for organizing migrant workers. Analyzing campaigns by unions such as SEIU, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) and the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), he stresses that migrant organizing requires a broader approach to organizing that involves civil rights struggles, as these are fundamental for migrants. Furthermore, he argues that while unions need to hire organizers able to communicate with migrants, this is not sufficient: given the limited availability of organizers with migrants' language proficiency, migrant organizing campaigns need to be member-driven and rely on organizing committees and organizing work conducted by trained migrant members themselves. Similarly, Voss and Sherman (2000) explore the factors contributing to the adoption of innovative organizing approaches by local unions in the US that – at the same time – explain success in organizing migrants. They find several conditions facilitating innovative organizing: where a union is in crisis and has suffered strong membership loss, innovative organizing is more probable, as is support from the national union for such an approach and the presence of local union staff coming from other social movements.

Other topics discussed in the US literature include the challenges of organizing migrant workers in the highly mobile global garment industry (Bonacich 2000); the interplay of grassroots organizing by migrants themselves, often building on extensive social networks and unions' commitment of resources to supporting their efforts, which render organizing efforts successful (Milkman and Wong 2000); the difficult task of sustaining the achievements of organizing campaigns and building up a durable union structure (Fisk et al. 2000); and document how migrants themselves engage in bottom-up organizing campaigns, often without the support of formal unions, showing that they are – contrary to what is often assumed – “*more* likely to organize and protest than are their native-born counterparts” (Ness 2005, 2; see also Gabriel 2006).

Despite US unions' increasing interest in organizing migrant workers, unions' bureaucracy, business unionism and lack of democratic rank-and-file participation continues to hinder an adequate representation of minorities and their concerns in most unions. Hence, within North American labor movement research, several studies analyze the relationship between unions and migration from a more critical perspective, stressing the continued neglect of low-wage migrant workers by unions by – among others – lacking bilingual personnel and contracts, as well as highlighting migrants' efforts for self-organization. They focus on so-called workers centers (Fine 2007), “poor workers' unions” (Tait

2005) and other forms of migrant workers' self-organization that stress "rank-and-file organizing and democratic union building" (Tait 2005, 10; see also Ness 2011; Archer et al. 2010; Dziembowska 2010; Garea and Stern 2010; Ghandnoosh 2010; Kwon 2010).

Fine (2006; see also Gordon 2005) – for instance – analyzes the recent spread of workers centers, community-based organizations of mostly immigrant low-wage workers that fill the gap left by unions, which often do not bother with organizing low-wage workers. These organizations are examples of migrant workers' self-organization and their cohesion often rests not only on labor, but also other grounds such as shared ethnicity, language or sex, and they have powerfully shown that migrants are far from being "unorganizable". Interestingly, these organizations also apply tactics that extend beyond the usual ones employed by labor unions, frequently involving demonstrations, boycotts or pickets. This observation is also highlighted by Tait (2005), who analyzes the development of what she calls "poor workers' unions". Starting from many AFL-CIO-affiliated unions' continued reluctance to organize migrant workers and give up bureaucratic control, the lacking racial and gender diversity in US labor union leaderships as well as their lack of democratic rank-and-file participation, Tait documents how traditional unions' neglect of important issues in poor people's lives such as housing, health care, racial discrimination or police brutality leads these "independent social justice and community-based organizations" (ibid., 10) to organize around these topics, in addition to workplace issues (ibid., 11ff, 136). Furthermore, many of these unions explicitly build on linguistic, ethnic, racial and gender solidarities among groups of migrant workers and organize in the community rather than in the workplace (ibid., 129). Analyzing migrant workers' self-organization in different industries in New York City, Ness (2005) documents how rather than proactively organizing, these low-wage workers usually working in dispersed small shops, traditional labor unions – at best – step in once migrants' efforts at organizing are well under way and in fact they often refuse to support migrant workers who turn to unions in search for help (see also Tait 2005). He argues that unions' bureaucratic structure as well as the fact that union leaders "reflect the composition of members of two or three generations ago" (ibid., 53) is an impediment to migrant workers' organization, as is unions' unwillingness to give workers autonomy and learn from their dissent and militancy.

Research gap: the limited research on migration's impact on unions

Despite the wealth of research dealing with unions' approach *towards* migrants, research on the role that migrants play *within* unions and how they possibly *influence* them is rare (cf. Marino 2015). Interestingly enough, this is also true for the case of research dealing with internal union structures and dynamics such as democracy, decision-making processes and communication, i.e. studies analyzing the internal structure and processes as a factor explaining unions'

inclusion or non-inclusion of migrant workers, rather than explaining migrants' possibilities to influence unions or have their voices heard (e.g. Marino et al. 2015; Connolly et al. 2014; Martínez et al. 2009; a partial exception is Marino 2015). Furthermore, most research has a domestic focus, i.e. it takes migrants as "immigrants", largely without taking their transnational connections, practices and identities into account. This section discusses the little research that touches upon the role that migrants play *within* unions. It first deals with contributions within labor historiography and then turns to some contemporary anecdotal accounts that engage with migrants' influence on unions.

Historically, migration has always played an important role in the formation and shaping of labor movements, which has been a relevant topic to some degree in labor historiography. "The most important cross-border influence in class formation is probably migration", labor historian van der Linden (2003, 147) writes, as it has always played a crucial role in the "transnational diffusion of American organizational models" (ibid., 144). Historical studies focus – among others – on the cultural practices and political ideas, worldviews and practices brought from "home" (e.g. Mason Hart 1998, xi; Weber 1998).

Migrants' political backgrounds and action repertoires have significantly influenced host country movements. In the case of European migration to the US at the turn of the 20th century, the radical political socialization and background of Jewish, German, Finnish and Eastern European migrants from well-developed working-class movements played an important role for US labor movement and its radicalization in several industries and geographic areas (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 166f.; Montgomery 1974). At this time when the development of socialist parties was still closely tied to workers and the labor movement, Portes and Rumbaut (2014, 9) argue that European migrants with union and party experience came to constitute "the backbone of the union movement" and "the first radical cohorts" in the US in the early-20th century. For instance, the "Red Finns" – Finnish socialists – were the backbone of the Socialist Party in mining and industrial towns in the Midwest, while Jewish needle-trade workers constituted the core of the union movement in the east (ibid., 166). Similarly, immigrants from Europe played a crucial role in forming labor movements in South America in the late-19th and early-20th century. Italians with a background in the labor and anarchist movements who migrated to Uruguay strongly influenced the Uruguayan labor movement. These newcomers contributed to Uruguay being the first Latin American country to introduce the eight-hour day and legalize labor unions. In the Argentinian labor movement, European migrants' anarcho-syndicalist background played a similar role in the spread of strikes as a means of social struggle (Arocena 2009; Ceol et al. 2000). For the case of Mexican migrant workers who moved to the US in the late-19th and the 20th centuries, Mason Hart (1998) has documented the employment of "community leaders, mutual assistance societies, cooperatives, and a wide range of labor-organizing strategies including accommodationist and

radical tendencies” (ibid., xi). In a discussion of the role of cultural customs from “home” in workers’ organizing, Necochea Gracia (1998) stresses that drawing from individualized labor experiences as peasants, artisans, and/or merchants “back home”, Mexican workers in Chicago in the early-20th century brought along work attitudes that challenged the organization of industrial work and were a constant source of indignation and protest. As he notes, they used the kinship and friendship bonds that their work and everyday life was organized around in Mexico to create the solidarity necessary for collective action such as work stoppages (ibid., 203). Weber (1998) – also dealing with Mexican workers in the US – stresses the Mexican Revolution as a “formative experience” (ibid., 220) and “a myth and a model of collective struggle” (ibid., 227) for many Mexican workers informing their labor struggles in the US in the 1920s and 1930s. She finds that they “applied tactics and strategies that they had learned there as a model of mobilization” (ibid., 221) in the California cotton strike in 1933. Weber argues that Mexican communists were crucial in labor organizing and leading strikes in the cotton fields, and although many Mexican workers had no previous labor organization experience, “the Mexican people (were) revolutionary ... They had (the revolution) behind them that helped them to see the exploitation here in this country” (ibid., 224). Moreover, she describes the crucial role of Mexican social networks, past experience and the tradition of mutual assistance in the massive strike wave following the Great Depression in 1929, where Mexicans comprised 75-90 per cent of the strikers (ibid., 224f.): the networks served to precipitate and maintain the strike, while “their sense of mutualism undergirded their solidarity, and their past experience in labor and social conflicts supplied tactics and strategies” (ibid., 225). She concludes that “these elements from the Mexican experience proved crucial to the spread of the strikes that disrupted California harvests in the 1930s” (ibid., 225), as “(c)ommon interests and a sense of mutual aid, reinforced in families and work crews, strengthened the workers’ sense of solidarity and resolve during the strike.” (ibid., 227).

However, even in labor historiography, the role that migrants played in destination countries’ labor unions has remained a minor focus. Labor history has largely been confined to nation-state boundaries. As Fink (2011, xiif.) explains, although “the context for studies of workers’ movements has been ‘global’ since the nineteenth century”, particularly US historians’ analysis of them has largely remained “imprisoned in national historiographies”, as people and concepts have rarely been understood as truly transnational subjects moving across borders and nation-states were given “outsized influence as both historical agents and sources of identity” (ibid.). He argues that only in the context of contemporary globalization processes has labor history begun to hesitantly take a “transnational turn” and increasingly acknowledged transnational, international, translocal and transcultural interconnections since the 1990s (ibid.).

Even less so than in labor historiography has the influence of migrants – let alone their transnational ties – on labor unions and their policies, strategies and action repertoires gained contemporary academic interest. Only few contributions view migration as a relevant factor in discussing labor movements and explicitly focus on what migration implies for labor unions. Given labor unions’ development – after an early internationalist phase – as organizations bound by nation-state borders, labor unions usually viewed migration as an exception, and most research was confined to nation-state containers. One of the few exceptions of contemporary scholars vehemently advocating for a stronger inclusion of migration into labor studies is Munck (2013, see also 2012, 2009). He calls for a stronger inclusion of migration into labor movement research not only because migration has always played an important – but not sufficiently acknowledged – role for labor unions (and be it only as a source of division), and because this role will probably grow in importance (Munck 2009, 619, 622). He particularly argues that migration needs to be viewed as a relevant factor in labor’s strategy vis-à-vis the crisis of global capitalism and included in the debate on labor revitalization. Migration should be seen as an opportunity for labor in neoliberal globalization, as the increased movement of workers across borders and the practices that they bring into national labor movements could force the latter to deal with their new ideas and practices and empower labor movements and contribute to their democratic transformation. Munck argues that unions around the world should give up their historic protectionist and often anti-immigrant stance, instead viewing migration as an opportunity in confronting capitalist globalization (Munck 2011, 5, 16; 2009, 622; 2012, 121f., 132f.). However, Munck is concerned with the way in which unions confront migration, rather than how migrants influence the former. While seeing this potential significance, he remains on the level of appealing to take migration into account when dealing with labor’s response to global capitalism.

The closest that contemporary research comes to exploring the ways in which migrants influence unions is several relatively superficial or anecdotal statements, some of them in the above-cited research on unions’ approaches towards migration, on how migrants’ ideas, worldviews or practices – namely, the cultural skills and social remittances that they bring along – affect unions’ work, as well as the recognition that migrants’ social networks and sense of mutualism or collectivity are a valuable basis for labor organizing. For instance, in discussing the factors facilitating migrants’ “organizability” in contemporary US labor unions, Milkman (2006) emphasizes that contemporary migrants – as in previous times – tend to have stronger social networks, which are embedded in occupational and/or workplace settings (*ibid.*, 133). She argues that the “vibrant ethnic social networks and tight-knit communities” (*ibid.*, 134) of Mexican and Central American migrants have “long been a resource on which immigrants have drawn in labor disputes and other forms of collective organizing” (*ibid.*; for similar arguments, see Bacon 2004, 266; Ruiz Cameron 1999; Acuña 1996, 189).

Furthermore, Milkman argues that unions may be “more compatible with the lived experience, worldviews, and identities of many immigrants”, particularly of Central Americans and Mexicans (ibid., 133). Originating from less individualistic societies than the US and being embedded in dense social networks and communities, migrants frequently have “a more collectively oriented worldview than most native-born workers – a worldview in which unionism was a familiar, or at least comfortable, option”, she argues (2006, 118, 137). While migrants’ receptiveness to the idea of collective organization as well as their close social networks is probably not exclusively a consequence of the “less individualistic societies” that they originate from, but also arises out of migrants’ shared experience of exclusion and discrimination – a point that is also highlighted by Milkman herself – migrants’ strong receptiveness to ideas of collectivism has also been found by several other studies (e.g. Bacon 2010; Muñiz 2010; Weber 1998).⁷⁸

While it has not been researched in any systematic or in-depth manner, it is also frequently argued that migrants “have had positive experiences of unionism and/or other forms of collective organization in their home countries” (Milkman 2006, 137) and an understanding of unionism opposite to the dominant servicing model: for them, being in a union meant actively organizing and being willing to take up a fight with employers, as labor and other social activism is much more combative in these countries and they have sometimes been described as having a stronger class consciousness (Bacon 2015; Waldinger et al. 1998, 117; for a comparison of different migrant groups, see Lopez, 2004, 16, and Wells 2000, 119). This has prompted many of them to play important roles in the California labor movement: while no systematic evidence has been gathered on this point, she argues that “it is striking that many of the rank-and-file immigrant union leaders who emerged in the California labor movement in the 1990s were labor or social movement activists in their native lands” (ibid., 137; Milkman 2011a, 365; see also Gordon 2005, for examples of migrant worker center activists with a background in organizing or political activism in their countries of origin). This is also stressed by Bacon (2004, 267) who – dealing with Mexican migrants in the US – argues that “the workers displaced by NAFTA were often among those most interested in organizing unions and defending labor rights once they arrived in the United States”. He is convinced that the revitalization of the US labor movement rests – to an important degree – on “the militance of immigrants (...) and the progressive social ideas” (ibid., 254) that they brought.

⁷⁸ However, there is some debate on Mexican migrants’ attitude towards unions. Given the prevalence of corrupt and yellow unions in Mexico, Mexican migrants generally rather make negative (if any) experiences with labor unions “at home”. Thus, it has been said that Mexican migrants generally have a rather negative view of labor unions (e.g. Herrera Lima 2006; for a somewhat different view, see Bacon 2004; for an interesting example of how the cultural and historical traditions of Mexican migrants lead to different understandings of unions when compared to US workers, see Bacon 2010). This view was also expressed by many of the staff, officers and members of different US unions who I interviewed.

In the Los Angeles JfJ campaign, some contributions have highlighted that the overwhelmingly Latino janitors showed a strong class consciousness and a willingness to take the risks of unionization (Milkman 2006, 137; Waldinger et al. 1998, 117). Leaders of the campaign had been active in the Salvadoran liberation struggle or other social and political movements in Central America (Waldinger et al. 1998, 117; Acuña 1996, 185).⁷⁹ In her analysis of migrant workers organizing in the hotel industry in San Francisco, Wells (2000, 119) finds that migrants from the various countries differ regarding their attitude towards unions, based on previous experiences and attitudes towards unions. While mainland Chinese workers – for instance – are mostly less receptive given their experience in China where they “think of unions as (...) arms of the government”, “(l)atino immigrants are especially receptive and militant union members. Not only do they often come from countries with strong and legitimate labor movements, but many were union members or leaders there. Moreover, many Mexicans and especially Central Americans engaged in dangerous authority-challenging struggles in the chain of events that led to their emigration” (ibid.). Moreover, in their research on several Californian union locals adopting organizing strategies, Voss and Sherman (2000) mention that several of the immigrant organizers had community organizing or political experience in their home countries, such as the Philippines and Mexico (ibid., 104). Zabin (2000, 153) observes similarly for the case of the organizing efforts at the American Racing Equipment in Los Angeles in 1990-91, in which several of the leaders had been active in unions or politics in Mexico prior to their migration. Acuña (1996, 186) states (albeit without going into detail) that “(n)ot coincidentally, the militancy of today is built on unions with high percentages of immigrant membership, just as the initial militancy of the labor movement was created by immigrants in days past”. In a similar vein, while not empirically analyzing the role that migrants play in labor unions, Bacon (2010) argues that migrants are often supportive of working-class struggles as they have a tradition of organizing and mutual support. He is convinced that undocumented migrants are “a source of strength for the labor movement, (as) many immigrant workers don’t have to be told what unions are, or even, in many cases, how to organize (...). They have something to offer labor”. Bacon argues that the experience that migrants from countries such as Mexico and El Salvador – where hiring strikebreakers during legal strikes is illegal – bring “gives workers from these countries a greater expectation of their labor rights. (...) These cultural expectations place a higher value on labor rights than on private property rights – an expectation that would benefit U.S. workers as a whole” (ibid.).

⁷⁹ Eliseo Medina – then-president of the SEIU janitors local in San Diego and later vice president of SEIU – stated: “when you come from a country where they shoot you for being a unionist or a striker, then getting fired from your job doesn't seem so bad. Immigrants from Central America have a much more militant history as unionists than we do, and the more militant workers are, the more the union can do” (cited in Bacon 1995).

A few contributions extend beyond migrants' receptivity to ideas of collective organizing and unionization, and more concretely deal with the impact that the incorporation of migrant members has on unions and their policies. In fact, Wells' (2000) aforementioned contribution is located at the intersection of unions' dealing *with* migrants and how this alters unions themselves. Her analysis discusses the reshaping of practices and programs of Local 2 of the hotel and restaurant workers' union HERE that takes place in the course of the attempts to organize migrant workers. She finds that the local's practices are altered in the course of targeting and incorporating of migrants in three areas. First, in the area of union receptivity, whereby given migrants' varying attitude towards unions, union staff adapt to these circumstances and – for instance – avoid “Maoist” language to avoid repelling Chinese workers (ibid., 121). Second, in the area of organizing approaches reacting to ethnic divisions, she notices that the union has not only hired organizers who are fluent in migrants' different languages and that they shape their organizing approaches to take account of the ways in which ethnicity structures relations of trust and leadership within each ethnic group (ibid., 122-24); moreover, the focus on migrant workers had led the union local to getting involved with the wider community, maintaining contact with a variety of immigrant community organizations (ibid., 124). Finally, in the area of the involvement of migrants in the union structure, practices and contracts, Wells finds that the presence of migrants has led to an early opening of the union structures to migrants, with migrants having been represented in the leadership since the mid-1980s and migrant concerns having entered the union's contracts in areas such as extended leave policy so that migrants can visit their relatives “back home” and the inclusion of immigration assistance to the legal benefit plan (ibid., 125-6).

While Wells deals with the adapting of unions to migrant (potential) memberships, a few contributions more explicitly deal with migrants' social remittances – although not using the term – and their impact, hence touching upon the influence that migrants' transnational connections have on unions. One of these contributions is Sarmiento's (2011) unpublished master's thesis on “Cultural Knowledge and the Social Agency of Immigrant Latino Organizers in the Los Angeles Labor Movement”, which analyzes the impact that migrants' previous experiences and worldviews have on unions' action repertoires. Sarmiento points out that in the 1990s many Latino migrant union organizers drew from their organizing experiences “back home” and brought along a specific cultural capital that influenced their activism in US labor unions. Through their previous activism trajectories, they brought:

a political ideology which provided a frame through which (...) (they) observed and understood the nature of the social problem they sought to address. (...) Marxist political ideology (...) equipped them with analytical tools such as a theory of political economy used to explain the economic crises their countries were experiencing (...) (and a)long with this political ideology came a political identity and a sense of class-consciousness (ibid., 94).

Furthermore, they brought along more comprehensive approaches to organizing, which they introduced into their unions' action repertoires, including organizing the bases at the community level. On the strategies learned in their countries' civil wars that Salvadoran and Guatemalan organizers drew from their organizing work in the US, Sarmiento writes: "subversive organizing strategies such as building extensive, clandestine networks and strategic coalitions between student activist groups, labor unions and community-based organizations including churches were demanded by organizing in the midst of civil war. They developed specific tactics such as the use of safe houses for planning meetings or organizing soccer tournaments to mobilize communities" (ibid., 94). Moreover, Sarmiento found that for political education and organizing trainings many Salvadoran-origin organizers relied on the Popular Education methods of Paulo Freire, which they had been taught by the FMLN during the civil war. This is a point also highlighted in an earlier contribution by Bacon (2004, 264-68), in which he finds that liberation theory played an important role in the aforementioned meatpacking organizing campaign: in this case, a Guatemalan-origin seminarian who had been strongly involved in the radical movement organizing poor peasants in the Guatemalan civil war and who was familiar with Paulo Freire's theories built on the extensive networks in the Latino community for organizing outside the plant, and the church became crucial in the organizing efforts as a safe place where Latino workers met every Sunday.

Similarly, despite not being concerned with a traditional union but rather a worker center, Theodore (2010) traces how the worldviews of Latin American leaders of the National Day Laborers Organizing Network are shaped by processes of Popular Education that they had learned through their involvement particularly in the Salvadoran civil war. Freire's education methods constitute "a common repertoire of practice, and a common language" (ibid., 18), a "public culture" (ibid., in reference to Tarrow). From these, they took forms of organizing, collective action and leadership development and adapted them to the task of day laborer organizing in the US. Through assembling elements from different strategies, they develop approaches to organizing that respect the difference and situatedness of workers coming from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. Among others, they use "techniques that echo the participatory theatrical performances" (ibid., 17) used by Popular Education to "enable workers to see themselves as the authors of their own histories" (ibid.) and develop leadership, "dirigentes populares" (ibid.).

Finally, Fitzgerald's (2004) study on a South Californian union local and the strong impact that its members' ties to their Mexican hometowns has on its politics is directly related to the topic of this thesis, as it focuses on migrant union members' transnational ties and identities. The local has a strongly migrant character and its leaderships promotes a dual nationalism combining an identification with "our city of South City" (ibid., 234) and the Mexican nation.

Migrant members' background plays a decisive role in inner-union politics: during elections for office, "(h)ometown and kinship networks figure prominently in the selection of union electoral candidates" (ibid., 238), as candidates' ties to the hometowns from which the largest groups of members originate – particularly the community of Guadalupe in the Mexican state of Michoacán – are crucial. Support for candidates in election campaigns is mobilized based on hometown ties and candidates' campaigns include visits to these hometowns. Furthermore, union staff are usually selected based on their hometown networks and thus their ability to attract votes for officers, while for US-born members and those without ties to hometowns it is difficult to get a job (ibid., 239-42).

In sum, a number of contributions have touched upon (although very few have analyzed) the impact of migrants' social remittances and cultural skills on unions. While most of them focus on migrants' receptivity for unions, a few indicate the relevance that migrants' social remittances and cultural skills could also have for unions' policies. However, the role that migrants' transnational relationships, networks and identities play in unions has almost entirely lacked explicit focus in labor movement research.

2.3.1.2 (Transnational) migration in international labor solidarity research

Empirically, migrants and their transnational connections have historically often played a role in labor movements' international relationships, and they continue to do so today. Nevertheless, even less so than how migration affects unions in general have the ways in which migration – and particularly migrants' transnational practices, identities and embeddedness in transnational social spaces – influences unions' international solidarity work been a topic of research. Greer et al. note this gap: "What (the literature dealing with unions' organizing of migrants) ha(s) in common is that transnationalism plays no role in analysis of union behaviour. Migration is principally understood in terms of the concerns of host country unions and workers or local ethnic communities" (2011, 5). While international labor solidarity is much discussed in labor research, migration is hardly taken into account in these discussions. References to it mostly remain on a superficial level with mentions of such instances rarely extending beyond a couple of sentences or a paragraph, and do not reach a detailed analysis of the role that migrants and their transnational connections might play in unions' cross-border relationships (e.g. Bacon 2016, 168; Stillerman 2003, 595).⁸⁰

A few contributions deal with the historical linkages of migrants in international solidarity. Migrants have often been involved in supporting social and political

⁸⁰ In dealing with the potential that migration holds for cross-border solidarity, Bacon (2016, 168) states: "What would happen if Mexican unions began sending organizers or active workers north into the United States? In reality, active members are already making that move, and have been for a long time. Yet there is no organized way of looking at this."

movements in their countries of origin. For instance, at the beginning of the 20th century European migrants in the US supported liberation movements in Europe, and Mexican migrants in the US supported the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Flores 2011; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999; Weber 1998).

Furthermore, many cases also exist in history in which migrants have been involved with labor movements “back home”. Flores (2011, 347) mentions how US sections of the Mexican Popular Front – a transnational organization tied to the Mexican Communist Party – began to connect Mexican workers in Chicago to the labor movement in Mexico in 1937. They invited representatives of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) to speak at their organization in Chicago. Weber (1998, 219f., 223f.) stresses the transnational connections of Mexican migrant workers in the US in the early-19th century, many of which had experienced labor conflicts on both sides of the border, or even fought in the Mexican Revolution. The strong links to the other side of the border that many of them led to a “cross-pollination of social conflicts carried by transnational migrant workers” (ibid., 220) who brought along experiences of struggles and conflicts from the other side between the Durango cotton-growing district and the San Joaquin Valley in California. An interesting case is examined by Remes (2011), who describes the transnational lives, communities and identities of Toronto-based printers who were members of the International Typographical Union that encompassed locals in the US and Canada. Given the common North American labor market for printers in the second half of the 19th century, printers constantly traveled to other cities including US cities like Chicago, New York and Detroit. This exchange led to a “transnational community of printers in different cities” (ibid., 389), which prompted them to support – among others – printers in US cities with generous donations to strike and relief funds. While this is not a case of cross-border union cooperation as the printers were all members of the same transnational union (and still today, many US unions also represent workers in Canada), it illustrates the power of affective and community ties through migration. Through supporting others, printers improved conditions in their own labor market. “In matters relating to the continental labor market, the Canadianness of Toronto and its printers seemed barely to matter; instead, the TTU (Toronto Typographical Union – author’s note) emphasized similarities with the United States” (ibid., 392). Another interesting example of transnational connections of migrants with worker movements “back home” is the Mexican Flores Magón brothers who founded the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) in US exile, which stressed the “international community of workers” (Weber 1998, 222) and subsequently organized workers on both sides of the border (ibid.). Similarly, Mexican migrants working in US mines (as well as US migrants working in mines in Mexico) played a role in the IWW’s labor organizing in both countries, as La Botz (2013) mentions. However, few of these contributions analyze the role that migrants played within destination-country unions regarding their international work in further detail. Hence, while several cases of migrants’ transnational

connections to labor movements “back home” are mentioned in historical accounts, how migration influenced unions’ international work is rarely explicitly analyzed.

Research focusing on cross-border union collaboration as a way of dealing with migration

The influence that contemporary migration – and the transnational connections, practices and identities that migrants maintain – have on international solidarity constitutes an even larger gap in research dealing with international labor solidarity. Most current research linking labor transnationalism to the contemporary growth of transnational migration does not analyze the role that the latter plays in unions’ international work. Instead, this research deals with migration as a focus for cross-border union cooperation: it focuses on destination and origin-country unions’ attempts at organizing migrants and protecting their rights, i.e. on unions’ (transnational) policies *towards* migrants, discussing “migration as a problem of labour transnationalism” (Greer et al. 2011, 4), i.e. migration as a focus of unions’ cross-border cooperation (see also David 2002; Center for Migrant Advocacy Philippines 2005; Schwenken 2006, 301ff). Among others, it has been discussed whether and how labor unions can organize migrant workers transnationally to protect their rights, as I will highlight in sketching out some of the most important recent contributions.

Holgate’s (2011) dealing with the issue is largely limited to an appeal to cooperate for the protection of migrants’ rights: after discussing challenges that labor movements face around the world in organizing migrant workers and protecting their rights, Holgate calls for stronger transnational cooperation: “while Global Union Federations may have formulated good policy on the unionization of migrant workers, these can be difficult to translate into action at a national or local level without the necessary resources or the ability of unions to work together *transnationally* or across structures” (ibid., 197, emphasis in original). Greer et al. (2011) analyze the European Migrant Workers Union (EMWU), an attempt by the German construction union IG BAU to organize migrant workers in the European construction sector in a transnational union organization in 2004, which eventually failed as it did not succeed in organizing enough members. The authors propose the concept of “transnational industrial citizenship” and call for a “transnational migrant worker organizing” (ibid., 3), particularly in the case of hyper-mobile workers such as those in the European construction industry. Similarly, Gordon (2009) advocates for transnational cooperation and a “transnational labor citizenship” to protect migrant workers’ rights. With the concept of transnational labor citizenship, she intends to “link worker self-organization with the enforcement of basic workplace rights in a way that crosses borders just as workers do” (ibid., 5), arguing that this requires cross-border structures and relationships between unions and NGOs defending migrants’ rights. While she observes that US unions have made great progress in

organizing migrant workers – albeit without collaborating with unions in migrants’ countries of origin – she discusses some attempts at cooperating transnationally to promote a mobile labor citizenship in different countries: among others, she mentions the role of the GUFs, the case of bilateral partnerships between unions in origin and destination countries such as construction unions in the US and Italy, the case of origin countries’ labor federations committed to cross-border solidarity and migrant organizing such as in the case of Nepal and Korea, as well as the case of the US-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which has established a presence in Mexico to organize farm workers where they are recruited (ibid., 30-43). After discussing some of the challenges that these attempts face, Gordon calls for a continuing and intensification of such work (for further accounts of approaches of unions at binational cross-border cooperation, as well as GUFs’ attempts around migrant workers’ rights, see Center for Migrant Advocacy Philippines 2005; David 2002). Calderón and Domínguez (2008) stress the need for transnational labor regulation in the Mexico-US area in view of Mexican labor migration. They discuss unions’ way of dealing with the migration topic domestically in both Mexico and the US, as well as transnationally. After laying out that little is done on the part of Mexican unions in terms of developing strategies to protect migrant workers (except a few small unions like the FAT and the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores, UNT) and providing a picture of US unions’ efforts at organizing Mexican migrant workers, they sketch the very limited attempts at establishing links across borders, such as agreements between the UNT and the AFL-CIO and between the Red de Mujeres Sindicalistas and the FLOC. They conclude by stating that besides isolated concrete activities, no cross-border cooperation between US and Mexican unions has been developed on the migration issue to date, while most of it remains on the rhetoric level of declarations and agreements, with little concrete action (for a similar argument and an analysis of the historical, political and institutional obstacles impeding a cross-border solidarity between unions in Mexico and the US on migration issues in the context of persistent Mexican migration and deepening North American economic integration, see Watts 2003). Some authors analyze the aforementioned FLOC, which is an interesting case in point as it is the only organization to date that – while based in the US – uses a transnational approach to proactively organize guest workers *in Mexico* coming to farms in the US *before* they migrate, in which “the economic and social ties between migrant workers and their home communities have been a source of information flows regarding agricultural decline at home and poor working conditions abroad, fueling cross-national labor organizing” (Stillerman 2003, 587; see also Ness 2011).⁸¹

⁸¹ A somewhat similar, but not exclusively labor organization that some contributions (e.g. Bacon 2016, 170; Stillerman 2003, 588; Brooks and Fox 2002, 51) deal with is the FIOB mentioned in chapter 2.2, which has offices in several Californian cities and Oaxaca, and

In addition to these contributions, research mentions cases in which unions have cooperated practically across borders for the organization of migrant workers, e.g. by sending organizers (several historical cases are mentioned in Bacon 2011).⁸² For instance, Cohen and Early (1999, 153) mention the collaboration between the US Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the Mexican Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana (STRM), in which STRM organizers supported a CWA campaign in Los Angeles among Spanish-speaking truckers. In his analysis of the emergence of labor transnationalism in the context of NAFTA, Stillerman (2003, 585ff, 595) touches upon (but does not go into detail on) the support of the Mexican union Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT) for both the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) in organizing campaigns among Latino migrant workers in Milwaukee and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in organizing Mexican-origin apple pickers in the State of Washington. Hathaway (2000, 245, see also 22) states that the workers “raised in a culture and repression and fearful of deportation – were thinking in a context that (a FAT organizer) felt the US-born organizers could not fully appreciate”. While such instances of cooperation focus on the organization of migrant workers, they can evidently also strengthen cross-border solidarity more generally and promote an involvement – and “using” – of migrant workers in US unions for the promotion of international activities. In this vein, Stillerman concludes by arguing that migration creates opportunities for cross-border labor cooperation (2003, 595):

The UE and IBT acknowledge that Mexican organizers have better insight into the cultural attitudes, concerns, fears, and political experiences of Latino migrant workers. Moreover, these campaigns demonstrate how some unions are beginning to see the organizational advantages created by increasing immigration of working people to the United States, particularly from Mexico and Latin America, during the past two decades. These migrants’ ties to their home countries as well as these nations’ proximity to the United States create new opportunities for cross-national organizing.

Research gaps: the limited focus on migration’s impact on international labor solidarity

As previously seen, while some research exists connecting migration and international labor solidarity, almost all of these contributions do so with a focus on transnational cooperation *around* – i.e. as a means to deal with – migration. As laid out above, most research on the labor union-migration nexus focuses on unions’ *dealing with* the phenomenon of migration or migrants, asking for

works on a variety of issues such as immigrant and indigenous, but also labor rights, occupational health and safety, cultural preservation and economic development in Oaxaca, and on which several authors have worked .

⁸² A historical example is given by Weber (1998, 221): as early as 1920, the Mexican Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos (CROM) founded the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (CUCOM) to organize Mexican workers in the US.

possibilities to protect their rights, sometimes including a call for (and – in some exceptions – a focus on) international union collaboration. However, almost none of it takes the opposite perspective, asking how migration possibly *influences* – or can even help to promote – international labor collaboration. Most contributions doing so do not go beyond appeals to take migration into account as a possibly crucial factor for labor’s prospects of international solidarity (e.g. Brecher et al. 2006, 16; Stillerman 2003, 595).

Only a few instances of migrants empirically playing a role in unions’ international work are mentioned in the literature. Among others, Gordon (2009, 28, footnote 99) mentions that in their strategic alliance with the Mexican FAT, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) have on several occasions built on Mexican-origin UE organizers in supporting the FAT’s organizing campaigns. Similarly, Hathaway (2000, 240) mentions in passing that migrants played a role in the relationships between the Arizona United Steelworkers (USW) and the Mexican Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos, Siderúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMSSRM, “Los Mineros”) in the 1990s: as a strike in the Mexican mining town Cananea broke out in 1998, the Mineros delegation to Tucson met refugees from previous strikes in 1978 and 1989, as well as Jerry Acosta – the AFL-CIO’s director of mobilization in Arizona – who had cousins working at the Cananea mine. Together, they organized support and donations to the striking Cananea families. In the aforementioned contribution on the collaboration between the CWA and STRM, Cohen and Early (1999, 153) state that US organizers who “were bilingual and had experience in organizing immigrant workers from Mexico and Central and South America” (ibid.) conducted trainings with the STRM. These are likely to have been of migrant origin, although the authors do not enter into detail on this question.

Among the very few authors more intensively connecting cross-border solidarity and migration is journalist and photographer David Bacon, whom I mentioned above and who is the author of the quote at the beginning of this thesis. He has repeatedly focused on migrants’ transnational connections and stressed their potential for US-Mexican cross-border union relationships, both historically and today (2016; 2011). Furthermore, he has highlighted the concern that some Mexican-origin US union leaders such as former SEIU Vice President Eliseo Medina maintain for political affairs in Mexico. “Today in union meetings in many big U.S. cities, it’s not that unusual, especially in unions where Latinos make up a significant section of the membership, to hear discussions of the Zapatistas, language discrimination in schools, or Mexican election politics, right along with organizing drives and civil disobedience in defense of labor rights” (Bacon 2004, 284). In a short historical overview (Bacon 2011), he names several examples of the long history of cross-border solidarity between Mexican and US workers, particularly in the border region, where many of the US workers were of Mexican origin and had family ties to Mexico. Already in

the 1930s and 1940s, Mexican unions supported US unions based on their solidarity with their Mexican and Mexican-American “paisanos”, while Mexican unions conducted organizing activities in Texas and cooperated with their US counterparts to organize Mexican workers in the US. While the strong solidarity activities were severely hit by the Cold War, they did not entirely stop and some instances of cooperation between miners and maquiladora workers persisted. For instance, during a strike in the Mexican mine of Cananea in 1961, a Mexican-origin leader of the US Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers led a delegation bringing food and money to the striking Mexican workers, and in the following year returned the favor when the US union went on strike (Bacon 2004, 272).

While these experiences are little known, he insists that they should not be forgotten but rather constitute a basis for contemporary efforts at building cross-border solidarity: “Those early efforts met success by concentrating on the key role of Mexican workers in the U.S. Today’s circumstances are different, but the migration of people is just as important to solidarity today as it was eighty years ago” (ibid.). However, in contrast to the past, he states that most Mexican unions do not see this movement of people as a “resource they can or should organize” (ibid.). Moreover, Bacon mentions an increasing interest among US farmworker unions (many of whose members are migrants) in activity in Mexico and their support for striking farmworkers in Baja California, as well as the partnership between the United Farm Workers (UFW) and the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales, FIOB) – an organization of Oaxacan communities in both Mexico and the US – and the support of both organizations for the farmworkers’ strike in the San Quintín Valley in Baja California (albeit without discussing the role that migrants in UFW may have played in it) (Bacon 2016, 170ff, see also Bacon 2011). Moreover, he reports on the beginning solidarity efforts between US and Mexican teachers, in which “the vast number of Mexican students in California schools, and with many immigrants themselves now working as teachers, the basis is growing for much closer relationships” (ibid., 173). While strongly emphasizing the role that migration could play for international labor solidarity and mentioning many historical, as well as some contemporary examples of it, the author has not analyzed in detail what this role looks like, as well as whether and in what ways migrants and their transnational connections might help to overcome obstacles to international solidarity.

An interesting study on the relevance of migrants’ transnational ties and identities for labor unions regarding their international activities – coming closest to the research subject pursued in this thesis – is Fitzgerald’s (2004) aforementioned study on a California union local. The author finds that cross-border ties to migrants’ Mexican hometowns not only constitute an important element in the local’s internal politics; moreover, they also have implications for cross-border activities. A large number of clubs from members’ different

hometowns regularly conduct dances and fundraising events at the union hall for projects in their respective communities. In the run-up to the elections of officers, candidates donate for such projects and support fundraisers. “The three top Local leaders view cross-border politics and dual nationalist commitments as complementary to their political project in the United States” (ibid., 236), Fitzgerald states. Interestingly, the activities directed at Mexico split up into projects and relationships based on loyalties to different hometowns – as these constitute important power bases – rather than taking the form of joint activities: “A major barrier to transborder collective action on the national level is the salience of subnational hometown identities and the material rewards offered through hometown networks” (ibid., 237) and Fitzgerald concludes that “(e)veryday expressions of American and Mexican nationalisms are manifest while discourses of labour transnationalism are absent. While the union is engaged in activities crossing the *state* border (...), the union’s activities reinforce rather than transcend the *national*” (ibid., 234, emphasis in original). Hence, while the study does not find a considerable international solidarity work arising out of migrants’ transnational ties, it shows the relevance of these connections and identities for local unions’ politics and gives hints at how they can influence their international work.

Nevertheless, besides the effects that migrant union members’ social ties to their hometowns have on local unions’ activities pointed out in this study, questions concerning the role that the increasing incorporation of transnational migrants and their embeddedness in webs of transnational social contacts may play in unions’ solidarity work – and particularly in overcoming solidarity’s obstacles – remain to be answered. Moreover, nor have migrants’ emotional ties and continued concern for their countries of origin been a topic of study in international labor solidarity research. Furthermore, the influence that migrants’ worldviews and previous experiences might have on host country unions’ approaches to and engagement in international solidarity has not been analyzed.

One possible reason for the little academic interest in the role of transnational migration in international labor solidarity is that migrants’ countries of origin are not usually considered relevant in the context of international labor solidarity: the wealth of international labor solidarity is not between migration origin and destination countries, as most migrant union members in destination countries originate from countries of the Global South. As many destination-country unions see poor and economically small countries as strategically irrelevant, most of their scarce resources for international solidarity are directed at other partners that are considered more important. As these are generally the large and powerful unions in transnational corporations’ home countries, most efforts at establishing international alliances target other destination-country unions.

However, this reasoning not only ignores that this has never been true across the board, but it also misses the increasing relevance of North-South solidarity in a

context of an ever-more global capital: as TNCs relocate production to low-wage countries (or the other way round)⁸³, particularly (but not only) in industries with little fixed capital, industrialized country unions have a growing interest in collaborating with unions in those countries. This is the case – among others – with the important anti-sweatshop campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, in which several US unions collaborated with labor unions in Central American countries like El Salvador and Honduras (Anner 2011; Bacon 2004), but also clearly in many industries in such contexts as the NAFTA region (Kay 2011). Within campaigns and networks such as the Clean Clothes Campaign and the TIE⁸⁴-promoted ExChains network, powerful unions like the German services union ver.di today collaborate with unions in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India.

Furthermore, not all migrants are from “Third World” countries strategically irrelevant to destination-country unions; for instance, by far the largest number of migrants in the US is made up by Mexicans, in Germany, by Turks, and in Portugal, by Brazilians. With these origin countries being important emerging economies with high levels of investments by transnational corporations, industrialized country unions indeed have an interest in collaborating with unions there and many cases of alliances between unions in destination and origin countries exist.⁸⁵

Thus, significant solidarity between migration destination and origin countries exists, as many migration origin countries are increasingly relevant for destination-country unions; in fact, even where it does not exist, migrants’ transnational linkages can constitute the basis for the promotion of solidarity relationships based on other than exclusively economic-strategic considerations, as I will show in this thesis.

2.3.2 Research gaps in transnational migration research: research linking transnational migration and labor unions

Whereas migration and migrants (although their transnational dimension only to a very limited degree) have played some role in labor movement research, in the realm of transnational migration research it is difficult to find a specific focus on labor unions, let alone international labor solidarity. The two strands within transnationalism studies more generally that come closest to dealing with the

⁸³ Promoted by the growing migrant population in destination countries, large origin-country companies also expand to destination countries, as is the case – for instance – with the Mexican grocery store chain “El Super”, which has opened several stores in the US and induced the US union UFCW to seek solidarity with Mexican unions (see Bacon 2016, 159).

⁸⁴ Transnationals Information Exchange is a network founded in 1978 by union activists in different countries with the intention to “encourage, organise, and facilitate international consciousness and cooperation among workers and their organisations in various parts of the world” (http://tie-germany.org/who_we_are/index.html).

⁸⁵ For instance, between UE in the US and the FAT in Mexico; the USW in the US and the Mexican “Los Mineros”; between the German ver.di and the Turkish Motor Vehicle and Transport Union TÜMTIS.

connection between transnational migration and labor unions – sometimes explicitly touching upon unions – are, on the one hand, contributions dealing with organizations and social movements and their transnationalization in the context of transnational migration, and, on the other, research focusing on work, employment regimes and working conditions in this context.

2.3.2.1 Organizations and social movements in transnational migration research

In the realm of transnationalism studies, not only has the transnationalization of migration been researched, but also extensive research on transnational organizations and social movements exists. As mentioned in chapter 2, organizations and social movements are affected by the same transnationalization processes as migration. In the last two decades, a wealth of research has dealt with the development of TNCs, NGOs, social movements and social movement organizations such as humanitarian NGOs, as well as the feminist, environmental, indigenous and anti-globalization movements. However, as I will lay out in this section, this research rarely links transnational organizations and social movements to migration and – where it does – the organizations and movements that it focuses on usually do not comprise labor unions.

While an extensive strand of literature exists analyzing transnational corporations (see Dunning 1992; Ietto-Gillies 2012; Mense-Petermann and Wagner 2006), for the purpose of this thesis dealing with labor unions – that constitute both organizations and social movements – the research on non-profit organizations and social movements and their transnationalization is more relevant. This strand of research has documented the development of transnational social movements and social movement organizations fueled – among others – by modern communication technologies and the framing of collective identities mobilizing activists around the world by transnational social movements (e.g. Flesher Fominaya 2014; Herkenrath 2011; Della Porta et al. 2009; Beckert et al. 2004; Liese 2000; see also the volume edited by Pries 2008c). A series of contributions has dealt with the development and activities of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) in areas such as the feminist, human rights, anti-globalization and indigenous movements (e.g. Keck and Sikkink 1998; see also Carpenter 2007; Domínguez 2002; Trubek et al. 2000; Sage 1999). Important social movement scholars like Tarrow (2006) have intensively dealt with the development of transnational social movements in realms such as environmental, global justice and human rights movements (see also Waterman 1998), as well as transnational social movement organizations⁸⁶ such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Oxfam (Smith et al. 1994; see also Doherty and Doyle 2013a; Dijkzeul 2008). Other authors have dealt with

⁸⁶ Smith et al. (1994, 124) define TSMOs as NGOs that “target international institutions and attempt to affect international policies in their ultimate aims of influencing state behavior”.

feminist movements and showed – among others – that promoted by internet communication as well as transnational organizations such as the UN, feminist groups such as Code Pink, Women in Black or Women for Women International have established transnational solidarity networks through increased interaction on global conferences and delegations (Ferguson 2011; Gould 2007; see also Lenz 2008). These scholars have shown that the growing connections across borders have – as Tarrow puts it – “produced a stratum of people who, in their lives and their activities, are able to combine the resources and opportunities of their own societies into transnational networks” (Tarrow 2006, 43). In this line of thinking, Smith notes that “we increasingly find that national groups are participating in more informal transnational networks or coalitions as they discover that achieving their organizational aims requires engagement at the transnational level” (2011, 320).

Hence, a broad body of research has noticed that the context of global economic integration, modern telecommunication technologies, etc. promoting transnational migration has also led to the development of transnational social movements and organizations. However, this research is seldom linked to migration. The research strands analyzing manifestations of transnationalism in different realms remain largely unconnected (Schwenken 2006, 23): Although – by and large – both social movements and organizations on the one hand and migration on the other have been major topics in research dealing with transnationalization processes, these bodies of literature are seldom analyzed conjunctively, and transnational migration scholars rarely take migration’s interrelationships with transnational organizations and social movements into focus.

Exceptions include research explicitly dealing with migrants’ self-organization, migrant organizations and the transnational political, religious and economic practices that migrants engage in that I described in the previous chapter: in contributions analyzing migrants’ (transnational) advocacy and mobilization in their struggle for improved working conditions, pay, legal status, respect, or a political voice, transnational mobilizations and networks that migrants build on constitute a relevant factor (Francisco and Rodriguez 2014; Francisco 2014; Schwenken 2003; superficially: Ally 2005; for an important contribution linking transnational migration and social movement research, and applying concepts from social movement research such as framing and resource mobilization to transnational migration, see Schwenken 2006). Evidently, the research dealing with transnational migrant organizations focuses on organizations in the context of transnational migration. Moreover, studies focusing on exiles’ and refugees’ involvement in their home countries’ political organizations social movements such as liberation struggles and political parties, as well as that on migrants’ engagement in the establishment of transnational businesses links migration and transnational organizations and movements (e.g. Zhou 2004; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). However, the research object of this strand of

literature generally is – as laid out in chapter 2.2 – migrants’ transnational practices and self-organizations, and the impact that these have on sending countries’ economies, politics and culture, rather than the impact that migrants’ transnational practices have on existing organizations and their transnationalization.

However, some literature explicitly analyzes how transnational migration influences organizations and social movements and their transnationalization. The volume edited by Faist (2000a) mentioned in the introduction is an important contribution linking transnational migration to organizations. It analyzes the development of cultural, economic and political transnational spaces arising out of transnational migration between Turkey and Germany. Rejecting the term “transnational” and proposing the term “transstate spaces” (see footnote 48), the volume explicitly not only focuses on transnational relationships of individuals and groups, but also of state policy and organizations (Faist 2000b, 49). Faist (2000b) stresses that transnational issue networks and activist networks can either build on long-existing migration regimes or contribute to the emergence of migration regimes (*ibid.*, 21f.), and that transnational religious communities and churches are often built on migrant communities spread around the world (*ibid.*, 23, 27). The development of transstate communities and organizations that are based on religious and political projects usually requires – among others – strong and enduring ties of migrants to both their home and host countries (*ibid.*, 40f.). In the volume, Mertens (2000) shows how the Kurdish diaspora living in Europe – particularly in Germany – constitutes a fundamental element in the mobilization of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party PKK. Through migration, this organization has considerably transnationalized as it was able to mobilize Kurdish migrants for its cause and build a transstate political organizational network. The PKK bypassed the unfavorable mobilization conditions in Turkey by building on a functioning communication infrastructure in Germany that led to Kurdish migrants in Germany lobby both Turkey and the German state to influence Turkish politics. Mertens finds that the development of a Kurdish collective identity has had effects on both the destination and the origin country, and “the development of organizations cannot be located solely in Turkey or Germany, but that (developments) (...) are mutually dependent and influence each other across state border” (*ibid.*, 160, own translation). In fact, the author states that without chain migration and the transfer of social and cultural capital to Germany, the mobilization of Kurds in Germany, Turkey and Europe by the PKK would not have taken place as it did (*ibid.*, 161). In a similar vein, Trautner (2000) links transnational migration and organizations in his research on the role that Islamic organizations play as carriers of the transstate space between Germany and Turkey. He shows how the German branch of the Islamic organization Milli Görüs has developed – to some degree – away from its mother organization in Turkey, as it used the relative freedom of religious and

political activity in Germany as compared to Turkey for a “relocation of political development” (“Verlagerung politischer Entfaltung”, *ibid.*, 64) to Germany.

Hence, some transnational migration scholars have dealt with organizations and social movements. However, the focus mostly lies on organizations and movements in such realms as religion, politics, education, culture or economics (see also Adick 2008; Heinemann and Kamicili 2000), whereas labor unions are much less a focus. Those studies touching upon unions mostly discuss them as an actor in the struggle for migrants’ rights, but do not analyze the impact that transnational migration has on them. For instance, Schwenken (2006, 279ff), who explicitly links transnational migration and social movement research in her analysis of migrant domestic workers’ self-organization and struggles for rights in the EU, discusses the relationship of the RESPECT network – a network comprising both migrants and pro-migrant NGOs – with labor unions, asking whether unions play a facilitating or rather a hindering role in promoting undocumented migrants’ interests. She finds that the question cannot unequivocally be answered: while some unions played an important role as an ally in migrants’ struggle – particularly the British TGWU – in providing resources political contacts, and lobby work, many other unions did not significantly engage in domestic workers’ struggles, which Schwenken argues to be a consequence of unions’ ambivalent approach towards undocumented migrant workers that oscillates between “disinterest, defense, opening” (“Desinteresse, Abwehr, Öffnung”, *ibid.*, 304).

In sum, while some studies deal with the role of labor unions in (undocumented) migrants’ struggle for their rights and dignified working conditions – i.e. as an actor in migrants’ movements and organization – how transnational migration processes *affect* labor unions, let alone international labor solidarity, has not held strong interest for transnational migration scholars.

2.3.2.2 Work and employment in transnational migration research

The second strand of transnational migration research relevant for the present study is located at the interface of transnational migration and work. Several lines of research linking migration to work and employment issues exist. First, in traditional (im-)migration research, the incorporation of migrants into host societies and their institutions have been an important topic and many studies have not only dealt with the incorporation of migrants into educational and welfare systems and their political or entrepreneurial activities (Bade and Bommers 2004; Freeman 2004; Gesemann 2001), but also into national labor markets and unions, as well as migrants’ employment trajectories and their participation in workplace-based representation (Samers 2010; Siminovskaia 2008; McGovern 2007; Sauer 2007; Bauder 2006; Kogan 2006; Hinken 2004; Öztürk 2002; Portes 1981). The focus of this “classic” strand of literature mainly lies on these institutions as a means for migrants’ integration into the host society.

Second, migration research has a strong focus on work in the sense that it views work as lying at the roots of migration processes: research has long conceptualized migration solely as labor migration and migrants largely as workers who were only expected to remain in the destination country as long as their labor force was needed. The reasons explaining migration movements (apart from natural disasters, wars, etc. that cause refugee movements) were analyzed in terms of in economic push and pull factors and mostly reduced to labor shortages in destination countries and oversupply in origin countries, as well as the resulting wage differentials, i.e. the sole motivation to migrate was often seen to be the search for work (Borjas 1999; Todaro 1980; Ravenstein 1885). Furthermore, critical scholars such as Sassen (1988) discussed migration as a global labor supply system that is produced by the growing internationalization of production and investment. Linking migration to economic globalization, Sassen highlights how the internationalization of capital leads to the disruption of traditional work structures, the feminization of labor and a westernization in migration origin countries, and how this – in interaction with an increasing demand for labor in destination countries and cities – produces increased migration movements.

Third – and most importantly in the context of this thesis – work is also a relevant topic to some degree in contemporary transnational migration research. In fact, the economic globalization processes highlighted by Sassen are also seen to be at the roots of transnational migration, as the insecurity of livelihoods is understood to force migrants and those they leave behind to rely on transnational networks as safety nets (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 5f.; Basch et al. 2005/1994). Nevertheless, the topic of working conditions and employment regimes – let alone labor unions – is not a major focus in most transnational migration research, although some exceptions exist: particularly the research that developed out of feminist and gender relations studies and that focuses on migrant domestic work and the development of global care chains explicitly takes employment issues and working conditions into focus. In discussing this female migration explicitly as labor migration, it starts from the acknowledgment that domestic work has developed into a global labor market that is taken care of – to an important degree – by female migrant workers who are described as “servants of globalization” (Salazar Parreñas 2001b; see also Encinas-Franco 2010; Scheiwe and Krawietz 2010b; Lutz 2007a; Ally 2005; Truong 1996). The workers in this domestic labor market are “increasingly sourced from outside” (Yeates 2005, 4) Global North countries like the US or those of the EU (Hochschild 2000b; see also Lutz and Palenga 2011). The migration of female care workers is an element of the “buoyant global trade in domestic care services” (Yeates 2005, 4) and the other side of the coin of the rapid growth of the care services sector in such countries as the US, particularly health care and cleaning (ibid.).

Among others, the topics discussed in this research include the gendered employment regimes in transnational domestic work and migrants' areas of activity and working conditions, including the precariousness of their work, the working hours, pay and relationship to the employers; the legal regulation and the policies of destination and origin countries regarding migrant domestic work, and migration and employment regimes shaping the character of migrant care work, as well as the other way round, i.e. how migration affects labor regulation in this domain; and the reproduction of power and financial asymmetries that the outsourcing of reproductive work by better-off women (who are mostly white and live in the Global North) to female migrant workers entails (Da Roit and Weicht 2013; Husmann 2010; Karakayali 2010; Rodriguez 2010; Scheiwe 2010; von Kondratowitz 2010; Lutz 2008). A further focus is what Salazar Parreñas (2001a) has called "mothering from a distance" and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) "transnational motherhood", i.e. the relationship that migrant mothers maintain with the children who they leave "at home", the emotional implications this has and the coping strategies that mothers and children – and the rest of the families – employ for dealing with it (see also Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2003; Isaksen et al. 2008).

Some of these topics are also important foci in the debate on care chains, which explicitly focuses on the transnational dimension of migrant domestic work. With the term "global care chain", Hochschild (2000a) described the chain reaction that the employment of migrant domestic workers in destination countries provokes, as their departure often goes along with the employment of further migrant workers in the households that migrating domestic workers leave behind: women who migrate to work in a household in another country often leave behind children or elderly relatives somebody has to take care of, reflecting a care gap that is often filled by other female migrants. Important topics in this strand of research are thus the transnationalization of reproductive and emotional work, including the transnational ties to children and other relatives and the transnational organization of education and mothering in these transnational households (see also Isaksen et al. 2008; Yeates 2012).

Hence, this strand of transnational migration research has in fact dealt with working conditions, work organization, regulation and their transnational dimensions, as well as the implications that migration has on them. However, this remains largely unconnected to labor unions: while on the one hand explicitly focusing on the *transnational* dimension of domestic workers' migration – particularly the transnationalization of care – and on the other hand tackling migration as *labor* migration, the debate on transnational domestic work and global care chains generally does not focus on labor unions or even international labor solidarity.

However, one strand of research on migrant domestic workers does focus on unions: similar to the literature linking unions to migration laid out above, scholars focusing on migrant domestic workers have dealt with migrants' (self-

organization and with the role that unions play in the organization of migrant domestic workers and their defense of their rights, or their failure to do so. In line with the research on unions' approach to migrant-organizing, studies such as those by Kraamwinkel (2016), Jiang and Korczynski (2016), Marchetti (2012), Boris and Nadasen (2008) and Ally (2005) discuss the upheaval in (migrant) domestic worker organizing that has taken place in around the world in recent years. Many of them observe a self-organization, or organization with other organizations and movements – an “associational model” (Ally 2005) – rather than a strong role of labor unions in domestic workers' organization. Ally (2005, 195) speaks of “a resurgence of domestic worker organizing, but not necessarily always domestic worker unionizing”, but also documents an increasing engagement in domestic worker organizing by many European and American unions. In fact, in recent years labor unions and other NGOs have put the topic of domestic workers on the agenda, leading to – among others – the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention (C189) by the International Labor Organization in 2011, which entered into force in 2013 (ILO 2011; see also Scheiwe and Krawietz 2010b). However, this research strand is seldom explicitly placed in the context of *transnational* migration, and migration's transnational features generally do not play a role: while much of the research explicitly views domestic work as a highly migrant economic sector, in most of the contributions the focus lies on migrants' organization within national boundaries, while their transnational connections and the transnational repercussions this migration brings is not a topic, despite the strongly transnational character that much of this migration has. Moreover, it does not deal with the impact that this migration has on unions and their activities (e.g. Boris and Nadasen 2008; Jiang and Korczynski 2016; Marchetti 2012; Ally 2005; for a partial exception, as mentioned above, see Schwenken 2006).

Summing up, although transnational migration scholars have dealt – to some degree – with both work and working conditions on the one hand and organizations and social movements on the other, labor unions have not constituted a relevant focus in the realm of transnational migration research, despite being important organizations shaping not only working conditions but also influencing the economic, social and political structure of most societies. Indeed, particularly how transnational migration affects labor unions – or even international labor solidarity – remains an open question that this present research will address.

3 Methodological approach and field research

3.1 Methodological approach

3.1.1 Generation of theory out of empirical data and the role of theory in exploratory research

Exploration and inductive reasoning are important in science (...) because deductive logic alone can never uncover new ideas and observations. (Stebbins 2001, 8)

3.1.1.1 Exploratory research: developing theory out of empirical data

Given the lack of literature on the relationship between international labor solidarity and transnational migration, the research was exploratory: the goal of the investigation was to gain new insights into the role that transnational migration plays in unions' international solidarity work, rather than testing hypotheses derived in advance from theory. Social science exploration – as opposed to confirmatory research – is defined by Stebbins (2001, 3) as “a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life.” Researchers explore “when they have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they want to examine but nevertheless have reason to believe it contains elements worth discovering” (Stebbins 2001, 6; see also Yin 2009, 28f.). This is what the present research project is about: having almost no scientific knowledge about the process in question – the influence of transnational migration on unions' international solidarity work – it explores this process as from the existing literature on transnational migration and that on international labor solidarity I have reason to believe that “it contains elements worth discovering”.

Conducting exploratory research does not mean that no theoretically relevant findings are produced: rather than understanding exploratory research merely as an initial research phase that sets the ground for further theory-developing or -testing research, I understand exploratory research as being inherently linked to the generation of theory, although this theory is tentative. In this understanding, the main goal of exploratory research is “the production of inductively derived generalizations about the group, process, activity, or situation under study”, and these generalizations are then “weaved” into “a *grounded theory* explaining the object of study” (Stebbins 2001, 6, emphasis in original). The development of “grounded” theory out of empirical data is the fundamental idea of what Glaser and Strauss (1967) have proposed in their seminal contribution “The Discovery of Grounded Theory”: rather than testing theories and hypotheses gained from existing literature, they claim that the aim of research is to *generate* hypotheses and theory about social processes out of empirical material (Glaser and Strauss 1967; see also Rosenthal 2008, 48ff). As Glaser and Strauss (1967, 6) explain, generating a theory from data “means that most hypotheses and concepts not

only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. *Generating a theory involves a process of research*” (emphasis in original). Hence, such an approach – as interpretive research designs – does not “stipulate the definition of concepts as a starting point” (Yanow 2014, 17), but allows “concepts to emerge from the field” (ibid., 3; see also Lamnek 2005, 21).

Although the goal is thus to develop generalizations out of the data, it is crucial to understand that exploratory findings are always hypothetical (Stebbins 2001, 40). An exploratory study cannot itself confirm the generalizations that it generates out of empirical data, as “it is logically impossible to generate and confirm hypotheses using the same data” (ibid., 25). Moreover, while Glaser and Strauss (1967) agree that generating theory should always be accompanied by verification, they argue that generation should have priority and they clearly reject the possibility of simultaneously generating and testing theories:

Partial testing of theory, when necessary, is left to more rigorous approaches (sometimes qualitative but usually quantitative). (...) (this) method is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems (...) Further, no attempt is made (...) to ascertain either the universality or the proof of suggested causes or other properties. (ibid., 103-4)

Exploratory research – as single or small-n case studies more generally – is hence relatively unable “to render judgments on the frequency or representativeness of particular cases” (George and Bennett 2005, 22). In generating theory, the relationships among categories and properties are “suggested as hypotheses pertinent to direction of relationship, not tested as descriptions of both direction and magnitude” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 63f.). George and Bennett (2005, 31) state that case study researchers “are more interested in finding the conditions under which specified outcomes occur, and the mechanisms through which they occur, rather than uncovering the frequency with which those conditions and their outcomes arise”. This is also true for exploratory research. However, in this case, the establishment of causal relationships (even if limited to specific conditions) whereby “certain conditions are believed to lead to other outcomes” (Yin 2009, 40) in the form of “if x, then y” mechanisms is only tentative, as it is beyond an exploratory study to verify such relationships. The main concern of exploratory research is to find out the mechanisms through which (the outcomes) occur. This was clearly the case in the present project: rather than being interested in discovering how widespread the observed phenomena are, the goal was to examine whether and in what ways – i.e. how and through which processes – transnational migration can influence unions’ international solidarity and gain a first impression of variables influencing the shape of that influence.

Nevertheless, validity of gained generalizations can also be reached in exploratory research. Theory based on data “can usually not be completely

refuted by more data or replaced by another theory”, Glaser and Strauss (1967, 4) write, as it “is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation” (ibid.). In the logic of theory generation out of empirical data, “evidence and testing never destroy a theory (...), they only modify it. A theory's only replacement is a better theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 28). Furthermore, validity in exploration is fundamentally different from that in confirmatory research, as Stebbins (2001, 25f.) has argued: validity in exploration “centers on the need to gain an accurate or true impression of the phenomenon under study” (ibid., 25). Hence, whereas in confirmatory research the researcher needs to “find measures and indices that indirectly convey an accurate impression” of the observed phenomena (Stebbins 2001, 26), in exploration it is necessary to “acquire directly an accurate impression” of these phenomena (ibid.; see also Reiter 2013, 4). This can be accomplished by a variety of means, including a triangulation of methods, “asking key informants to comment on the familiarity and reasonableness of observations” (ibid., 26) and “finding recurrent evidence for each generalization” (ibid., 26), each of which I did in the present study.

Moreover, exploratory research hence aims at generalizations about the studied processes, which George and Bennett (2005, 32) have called “contingent generalizations”. The crucial point is that exploratory research views its object of study as being representative of a certain *type* of groups, processes or situations that it aims to produce generalizations about, rather than as a single, unique one. While exploratory research is monothematic, “in its quest for generalizations, (it) overlooks the unique features of its objects of study” (Stebbins 2001, 11) and “centers on groups, processes, activities, or situations whose individual uniqueness are not important or influential in any broad sense and so nothing of scientific value is lost when they are ignored” (ibid., 12; see also George and Bennett 2005, 31).

Nonetheless, the findings gained in exploratory research need to be verified in subsequent studies.

Although validity and reliability are also important to them in each study they execute, exploratory researchers recognize that the most authoritative statement about validity and reliability can only be made down the road in the wake of several open-ended investigations (Stebbins 2001, 26).

The development of a coherent and verified theory out of empirical data thus takes time and requires a set of field studies and “continuous interstudy comparisons of groups, activists, or processes” (ibid., 13), rather than being the product of one individual study. However, what Stebbins (2001, 12) refers to as “concatenated exploration” that “steadily expands the range of applicability as well as the level of validity of the accumulating findings from each component field investigation” (ibid., 15f.) takes many years and is clearly beyond the reach of an individual dissertation. This task falls on future research and I agree with

Glaser and Strauss (1967, 32), who understand “theory as process; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product.”

3.1.1.2 On the role of theory in exploratory research

Agreeing with the view that all new knowledge comes from some form of induction (e.g. Stebbins 2001, 8) does not mean that existing theory plays no role in exploratory research. The role that I assign to theory in research is where I differ from the Grounded Theory approach: the authors of “Discovering Grounded Theory” neglected the role that theory and previous knowledge play in the research process. While in my view it is wrong to accuse them of claiming that previous knowledge should play *no role at all* in the research process and the generation of data, or that the researcher can enter the field as a ‘blank sheet’⁸⁷ (see also Strübing 2013, 112f.; Truschkat, Kaiser, and Reinartz 2005), they assign theory a negligible – or even detrimental – role in the research process⁸⁸ (see also Stebbins 2001, 7). By contrast, I agree with Burawoy (2009; see also Reiter 2013) that existing theory plays a crucial role in empirical research – even in exploratory research – both when entering the field and in the purpose of research: “Instead of discovering grounded theory, we elaborate existing theory” (ibid., 43). This statement expresses two important considerations. On the one hand, it is a fundamental critique of the positivist tradition in the social sciences, in stating that no “objective” reality exists. In rejecting the idea of “discovering” some theory that lies in the empirical, objective, “reality”, Burawoy stresses that we *always* view reality through a theoretical lens based on our previous knowledge, including in dealing with a “new”, previously-unexplored empirical material. This means that researchers (like anybody else) do not enter the field as “blank sheets”: they cannot strip themselves from theories when investigating a subject, but rather they see and interpret the world through theoretical lenses. It is through theories, previous experiences and knowledge that we are able to make sense of the world and interpret and explain phenomena that we observe: “Without theory we are blind – we cannot see the world” Burawoy insists (ibid., 13; see also Reiter 2013, 4).⁸⁹

⁸⁷ They clearly state that “of course, the researcher does not approach reality as a *tabula rasa*. He must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 3); and while they argue that most hypotheses and concepts come from the data, they state that “the *source* of certain ideas, or even ‘models’, can come from sources other than the data. The biographies of scientists are replete with stories of occasional flashes of insight, of seminal ideas, garnered from sources outside the data”, the crucial point is that such insights “must be brought into relation to the data” in order to generate grounded theory” (ibid., 6).

⁸⁸ They recommend “to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 37).

⁸⁹ The same is evidently true for deductive, hypotheses-testing research. Reiter (2013, 3) states that “(c)onducting confirmatory research, we mobilize great resources to test the fruits of our own minds – not reality”.

Furthermore, a theoretical lens is also necessary for the delimitation of the empirical field, as otherwise exploratory research would be endless (Reiter 2013, 10). It is previous knowledge and the initial assumptions, hypotheses and questions derived from it that determine the relationships and mechanisms that the researcher intends to look at, thus making the interpretation of empirical data possible (ibid.; Rosenthal 2008, 49; see also Mayring 2002, 28, 29f.). As Reiter (2013, 11) explains, in such an approach, induction

becomes part of a deductively initiated research project and allows for a pressing forward of findings up to the point where the causal mechanism previously established through a theoretical framework is explained.

On the other hand, it follows from Burawoy's statement above that the intention of research is not the discovery of some reality, but rather the improvement of existing theories. As we always draw on existing theories in observing phenomena – even if we do not want to admit it – research aims to modify, correct, reformulate or replace existing theory through contact with empirical data, rather than developing theory out of an objective reality that exists independently from theoretical perspectives, convictions or previous knowledge. However, this does not mean that social research cannot focus on identifying previously not explored or understood aspects, processes or relations: rather than starting without any knowledge at all and intending to discover completely new issues and theories, exploratory research intends to inductively expand and correct previous knowledge and theory as it “seeks to provide new and previously overlooked explanations and it can do so by actively engaging the researcher in a process of amplifying his or her conceptual tools and allowing him or her to pose new questions and provide new explanations by looking at reality from a new angle” (Reiter 2013, 4f.). Furthermore:

Exploratory research becomes an act of gradual, structured and theory-led heuristic expansion from an original set of models, explanations and questions. It does not start from scratch. In this context, the good question is one that is fruitful in allowing us to explore hitherto unexplored aspects and possibilities of explanation and causal relation. One that allows us to see plausible connections that have previously not been seen, explored, or understood. (ibid., 7f.)

3.1.2 Conducting exploratory research: fieldwork as a ‘rolling revisit’ and openness in the research process

However, stressing the role of theory does not mean that the research process is theory-led and that it aims to test theoretically-founded hypotheses; rather, such a research approach implies a “particular, iterative relationship between theory and data, the former both emerging from and framing the latter”, as Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, 27f., 38) explain for the case of interpretive research designs. Burawoy explains this process of modifying our theoretical assumptions through fieldwork (2009, 53):

In our fieldwork we do not look for confirmations but for theory's refutations. We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical

reconstruction. If these reconstructions come at too great a cost, we may have to abandon our theory altogether, and start afresh with a new, interesting theory for which our case is once more an anomaly.

Such an approach naturally requires – above all – a high degree of *openness* in the research process and a “research design flexibility” (Yanow 2014, 19) that allows responding to field situations and adapting the focus and strategy to new insights (see also Rosenthal 2008, 48ff; Lamnek 2005, 21; Mayring 2002, 27f.). In contrast to confirmatory research – with its “reliance on control of variables and prediction of outcomes using hypotheses” (Stebbins 2001, 10) and where “the research design (including sampling and statistical treatment of data) reigns supreme” (ibid., 9) – in exploration the “study design, measurement techniques, received theory without an exploratory base (are) subordinate” to the generation of new ideas out of the data (ibid.). While this does not mean that the research process can be arbitrary and unsystematic, it needs to be guided by openness and flexibility to avoid premature theoretical closure (ibid., 6, 9f.). Glaser and Strauss (1967, 47) thus state:

Beyond the decisions concerning initial collection of data, further collection cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory (as is done so carefully in research designed for verification and description). The emerging theory points to the next steps – the sociologist does not know them until he is guided by emerging gaps in his theory and by research questions suggested by previous answers.

Stebbins (2001, 17f.) hence compares the process of exploration to the setting and realizing an agenda for a meeting, as these are established in advance and “consist of a number of points to be considered there, each of which can potentially generate discussion and new ideas not previously weighed” (ibid., 18). Particularly the point “*varia*” expresses “another way of searching for new ideas, for items not thought of when the agenda was being created” (ibid.).

The openness refers to both the researcher and the methods applied (Mayring 2002, 27f.; Lamnek 2005, 21). On the one hand, it presupposes an openness of the researcher in the field towards possible unexpected findings, informed by what has been called “theoretical sensitivity” by Glaser⁹⁰ (cf. Strauss and Corbin 1990). This means – among others – analyzing collected data not only regarding already-established hypotheses and formulated questions, but always – and above all – analyzing them regarding unexpected or surprising results. Hence, while initial hypotheses guide the entry into the field, an early constriction on them is to be avoided to take account of unexpected findings out of which additional – and possibly alternative – hypotheses can be generated (Yanow 2014, 18; Mayring 2002, 27f.; Glaser and Strauss 1967, 38ff). This naturally

⁹⁰ With “theoretical sensitivity”, Glaser refers to the researchers’ “awareness for the subtleties of data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 41), which depends on the researchers’ previous reading or experiences with the topic, and which can be further developed during the research process. Theoretical sensitivity can be informed by literature, professional and/or personal experience and the analytic process itself (ibid., 41ff).

implies that initial hypotheses or explanations are *preliminary* explanations among other possible explanations that will be developed and verified, falsified and corrected or complemented when exposing them to the data (Rosenthal 2008, 49; Flick 2007, 69ff; Glaser and Strauss 1967, 33f.).⁹¹ In fact, even the research question itself can be altered through contact with the field, as such a “deductive – inductive research design” (Reiter 2013, 11)

allows for a revision of the initial hypotheses and even for the reformulation of the research question – in a process of slowly and gradually making oneself familiar with all of the phenomena associated and related to the problem in question.

On the other hand, methodological openness is also required: the researcher must be willing to adapt the research methods to new insights if they demand to take account of unexpected findings (Mayring 2002, 28). As the decision concerning what data to collect and from where is not established a priori, but rather guided by emerging categories and hypotheses in the course of the research, the methods and means to collecting the data must be flexible and adapted to new situations, if necessary (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 65f.).

The requirement of adaptation of research methods, hypotheses and even questions to the empirical material clearly implies that in such an exploratory research process data collection and evaluation are not separate research steps, but rather take place simultaneously and mutually inform each other. The research is a joint process of data collection, their analysis and interpretation, the generation of categories and hypotheses and their validation or complementation through renewed data collection, analysis and interpretation, and so on, as proposed by the Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; see also Lamnek 2005, 108ff):

Joint collection, coding, and analysis of data is the underlying operation. The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as process, requires that all three operations be done together as much as possible. They should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of an investigation to its end. (...) (The separation of each operation hinders generation of theory. (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 41)

This process requires “an engagement with multiple pieces at once” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 28) and several hypotheses are usually pursued at the same time (see also Mayring 2002, 29f.). Through the simultaneity of these

⁹¹ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, 36) explain that this does not mean that such kind of research is prone to vagueness and impreciseness: “This greater openness and flexibility to respond to local circumstances reflects their underlying logic of inquiry, not the (in)adequacy of the researcher or of the proposed project. It is a response to researchers’ expectations of finding the social world they study to be dynamic (and nuanced), rather than stable and fixed. But this doesn’t mean that interpretive researchers are always on ‘shaky’ or ‘loose’ ground. Rather, it means that, like captains of a ship, they are more attuned to changing weather conditions and riding the resulting waves, instead of strictly following the initial course that they might have laid out on dry ground.”

analytical steps, the process of theory formation is kept sufficiently open to account for continuous alterations and developments, while the exclusion of new ideas due to routines or pre-established rules is avoided (Strübing 2013, 126f.; Lamnek, 2005, 108ff; 25; Glaser and Strauss, 1967, 39f., 43). In such a research process, fieldwork is a “rolling revisit” (Burawoy 2009, 124) in which “(e)very entry into the field is followed not just by writing about what happened but also by an analysis in which questions are posed, hypotheses are formulated, and theory is elaborated – all to be checked out during successive visits” (ibid.).

Despite the high degree of openness and flexibility, exploratory research is not arbitrary or unsystematic. In “The Discovery of Grounded Theory”, Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose a highly systematic process of theory generation out of empirical data. In fact, the authors’ main concern is “to further the systematization of the collection, coding and analysis of qualitative data for the generation of theory” (ibid., 18). They describe a systematic procedure for the simultaneous collection, coding and analysis of data, and through it a systematic process of generating theoretical categories, which I will describe in further detail below.

3.1.3 Exploratory research and openness in the present project

In this investigation, conducting exploratory research meant that the intention was to develop theory out of the empirical data found in the fieldwork in a relatively unexplored area, i.e. to discover “new”, previously not studied and theorized relationships between transnational migration and international labor solidarity. The aim was to reach assertions on whether and how – i.e. through which mechanisms – migrants and their transnational “features” (practices, ways of belonging, personal relationships, social remittances, etc.) play a role in international labor solidarity and in what ways, particularly regarding the overcoming of its obstacles. This means that the goal was to identify causal mechanisms or processes, albeit without claiming, that they *always* do so, or that they always do so under certain conditions. This remains to be examined in future investigations.

As previously mentioned, the understanding of the role of theory in empirical research described meant that I did not attempt to enter the field as a “blank sheet”; instead, I *did* thoroughly study the existing literature on international labor solidarity, transnational migration and at the intersection of labor unions and migration, which informed my perspective and expectations. While – as laid out above – almost no research on the relationship between international labor solidarity and transnational migration exists, solidarity theories, research on the challenges of international labor solidarity and such on transnational migration clearly informed my ways of understanding the issue, how I delimited the topic to study and its focus and the questions that I posed: clearly, I did not want to explore an entire social group or community *in general*, such as “migrant group xy in labor union xz”, but rather I wanted to look at the interface of this group

and another topic – international labor solidarity – and how the former influences the latter, as from theory I had reason to believe that this relationship could be worth researching. However, I understood these delimitations as initial and my intention was to adapt them in the course of the fieldwork. This meant that while the underlying research question was “What role does transnational migration play, and can it help to overcome some of the obstacles of international labor solidarity?”, the concrete field research practice was led by significantly smaller-scale and more open questions such as “Do migrants participate in their unions’ international solidarity work?”, “In what ways?”, “Do they have a particular interest in international solidarity with their countries of origin?”, “Or the contrary?” and “Do they push certain topics/activities, or is the opposite the case?”, among many others. Moreover, while I did not abolish the underlying research question altogether and replace it with a new one, I constantly revised, adapted, complemented and even abolished these smaller-scale working questions in reaction to the empirical data.

Furthermore, my previous knowledge clearly informed my way of thinking about the possible connections between transnational migration and international labor solidarity, as well as my expectations regarding possible influences of migration on unions’ solidarity work. Hence, I *did* establish hypotheses regarding the relationship of transnational migration and international labor solidarity, which I gained out of findings from transnational migration research as well as international labor solidarity theory. At the most basic level, I expected that transnational migration could play *some* role in unions’ international work, and the focus on whether it can help to overcome some of solidarity’s obstacles makes clear that at the very least I thought that it could possibly do so: my interest was not only the general role that transnational migration plays in international solidarity, but more concretely whether it can help to overcome some of its problems and – if so – in what ways. Hence, while the research process was open, I looked for hints at instances in which migrants’ transnational connections can possibly help to overcome some obstacles. However, while looking for hints at this, I was open for learning the opposite, and in fact the result could also have been that transnational migration plays a detrimental role in unions’ international solidarity work (and it may do so in other cases). *Indeed, clearly, I did not have an idea – or even a theory – on what the relationship between transnational migration and international labor solidarity looks like*, as no such theory exists. Given the lack of research in the area, rather than having a theory on transnational migration’s role in international solidarity, I had countless subordinate hypotheses derived from research in related fields on what this relationship could possibly look like, some of which were concrete and others broad and general, many were vague and sometimes they were even contradicting. These included (among many others):

- Migrants and their emotional connections to their countries and/or communities of origin can constitute the basis of a feeling of togetherness – i.e. a community of fate – with the workers in those countries;
- Where migrants have a background in labor unions in their countries of origin, it can constitute a crucial resource for the establishing and conducting of solidarity activities with those countries;
- Migrants’ background can lead to reservations to working with unions in their countries of origin (particularly in countries where labor unions are problematic);
- Migrants’ family and other personal relationships with individuals (and possibly even labor unions) “back home” can constitute important points of contact and channels for information flows for unions’ solidarity work;
- The presence of migrants in labor unions can help to overcome the widespread prejudices, reservations and racism against workers abroad, particularly those in Southern countries, as they can transmit information from them to the rest of the membership;
- Migrants’ language skills and knowledge of their countries of origin can facilitate the conduction of solidarity relationships.

However, most importantly, while I started the research with a series of hypotheses, I understood them as *working* hypotheses initially guiding the research; accordingly, they fulfilled the role of subordinate research questions specifying the focus of the research. I was aware of the wealth of my – often contradicting – hypotheses and clearly entered the field with the intention to question these ideas. Thus, they had the status of preliminary hypotheses that were to be concretized, adapted, corrected or discarded and replaced in the course of the research process. Indeed, this was what I constantly did during the fieldwork: During the entire research process, I adapted and re-adapted the hypotheses and theoretical concepts that I worked with to the empirical data I found, gradually specifying them. Nonetheless, crucially – and in contrast to a strict Grounded Theory approach – I did this in ping-pong with existing theory, i.e. I continuously reverted to theory in search for helpful concepts in my efforts to link my findings to existing theory.

In the course of this work, some of the initial hypotheses proved to be true (which I proceeded to follow), while others proved incorrect or irrelevant and I subsequently adapted or replaced them by new ones. In fact, none of the theoretical concepts – or “conceptual categories”, as Glaser and Strauss (1967, 23) would call them – discussed in chapters 2.1 and 2.2 above initially guided the research; rather, they are the *result* of the process of adaptation of hypotheses and theories, i.e. they emerged as the salient concepts regarding the research questions during the fieldwork. However, in line with the role that theory plays in my research approach, all of the relevant theoretical concepts

used in this thesis are existing concepts developed in previous research (albeit on other subjects), rather than developing completely new categories, as Grounded Theory calls for.⁹² My theory-generating contribution refers to the relationship of these categories. Hence, the “conceptual categories” central to this thesis – the two sets of problems of international labor solidarity laid out (the narrow understanding of solidarity and little priority of international work; and the lack of a perceived community of fate and of a practical solidarity involving the membership), as well as the three concepts of transnational migration research (transnational ways of belonging; involvement in transnational political networks and organizations; and social remittances and cultural skills) – are the consequence of the exposure of the initial hypotheses to the data, as well as their subsequent modification, amplification and replacement by new ones. Some of the findings surprised me: for instance, I had not expected migrants’ social remittances and previous activism experiences to play as important a role; migrants’ personal transnational relationships to play only a minor role and that – besides a few exceptions – migrants essentially do not have personal and family relationships to labor unions “back home”; that their transnational identities only play a role in one of the two cases studied, as they not necessarily constitute the basis for an emotional foundation for the solidarity work; that migrants’ cultural skills and social remittances can provide the basis for developing a community of fate through the development of personal relationships *in the course of the solidarity work* itself; or that migrants have the important influence on unions’ conception of solidarity and unionism that I found them to have in one case.

At the same time, I also adapted research methods where required. While a complete revision of methods was not necessary, I adapted both the interview contents and their form, particularly including longer narrative episodes in reaction to encountering new issues in previous ones that I wanted to approach in an open manner. Furthermore, in addition to interviews and document analysis, in both case studies I participated in events such as rallies and other events where it broadened my understanding of phenomena that I came across in the interviews. Furthermore, in one of the cases, I broadened the data base by including documents from social media – particularly Facebook – as this emerged as a relevant source of information on the personal cross-border relationships that I found in that case.

⁹² Glaser and Strauss (1967, 36f.) are clear on this: “Although categories can be borrowed from existing theory, provided that the data are continually studied to make certain that the categories fit, generating theory does put a premium on emergent conceptualizations”; hence, “(a) discovered, grounded theory, then, will tend to combine mostly concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data with some existing ones that are clearly useful” (ibid., 46).

3.2 Field research

3.2.1 Case study research and selection of cases

I explored the role that transnational migration plays in unions' international solidarity by conducting research in two individual cases of local and regional entities of US labor unions. In these, I analyzed the role that migrants and their transnational features played in the solidarity work with migrants' countries of origin.

The advantage of case studies in a context where little previous research exists is that they allow for the "heuristic identification of new variables and hypotheses" (George and Bennett, 2005, 20), whereby researchers are able to derive and track new hypotheses that they had not previously thought of before the field work. Similarly, they allow for the discovery of previously not considered causal mechanisms and intervening variables in the processes studied: "Within a single case, we can look at a large number of intervening variables and inductively observe any unexpected aspects of the operation of a particular causal mechanism or help identify what conditions present in a case activate the causal mechanism" (ibid., 21). Case studies are thus particularly suited for exploratory research where the goal is precisely to discover new processes, relationships and causal mechanisms.

I conducted the research in two cases of regional entities US labor unions – one union local and one union district – and their migrant memberships. I chose the regional and local level (rather than national unions) not only for practicability reasons, but especially because it is at the lower local and regional levels that migrants are likely to take part in – and possibly influence – the solidarity work: it is here that migrants (as other minorities) concentrate, whereas they are usually under-represented in the higher levels of union hierarchies.

The cases differed in a number of characteristics to include a broad a variety of ways in which migration may affect international union solidarity. It is important to stress that in exploratory research with several cases, these are not comparative in the strict sense, as the salient theoretical categories are gained in the course of the research itself and are not defined a priori. Rather than comparing variables in two or more cases, exploratory research traces in detail processes at work in each of the cases to reach as much understanding as possible on the studied phenomena:

In exploratory social science, the choice of cases is (...) predicated by the logic of analyzing the richest, most telling, cases and to unveil the thickest and most telling connection between two variables. Such a study is, in a strict use of the term, not a comparative case study, where cases are used to simulate experimental research settings. Instead, cases are chosen so that each single one can tell a lot about the underlying conditions and causal mechanisms at work. Instead of focusing on overlap and similarity on the independent or dependent variables, exploratory research seeks to detect causal mechanisms, that is, causal propositions that link independent to dependent variables. (Reiter 2013, 8f.)

For the present project, this means that the rationale for studying two cases is *not* primarily to *compare* them and the effect that the “independent variables” (i.e. their different characteristics) have on the way transnational migrants influence their unions’ solidarity work, and to establish theories on causal mechanisms in the sense of “variable x leads to outcome y, whereas variable a leads to outcome b”; rather, the intention is primarily to include as many independent variables as possible to learn about as many ways as possible in which migration influences international labor solidarity. However, naturally, on a secondary level, analyzing the underlying “causal mechanisms at work” leading to the specific outcomes in each case also allows for the formulation of *tentative* causal mechanisms between these differing conditions and their outcomes: evidently, I also aimed to understand the conditions that lead to certain categories being at work in one case but not in the other (or even within each case, why they were at work for some migrant groups and not for others). These causal mechanisms are first observations on how specific conditions – or independent variables – influence migration’s role in unions’ international work. They need to be not only confirmed (or falsified) but also concretized and elaborated in further investigations involving a more systematic comparison and a larger number of cases of both migrants and unions and types of international solidarity work: in an exploratory research in which the cases are not selected to explicitly compare “most similar” or “most different” cases along clearly-established axes of comparison but rather to involve as much differentiation as possible, it is impossible to control for all possible independent and intervening variables affecting the outcomes. Hence, the goal of conducting the research in two cases with different characteristics was:

- 1) first and foremost, to discover as many ways as possible in which migrants and their transnational features influence unions’ international solidarity and possibly help to overcome obstacles; and
- 2) secondly, to gain first insights into how this role is influenced by different factors, i.e. how independent variables influence the outcome – migrants’ influence on unions’ international solidarity work – and in what ways.

Case selection. In line with the exploratory character of the investigation, the selection of cases itself was a result of contact with the field. The empirical research comprised three field stays of differing duration (the first, two weeks, the others, four or five months) between 2012 and 2014, each one informing the subsequent one. In the first one and first part of the second one, I gained an overview of crucial issues that I had not found sufficient information about in the literature or union documents⁹³, particularly on international solidarity

⁹³ Unions generally do not document the migrant share of their membership, even less so at a regional or even local level (see chapter 4). The same is true for international solidarity work at the regional or local level: particularly where locals conduct solidarity activities independently from the national union, the latter might not even be aware of it, let alone document it.

activities conducted by the local and regional levels of unions and on migrant union memberships at the local and regional levels, as well as on their countries of origin. In the course of this first phase, I focused the research question and identified cases to conduct the research in.

Case selection clearly did not follow a rationale for finding “representative” cases. In fact, given the lack of research on the topic, it would be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to determine what representative cases are. In line with the exploratory research approach, the cases were chosen for “their theoretical importance” (McCallum 2013, 162), i.e. I chose the “richest, most telling, cases (...) to unveil the thickest and most telling connection” between the variables involved (Reiter 2013, 8f., see above), meaning that cases were particularly suited to give insights into the role that migrants and their transnational features play in unions’ international solidarity work. For this purpose, the cases needed to fulfill two basic conditions: they needed to have a significant number of migrants (regardless whether first and/or second generation) originating from some particular country, as well as an existing international work with that country, regardless of whether that solidarity work comprised close long-standing working relationships or rather ad-hoc individual (but recurrent, or regular) solidarity activities, or something in between.

In order to include sufficient variation in “independent variables” to cover a broad variety of ways in which migration influences solidarity, I selected two cases that differed in a number of characteristics that I had reason to believe could be relevant in determining the role that migrants play in unions’ international solidarity work. The variation relates to both kinds of units, i.e. the character of migration *and* the labor unions and their international solidarity work. The selection was based on five criteria that either seemed to account for some differences in the role that migration plays in unions’ international solidarity work during the first exploratory research phase, or that I assumed to hold significance regarding that role, as they generally influence migrants’ transnational ties and behavior, as well as unions’ international solidarity patterns. However, the cases differed regarding more than these categories – e.g. on gender composition, geographical region, migrant membership share, migrants’ residence status (undocumented vs. documented/citizens), migrants’ social structure – and the research was conducted in such a way to ensure sufficient openness for these or other factors to emerge as further relevant variables influencing the unit of analysis. The main criteria were as follows:

On the labor union side and its international solidarity work, the selection criteria are strongly related:

1. *Type of union: manufacturing vs. services union.* I chose one services and one manufacturing union: services unions are less affected by the direct competition of production sites and employers’ strategies of pitting workers at different sites against each other. Hence, in the past most have

not seen themselves as being strongly forced to cooperate across borders and many have – until recently – not had a trajectory of much international solidarity, unlike most manufacturing unions (Tattersall 2007, 156).⁹⁴ This might be relevant for migrants' role in the solidarity work, as the possibilities for migrants to participate in or influence it may be different whether a long-standing alliance and tradition of international cooperation with clearly-established collaboration routines exists, or whether international solidarity is relatively new and has a rather “experimental” character, or even if no interest in international solidarity exists. Manufacturing and services unions also differ in a number of other aspects; for instance, while services union members are overwhelmingly low-skilled and low-paid workers, manufacturing union memberships are usually better skilled and paid.

2. *Type of international solidarity: existing or non-existing alliance with the origin country at the national union level.* Taking the above criterion further and following what I learned in the first field stay, I hence chose one case (the manufacturing union) in which an alliance with migrants' country of origin exists at the level of the national union, i.e. where solidarity with that country is a policy of the national union. In the other case, no solidarity work with migrants' country of origin exists at the level of the national union, but it nevertheless conducts solidarity work with that country.
3. *Union structure: strong hierarchy vs. local autonomy.* As I studied local and regional entities of unions, the degree of autonomy of these entities appeared to be a possibly relevant factor for migrants' role in – and influencing – the solidarity work.⁹⁵ The two cases hence represent one relatively hierarchically-structured union (the manufacturing union) and a highly decentralized union with a strong autonomy of locals.

On the migration side and migrants' transnational features:

4. *Migrants' countries of origin and character of the migration.* The origin country can potentially have an impact on migrants' role, as factors such as geographical distance, migration networks and history or legal frameworks strongly affect the degree to which migrants are willing and able to maintain transnational connections, as well as the character that these connections have. Furthermore, migration can have a very different

⁹⁴ However, this has recently changed to some degree. Shrinking membership and firm mergers across industries have increasingly forced services sectors to expand their struggle for organizing borders and sectors (Tattersall 2007, 156; see chapter 4).

⁹⁵ In an interesting contribution on the factors explaining the differences in unions' strategies towards migrant workers, Marino (2012) stresses that a high degree of decentralization and local autonomy promotes the incorporation of migrants, as it gives local unions sufficient autonomy to develop own measures adapted to migrants' needs and to establish close contact with migrant workers.

character in many other regards (for instance, comprising highly-skilled professionals or involving migration to escape poverty, or comprising refugees fleeing political oppression or natural disasters; being mainly from rural or from urban areas; etc.). I chose migrants to the US from two countries of origin that are known for their strong transnational ties: Salvadoran and Mexican migrants. However, the two groups differ in some important aspects: Salvadoran migration (as with Central American migration more generally) comprises – to an important degree – refugees from the civil war and violence in the 1980s and 1990s, many of which have trajectories of political activism and a strong political consciousness. By contrast, Mexican migration is usually considered to comprise migrants fleeing poverty coming mostly from rural areas and the informal sector, with no previous activism experience.

5. *Migrant generation and residence status.* Whether migrants have recently come to the US or whether it was their parents or even grandparents who migrated can influence the shape and intensity of their transnational ties. Their residence status determines migrants' possibilities to travel back and forth and – possibly – their willingness to (publicly) engage in political activities, as it is often assumed that undocumented migrants are less willing to engage in political activities, including the labor movement. While this assumption has been called into question – at least for the case of labor unions – by the above-described willingness of undocumented migrants to organize in unions in the last two decades, they could still be – on the whole – less willing to speak up publicly and engage in unions' official policies. In the two cases that I chose, Salvadoran migrants are largely first generation – many undocumented – migrants, as Salvadorans mainly came to the US during the Salvadoran civil war. The Mexican migrants are mainly of second generation as – given the long history of Mexican migration to the US – a large share of Mexican migrants in the US are of second, third or even further generations.

In the course of the research, some of these “independent variables” proved more relevant than others. For instance, while the migrant group (particularly in terms of their country of origin, but to some degree also migrant generation) was immediately apparent as a highly relevant factor, migrants' residence status was not: in fact, in the Salvadoran case with a large share of undocumented migrants, these were highly willing to speak up and fight for their concerns.

However, it needs to be said that the research means that I disposed of allowed me to analyze the explanatory power of some variables better than others, which may have contributed to differences in the role that I found them to play. Generally, it was easier to trace the variables on the “migrant” side than the “union” side. For instance, I could easily compare several migrant groups within and across cases, as most unions have migrant members from several countries.

Through interviewing a number of migrants from other countries and generations, I could thus tentatively carve out the role that migrants' origin and – to some degree – generation played. However, I could not compare more types of unions than the two that I had selected, and in these cases while it seemed to make a difference whether or not an alliance with migrants' country of origin exists at the national union level, I cannot make a clear statement on the role that unions' economic sector more generally – i.e. manufacturing vs. services – plays. Nonetheless, at the same time, in some cases it was possible to trace the relevance of a “union” variable without comparing it to further unions: local autonomy was immediately apparent as a factor determining migrants' ability to promote their own solidarity activities, which I found out not through comparison with other unions, but rather through tracing the autonomous history of the local and its character as a particularly “migrant” and “political” local union.

3.2.2 *Data collection and sources of data*

3.2.2.1 Data collection

Data collection process. The circular process of data collection and analysis meant that in each case the decision concerning what data to collect next – i.e. who to interview and on what topics, what documents to review or what event to observe – was taken in response to previously-analyzed data and the conceptual categories that they produced. In what Glaser and Strauss (1967, 45; see also Strübing 2013, 116f.) call “theoretical sampling”, the data collection process is determined by the emerging categories in data analysis:

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory.

In contrast to statistical sampling of data, which “is done to obtain accurate evidence on distributions of people among categories to be used in descriptions or verifications” (ibid., 63), theoretical sampling “is done in order to discover categories and their properties, and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory” (ibid.). Glaser and Strauss (ibid., 48) describe this process as follows:

The criteria of theoretical sampling are designed to be applied in the ongoing joint collection and analysis of data associated with the generation of theory. Therefore, they are continually tailored to fit the data and are applied judiciously at the right point and moment in the analysis. The analyst can continually adjust his control of data collection to ensure the data's relevance to the impersonal criteria of his emerging theory.

Similarly, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 201) further specify theoretical sampling as:

Data gathering driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory and based on the concept of “making comparisons,” whose purpose is to go to places, people,

or events that will maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions.

Thus, in each case data collection was guided by the aim of further developing emergent categories and data to collect (mostly interview partners and the content of interviews, but also documents and events) was chosen concerning whether it would add to the development of the category. This process was mainly led by the principal goal of the investigation, namely to detect as many ways as possible in which migrants and their transnational features influence unions' international work. However, as the secondary aim was to find hints at variables influencing these ways, data collection also considered independent variables influencing migrants' role.

For instance, while interview partners were initially chosen more or less randomly (or based on the snowball principle) and the contents of the interviews very broad and open, as soon as initial categories emerged these led the selection of further interview partners and interview topics. For example, when the category of "social remittances" in the USWW case emerged, I first focused on their shape, interviewing more Salvadoran migrants to find out what they comprise. This was then immediately complemented by interviewing some non-Salvadoran migrants (Mexicans and Guatemalans) and focusing on them in interview contents, to ascertain whether these social remittances were specific to Salvadorans and what their specific characteristics in comparison to others were. Similarly, in the USW case, when the category "personal relationships" emerged, I focused subsequent data collection on both learning more about the characteristics of these relationships and comparing Mexican migrants to non-migrants in this regard, to ascertain whether this category was exclusive to migrants, and why.

Data triangulation. I obtained data from three different sources: interviews, written documents and direct observation. Yin (2009, 116) stresses that for case study research "any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode." Even more so in exploratory research and the generation of theory, various sources of data are helpful. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 75f.) argue that theoretical sampling in field studies requires several sources of data:

In field studies, theoretical sampling usually requires reading documents, interviewing, and observing at the same time, since all slices of data are relevant. There is little, if any, systematic interviewing of a sample of respondents, or interviewing that excludes observation.

Having diverse "slices of data" is an advantage for theory generation, they argue (ibid., 66):

The result is, of course, a variety of slices of data that would be bewildering if we wished to evaluate them as accurate evidence for verifications. However, for generating theory this variety is highly beneficial, because it yields more

information on categories than any one mode of knowing (technique of collection). The different ways of knowing about a category virtually force him to generate properties as he tries to understand the differences between the various slices of data, in terms of the different conditions under which they were collected.

3.2.2.2 Sources of data: open semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and direct observation

The data hence stemmed from 1) open semi-structured interviews, 2) documents such as union newsletters, websites, documents on activities, as well as official statements and reports and 3) direct observation of activities such as rallies and marches, as well as union premises, staff offices, personal belongings and furnishing of interview partners' flats.

Open, semi-structured interviews

The main source of data was open, semi-structured interviews. In this context, openness meant that the interview questions were open and designed to generate the broadest possible range of responses: in fact, they were often invitations to talk about a specific topic rather than real questions. Semi-structured meant that I did not have a catalog of questions to be answered by interviewees, but rather a list of topics that I wanted to touch upon (see Mayring 2002, 66). In the beginning, this list was very broad and rather vague, although it became more concrete in the course of the research process and as relevant categories emerged.

An open and semi-structured character of interviews is crucial for a research project such as this one, to leave sufficient space for the emergence of new issues that I had not previously thought of. This is also why I included – in many interviews particularly in the initial phase of the research – narrative sections at the beginning in which I invited the interviewees to talk about issues that they considered interesting or relevant regarding their personal history or activities in the union. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 75f.) describe the function of initial narrative sections in theory-generating field research as follows:

At the beginning of the research, interviews usually consist of open-ended conversations during which respondents are allowed to talk with no imposed limitations of time. (...) Later, when interviews and observations are directed by the emerging theory, he can ask direct questions bearing on his categories. These can be answered sufficiently and fairly quickly. Thus, the time for any one interview grows shorter as the number of interviews increases, because the researcher now questions many people, in different positions and different groups, about the same topics. (However), the sociologist still cannot state how long all his interviews will take because a new category might emerge at any time; this emergence will call for lengthy open-ended conversations and prolonged observations within some groups (...).

More concretely, Meuser and Nagel (2009, 33) explain how an interview should be designed to allow for sufficient openness and flexibility:

It is obvious that the occurrence of such reports cannot be anticipated when designing an interview schedule. Therefore, it is all the more important to carry out the interviews in such a way that (a) does not prevent the expert from addressing unforeseen aspects of topics and (b) utilizes such aspects in subsequent interviews. From our experience it is crucial for a successful outcome of an (...) interview to use the schedule in a flexible, non-bureaucratic way – that is as a thematic guideline and not as if it were a questionnaire to be administered. It is the relevance structures of the interviewees, which shall be elicited, not those of the interviewer.

Furthermore, such open interviews allow for “the possibility of enquiring openly about situational meanings or motives for action, or collecting everyday theories and self-interpretations in a differentiated and open way” (Hopf 2004, 203). This was particularly important in this case, as the research interest lay – to an important degree – on subjective perceptions, motivations and rationales of action. Furthermore, given the “newness” of the issue researched (in the sense that little has been researched, written and discussed about it), I could not assume the knowledge on it to be readily accessible and easily verbally expressed. Therefore, I needed to reconstruct it from the description of concrete actions and events, and the interviews focused – to an important degree – on the description of concrete past activities, processes and events. What Meuser and Nagel (2009, 30) state on the expert interview applies to most interviews that I conducted:

the operational knowledge guiding and orienting a person’s behaviour is difficult to be accessed consciously, it is hardly to “reeled off” just like that in the interview. However, it is seizable in the empirical data and open to reconstruction from what the interviewee tells. It is to be achieved favourably on the basis of narrations of concrete problems, conflict and problem solutions taken from the expert’s experience

As a consequence of their open character, the focus of the interviews and the topics discussed changed several times during the research process, according to emerging topics in the previous data collected and analyzed. While topics were relatively similar to each other across interviewees and the two cases at the beginning, in the course of the research, the topics discussed increasingly diverged across the two cases: over time, the interviews became more focused on the developing salient categories (Stebbins 2001, 14f.), which were different in the two cases regarding both transnational migration and international labor solidarity, and I placed particular (but not exclusive) emphasis on specific categories in each of the cases. Nevertheless, the interviews always maintained their open character in terms of the questions posed and regarding the initial narrative parts.

Beyond the initial narrative parts, in most interviews I touched upon a broad range of topics to avoid precluding issues by focusing too quickly on specific aspects. Hence, while variation existed, very broadly, most of the interviews touched upon the following topics:

- Shape and concrete activities of the solidarity work conducted
- Migrants' involvement in the solidarity work
- Their motivation for doing so
- Migrants' transnational connections, identities, practices and networks
- Acceptance of and attitude towards the solidarity work among the membership and leadership
- Questions of internal democracy and possibilities of influencing union policies
- In many interviews, racism within the union

Given the exploratory character of the research, across the total 75 interviews conducted I spoke with a broad variety of individuals with different positions and roles in the union, solidarity work and migration histories to gain an insight into the roles that migration can play in international solidarity. Analytically – not always in practice, however, as interview partners frequently belonged to both categories of interview (see appendix for list of interviews) – the interviews that I conducted can be divided into two categories according to their epistemological interests: interviews with migrants personally involved in the solidarity work, as well as expert interviews. Whereas the first focused on interviewees' personal histories, beliefs, motivations and practices (see Strübing 2013, 96), the latter's main concern was interviewees' knowledge on processes, work and rules of routine action in the union and the solidarity work. Both types of interviews complemented each other to gain a broad insight into the unit of analysis.

On the one hand, I interviewed migrants (and some non-migrants, for comparative purposes as explained above⁹⁶) involved in the solidarity work of their union: as I was interested in migrants' transnational connections, identities, their ideas, motivations and interests, as well as their impact on the unions' solidarity work, it was crucial to talk to migrants involved in that work. Learning about migrants' personal involvement in the solidarity work, the activities that they carry out or participate in, their motivations and points of view on the solidarity work as well as their transnational connections, practices and identities constituted a fundamental element for learning about transnational migration's impact on the solidarity work. Hence, these interviews focused on migrants' own involvement in the solidarity work, their personal migration

⁹⁶ Where I conducted interviews with non-migrants (or, in one case, with a migrant not involved in the solidarity work), it was in areas in which a comparison, i.e. the differences and similarities to non-migrants (or other migrant groups) were relevant for the research question, as was the case, e.g. to find out why Salvadoran migrants strongly engaged in solidarity with their country of origin, whereas other migrant groups (I interviewed Mexicans and Guatemalans) did not.

histories and transnational connections, their union activism and their motivations and feelings about it.

This group includes migrant rank-and-file activists as well as staff persons and functionaries involved in the solidarity work. While most of those whom I interviewed are “only” members (and did not hold a paid staff or officer position in the union), I focused on members who actively engage in the union: all of the interviewed are activists, and some hold (unpaid) volunteer positions in the union such as “industry vice president”, “rapid response coordinator”⁹⁷ or serve as volunteer organizers in organizing campaigns. In this category, I conducted twenty interviews with eighteen individuals altogether: eight in the first case (USWW), mostly in Spanish; and twelve interviews with ten individuals in the second case (USW), mostly in English (see appendix).

In addition to the aforementioned topics and an emphasis on migrants’ personal involvement and concrete activities in the solidarity work, as well as their motivation for doing so, the interviews also focused on:

- their migration history and their transnational connections, identities, practices and networks independently from the solidarity work or the union: this was usually embedded in a long narration of their (or their parents’) migration history, activities previous to the migration, relationships to family “back home” and the significance of their migrant identity, among others.
- their engagement in the union (independently from the solidarity work), including how they got into the union and what their role or activities in it are.

However, I was not only interested in migrants’ personal involvement in the solidarity; moreover, I also wanted to learn about how migrants and their transnational connections affect *unions’* international work. Therefore, it was necessary to speak to individuals holding a position in the union who can at least to some degree speak *on behalf of* – or at least express the logic of – the organization, as is the case with union officers and staff, or individuals holding a volunteer position significant in the union hierarchy or to its work organization. I hence conducted what Bogner and Menz (2009, 48) have called “theory-generating expert interviews”:

The essence of the theory-generating interview is that its goal is the communicative opening up and analytic reconstruction of the subjective dimension of expert knowledge. Here, subjective action orientations and implicit decision making maxims of experts from a particular specialist field are the

⁹⁷ Industry vice presidents are rank-and-file leaders in USWW in charge of supporting the elected leadership and staff in mobilizing and educating the membership in each of the industries such as janitorial, airports or security. Rapid response coordinators are rank-and-file leaders in each USW local who are in charge of coordinating actions such as rallies, strike support activities and organize information for the membership.

starting-point of the formulation of theory. The researcher seeks to formulate a theoretically rich conceptualization of (implicit) stores of knowledge, conceptions of the world and routines, which the experts develop in their activities and which are constitutive for the functioning of social systems.

These expert interviews focused on interviewees' knowledge on structures and operational procedures, which they gain from their position of being insiders; on personal histories and opinions they focused only insofar as they were relevant for the procedures and structures (Strübing 2013, 96; see also Littig 2008).

At the most basic level, a person is an expert because “the researcher assumes – for whatever reason – that she or he has knowledge, which she or he may not necessarily possess alone, but which is not accessible to anybody in the field of action under study”, which distinguishes experts from laypersons (Meuser and Nagel 2009, 18, see also Bogner and Menz 2009). However, importantly, the status of expert goes beyond anybody who has access to a special knowledge, as it is connected to positions exerting some influence on problem-solving and decision-making in the area under study⁹⁸ (Meuser and Nagel 1994, 180; see also Bogner and Menz 2009; Littig 2008), and experts have “a special or even an exclusive position in the area to be studied that gives them access to knowledge that others do not have” (Strübing 2013, 96, own translation). In Bogner and Menz' (2009, 54f.) words, experts'

action orientations, knowledge and assessments decisively structure, or help to structure, the conditions of action of other actors, thereby showing that expert knowledge has a socially relevant dimension. It is not the exclusive nature of his or her knowledge that makes an expert interesting for the purposes of an interview (...), but the fact that this knowledge has the power to produce practical effects. (...) In other words, the possibility exists that the expert may be able to get his or her orientations enforced (at least in part).

These positions do not need to be high-level functionaries or leaders, as experts can also “acquire a special knowledge through their activity (...). The definition of experts as active participants emphasizes the specific functions such individuals have with regard to problems – whether by virtue of a professional role, or as a volunteer” (Meuser and Nagel 2009, 24; see also Littig 2008).

For the purpose of this research, experts were thus individuals who a) I assumed to have – from their position or role in the union – particular knowledge on processes and routines, ways in which “things are done” and decisions taken within the union and the solidarity work, and b) held a position that gave them some influence on decision-making or dominant perceptions and routines within the union and who I could assume to – at the very least – express the logic of the organization. Hence, I saw them as representatives of the union and their interpretations, points of view and opinions as expressions of “how things are done”, of what is accepted or mainstream in the union. In these interviews, the

⁹⁸ In fact, all the examples of experts Meuser and Nagel (1994) refer to are professionals holding decision-making positions in businesses, public administration, etc.

focus hence lay on interviewees' knowledge – or perception – of the role that migration plays in the union's solidarity work. Furthermore, throughout the research process, interviews with experts served – in a logic of methodological triangulation (see Yin 2009) – to verify the categories emerging out of the other interviews.

In this category, I conducted 22 interviews with nineteen individuals, about half of whom are current and former paid staff, while the other half are elected officers, with the majority of them holding paid positions such as local (vice) presidents and (sub-)district directors, as well as a minority holding unpaid volunteer positions. Of these interviews, I conducted ten in the first case (USWW) and twelve interviews with nine individuals in the second case (USW). In addition to the aforementioned topics, these interviews focused on issues such as:

- the status that the solidarity work has within the union's policies
- decision-making structures and procedures within the union and the solidarity work, as well as issues such as funding and work routines
- the relevance that the presence and activities of migrants have in the solidarity work (e.g. Is it used by the union? Do they push the solidarity in a specific direction? etc.)

Importantly, also in the case of expert interviews, I could not assume that the expert knowledge was always be explicit and reflective, and that it could be easily verbally formulated; rather, as Bogner and Menz (2009, 54f.; see also Meuser and Nagel 2009, 30) highlight, expert knowledge is – to an important degree – tacit:

(E)xpert knowledge consists not only of systematized, reflexively accessible knowledge relating to a specialized subject or field, but also has to a considerable extent the character of practical or action knowledge, which incorporates a range of quite disparate maxims for action, individual rules of decision, collective orientations and patterns of social interpretation.

Hence, expert knowledge in this understanding is not directly accessible, but rather comprises “the basic orientations of the expert, his or her implicit knowledge, that is to say the unwritten laws and decision-making maxims that operate in his or her specific functional area of expertise” (Bogner and Menz 2009, 51). Particularly what Bogner and Menz (2009) have called “interpretative knowledge” (as opposed to technical and process knowledge) is highly subjective, as it comprises “the expert's subjective orientations, rules, points of view and interpretations” and “the sphere of ideas and ideologies, of fragmentary, inconsistent configurations of meaning and patterns of explanation” (ibid., 52).

For the interview method applied, this meant that “one cannot enquire directly about the implicit rules of routine action, the expert's habits and traditions; these

things have to be reconstructed” (ibid.). In this understanding, expert interviews cannot be “conceptualized as a process of extracting knowledge from the interviewee by asking questions in the sense of a questionnaire” (Meuser and Nagel 2009, 31), but rather require a relatively open way of interviewing:

we consider an open interview based on a topic guide to be appropriate for data collection. As regards the reconstruction of knowledge, which underlies expert behaviour, questionnaires would at best allow for knowledge at the level of the discursive consciousness containing rationalist reasoning corresponding with officially accepted standards. This type of argument is to be found quite often in expert interviews, but apart from the rare case in which the interviewee does not really cooperate, that is answers with semi-official statements, experts do reveal a lot more about relevances and maxims connected with their positions and functions: when they carry on talking about their activities, extemporize, give examples, or use other forms of exploration. The open interview provides the room for the interviewee to unfold his own outlooks and reflections. As to data collection interviewing should be based on general topics but avoid closed questions and a prefixed guideline. (ibid.)

In other words, in the interviews, questions also focused on narrations of concrete practices, routines, decision-making processes, etc. These were then analyzed and interpreted regarding the research question, whereby “general principles and maxims can be grasped, and a reconstruction of the logic underlying a decision is facilitated” (see Meuser and Nagel 2009, 33f.). This meant that also in the expert interviews, narrative sections constituted an important element. Meuser and Nagel (2009, 33) highlight the important function that narrations can have in bringing to light the tacit parts of expert knowledge:

Narratives about episodes in the field of the expert’s professional activity turn out to be key points of reference for the reconstruction of orientations guiding conduct. Methodically, this can be put to good use by eliciting narrations through the mode of interviewing. Narratives provide insight into the tacit aspects of expert knowledge, which she or he is not fully aware of and which, on the contrary, become noticed only gradually in the course of the narration.

Beyond theory-generating expert interviews, in the initial phase of the investigation, I conducted 43 what Bogner and Menz (2009) call “exploratory expert interviews”, which serve to “sound(...) out the subject under investigation” (ibid., 46) and that

can serve to establish an initial orientation in a field that is either substantively new or poorly defined, as a way of helping the researcher to develop a clearer idea of the problem or as a preliminary move in the identification of a final interview guide. In this sense, exploratory interviews help to structure the area under investigation and to generate hypotheses. The experts interviewed may themselves belong to the target group of the study as part of the field of action, but in many cases experts are also deliberately used as a complementary source of information about the target group that is the actual subject. In the latter case, the expert’s role is that of someone who possesses “contextual knowledge.” (ibid.)

This type of expert interviews focuses on interviewees' specific contextual knowledge on the area of study (Littig 2008), and I used them as an orientation for the investigation in the initial phase. They gradually led to the adjustment of the focus and research questions. These interviews – some of which had the character of background conversations rather than formal interviews – were mainly with experts outside the actual target group, mostly researchers and representatives from other unions and labor organizations, as well as some staff persons and officers of the unions studied, but other districts, locals or the national union.

Nonetheless, this distinction between the different types of interviews is clearly an analytical one. While their epistemological interest differs, particularly the interviews with experts and those with migrants involved in the solidarity work often cannot clearly be separated in practice⁹⁹ (see also Bogner and Menz 2009): in the cases of migrant officers and staff, whose interpretations – by virtue of their positions – clearly “structure the concrete field of action in a way that is meaningful and guides action” (Bogner and Menz 2009, 54), I was interested in both their expert knowledge on “interaction routines, organizational constellations” (ibid., 52) and “unwritten laws and decision-making maxims” (ibid., 51) and their personal history, involvement and motivations.

And also migrants who are “only” rank-and-file activists and do not hold a position with decision-making power have expert knowledge in the sense described above¹⁰⁰: through being involved in the solidarity work, they have specific knowledge that others not involved in it do not have on the issue under study. In fact, most of them clearly dispose of what Bogner and Menz (2009) have called “process knowledge”:

(I) nformation about sequences of actions, interaction routines, organizational constellations, and past or current events, (...) where the expert, because of his or her practical activity, is directly involved or about which she or he at least has more precise knowledge because these things are close to his or her field of

⁹⁹ In fact, experts are – in most cases – part of and involved in the field under study (Strübing 2013, 96). Bogner and Menz (2009) stress that the differentiation of different types of expert interviews that they establish depending on their respective epistemological interest is made essentially for analytic purposes; in practice, interview types are not completely separate but usually entail elements of various types.

¹⁰⁰ Bogner and Menz (2009, 53) stress that to reconstruct interpretative expert knowledge, it can be necessary to “integrate the expert methodologically as a ‘private person’”: “It is only in the phase when the data are evaluated that it becomes clear whether the relevance structures and patterns of orientations used by the expert can be reconstructed exclusively by using his or her explanations given from within the professional context, or whether it is also necessary to incorporate comments made from the personal sphere. It is frequently the case that those very passages in an interview where commonplaces and pithy sayings from everyday life are mobilized, or arguments put forward which rely on metaphors from the ‘private’ sphere, are of particular interest. One can hardly distinguish in practice between the interviewee as ‘expert’ and the interviewee as ‘private person’, and it makes no methodological sense to attempt to do this.”

action. This process knowledge, unlike technical knowledge, is not really specialized knowledge in the narrow sense (something one can acquire through educational qualifications), but is more a matter of knowledge based on practical experience acquired from one's own context of action.

Clearly, this definition not only comprises union officials and staff, but also migrant rank-and-file activists involved in the solidarity work. Thus, beyond migrants' personal history, the interviews also discussed processes and routines and "how things are done" in the solidarity work.

Document analysis

The second source of evidence was written documents. They played a secondary role compared to the interviews, mainly because little written information exists on questions that hold relevance for the research interest. While I had hoped to conduct an analysis of relevant documents beforehand to gain an overview on relevant issues such as migrant membership shares, activities of the migrant membership, local-level solidarity activities and political views of the local union or relationships with partners abroad, I found few such documents, let alone before entering the field. The documents used (some of them beforehand, some of them when gaining access in the course of research) were mainly:

- Websites of the union local and district
- Newsletters and other publications of locals and districts
- Bylaws of the union in question
- Publications such as reports on organizing campaigns and other activities
- PowerPoint presentations by staff persons
- Reports on the ArcelorMittal Global Health and Safety Agreement by USW and IndustriAll
- A book authored by Los Mineros president Napoleón Gómez Urrutia called "Collapse of Dignity" on the Pasta de Conchos mine disaster and its consequences
- Media, press coverage on the respective union entities and their activities

Under these circumstances, rather than contributing to the generation of new hypotheses and categories, the documents served two other purposes: first, they complemented insights gained from the other data and served to gain background information on issues that were only superficially touched upon in the interviews but that I needed more information on; and second, in the logic of data triangulation, they served to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin 2009, 103), i.e. to verify categories and hypotheses developed out of the other data collected (cf. Mayring 2002, 49).

Direct observation

Finally, direct observation also fed into the development and corroboration of categories and hypotheses. For instance, the observation of furnishings of union staff's offices or homes of other interviewees provided insights into the status of the solidarity work and the relationship to the partner organization: in many cases, rooms' and offices' walls were literally paved with flags, pictures and posters of the partner organization, and/or objects such as T-shirts and presents that they had received from them stood on the desk or on shelves. In other cases, the furnishings documented interviewees' identification with their country of origin, when it was crowded with references to Mexico or El Salvador, such as pictures, flags, maps, handicraft and music. Furthermore, I also observed and participated in activities such as rallies and marches for the partner organization and other topics such as immigration reform, as well as other events conducted in the union facilities.

Similar to the document analysis, this data mainly served for the verification of categories and hypotheses developed out of other data. However, more than in the case of documents, the observations also contributed to the formulation of hypotheses and categories, as it was in some cases observations that categories initially emerged from (for instance, the political character of Salvadoran migration and the nature of the solidarity work became clear to me as early as the second interview in USWW in entering the office of one staff person).

3.2.3 *Data analysis: developing conceptual categories through extensive coding and comparison*

As described above, the research approach presupposed a circular process in which data analysis took place simultaneously with its collection in ping-pong with theory. This means that I always immediately analyzed the collected data in the field and developed conceptual categories and hypotheses that subsequently informed the following research steps, focus and questions, as Glaser and Strauss (1967, 71) explain for the Grounded Theory method (see also Strübing 2013, 113; Lamnek 2005, 108f.):

When generating theory through joint theoretical collection, coding, and analysis of data, the temporal aspects of the research are different from those characteristic of research where separate periods of work are designated for each aspect of the research. In the latter case, only brief or minor efforts, if any, are directed toward coding and analysis while data are collected. Research aimed at discovering theory, however, requires that all three procedures go on simultaneously to the fullest extent possible; for this, as we have said, is the underlying operation when generating theory. Indeed, it is impossible to engage in theoretical sampling without coding and analyzing at the same time.

I largely followed the procedure for data analysis proposed for the generation of grounded theories that ensures that “categories (...) emerge (...) from the data and are constantly being selectively reformulated by them” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 76; see also Strauss 1987). Strauss and Corbin (1990, 102) advocate an

immediate detailed coding and analysis of written data to “uncover, name, and develop concepts” – what they (ibid., 57) call “microanalysis”. They distinguish different types of coding – open coding, axial coding, and selective coding – according to the research phase (see also Strauss 1987).¹⁰¹ Except for most exploratory expert interviews in the initial research phase, I hence recorded all interviews and immediately transcribed and coded them with the coding software MaxQDA to develop conceptual categories.

In the first step of “open coding”, I went through written material in detail sentence-by-sentence and coded extensively for a wealth of different concepts in the data, with the intention to “open up the inquiry” (Strauss 1987, 29). Through this coding, “data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (ibid.). As Strauss explains (1987, 28; see also Strauss and Corbin, 1990) this procedure involves:

unrestricted coding of the data. (...) The aim is to produce concepts that seem to fit the data. These concepts and their dimensions are as yet entirely provisional; but thinking about these results in a host of questions and equally provisional answers, which immediately leads to further issues pertaining to conditions, strategies, interactions, and consequences. As the analyst moves to the next words, next lines, the process snowballs, with the quick surfacing of information bearing on the questions and hypotheses, and sometimes even possible crosscutting of dimensions.

Importantly, in contrast to the verification of theory – which “aims at establishing a relatively few major uniformities and variations on the same conceptual level” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 37) – this coding can refer to a broad variety of levels and dimensions, as the research aims at “achieving much diversity in emergent categories, synthesized at as many levels of conceptual and hypothetical generalization as possible” (ibid.) and:

generating and plausibly suggesting (...) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems (...): Some of these properties may be causes, (...) but (...) others are conditions, consequences, dimensions, types, processes, etc. (ibid., 104)

In this initial phase of coding, developed codes are tentative and preliminary. As the intention in this step is to code for everything that might be relevant, it is in the nature of things that many of the initial codes are corrected or overthrown in the course of the further research process: “Whatever is wrong in interpreting those lines and words will eventually be cancelled out through later steps of the inquiry. Concepts will then work or not work, distinctions will be useful or not useful - or modified” (Strauss 1987, 29). Strauss (ibid., 32) thus explains that initial codes:

are provisional so will end up considerably modified, elaborated, and so on. Hence, the analyst must not become too committed to the first codes, must not

¹⁰¹ Glaser (1978) distinguishes between only two types: open coding and theoretical coding, the latter of which includes Strauss’ axial and selective coding steps.

become selective too quickly, tempting as that is, since initial codes can seem highly relevant when they are actually not. Open coding proliferates codes quickly, but the process later begins to slow down through the continual verifying that each code really does fit.

Hence, open coding meant that I started by coding for every possible instance that could be relevant, developing a great wealth of codes and categories on different levels and in a broad variety of areas touched upon in the interviews. I expected many of these initial codes to change during the course of the research – and many did – while even more later proved to be not relevant, whereby I stopped pursuing them. For instance, in one of the cases, minorities' possibilities of influencing union decision-making seemed to be a relevant category, which led to the generation of sub-categories related to structural conditions for influencing politics, such as union democracy, the openness of the leadership to migrants' interests and members' decision-making power, and I began coding for many of instances relating to them. In the other case, at the beginning of the research, inner-union racism appeared to be a potentially crucial category, and I coded for numerous sub-categories referring to experiences of racism and prejudices against migrants as well as workers in Mexico and the coexistence of migrant and non-migrant members, among others. However, in the course of the research process, it resulted that these categories – while important – were not the decisive ones, and I subsequently began to replace them with others.

The open coding gradually led to the concretization, adjustment or replacement and “verification” of developed categories through what Strauss (1987) calls “axial coding”. It comprises “intense analysis done around one category at a time” (ibid., 32) and “results in cumulative knowledge about relationships between that category and other categories and subcategories” (ibid., 32). Accordingly, through focusing on and coding around some of the conceptual categories, which involved going over and coding existing data time and again, I further developed them. When a category was sufficiently developed, I frequently re-coded the data for this category, which Strauss (1987, 33) calls “selective coding”, namely to “delimit(...) coding to only those codes that relate to the core codes”. This also became “a guide to further theoretical sampling and data collection” (ibid.), i.e. once a category was established, I chose interview partners and topics in the interviews to further develop this category (for instance, a broad concept of unionism and solidarity, or migrants' knowledge of Mexican culture, society and politics).

The final categories gained out of the empirical data (the “core categories”, see Strauss 1987, 34f.) developed only gradually. Step by step, I reduced the number of categories and increasingly focused on the elaboration and concretization of a limited number of theoretical categories that were particularly relevant to describe the role that transnational migration plays in international labor solidarity. Their development entailed a repeated re-coding that focused on newly – or more thoroughly – developed core categories through

selective coding, as well as an abolishment and adjustment of previous codes and categories when they proved irrelevant, non-useful or wrong. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 111) explain this process as follows:

The second level for delimiting the theory is a reduction in the original list of categories for coding. As the theory grows, becomes reduced, and increasingly works better for ordering a mass of qualitative data, the analyst becomes committed to it. His commitment now allows him to cut down the original list of categories for collecting and coding data, according to the present boundaries of his theory. In turn, his consideration, coding, and analyzing of incidents can become more select and focused. He can devote more time to the constant comparison of incidents clearly applicable to this smaller set of categories.

Except the very beginning of the research, most of this coding took place more or less simultaneously. While the three types of coding sound like a structured step-by-step procedure, most of the time they take place simultaneously and new categories continue to emerge almost throughout the complete research process (see Strauss 1987, 32f.). In fact, axial coding takes place simultaneously with open coding (although not so much at the beginning of the coding process) and “alternates with looser kinds of open coding, especially as the analyst examines new aspects of the phenomena under study” (Strauss 1987, 32; see also Strauss and Corbin 1990, 57) and only the final development of the categories through selective coding takes place with some delay (however, open coding can continue and new categories can emerge simultaneously with the selective coding for others).

The development of conceptual categories and their relations is mainly based on the comparison of observed incidents. In empirical research as well as daily practice, comparison is the fundamental tool for the discovery of the specificities of a particular phenomenon or characteristic: the “observation of difference” (“Differenzbeobachtung”) (Strübing 2013, 28f.) and similarities is the key means through which we develop typologies and understandings of causal mechanisms. Hence, implicit and explicit comparisons of cases, incidents, individuals and groups played a major role in the development of the categories. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 106) have labeled the comparison in the coding process for the development of grounded theories as the “constant comparative method”:

Coding need consist only of noting categories on margins, but can be done more elaborately (e.g., on cards). It should keep track of the comparison group in which the incident occurs. To this procedure we add the basic, defining rule for the constant comparative method: while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category. (...) This constant comparison of the incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category. The analyst starts thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relation to other categories, and its other properties.

Through comparison, first conceptual categories and their properties are developed and then “hypotheses or generalized relations among the categories and their properties” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 35). A comparison of the indicators of concepts – i.e. “actual data, such as behavioral actions and events, observed or described in documents and in the words of interviewees and informants” (Strauss 1987, 25) – helps to distill the core of a category:

By making ‘comparisons of indicator to indicator the analyst is forced into confronting similarities, differences, and degrees of consistency of meaning among indicators. This generates an underlying uniformity, which in turn results in a coded’ category (ibid., emphasis in original)

Comparison thus prompts the researcher to focus on the indicators’ similarities and differences, which “leads him to generate abstract categories and their properties” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 36). The hypotheses may initially seem unrelated, but:

as categories and properties emerge, develop in abstraction, and become related, their accumulating interrelations form an integrated central theoretical framework-the core of the emerging theory. (ibid., 40)

The researcher usually starts by comparing *similar* cases, incidents and groups, followed by a comparison with *differing* cases, incidents and groups to find the reach and limits of the category, as well as where it needs modifications (Strübing 2013, 115f.; Strauss and Corbin 1996). While I did not make comparisons across labor unions and their international solidarity work, to elaborate the concrete characteristics of each category I compared the incidents observed with both similar and differing incidents in the same group and other groups within each case, both in the data that I had already collected and transcribed and in choosing subsequent data to collect (Strübing 2013, 115; see also Lamnek 2006, 104). Furthermore, I constantly made external comparisons, i.e. comparisons with other cases, incidents or groups not found in the data, but which I knew from previous experiences or from reading, in order to develop the specificities of a category (Strauss 1987, 57f.).

When first developing a category, the comparison of incidents to similar incidents in the same group (e.g. comparing incidents such as the existence and the shape of personal relationships that individuals in the same group – in this case, Mexican migrants – maintain with partners in Mexico, or the political identification that individuals in the same group – here, Salvadoran migrants – have with the FMLN) naturally assumes fundamental importance; otherwise, the category would simply not emerge. Hence, while the comparison of similar incidents within the same group was the fundamental tool for the initial development of categories, I also compared incidents and groups with differing ones to find out about their specificities, by either talking to other groups outside the research groups (i.e. African American and white non-migrants as well as migrants from other countries) or asking about comparison incidents and groups

in the interviews (e.g. other cases of solidarity, other groups of members or other unions).

It was through such comparison of incidents of the emerging categories that the categories obtained their final shape; for instance, the category “embeddedness in political networks and organizations” started much more broadly as “transnational social ties” (albeit, which other migrant groups also had), and only through comparing the incidents in this category with each other I carved out that it was migrants’ embeddedness in *political* groups, organizations and networks that were decisive. Similarly, through comparison of Salvadorans’ identification with the FMLN to the ways of belonging of other migrants as well as Salvadorans’ identification with El Salvador more broadly, the category “transnational ways of belonging” (which also other migrants – for instance, Guatemalans – strongly showed) developed into Salvadorans’ *political* ways of belonging that moved them to strongly promote solidarity work with their country of origin. In the category “social remittances” of Salvadorans, comparing the incidents in the category with other groups (other migrant groups and non-migrants) carved out the particular character of Salvadorans’ view on unions and solidarity (which they share – to some degree – with Guatemalans, but not with Mexicans, let alone non-migrants). Moreover, the category “personal relationships” and “cultural skills” and their characteristics in the other case evolved by comparing Mexican migrants with other member groups.

In the development of conceptual categories based on comparison, all types of data are included. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 106; see also Strauss 1987, 29) explain:

the constant comparative method in contrast to analytic induction requires only saturation of data-not consideration of all available data, nor are the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined case. The constant comparative method (...) is more likely to be applied in the same study to any kind of qualitative information, including observations, interviews, documents, articles, books, and so forth.

Hence, the observations obtained through each type of data were not separate steps, but rather they permanently mutually informed each other and influenced the development of categories. I not only transcribed the interviews, but also immediately analyzed the other data – documents and direct observations – and included them in the generation of conceptual categories.

The development of conceptual categories was also supported by the writing of “analytic memos” (Strauss 1987, 33; see also Strübing 2013, 125f.). In fact, these are considered to play a crucial role in the development of grounded theories (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 107). Strauss (1987, 32) suggests to frequently “interrupt the coding in order to write a theoretical memo. This leads quickly to accumulated memos as well as moves the analyst further from the data and into a more analytic realm.” Hence, I complemented the coding process with writing memos in which I structured and related the different categories to

each other that I was pursuing at that time, which helped me to figure out their significance. Furthermore, they helped me to make sense of the differing observations from the two cases, the differing questions that emerged in them in the course of the research process, as well as in focusing and adapting the research question(s). I wrote memos particularly in phases in which the wealth of categories on different levels and areas almost overwhelmed me. In them, I formulated the categories that I was currently pursuing, their characteristics and the incidents that supported them, as well as their interrelationships. As the intention of memos is to support the process of theory building, it sometimes took me a day or two to write them: as Burawoy (2009, 124), states memos constitute “a continuous dialogue between observation and theory”, as they constantly link empirical data with theory, interpret the data, revise theoretical concepts or search for new ones if the previous ones do not apply.

Data presentation

Given that the interview sample in the case studies included undocumented migrants, most interview partners are cited anonymously, specifying only their position in the union (such as “division coordinator”, “financial secretary”, “rank-and-file activist”, etc.). Those interview partners, however, that are too well-known in the US labor movement or would easily be found through a google search, I decided to cite with their names, as I did the experts outside the target group who I interviewed in the first research phase (mostly researchers, officials of other unions, and representatives of other labor and community groups). A complete list of the interviews can be found in the appendix.

4 Empirical context: transnational migration, labor unions, and international solidarity in the US and the cases studied

4.1 *Transnational migration in the US and migration from El Salvador and Mexico*

4.1.1 Transnational migration in the US

In absolute terms, the US is currently the world's largest destination country of international migration (IOM 2016). In 2015, 46.6 million people living in the US had been born in other countries, representing 14.2 per cent of the total population of 324 million¹⁰² (US Census Population Clock 2017; Pew Research Center 2016).

Of course, the country's history is one of immigration. Founded as a nation-state by European immigrants, its population has since then continuously been fueled by subsequent waves of immigration, as US industrial and agricultural employers have built on foreign workers to meet their demand for labor. In the last two decades of the 19th century, over 23 million immigrants came to the US, and foreign-born made up 14.7 per cent of the population in 1910 (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 2). The share of foreign-born among the total population decreased to 4.7 per cent in 1970, but since then it has steadily grown, reaching 11.1 per cent in 2000 and 12.9 per cent in 2010 (*ibid.*, 25).

In the 19th and first decades of the 20th century, immigration was mainly European, with the main groups initially coming from the UK, Ireland, Scandinavia and Germany, and later from Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 4f.). Since then, migrants from so-called Third World and some newly-industrialized countries make up the majority of migrants, with the largest foreign-born groups today coming from Mexico, India, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, El Salvador, Cuba and Korea (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 93; see also Brown and Stepler 2016). Between 1965 and 2015, Latin American countries accounted for 51 per cent of all migration to the US (Pew Research Center 2015, 11).

With immigration policies becoming more restrictive and the enforcement of the Southern border much stricter in recent decades and particularly since 9/11, much of the previously cyclical migration stopped, forcing migrants to remain in the US without documents (Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 234-47). For decades, particularly migrants from Mexico had temporally come to the US during harvest season and for temporal contracts in railway construction. While the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 legalized most migrants who had come to the country before 1983, since then no significant

¹⁰² The International Organization for Migration gives somewhat higher figures, speaking of 14.49 per cent of the US total resident population being foreign born in 2015 (IOM 2015); Krogstad and Keegan (2015) speak of 13.1 per cent in 2013.

legalization of undocumented migrants has taken place. Along with the closing of the border to Mexico since the 2000s, this fueled the large population of approximately 11 million undocumented migrants living in the US today. Indeed, they make up 26 per cent of the total foreign-born population (Krogstad et al. 2016; Passel and Cohn 2016, 23).

Many migrants in the US maintain strong transnational ties to their countries and communities of origin. In fact, transnational migration studies first emerged here, dealing with transnational migrant communities spanning the US and countries of origin such as the Caribbean countries, Central America and Mexico, documenting the development of strong transnational networks, communities and enterprises, among others (Itzigsohn 2000; Vila 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Basch et al. 2005/1994). As in other places, transnationalism is not entirely new in the US, as in previous migration waves many migrant groups also maintained strong ties to their countries and communities of origin.¹⁰³ However, in the US as in other countries, what distinguishes contemporary transnationalism from previous periods is its intensity and regularity, as well as the possibility to maintain ties over a long period of time: modern telecommunications and money transfer technologies as well as fast and affordable travel possibilities make migration, return visits and the maintaining of close relationships with relatives and friends “back home” easier.¹⁰⁴

Today, in all large migration destination cities, direct daily flights and bus lines to major migrant-origin cities exist, and many migrants in the US today frequently travel back and forth, flying “home” for Christmas, Easter or family celebrations. The legalization of approximately 2.5 million undocumented migrants through IRCA in 1986 has contributed to this development, giving them the possibility to travel back and forth and more easily maintain their transnational practices (Portes 1997, 5). Furthermore, phone and internet shops and companies providing cheap calls to migrants’ origin countries have mushroomed across the country in the last two decades, as have money transfer agencies, significantly reducing both the risks and costs associated with sending remittances (Fritz et al. 2008).

¹⁰³ For instance, as Weber (1988, 211f.) explains, Italian immigrants in Buffalo, New York, returned home for civil celebrations and family visits in the early-19th century, with the local press advertising cheap tickets to Italy for Christmas. Moreover, Mexican migration to the US has always had a transnational character (ibid.; see below).

¹⁰⁴ A further factor contributing to the strong transnational ties is geographical proximity: the fact that a large part of the current migration to the US is from Central American and Caribbean countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala makes not only migration itself but also visits “back home”, circular migration and the sending of goods easier, faster and more affordable than in more distant contexts and previous migration waves.

The most evident expression of US migrants' transnationalism is the amount of remittances transferred from the US to other countries: in 2015, 61.4 billion USD in remittances were transferred from the US to migrants' countries of origin (IOM 2017). Moreover, countless hometown associations and other transnational organizations exist in the US that send collective remittances to and engage in development and cultural projects in countries of origin.

The regions in which I conducted the research – Los Angeles and the Midwest around Chicago – are two of the most important destinations for migrants coming to the US. While California did not play a significant role as a migration destination state until the early-20th century, today it is by far the largest destination state in the US: in 2010, 10.15 million – or 25 per cent of the foreign-born population living in the US – resided in California (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 86, 92). In 2010, it was the main destination state for almost all migrant groups (except for Cubans, who mainly resided in Florida, and Dominicans, who mainly lived in New York; see Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 93). In the state, the city of Los Angeles is the main destination: in 2011, of those migrants newly obtaining legal permanent residency, Los Angeles was the preferred city for migrant groups such as Mexicans, Salvadorans, Vietnamese, Filipinos and Guatemalans (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 95). Furthermore, Los Angeles is the second-largest residential area of undocumented migrants (after New York City): in 2014, approximately one million undocumented migrants lived in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim (Passel and Cohn 2017).

The Midwest is also an important destination for migrants. Since the early-20th century, migrants came to the area to work in Chicago's slaughterhouses, the railroads, the breweries of Milwaukee and the steel mills of Gary, Indiana (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 84). Illinois has long been among the top seven migration destination US states (ibid., 86). In 2010, close to 1.8 million foreign-born persons lived in Illinois (ibid., 92). Particularly the city of Chicago is one of the country's main migration-destinations: it occupied third place (after New York and Los Angeles) among the most important destination cities of migrants obtaining legal permanent residence in 1967, 1975, 1993 and 2002 (ibid., 103).

4.1.2 Migration from El Salvador and Mexico

Migrants from Mexico and El Salvador not only belong to the largest migrant groups in the US, with Mexicans as by far the largest group of foreign-born in the US and Salvadorans constituting the third-largest group from Latin American countries (Pew Research Center 2016); moreover, they are also considered particularly involved in transnational practices and embedded in transnational networks, being among the few countries in which formal migrant-state collaborations exist regarding the use of collective remittances, or matching fund programs (Burgess 2012). Both states have been classified as "transnational nation-states" by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, 1023), in the

sense that “they treat their migrants as long-term, long-distance members” and that “migrants’ contributions and participation have become an integral part of national policy” (ibid.). Much research dealing with transnational migration in the US context thus focuses on these two groups (e.g. Burgess 2012; Baker-Cristales 2008; Peraza 2008; Portes et al. 2002; Rivera-Salgado 2002; Landolt et al. 1999).

4.1.2.1 Migration from El Salvador

Salvadorans are among the largest foreign-born groups living in the US, and the second-largest Latin American group when excluding the population from the US territory of Puerto Rico. In 2015, 1.28 million persons residing in the US had been born in El Salvador (IOM 2015a), and the overall Salvadoran-origin population (including those born in the US) was about 2 million in 2013 (Pew Research Center 2015; see also Brown and Patten 2014). In 2008, one in five Salvadorans lived in the US (Migration Policy Institute 2010).

California is by far the main settlement state for Salvadoran migrants: in 2010, 34.8 per cent of Salvadoran migrants lived there, followed by Texas (13.9 per cent) (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 93). Salvadorans were the second-largest group among the almost 6 million Hispanic¹⁰⁵-origin population living in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim in 2014, accounting for 7.4 per cent of this group, following Mexicans who made up the vast majority (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends 2016). In 2008, approximately 25 per cent of the Salvadoran population in the US lived in Los Angeles (migration policy institute 2010), and of the new legal migrants from El Salvador admitted to legal permanent residency in 2011, 23 per cent aimed for that city (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 95).

Salvadoran migration to the US is relatively recent. Although some migration previously existed, most Salvadorans came to the US during the 1980s and 1990s, fleeing from the violence and government oppression during the Salvadoran civil war and the deteriorating economic possibilities that resulted from the war (Landolt 2003b, 635). The civil war between the military government supported by the US government and the guerrilla front of the FMLN – integrated by five guerrilla groups that wanted to put an end to the series of military dictatorships that had governed the country for decades – lasted from 1980 to 1992.¹⁰⁶ During the war, more than 80,000 people were

¹⁰⁵ The term “Hispanic” – as with “Latino” – used by the US government to categorize population groups of Latin American origin is problematic: most migrants and their children do not identify as “Latinos” or “Hispanics” and do not feel that they share a common culture, but rather they identify with their – or their parents’ – country of origin (e.g. Taylor et al. 2012).

¹⁰⁶ The FMLN formed in 1980 out of five armed revolutionary organizations that had formed – along with a broad social movement – organizations among unions, student, peasant and religious organizations in reaction to electoral fraud by the military government, as well

killed, and almost a third of the Salvadoran population of 5 million in 1980 were displaced, with the majority of those leaving the country going to the US (Baker-Cristales 2008, 349; Landolt 2003a, 304). Estimations on the numbers of Salvadorans entering the US significantly vary, reaching from 465,433 Salvadorans living in the country in 1990 (up from 94,447 in 1980) up to over a million already in the mid-1980s (Perla and Bibler 2009, 12). Given that the US government supported the Salvadoran military government, it denied Salvadoran migrants refugee status as well as the individual status of political asylum in almost all cases, meaning that a large share of Salvadoran refugees were illegally in the US or had only temporary residence permits (Landolt 2003a, 304f.; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 8f.). It was not until 1990 that the Immigration Act created the Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which granted Salvadorans legal residency, and in 1997 they obtained the right to apply for legal permanent residency through the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), through which approximately 83,340 Salvadorans and Guatemalans became legal permanent residents (Perla and Bibler 2009, 13f.). Today, due to family reunification as well as recent migration, more than a quarter of the Salvadoran migrants living in the US in 2008 came to the US in 2000 or later (migration policy institute 2010). The share of the foreign-born among the Salvadoran community in the US hence fell from 76 per cent in 2000 to 59 per cent in 2013 (Pew Hispanic Center 2015). At the same time, the share of undocumented migrants rose from 300,000 in 1990 to approximately 700,000 in 2015 (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends 2016).

Given this history, Salvadoran migrants maintain strong transnational ties to their country of origin. The need to maintain transnational ties with family and friends “back home” – which all migrants have – was strengthened by the context of migrants’ exit from El Salvador and their reception in the US: they were dominated by civil war uncertainties and a hostile political climate and federal US government, as well as by “high levels of family separation and a large incidence of binational families” (Guarnizo et al. 2003; Landolt 2003a; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 11). The context of their exit of the country as well as the insecure legal status in the US and the risk of being deported as well as the fear and insecure situation of their families in El Salvador contributed to their maintaining of contact with them, whom they sent money and medicine and with whom, over time they developed “transnational reference frames of decision-making” (Landolt 2003a, 305, own translation) and a “transnational administration of resources” (Landolt 2003b, 635, 633, own translation). Landolt et al. (1999, 293) hence find that Salvadoran migrants have generally preferred transnational over local strategies of economic and social incorporation, which they explain with “the uncertainties of war and a negative reception in the US (that) conspire to push migrants to maintain ties with their

as the subsequent violent repression of the opposition groups (see Perla and Bibler 2009, 9).

place of origin at a time when the dynamics of the world capitalist system make the maintenance of transnational relations feasible and thus transnational households surprisingly functional” (ibid., 294; see also Rivas 2010, 156f.). Migrants’ transnational family relationships intermingled with the transnational solidarity networks created by the FMLN, leading to a “transnationalization of the refugees’ places of arrival” (Landolt 2003b, 633, own translation), from where a broad variety of transnational networks and transnational institutions and associations were developed (ibid.). “Since their large-scale migration in the 1980s, the family lives and collective history of Salvadoran migrants has been marked by the cross-border circulation of people, resources, ideas, and symbols”, Landolt (2008, 53) writes.

Over time, the transnational social networks that Salvadoran exiles first established with their families expanded to include a variety of institutions such as businesses, political parties, charity organizations and youth groups (Landolt 2003b, 636). Today, Salvadoran migrants engage in a broad range of stable transnational social, economic and political practices. Landolt (2001, 232) argues that in many major migration destination cities, one can speak of “transnational neighborhoods” “in which the rhythm of life follows the beat of Salvadoran Transnationalism” (ibid.). In cities such as Los Angeles and Washington, DC, countless Salvadoran restaurants, bakeries and shops exist and Salvadoran newspapers, music and movies are readily available, allowing migrants to remain informed about developments in their country of origin. Moreover, media in El Salvador contribute to extending the imaginary of the Salvadoran nation to those living abroad, and several media institutions have begun covering the life of Salvadorans abroad (Rivas 2010, 161ff; Portes et al. 2002; Landolt et al. 1999, 294). Already in the late-1990s, Chinchilla and Hamilton (1999, 12) mentioned a “a socio-spatial transformation” of the area of South California through Salvadoran and Guatemalan migration, as numerous phone, courier and transport companies serve migrants’ communication needs with relatives, delivering letters and packages as well as providing telephone and internet services and trips to communities “back home”, and as Salvadoran supermarket chains have opened up branches in the US. Furthermore, airlines offer daily flights from major migration destination cities to San Salvador.

Another apparent indicator of Salvadoran transnational practices is the volume of remittances sent “back home” each year, which have grown rapidly particularly since the TPS was granted in 1990, more than doubling as a share of the country’s GDP between 1990 and 2004 (Perla and Bibler 2009, 14). Remittances from Salvadorans living abroad (by far the majority of them in the US) already exceeded the income from exports by the mid-1990s, amounting to over one billion of US-\$ (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 11f.). In 2008, they reached 2.55 billion US-\$, (Orozco 2008, 311), accounting for 15.9 per cent of the GDP in 2011 (Ahn Paarlberg 2012).

Moreover, numerous migrant organizations and hometown associations (HTAs) – or “comités de pueblo” – have developed, particularly after the signing of the peace accords in 1992, which replaced the dominance of the political conflict with the desire to help the country and communities of origin, and created the possibilities for it (Landolt 2003a, 308ff). The vast majority of them concentrate in California state, particularly in the city of Los Angeles (Burgess 2012, 123, 137; Landolt et al. 1999, 306). While some organizations engage in the support of the Salvadoran population in the US, the HTAs engage in social, cultural and economic projects in El Salvador, particularly health and education, disaster relief, town beautification and celebrations and public works, as well as sending supplies such as medicine, books or ambulances, often working with committees formed in the communities for this purpose (Burgess 2012, 123; see also Orozco 2009, 11f.; Landolt 2003b, 643). In 2005, the Salvadoran government identified 268 Salvadoran migrant organizations in the US, of which approximately 2,000 were HTAs, although many more unregistered organizations are likely to exist and many of them are strongly connected to counterpart organizations in migrants’ communities of origin (Burgess 2012, 122f., 131; see also Orozco 2009, 11). Landolt (2003a, 309) calculates that already at the beginning of the 2000s, about 50 per cent of Salvadoran municipalities maintained formal or informal links with migrant committees.

Salvadoran economic transnationalism extends beyond the sending of remittances and involves transnational entrepreneurial activities, which Landolt (2001, 217) views as “part of a transnational settlement strategy” (see also Landolt et al. 1999). Transnational economic activities are strongest in Los Angeles, where two migrant-based business organizations provide entrepreneurs with institutional contacts for their activities (Landolt 2001, 233). As Portes et al. (2002, 289) stress in analyzing different migrant communities, Salvadorans are very strongly engaged in transnational entrepreneurship when compared to others, which is a consequence of their strong bonds to the country of origin, arising out of the civil war:

All else equal, Salvadorans are 7 to 9 percent more likely to engage in transnational business activities than Dominicans, while Colombians are less likely to do so by about half that figure. (...) These results fit the known contexts of exit and reception under which each of these migrant flows has taken place: Salvadoran transnationalism is supported by strong bonds of solidarity with origin communities that were forged during the country's civil war; these bonds were subsequently put to economic use once the country returned to political democracy and internal peace.

Indeed, migrants’ transnational practices have also had an impact on those staying behind: not only do families often regularly receive consumer products such as electronic devices from their relatives in the US – in fact, it has been argued that this has contributed to the development of a stronger consumer culture in out-migration areas – but also origin communities are increasingly influenced by US culture such as dress and music styles (e.g. Chinchilla and

Hamilton 1999, 12f.).¹⁰⁷ Rivas (2010, 152) views the Salvadoran transnational space as “part of the national imaginary”.

Given the size of the Salvadoran population living in the US and the importance of their contribution to the country’s economy, the Salvadoran government has also increasingly courted the diaspora (Rivas 2010; Perla and Bibler 2009, 14f.). Baker-Cristales (2008, 349) writes that Salvadoran state actors “have had to rearticulate their claims to represent the nation as the nation has become increasingly transnational” and “the Salvadoran government has created a host of new agencies and adopted new discursive and institutional tactics for managing its emigrant population” (ibid.). Among others, the government has engaged in securing migrants’ legal status in the US; in the second half of the 1990s, the mandates of the ministries of finance, education and international relations were broadened to include the migrant community (Landolt 2003a, 313); the government and the consulates in the US established direct contact with migrant organizations such as CARECEN and El Rescate¹⁰⁸, as well as HTAs; the Directorate for Attention to Salvadorans Abroad (Dirección General de Atención a la Comunidad en el Exterior, DGACE) in the Foreign Ministry was created in 2000, with the aim of coordinating the ministries’ policies and promotes an economic and cultural rapprochement with the migrant community, through – among others – promoting transnational business opportunities and marketing Salvadoran products abroad, engaging Salvadorans abroad in local development initiatives and promoting Salvadoran cultural identity and transnational cultural practices; and in 2004, a Vice Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Salvadorans abroad was created and a program was launched for leveraging collective remittances by Salvadoran HTAs through the co-financing by public funds (Burguess 2012, 125; Perla and Bibler 2009, 14f.; Ambrosius et al. 2008,

¹⁰⁷ The Salvadoran-origin president of a SEIU local in Seattle that I interviewed explained: “I grew up (...) in El Salvador listening to US music from the 70s, you know, I like Pink Floyd, Eagles, America, Santana, all that, you understand? I grew up in that. And like that, many more people grew up. Out of 6.5 or 7 million Salvadorans, a little more than two million live in the United States. There is a natural connection. And if you see the twelve or fifteen daily flights from the US, or maybe 20, ALL these flights are full. I mean, there is no empty seats. You go to El Salvador, and there is no empty seats, wherever you take your flight from, Dallas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, wherever, Miami. (...) There is a natural connection, already for year, we are a semi-colony of the US. The Salvadoran *Colón* ceased to exist long ago, now it’s the dollar, so now, they don’t say anymore ‘give me a peseta’, is a quarter, just as in Los Angeles. (...) There is an almost organic connection with the US, for the Salvadorans, that does not exist with the other countries. People there name their children ‘Steven’. They don’t name them Juan anymore, they are called Johnny” (Interview with SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013; own translation).

¹⁰⁸ The *Centro para Refugiados Centroamericanos* (CARECEN) and *El Rescate* are important social service organizations founded by FMLN exiles in the US in the 1980s, committed to supporting the migrant population, maintaining it informed on the situation in El Salvador and publicizing violence and human rights abuses by the Salvadoran government, as well as denouncing US intervention in El Salvador (see chapter 5.2.2.1).

8; Baker-Cristales 2008, 353ff). Importantly, Salvadorans abroad were granted the right to vote in presidential elections in 2014, after they had long lobbied for it, seeing it as an expression of their “love for the homeland” as well as a “quid pro quo” for their contribution to the country, which they see as the “oxygen of the Salvadoran economy” (Landolt 2003a, 316f).

Indeed, migrants are clearly a political factor in El Salvador: even before gaining voting rights, these were “part of the Salvadoran political world”, Landolt (2003a, 319, own translation; see also Baker-Cristales 2008) argues, as migrants actively participate in El Salvador’s political affairs. Importantly, they have a strong influence on the votes of their relatives and friends back home, and Salvadoran political parties strongly campaign among the diaspora compared with other migrant-sending countries’ parties (Ahn Paarlberg 2012). Even before the exile community obtained the right to vote, in the presidential election of 2009 the candidates of both parties (the right-wing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista, ARENA, and the FMLN) campaigned in the US (Ahn Paarlberg 2012). Furthermore, in the municipal elections in 2000, migrant committees funded many electoral campaigns, many mayors were return migrants and municipal councils relied on the exile community to fund public works (ibid.). Moreover, what Landolt (2003b, 644) calls the “transnational mayor” (“alcalde transnacional”) is a frequent phenomenon: municipality mayors as well as municipality councils traveling to the US to promote the formation of HTAs supporting the community of origin. Both Landolt (2003a, 314) and Baker-Cristales (2008, 349) hence speak of a “transnational political field” that includes both a variety of actors in El Salvador and institutions and migrant associations abroad. Through it, Landolt (2003a, 314) writes that “migrants transnational(ly) participat(e) in the formation of the nation-state” (own translation).

4.1.2.2 Migration from Mexico

Mexicans constitute by far the largest group of migrants living in the US. Of the 46.63 million foreign-born people living in the US in 2015, 12.05 million – or 25.8 per cent – were from Mexico, followed by some distance by Chinese, amounting to 2.1 million (Pew Research Center 2016). In 2010, Mexicans represented 29.3 per cent of all foreign-born (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 93). The overall population of Mexican origin (including those born in the US) accounted for 34.6 million in 2013, or 11 per cent of the overall US population (Pew Research Center 2015; González-Barrera and López 2013). Of all Mexicans living outside Mexico, 96 per cent reside in the US (González-Barrera, López 2013).

Many of these reside in the Midwest, which has been an important destination for Mexican migration since the early-20th century. During the Mexican Revolution, large numbers of migrants came to the slaughterhouses in Chicago and the steel mills around Gary, Indiana, creating large Mexican communities

that have subsequently attracted further migration (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 83f.). In view of labor shortages produced by World War I, Midwestern labor agencies recruited Mexican workers between the beginning of World War I and the mid-1920s, while after legal restrictions reduced European immigration after 1924 some steel mills later recruited workers directly in Mexico (Flores 2011, 331; Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 145). Beyond the steel mills and slaughterhouses, Mexican migrants also worked in railway construction east of Chicago and eventually the Midwest automobile industry (Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 145). Consequently, the Mexican population in the Midwest rose to 80,000 in 1927, as well as from 200 to more than 20,000 in the city of Chicago between 1900 and 1930 (Flores 2011, 331). In 2010, Illinois was the third of the principal settlement states of Mexican migrants, accounting for 6.1 per cent of all Mexican immigrants, and in 2014 the Mexican-origin population accounted for 13.6 per cent of the total population of Illinois (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends 2014; Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 93). In 2015, about 21.7 per cent of the population of the city of Chicago was estimated to be of Mexican origin (US Census Bureau 2015). Mexicans accounted for almost 80 per cent of the 2.1 million Hispanic population (21.8 per cent of the total population) of the metropolitan area of Chicago-Naperville-Elgin in 2014 (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends 2016).

Mexican migration has a much longer history than other Latin American migration to the US, given not only the immediate vicinity of both countries but also the fact that a large part of the US belonged to Mexico until one and a half centuries ago.¹⁰⁹ The 2,000 mile-long border is the only border between a “First World” and a so-called “Third World” country¹¹⁰ and it makes migration easier than in the case of more distant countries. It has historically always been crossed by Mexican workers “following the crops” on agricultural farms, in the steel mills and copper mines or in railway construction, and it has only been gradually closed for migrants in the second half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1970s onwards (Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 232f.).

Mexican immigration was not significant until US employers – particularly in the western states – turned towards their Southern neighbor for cheap labor after 1910, when xenophobic measures pushed for by nativists had ceased the access to Chinese and Japanese immigrant workers¹¹¹ (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 13).

¹⁰⁹ After Mexico’s defeat by the US in the Mexican-American war, Mexico ceded to the US almost half of its territory under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, including the states of California, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Utah and parts of Wyoming and Colorado.

¹¹⁰ While the OECD labels Mexico as an emerging market economy or newly-industrialized country, this holds little practical significance for the majority of Mexico’s population, which continues to live in poverty, as large parts of the country and sections of the economy are decoupled from economic prosperity.

¹¹¹ Until 1920, Mexican immigration accounted for less than one per cent of all immigration to the US (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 14).

During the Great Recession of the 1930s, the deportation campaigns focused on Mexicans – including US-born Mexican Americans – as most European immigrants were legally in the US (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 21). Hence, while Mexicans accounted for 11.2 per cent of total immigration in the 1920s, migration from the country subsequently dropped to 4-6 per cent in the 1930s and 1940s (*ibid.*, 14).

Large-scale Mexican migration into the US labor market did not begin to surge again with the Bracero Program (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 14). Under these agreements between the US and Mexican governments, US farmers and ranches massively recruited Mexican contract workers from 1942 to 1964. In the course of its 22 years of existence, several millions of Mexicans entered the country, with an average number of 400,000 coming each year, and half a million per year in the second half of the 1950s (*ibid.*, 20f.; Lüthje and Scherrer 1997c, 89).¹¹² As mentioned above, much of this migration had a cyclical character: given the geographical proximity and the virtually non-existent border enforcement, most Mexican workers returned home after the harvest or after their contracts with the railroad companies had expired (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 14).

With agricultural deregulation, trade liberalization in the run-up to the NAFTA in the 1980s and early-1990s as well as economic integration through the agreement – which led to declining wages, the loss of employment and displacement of smallholder farmers – migration from the Mexican countryside sharply rose to both the maquiladora factories at the northern border and the US (Zong and Batalova 2016; Bacon 2014). Akers Chacón and Davis (2007, 136f.) estimate that between 1994 and 2004 more than 1.4 million Mexican peasants were ruined through cheap agricultural imports from the US, strongly fueling migration northwards. Between 1980 and 1990, the foreign-born Mexican population in the US almost doubled from 2.2 to 4.3 million, more than doubling again to 9.18 million in 2000 and reaching 11.5 million in 2006 (Zong and Batalova 2016). However, in recent years, Mexican migration to the US has slowed down due to the economic recession and border enforcement; indeed, net migration has been negative between 2009 and 2014 (Krogstad 2016; Vega 2014). With the closing of the border and the immigration-hostile policies, migration from Mexico has become increasingly undocumented, with 5.8 undocumented Mexican migrants living in the US in 2014, accounting for about 52 per cent of the approximately 11 million undocumented migrants living in the country (Krogstad et al. 2016; Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 176f.).¹¹³

¹¹² However, after its end in 1964, US farmers did not refrain from using Mexican workers. They replaced Bracero contract workers with undocumented Mexican migrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 24).

¹¹³ Undocumented migration from Mexico has always existed. As Akers Chacón and Davis (2007, 165f.) detail, the number of undocumented Mexican migrant workers far outnumbered those legally in the country through the Bracero Program from the 1940s to 1960s, as

In contrast to Salvadoran migration, Mexican migration has always been overwhelmingly labor migration, with Mexicans coming to the US in search for work particularly as urban workers and farm laborers (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 97). Moreover, in comparison with most countries, whose migrants are usually not the poorest (who can usually not afford the travel costs), given the geographical proximity and the shared border, the majority of Mexican migrants come from relatively poor households and have low skill levels (Portes and Rumbaut 2014, 113f.). In comparison with other migrant groups, the proportion of professionals and managers among Mexican migrants is low (*ibid.*, 97). In 2010, only 5.3 per cent of Mexican migrants residing in the US were college graduates, while only 39.2 per cent had a high school degree (compared with 28.2 per cent and 88.7 per cent of the native born; see *ibid.*, 115).

Importantly, Mexican migration to the US has long had a transnational character in a number of ways: as Portes and Rumbaut (2014, 22) highlight, already in the first half of the 20th century, a significant factor distinguishing Mexican migration from the previous European as well as the Asian migration waves was that through the Bracero Program, a continuous migration flow from Mexico was ensured, which facilitated maintaining a cultural and linguistic identity and ties to the home country (see also Weber 1998, 218). Furthermore, a significant part of Americans of Mexican descent in the Southwest did not actually cross the border; instead, it was the border that crossed about 120,000 Mexicans with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Ruiz Cameron 2000, 46f.). Furthermore, geographical proximity and the cyclical character of Mexican migration until the second half of the 20th century allowed migrants to maintain transnational ties more easily than many European and Asian migrants. Mexicans working in the US in the 1920s and 1930s followed work opportunities, occasionally going back to Mexico, maintaining strong social ties and support networks in their communities “back home” and among the migrant community in the US (Weber 1998, 2010ff). In fact, already in the 1910s to 1930s, Mexican political groups – through migrants in the US – operated from North of the border and Mexican consuls engaged in organizing Mexican migrant workers in the US (*ibid.*, 214). Not least, the large Mexico-US border region has always been transnational, with economic and social ties, political interests and – in fact – family and friendship relations that ignore the border, while many sister cities separated by the border whose functioning involves the daily border crossings of thousands of people (*ibid.*, 213).

The large number of Mexican migrants in the US, the long history of circular migration, geographical proximity as well as the 2,000 mile-long border that makes back and forth movements relatively easy have contributed to the development of transnational communities spanning Mexico and the US today. Contemporary research has documented the strong transnational ties that the

employers enthusiastically welcomed these workers without rights.

Mexican migrant community in the US maintains to its country and communities of origin. As Rivera-Salgado (2002, 262) writes, Mexican migrants in the US build transnational communities that allow them to “retain a considerable stake in both communities” and “maintain and develop multiple relationships (familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political) that cross multiple borders – geographic, cultural, linguistic, political” (ibid.). Through IRCA, more than 1.7 million undocumented Mexican migrants were legalized in 1986 (see Enchautegui 2013) and subsequently have been able to legally return “home” for vacation, religious, national or community festivities and family celebrations, as well as migrating back and forth, as many migrants do (cf. Pries 2008a, 51-59). As in the case of Salvadoran migration, given the spreading of businesses focused on this transnational community such as travel agencies, money transfer businesses, internet and telecommunications providers, today it is easy to maintain close contact with relatives and friends “back home”. In most US cities with large Mexican communities, daily direct flights from US and Mexican aviation companies as well as bus lines currently exist to large Mexican cities such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Morelia and Oaxaca (Guarnizo 2003, 685f.). Telecommunications companies such as AT&T discovered long-distance calls to Mexico as a major market, making cheap calls to Mexico accessible to the wide population (ibid., 683). With many Mexican companies having extended their market to the US and targeted the migrant community, the accessibility of Mexican products, food, media and culture facilitates the preservation of a Mexican – or rather, in most cases, transnational, and in the case of second-generation migrants, a Chicano¹¹⁴ – identity (ibid., 682f.; Bacon 2015b).

Again, one of the most apparent indications of Mexicans’ ties to their country of origin is the amount of money remitted to Mexico: in 2014, 24 billion US-\$ in remittances were transferred to Mexico. Given the size of Mexico’s economy, it does not depend that strongly on migrants’ remittances compared with smaller countries such as El Salvador, but nonetheless the sum is the second-largest source of foreign currency after oil exports (Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 187; Zong and Batalova 2006).

A further important expression of Mexican migrants’ transnationalism is the growth of Mexican HTAs, which constitute the largest group of HTAs in the US. Countless Mexican “clubes” exist that engage in projects such as the construction of roads, bridges, schools, clinics or churches in migrants’ home communities (Escala-Rabadán et al. 2006; Alarcón 2001; Levitt 1998b). Today, more than 2,500 US-based HTAs are registered with the Mexican government and they have become important political actors in their origin communities (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior 2017; see also Burgess 2012, 122).

¹¹⁴ The term “Chicano” describes Mexican Americans; in contrast to the neutral latter term, it has an emancipatory connotation as it became widely used by the Chicano civil rights movement in the 1960s.

The majority of them concentrate in California and Illinois, which together concentrate 80 per cent of the Mexican HTAs operating in the US, while in 2003, 251 “Clubes” or HTAs operated in Chicago (Escala-Rabaldán et al. 2006, 134; see also Burgess 2012, 122). Furthermore, a broad array of other transnational Mexican migrant organizations with different levels of institutionalization exist, such as the Binational Oaxacan Indigenous Front (FIOB) and the Oaxacan Federation of Indigenous Communities and Organizations in California (FOCOICA), which – while also financing projects in their home communities – also support the migrant population and contribute to the institutionalization of cross-border cultural exchange and information flows, which produce a transnational political community (Rivera-Salgado 2002, 266; see also Escala-Rabaldán et al. 2006).

Given that about 10 per cent of Mexico’s population lives in the US – counting only those born in Mexico – and the strong transnational ties that these migrants maintain, in recent years the Mexican state has increasingly targeted the diaspora population with measures aiming at securing the overseas population’s loyalty (Burgess 2012).

On the one hand, the state has developed measures to directly take advantage of the huge amount of remittances that Mexicans abroad send to their relatives “back home” each year. Beyond promoting more direct and cheaper money transfer channels, the Mexican government has recently celebrated Mexicans abroad as heroes and engaged in establishing close ties with HTAs. Among others, it already launched matching fund programs in the 1990s (the Two-for-One program later became the Three-for-One program), in which the national, state and municipal governments each add one dollar to each dollar that HTAs invest in a community (Ambrosius et al. 2008, 9-12; Escala-Rabaldán et al. 2006, 143).

On the other hand, the Mexican population living in the US is a major factor in Mexican politics. Among others, it has created the Institute for Mexicans abroad (IME), granted Mexican citizens residing abroad voting rights in 2006 (Burgess 2012, 134), guaranteed the non-loss of Mexican nationality when becoming US citizens and introduced the *matrícula consular* as an ID card that is also accessible to undocumented migrants which gives them – among others – access to financial services and thus the sending of remittances through bank transfers (Ambrosius et al. 2008, 11; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1014; Martínez-Saldaña and Ross Pineda 2002, 275). Furthermore, individual Mexican state governments strongly engage with their diaspora in the US, offering various services such as job training and distance-learning high school education, as well as promoting HTA investment in their communities (Escala-Rabaldán et al. 2006, 147). Moreover, Mexican politicians regularly campaign in US cities with large Mexican-origin population, and governors from Mexican emigration states visit migration destination states such as California regularly: not only due to migrants’ votes themselves, but also because they have an important influence

on relatives and friends “back home” (Martínez-Saldaña and Ross Pineda 2002, 284; Levitt 1998b, 2).

4.2 US labor unions and migration

Since most migrants are workers, migrants make up a large share of the US workforce: in 2014, foreign-born workers accounted for 17 per cent of the total civilian labor force (Passel and Cohn 2016, 7). While a significant share of them are highly educated professionals, by far the majority concentrates in low-wage industries (ibid.; Milkman 2011a). Particularly undocumented migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and concentrate in precarious and low-paid jobs at the bottom of the US labor market (Gordon 2009, 4f.; Fine, 2006a, 1). In 2014, 8 million – or 5 per cent – of the civilian labor force in the US was undocumented, with some states such as California, Nevada and Texas as well as some industries such as agriculture and construction as well as meat and poultry processing and the janitorial industry showing much higher numbers¹¹⁵ (Passel and Cohn 2016, 7; Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 177-83; see also Ontiveros 2008, 159). Although in principle undocumented workers’ labor rights are protected by law, they are constantly violated in these sectors, with payments below the minimum wage, wage theft, the retaliation or firing of workers who complain or organize and unpaid overtime, among others (Milkman 2011a, 354).¹¹⁶ This has been fueled by IRCA in 1986: while it legalized many undocumented migrants, IRCA also institutionalized employer sanctions for hiring undocumented workers, albeit with are rarely enforced, meaning that workers alone bear the risk of being apprehended by government enforcement agents and being deported (ibid., 369). The increasing number of workplace raids conducted by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) since the mid-2000s has created a climate of fear among undocumented workers, reducing their willingness to turn to legal remedies when experiencing labor law violations (Milkman 2001b, 308).

4.2.1 Anti-immigrant stance until the 1990s

Despite this situation, US unions have historically only rarely proactively addressed the situation of migrant – particularly undocumented – workers. In fact, many industries were “de-unionized” in the second half of the 20th century through the purposeful employment of undocumented and more vulnerable migrant workers, whereby low-wage migrant workers mostly – and increasingly – work in industries with few or no unions (Akers Chacón and Davis 2007, 176; Fine 2006b, 417f.).

¹¹⁵ In Nevada, undocumented workers account for 10.4 per cent of the workforce, in California for 9 per cent, in Texas for 8.5 per cent. Illinois is on the national average with 5 per cent (Passel and Cohn 2016, 25).

¹¹⁶ Consequently, Akers Chacón and Davis (2007, 195) state that the average family income for undocumented migrants living in the US for less than ten years was 25,700 US-\$ in 2003, compared to 47,700 US-\$ for natives and 47,800 US-\$ for documented migrants.

Historically, as the US workforce has always comprised a large share of migrant workers, these have always played a role in the labor movement (Milkman 2011a; Nissen and Grenier 2001a). As mentioned in chapter 2.3, European immigrants at times introduced socialist ideas of fraternity and solidarity into the labor movement, and some unions have always fought for a labor movement overcoming race barriers, such as the Knights of Labor in the second half of the 19th century, the IWW, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), the United Mine Workers (UMW), the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the United Electrical Workers (UE) from the 1930s onwards (Linkon and Russo 2001, 314; Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 568; Goldfield 1997, 68f.). Furthermore, Mexican workers were an important factor in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee's (SWOC) success in organizing the Chicago Steel industry in the 1930s, and by 1942, 15,000 Mexican workers were organized in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in Los Angeles (Grenier 1997, 98). Furthermore, the United Farm Workers' (UFW) – under legendary leader César Chavez – organized mostly Chicano and Filipino farm workers in the Southwest in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nevertheless, throughout most of the US labor movement's history, cases of migrant organizing remained the exception as unions mostly tried to keep migrant workers out of their membership and the country and favored restrictions on immigration (Milkman 2000). A narrow conception of solidarity excluding non-white workers and based on exclusionism and chauvinism prevailed in most US unions since the 19th century (Lüthje and Scherrer 2003). The unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) – which represented overwhelmingly white and male skilled and craft workers – had a very narrow conception of labor solidarity and made little efforts to organize unskilled immigrant workers, who were mostly seen as a threat to the achievements gained through craft unionism¹¹⁷ (Milkman 2000, 3; Yates 1998, 55). In the 19th century, most unions were hostile towards more recent immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (Milkman 2000, 3). At the beginning of the 20th century, in the AFL, “a shift toward exclusion” and a “trend toward business unionism” went hand in hand, as “(s)olidarities of all types narrowed (and) broad class interests were sacrificed to win increased wages and benefits for the fortunate few inside the unions” (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 569). By the turn of the 20th century, the AFL was openly anti-immigrant, and in the 1910s and 1920s it supported literacy tests for migrants and laws reducing immigration to small numbers (ibid.): in the context of strong racism in the US at that time, the increasing Mexican immigration after World War I as well as earlier Asian immigration was seen by AFL president Samuel Gompers as a threat to white workers' jobs and wages (Grenier 1997, 97f.). The racist stance concerned not only migrant workers, but was also – and in the 19th

¹¹⁷ Of course, these concerns are partly justified, as employers around the world have historically often utilized migrant workers for lowering labor standards.

century primarily – directed at African Americans (and, in fact, women) who were kept out of high-skill jobs and unions (Frank 1999, 124ff; Lüthje and Scherrer 1997a, 41). Many unions long officially restricted their membership to white men and explicitly excluded black workers, while race tensions were fueled by employers who kept workers divided by race and often recruited black workers as strike breakers; indeed, some of the race restrictions in unions' constitutions remained in effect into the 1960s (Goldfield 1997, 65f.; Yates 1998, 106ff).

While this changed to some degree with the emergence of industrial unions in the 1930s and the foundation of the CIO in 1935 – which demanded the equal treatment of migrant, African American and female workers – not all of its affiliated unions and members favored a broad, inclusive conception of solidarity (Frank 1999, 89). Indeed, by the late-1940s and the beginning of McCarthyism in the 1950s, the CIO – like the AFL – was dominated by a less progressive and more business unionism-oriented approach characterized by exclusionary stances and internal racism against African American and migrants (Goldfield 1997, 70, 76f.; Lüthje and Scherrer 2003, 102ff).

Furthermore, in the post-World War II period and with the more recent waves of migration since the 1960s until the 1980s, most labor unions continued to perceive migrant workers as a threat to established labor standards and maintained their anti-immigration stance, making little efforts to organize them (Bacon 2010; Ness 2005, 40). Migrant – and particularly undocumented – workers were seen as unorganizable and it was generally assumed that newly-arrived migrant workers from poor countries were willing to accept low wages and bad working conditions, the fear of deportation would detain them from unionizing and they were intending to go back to their home countries soon regardless (Milkman 2006, 81f., 115f.; Yates 1998, 114f.; Fantasia and Voss 2004, 138). Unions were also not particularly interested in organizing the typically low-wage sectors in which most migrant workers labor, while the disinterest was often accompanied by a marked racism and openly hostile attitude by union leaders and members against Latino and Asian workers (Fantasia and Voss, 2004, 39; for a description of how the building trades unions kept the growing share of Latino workers in the construction sector out of the market through discriminatory practices in hiring halls and English language tests, see Grenier 1997, 99; for an analysis of carpenters and ironworkers union members' in South Florida prejudices against migrant workers in the 1980s, see Nissen and Grenier 2001b).

The AFL-CIO kept Latino migrant workers in separate locals until the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and migrants and other minorities had separate wage groups and seniority rights, as well as restricted access to apprenticeship programs (Grenier 1997, 96f.). As late as 1986, most unions and the AFL-CIO supported the IRCA, which introduced sanctions for employers hiring undocumented migrant workers and essentially made working illegal for them (Bacon 2010;

Rabourn 2008, 17; Ness 2005, 40f.). Until the late-1990s, most unions did not translate their publications such as recruitment literature and pamphlets into other languages such as Spanish, Chinese or Korean, nor did they employ bilingual staff and hold their union meetings in languages other than English (Grenier 1997, 100; for the case of building trades unions in Florida, see Nissen and Grenier 2001b).

4.2.2 Unions' turn towards organizing migrants since the 1990s

However, in the last three decades, the growing migrant share of the workforce and the disastrous state in which the US labor movement finds itself has prompted many unions to reconsider their anti-immigrant stance (Bacon 2010; Ness 2005). Organized labor has been in steady decline since the 1970, leading to unionization rates of 13 per cent in the private sector in 1993, down from 38 per cent in 1954 (Ruiz Cameron 2000, 52; see also Frank 1999, 182)¹¹⁸. Against this backdrop, in the 1990s and 2000s, many unions – particularly in the services sector – began to embrace migrants as potential clientele at the same time as many unions began to slightly move away from an exclusive business unionism and towards more strongly engaging with communities and other social movements (López 2004; Turner and Hurd 2001; see also Devinatz 2010). At the same time as migrants started organizing in community-based organizations such as the aforementioned workers centers, many unions started organizing campaigns targeting migrant workers (Milkman 2011a). Unions like the SEIU, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE), and (much earlier) the UFW – which operated in low-wage industries with large migrant workforces such as janitorial, hospitality, and retail – rejected the IRCA and started to contest the sanctions that it entailed in the 1990s (Bacon 2011; Ness 2005).

Many of the first proactive organizing efforts of migrant workers took place in Southern California, as the region is – with its large migrant (mostly Latino) labor force – what Milkman (2000, 1f.) calls “the nation’s single largest magnet for immigrants and a key arena in the struggle for labor movement revitalization” (see also Milkman 2006, 9, 117f.; Ruiz Cameron 2000). Here, gaining ground for unions meant that they had to deal with the issue of organizing migrant workers. Through the “Justice for Janitors” campaign, SEIU organized over 6,000 mostly migrant janitorial workers – particularly from Mexico and Central America – in Los Angeles, since the late-1980s. The union targeted some of the major building owners, and after the great success of 1990 in Los Angeles the campaign was taken to other major cities across the country (Muñiz 2010, 213ff; Milkman 2006; Waldinger et al. 1998).

Following SEIU’s unexpected success in organizing migrant workers, a series of other organizing campaigns targeting migrants were launched in the 1990s, in

¹¹⁸ Today, the unionization rate in the private sector is 6.4 per cent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017).

California and beyond. Moreover, while most of the unions strongly engaging in migrant organizing are those such as SEIU, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE), UNITE and the Communications Workers of America (CWA), some traditionally exclusionary unions like the building trades – which had long been “the near-exclusive province of white men” (Gordon 2009, 32f.) – were also forced to deal with increasingly migrant workforces (Luce and Bank Muñoz 2008; Ness 2005, 53ff; Fantasia and Voss 2004, 154f.). Among many others, HERE Local 2 in San Francisco – with support of the International HERE – recruited bilingual staff and community activists to organize migrant workers who represented half of the industry’s workforce in 1990; HERE organized many low-wage migrant workers in Las Vegas’ Casinos since the 1980s; the Carpenters union organized 2,400 Mexican drywallers (after they had gone on strike and organized themselves) in Southern California in the early-1990s (Wells 2000); the Ironworkers Local 272 in Florida – in face of plummeting membership vis-à-vis the increasingly Latino workforce – went from having an openly hostile attitude towards migrants to proactively organizing migrant workers from the second half of the 1990s, hiring Latino staff and increasingly including migrant leadership (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 572-6); while having a migrant membership for a long time given the heavily migrant apparel workforce share of 83 per cent already in 1980,¹¹⁹ the textile union UNITE in Miami went from “tolerating” Cubans – who constituted the largest share of the workers – towards a proactive and welcoming policy of organizing migrant workers (ibid., 584ff); some locals of the Carpenters union hired bilingual organizers, introduced bilingual training programs and educated migrant workers about their rights (Rabourn 2008, 18f.; see also Gordon 2009, 33); the Laborers International Union (LIUNA) has forged an alliance with the overwhelmingly migrant National Day Laborers’ Organizing Network (NDLON) (Rabourn 2008, 18f.); and migrants also made up a large share of the 74,000 home health care providers organized in Los Angeles by SEIU in 1999 (Wells 2000; Milkman 2006, 130).

Importantly, in the second half of the 1990s, the US labor federation AFL-CIO realized that the sanctions introduced with IRCA prevented undocumented migrants from organizing and thus it officially reversed its anti-immigration position in 2000. It called for an end of employer sanctions and for a program to educate immigrant workers about their legal rights, as well as advocating for legalization and allying with migrants’ rights organizations in their struggle for an amnesty for undocumented workers in the US (Luce and Bank Muñoz 2008, 6; Nissen and Grenier 2001a; Ness 2005, 43). This was a consequence of the replacement of the old business unionism AFL-CIO leadership by the “New Voice” platform of former SEIU president John Sweeney in 1995. In the midst

¹¹⁹ Also the majority of the membership of the ILGWU, one of the two predecessor unions that merged in 1995 to form UNITE, was foreign-born already in the 1980s (Frank 1999, 154).

of organized labor's deep crisis, Sweeney tried to fundamentally alter the federation's policies to turn the tide. The AFL-CIO made organizing the unorganized – and particularly the organization of migrants and other minorities – a priority, designated 30 per cent of the federation's budget to this task and implemented measures targeted at recruiting and training leaders with a migration background (Lüthje and Scherrer 2003; Milkman 2000, 1f., 10f.). Indeed, while the progressive policies have not always enthusiastically been advanced in public by the AFL-CIO leadership and are not evenly supported by all unions, the turn towards organizing migrant workers is an important change of course in organized labor's political stance, as well as being the cornerstone of a more inclusive labor movement (Fine 2007; Lüthje and Scherrer 2003). Most recently, the AFL-CIO under president Richard Trumka (in office since 2009) has taken the approach a step further by broadening the focus to workers outside the workplace and promoting partnerships with community organizations. As Zweig (2016, 177) writes, by “realiz(ing) the importance of representing workers outside the workplace and outside the unions' own workplace-based membership”, the AFL-CIO and Trumka have made a “profound shift away from the narrow business unionism so characteristic of the AFL-CIO's history” (ibid.) and “direct(...) the labor movement toward a broader, more class-based view of its mission: representing the values and interests of all working people” (ibid., 178).

Clearly, this is not to say that migrant organizing is the rule. Indeed, the efforts at organizing migrant workers are generally on a small scale and comprise isolated rather than systematic organizing approaches, and in some unions (particularly the building trades) exclusionism towards migrants remains strong (Holgate 2011, Gordon 2009; Ness 2005). Moreover, as mentioned in chapter 2.3, many unions continue to be not particularly interested in organizing precarious, low-wage service or retail workers and are unwilling to make the effort to organize migrant workers – who are often employed in sectors that are difficult to organize, in small to medium-sized firms with few employees, and are frequently spread out – such as the low-wage restaurant workers or small laundries (Fine 2006b, 128f., 147ff; Ness 2005, 50ff). While unions rhetorically support the pro-immigrant stance of the AFL-CIO, most of them still do not devote significant resources and staff to the active organizing of new members, whether migrants or non-migrants (Milkman 2011a). Furthermore, even where they do, most union leaderships and staff continue to be white, making the promotion of migrants' interests a challenge and contributing to many migrants not feeling represented by their union leaderships. Low-wage migrant workers willing to unionize often have difficulties finding unions willing to organize them and thus they struggle for better conditions by themselves, with many remaining outside traditional labor unions and organizing in workers centers instead (Fine 2006a; Lopez 2014, 220). Migrants hence remain under-represented in the overall unionized workforce: in 2010, while foreign-born

persons made up 15.3 per cent of all wage and salary workers, they only accounted for 11.9 per cent of the unionized workers (Batalova 2011).

Despite these limitations, many unions have – at least at the level of locals – reversed their traditional indifferent (or even anti-immigrant) stance since the 1990s and have made the organization of migrant workers a goal. As mentioned in chapter 2.3, these proved highly receptive to unionization, and particularly Latinos were often strongly willing to organize (Milkman 2011a, 362, 365; Wells 2000, 119). Furthermore, the experiences of exploitation and stigmatization that many migrants share – and their close social networks – have often made organization easier (Bacon 2010; Fantasia and Voss 2004, 145). This explains why migrant workers largely account for the few successes that unions have had in stopping membership decline (Bacon 2015; Milkman 2006, 6).

Consequently, although migrant organizing and membership remain very uneven across unions, locals and sectors, migrant workers today make up large shares of union memberships in many of them. Whereas overall – as previously mentioned – foreign-born workers made up almost 12 per cent of total union membership in 2010, in the services sector as well as construction and the food industry including agriculture, migrant workers increasingly represent larger shares of unions' membership and even the majority in specific regions (Batalova 2011; Milkman 2006, 191). Unions usually do not collect data on their migrant membership and thus little hard data exists on migrant membership in unions. However, some estimations suggest large migrant membership shares in some unions: SEIU – the largest private sector union in the US – estimates that immigrants make up around 25 per cent of its membership,¹²⁰ as well as up to 80 or 90 per cent and in some regions and locals (SEIU 2011; see chapter 4.4). The situation is similar in other unions such as the hotel and restaurant workers union UNITE HERE, which represents industries that strongly rely on migrant labor,¹²¹ a union with – by its own account – 270,000 members who are “predominantly women and people of color”,¹²² and with many local memberships being almost exclusively migrant, among others in Los Angeles, Miami, New York, San Francisco or Chicago.¹²³

The growing migrant membership has led to a broadening of unions' agendas and including issues such as migrant rights and immigration reform¹²⁴ as many

¹²⁰ Interview with Elizabeth O'Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013.

¹²¹ UNITE HERE was founded by a merger of the UNITE and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) in 2004. The former UNITE membership later split off and formed Workers United, whereby UNITE HERE today mainly represents hotel and restaurant employees.

¹²² <http://unitehere.org/who-we-are/industries/>

¹²³ Interview with Clete Kiley, Director for Immigration Policy, UNITE HERE, Washington, D.C., April 9, 2013.

¹²⁴ For instance, one of the main forces pushing for the topic of immigration reform in

unions employ bilingual (and migrant) staff, translate their publications and union contracts, provide assistance with migration-related problems and advocate for the legalization of the approximately 11 million undocumented workers, as well as aligning themselves with migrants' rights organizations in their fight for immigration reform (Bacon 2010; Waldinger 2008; Ness 2005, 43).

4.3 US labor unions, international solidarity and its problems

4.3.1 US labor internationalism from the 19th century to the end of the Cold War: a history of protectionism, chauvinism and imperialism

To put it mildly, the US labor movement has an ambivalent trajectory of international labor solidarity. Since their founding, unions in the US have vacillated between international solidarity and protectionism. As many European migrants in the 19th and early-20th century had experience in radical labor and political movements, they brought ideas of global working-class solidarity that informed some sections of the US labor movement, particularly – but not only – radical unions such as the IWW (Nissen and Grenier 2001a).

However, throughout most of the pre-World War I era, US unions maintained a protectionist stance: a posture that reappeared in the 1930s and the late-20th century. They partnered with US employers, demanding policies protecting domestic industries rather than allying with workers abroad to challenge capital (Frank 1999, 47ff).¹²⁵ The protectionism against workers abroad was closely enmeshed with the chauvinism and nativism at home, manifesting in the exclusionary policy towards migrant workers, which constituted the “domestic counterparts of this foreign policy” (Scipes 2010, 14). As Nissen and Grenier (2001a, 570) state, “(t)he labor movement’s attitude and role regarding immigrants and its broader attitude and role in foreign policy and international solidarity activities (...) have been logically and historically closely intertwined” (see also Kay 2011, 45-56; Bacon 2004, 301f.).¹²⁶ In fact, both were an

SEIU was the former Vice President Eliseo Medina, and also his successor elected in 2013 – first-generation Mexican migrant Rocío Sáenz – who had previously been an organizer in SEIU’s JfJ campaign. In Los Angeles, Miguel Contreras – a Chicano former UFW organizer and then HERE staff – became the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor’s political director in 1994, and later secretary-treasurer, positions that allowed him to promote the Fed’s commitment to Latino immigrants (Milkman 2006, 131f.). Today, his wife and also Chicana – María Elena Durazo – heads the L.A. Fed, while many of the state’s union leaders are also Chicanos or migrants. However, not all unions with large – or even majoritarian – migrant membership do so. For instance, Nissen and Grenier (2001b, 86ff) find that HERE Local 355 in South Florida did not care about migrant interests and concerns in the 1990s, despite its 60 per cent Hispanic membership.

¹²⁵ Among the few exceptions is the United Electrical Workers (UE), which held firm in rejecting labor-management cooperation, blaming workers abroad for job losses, as well as Buy American campaigns (e.g. Frank 1999, 184f.)

¹²⁶ Of course, some exceptions existed. For instance, the ILGWU – with the majority of its

expression of the same understanding of unionism and unions' power, which relied on "an inward-turning protection of the skilled few" (Frank 1999, 70) rather than embracing a class-based concept of worker solidarity that transcends internal and nation-state boundaries. Hence, as Frank (1999, 70) concludes, "(d)efensive, its ranks sharply closed, the early 1930s AFL's inward-turning self-protection by the skilled meshed exactly with the Buy American movement's call for national self-protection". While strongly supporting high tariffs for foreign products, Samuel Gompers – the first president of the AFL, founded in 1886 – criticized that "while the industries are protected by preventing the importation of foreign manufactured articles, *it does not prevent the importation of the cheapest and most servile labor*" (emphasis in original, cited in Frank 1999, 49) and demanded that the "import" particularly of Chinese workers also be prohibited (see also Yates 1998, 95). For the many influential protectionist trade unionists of the AFL and its affiliated unions at the time, Frank (1999, 52) concludes that "American workers and employers were on one side, foreign products and foreign workers on the other. For them, protectionism led to a partnership of nationalist capitalists and native-born workers." While the protectionist stance alternated with the support of free trade policies – whenever "worldwide US corporate dominance ensured that exports far exceeded imports (and) free trade meant jobs" (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 570) and "we must keep in our minds the necessity to find even more markets for American-made goods overseas", as AFL-CIO president George Meany wrote in 1961 (quoted in Frank 1999, 103), given in the 1950s and 1960s the AFL-CIO was quick to adopt a protectionist stance again when imports threatened to destroy domestic jobs, as in the 1970s and 1980s (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 570; Frank 1999, 103, 131-186).

In the 20th century, most of the US labor movement's international activities supported US economic and military dominance. The AFL (and later AFL-CIO)¹²⁷ supported the US involvement in World War I and subsequently the numerous US interventions in its "backyard" in Central American and the Caribbean (Yates 1998, 96). World War II was followed by "a long history of

membership being foreign-born already in 1980s – promoted internal diversity while at the same time strongly advocating for protectionism against foreign textile imports (Frank 1999, 131ff). In any case, for both the attitude towards foreign policy and towards migrants, the "the ideological dividing line (between unions) was between policies and measures promoting unity and solidarity among workers regardless of nationality, race, or other characteristics and those promoting narrower or non-working-class identities and solidarities" (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 570).

¹²⁷ The CIO – founded in 1936 – merged with the AFL to form the AFL-CIO in 1955. The CIO was initially opposed to government foreign policy as well as the protectionist and anti-immigrant policies of the AFL and its affiliated unions; this changed, however, in the early years of the Cold War and after with McCarthyism, up to the point that by the time of the merger with the AFL in 1955, both federations were equally conservative (Frank 1999, 110; Yates 1998)

putting the US labor movement at the service of US Cold War objectives” (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 569f.; see also Scipes 2010; Frank 1999, 103). During the Cold War, while exceptions existed,¹²⁸ most US unions’ international activities were dominated by the State Department’s logic of anticommunism, rather than worker solidarity, particularly under McCarthyism and after the Taft-Hartley Act had expelled all radical unionists from the AFL-CIO (Kay 2011, 38ff).¹²⁹ In the years of US global corporate expansion in the 1950s and 1960s, the leaderships of the AFL-CIO – and particularly the CIO and its affiliated unions such as the United Autoworkers (UAW), the United Steelworkers (USW) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) – supported employers’ focusing on expanding to overseas markets, rather than struggling for redistribution at home: “Labor is not fighting for a larger slice of the national pie (...), labor is fighting for a larger pie”, UAW president Walter Reuther said in 1946 (quoted in Frank 1999, 109, see also 110-14). Indeed, this meant “labor and the corporations working together in a nationally based partnership to dominate the capitalist world” (Frank 1999, 110) and the full support of US Cold War foreign policy. Hence, with the official goal of supporting “free” labor movements, the AFL-CIO supported US global dominance of other countries and helped it to undermine democratic and leftist labor and liberation movements in countless countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America, as well as helping to found “pro-US, rival, CIA-funded unions” (Frank 1999, 111). Often, activities were carried out through clandestine ties with US government agencies (Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 569ff). For this purpose, institutes like the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and the Asian-American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI) were formed as parts of the AFL-CIO in the 1960s, which “became a haven for fanatical cold warriors” (Yates 1998, 97; see also Fantasia and Voss 2004, 58). They received most of their funds from the US

¹²⁸ From the 1960s onwards, several initiatives challenged the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy, such as, public criticism of the AFL-CIO’s involvement in Pinochet’s coup in Chile by the San Jose Labor Council and rank-and-file members of the American Federation of Teachers in Chicago; the formation of the Committee in International Solidarity for Trade Union Rights (CISTUR) in the 1980s that attempted to build support for unionists abroad fighting for social and economic justice; the formation of the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador (NLC) by labor leaders of national unions that opposed the Reagan Administration’s support of the military government and the contra war in Nicaragua in the 1980s; the efforts of Local 10 of the International Longshormen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) to build support for liberation struggles in South Africa; the United Electrical Workers’ (UE) building of bilateral relationships of solidarity to Mexican unions, particularly the FAT in the early-1990s; and the support of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) that denounced miserable working conditions and salaries in export processing zones, among others (see Scipes 2010, 69-72; Hathaway 2000).

¹²⁹ The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 – among many other restrictions to unions – required all union officials confirmed in writing that they were not, and had never been, members of the Communist Party. This served to purge radical unionists from all AFL-CIO affiliated unions, whereby those unions that rejected signing – such as the United Electrical Workers – were expelled from the AFL-CIO (Frank 1999, 108f.)

State Department and – often directly cooperating with US government institutions such as the CIA and the State Department – supported the military coups in Brazil in 1964 and Chile in 1973, sabotaged the Sandinista government and supported the contras¹³⁰ in Nicaragua in the 1980s and supported the Salvadoran military government in its war against workers, peasants and political opposition in the 1980s, among many others (Zweig 2016, 181; Scipes 2010, 29ff; Fantasia and Voss 2004, 58). Furthermore, AFL-CIO leadership under Meany supported the Vietnam War until the end (Yates 1998, 97).

The alignment with government foreign policy and the support of US corporate expansion by the AFL-CIO and its affiliates' leaderships is also a consequence of the form of unionism that most US unions pursued from the 19th century until the 1990s. The “trade unionism pure and simple” – as the AFL's first president Samuel Gompers called it (cited in Scipes 2010, 3), or what is today mostly termed business unionism, which most US unions represent – is also a consequence of US labor law that makes the individual shop the center of labor relations (Greven and Schwetz 2011, 145). The understanding of unionism associated with it is focused on workers' representation at the workplace and relies on an exclusionary view on solidarity that excludes “others” both at home (women, African Americans, or migrants) and abroad and perceives its task in the defense of its members' limited interests rather than those of all working people (Scipes 2010, 24). “Business unionism accepted the established social order based on Empire, race and capitalism (...); fought to keep immigrants out of the country (...); and has tried subsequently to maximize gains within this social order for union members”, Scipes (2010, 1) writes regarding the unionism of the AFL. This explains – to a large degree why – AFL-CIO foreign policy has been guided by the two principles of “protecting American union members' jobs from foreign competition” (ibid., 24) and “expanding the political and economic power of the U.S. Empire throughout the world” (ibid.) throughout most of its history. Indeed, it is also a main reason why “a broader vision, militancy, and especially willingness to engage in more than negotiations for collective bargaining agreements” (ibid., 27f.) were hastily and fervently been interpreted as communism by labor leaders during the Cold War. Given this history, it is unsurprising that many labor movements in Latin America and elsewhere maintain a significant distrust of US unions to date (Zweig 2016, 186; Bacon 2011; Kay 2011, 42, 76ff).

4.3.2 Engaging in international solidarity since the 1990s

However, in the 1980s, with the US government's support for Central American dictatorships and their war against workers, opposition to labor's fierce anticommunism policies grew within the labor movement, although Meany's successor Lane Kirkland continued the AFL-CIO's Cold War program (Yates

¹³⁰ The contras were the US-funded and trained right-wing groups that fought the Sandinista government after the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979.

1998, 98). Furthermore, in view of the increasing global economic interdependence, the US labor movement turned towards a more internationalist stance in the second half of the 1990s. In 1995, the AFL-CIO's New Voice leadership abandoned the old policies, shut down the AIFLD and the other regional institutes and formed a new American Center for International Solidarity, known as the Solidarity Center, which subsequently engaged in supporting labor movements abroad¹³¹ (Scipes 2010, 39; Lopez, 2004, 7; Yates 1998, 98).

In what Frank (1999, 246) calls “the discovery of transnational solidarity”, by the early-1990s workers and unions “had begun to discover not just globalization but international labor solidarity, and to understand workers in other countries not as alien ‘foreigners’ but as fellow workers sharing the same aspirations, facing the same challenges, and often employed by the same companies” (ibid.). Many unions – among them the UAW, the CWA, the Teamsters, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and UNITE – reconsidered their international policies. They increasingly came to see bad working conditions and low wages abroad as a means for employers to lower standards in the US, and several unions began supporting foreign unions’ struggle for better working conditions and higher wages, engaging in building direct links to counterparts in other countries and many established rank-and-file cross-border ties (ibid., 246f.; Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 2001, 263).

While some previous efforts at building cross-border solidarity took place¹³², the most important turning point for unions’ approach to international solidarity was the NAFTA that came into effect in 1994. It was through the common struggle against the agreement in the early-1990s that many US unions first began to practically cooperate with unions abroad (Kay 2011; Nissen and Grenier 2001a, 570f.; see also Stillerman 2003, 589ff, who argues that NAFTA only accelerated already-incipient alliances, rather than initiating them). Whereas “(p)rior to NAFTA, many North American labor leaders managed market threats and shocks in part by invoking explicitly racist or implicitly racialized rhetoric that constructed foreign workers or the products they made as the enemies of American workers” (Kay 2011, 56f.), this changed in the run-up to NAFTA. Through the mobilizations around the agreement, “a new consciousness and a new set of cooperative relationships (with Mexican and Canadian unions) emerged” (Frank 1999, 248; see also Kay 2011). In their shared opposition

¹³¹ However, the AFL-CIO’s international policy continues to be criticized. Among others, its continued government funding and connection to the National Endowment for Democracy is criticized, as well as the Solidarity Center’s involvement with the attempted coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 2002 (e.g. Scipes 2010, 39f.)

¹³² Among others, the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy (see footnote 128 above); moreover, the UMWA joined South African unions in launching a campaign against oil companies operating in South Africa, particularly Royal Dutch/Shell, as well as the CWA begun engaging in solidarity actions with unions in Canada, Mexico, Europe and Australia beginning in 1989 (Anner 2011, 59; Scipes 2010, 71; Bronfenbrenner 2007b, 4).

against the trade agreement, many unions began to cooperate with unions as well as non-labor movements such as environmental and consumer rights' groups in Canada and Mexico. For instance, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) established a close working relationship with counterparts in Canada (the Canada section of the United Steelworkers) and Mexico (FAT¹³³), CWA established relationships with their counterparts in Canada (Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union, CEP) and Mexico (STRM) and the AFL-CIO established relationships with the FAT and Canadian Labor Congress (CLC) (Kay 2011; Cohen and Early 1999). Moreover, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras was formed in the early-1990s, in which several US unions built a network with religious, environmental and community-based organizations to support workers in Mexican maquiladoras and their communities in their struggle for improved working and living conditions (Moody 1997a, 239f.; Stillerman 2003, 586ff). Furthermore, the Teamsters and the UAW engaged in Mexico, supporting cross-border exchanges and supporting organizing in maquilas (Stillerman 2003, 586). However, US unions also began to engage in solidarity in countries beyond the NAFTA region. Among others, as free trade led to skyrocketing apparel imports, unions in the apparel sector began turning towards cross-border organizing and allying with NGOs to enhance working conditions abroad, while UNITE partnered with the National Labor Committee¹³⁴ to mount public-awareness campaigns to raise wages and improve working conditions in Central American apparel export processing zones (EPZs)¹³⁵ and sent organizers to the region and the Dominican Republic (Anner 2011, 60; Frundt 2000). The UMWA supported Colombian mine workers' strikes for better wages and working conditions against Exxon in the early-1990s (Frank 1999, 247). More recently, other initiatives have also emerged, such as US Labor Against the War (USLAW), founded in 2003, which opposed the war in Iraq and called for a withdrawal of US troops, having engaged about 200 affiliated locals, state federations and other worker organizations (Zweig 2016, 190; Scipes 2010, 77f.). The UAW have strengthened ties with the German IG Metall in their efforts at organizing a Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the Teamsters have mobilized workers in ports around the world in support of locked-out IKEA

¹³³ The Authentic Workers' Front (FAT) is the most important independent union in Mexico, and the one most engaged in international solidarity. It was created by the Catholic church during the 1940s, but became radicalized, today being a strongly left-wing union (Stillerman 2003, 584f.).

¹³⁴ The NLC was one of the first anti-sweatshop NGO, formed in 1980 by a group of union activists that demanded the release of Salvadoran unionists and conditionality of US aid to El Salvador; later, the NLC focused on improving working conditions in Salvadoran EPZs (Anner 2011, 59).

¹³⁵ EPZs are defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as "industrial zones with special incentives set up to attract foreign investors, in which imported materials undergo some degree of processing before being (re-)exported" (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb286/pdf/esp-3.pdf>).

workers in British Columbia (Zweig 2016, 191). Of course, many locals, regions and individual members of unions are also involved in solidarity activities such as supporting strikes and organizing drives or donating during lockouts and for disaster relief, such as after the Haiti earthquake, sometimes even when their national unions are not. However, it is difficult to find systematic data on such activities, as most of them are not documented and not part of an official program¹³⁶ (cf. Bacon 2015; Kay 2011, 202f.; Babson 2000, 28).

In recent years, many US unions have also increasingly engaged in transnational strategic (or “comprehensive” or “corporate”) campaigns around specific transnational corporations. They have often turned particularly to European unions for support in their struggle against transnational employers (Bronfenbrenner 2007b; Greven 2006a). Among the corporate campaigns in recent years have been the UNI Global Union’s campaign against the multinational security services company Group 4 Securicor (G4S), in which SEIU played a leading role (McCallum 2013); the USW campaign against the German tire company Continental with the German IG Metall in 1999 (Greven 2006a, 261ff); CWA’s ongoing campaign against T-Mobile, in cooperation with ver.di in Germany; and SEIU’s “Driving Up Standards” campaign against FirstGroup with the UK union T&G in 2004 (Tattersall 2007). Clearly, as the name suggests, these campaigns are highly strategic, targeting a specific short-to-medium-term goal, as well as being planned and carried out by unions’ national leaderships. Most of them focus on strategically-relevant countries, i.e. generally countries in the Global North, particularly Europe, where the corporations’ headquarters are located. Unions in Southern countries only play an subordinate role (with the important exception of the anti-sweatshop movement in the 1990s, which were mostly led by NGOs, but in which US unions were also involved in cooperating with Central American worker groups for improving working conditions in EPZ producing clothing for the US market; see Anner 2011). Furthermore, while this is a logical consequence of the limited resources that labor unions have and the high costs usually involved with transnational cooperation, the character of the campaigns implies that the local level and union members are rarely involved beyond their occasional participation in protests or signing petitions. In fact, most union members are not even aware of their unions’ international work: as “we send representatives to (...) IndustriAll (...) it’s generally a few people, and everybody talks nice, but you know, at the base relationships, rubber workers in the United States in general don’t have ties with rubber workers unions in Germany. And Steelworker members in the steel industry in the United States, most of them have never heard of the International Metalworkers Federation or IndustriAll. And certainly and only a little handful have ever been to Germany and talked to

¹³⁶ Interviews with Molly McCoy, regional program director for the Americas, Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, April 8, 2013; Alexis De Simone, Senior Program Officer, Americas Region, Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, April 8, 2013.

a German steelworker”, as the director of USW District 7 expressed in the interview.¹³⁷ Clearly, alliances as well as strategic campaigns with the involvement of the rank and file and the level of locals exist, such as the corporate campaign against G4S led by UNI and SEIU, which – as McCallum (2013) argues – promoted local union empowerment and strengthened membership participation in the two cases he studied, India and South Africa. Another is the UE-FAT alliance, which is the most prominent example of strong rank-and-file participation, as the involvement of the membership is one of the alliance’s main goals (e.g. Kay 2011, 173; see also Hathaway 2000). Moreover, the CWA-ver.di campaign against T-Mobile involves partnerships at the level of individual call centers, and the USW-Mineros alliance, as I will show below. Nevertheless, such cases are the exception rather than the rule (McCallum 2013, 5).

Moreover, while the international solidarity activities of the last 25 years are an important turn away from the previous protectionism and chauvinism, only few of them have resulted in institutionalized long-term cooperations across borders. Most international solidarity activities rather comprise campaigns: “(i)n general, U.S. unions think about transnationalism in terms of campaigns, not structures”, Hyde and Ressaissi (2008, 62) state. While many of these have been successful and translated into concrete improvements for workers in practice, such campaigns are – as described in chapter 2.1 – highly strategic and instrumental in the sense of focusing on a particular (set of) goals and around a common employer (the transnational company), rather than aiming at constructing broader, long-term relationships of mutual support with unions abroad that endure beyond the attainment of that particular goal. Clearly, important exceptions also exist here, among them the two alliances mentioned above between the UE and the FAT (Kay 2011, 171ff; Hathaway 2000), between the USW and the Mineros, as well as between CWA and ver.di. Nevertheless, overall, as “the adversarial industrial relations system in the U.S. favours voluntaristic union strategies focused on narrow campaign demands and biased against the establishment of stable inter-union networks” (Greven 2006a, 260), many of the campaigns “are episodic and tend to quietly fade away when lacking success”, as Greven (*ibid.*, 258) writes about several US strategic campaigns involving unions in Germany. “Most cooperations emerge ad hoc within the context of campaigns that are clearly delimited regarding to content and time and thus operate only temporarily, even though they may formally exist longer” (Greven 2006b, 12f., own translation). Hyde and Ressaissi (2008, 55) call US unions’ campaigns “ad hoc campaigns” and doubt that they “will be able to achieve much without some more enduring organization” (*ibid.*; see also Kay 2011, 210). While Greven highlights that these alliances stand out for their ability to organize cross-border collective action in cases of conflict, US unions have not been as engaged in forming stable networks and institution-building

¹³⁷ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013.

compared with – for instance – European unions, which build on EWCs or interregional trade union councils (Filsinger et al. 2015; Greven 2006b, 12f.). Hence, as previously mentioned, US unions have often been blamed for pursuing “phone call solidarity” (Greven 2006a, 260; see also Greven and Schwetz 2011, 134), requesting support ad hoc and at very short notice, rather than building stable networks, which sometimes leads to resentments (see also Greer and Hauptmeier 2008, 82; Hyde and Ressaissi 2008, 60ff). Greven (2006a, 260) details how German unions are often suspicious of US unions’ strategic campaigns, which they view to be one-way solidarity, i.e. US unions ask for support from German unions when they need it, but they “appear unwilling to challenge corporations on behalf of others when they have good labour relations which could be leveraged” (ibid.; see also Greven and Schwetz 2011, 139). Hyde and Ressaissi (2008, 74) also criticize that US unions tend to view solidarity as a means to an end to pursue their own interests, rather than being interested in constructing a community with workers abroad based on mutual support and commitments. They argue that “American unions need, at the least, to engage other unions on a continuing consultative basis, listening to their experience and not merely expecting help when and as the Americans need it”, and criticize that “American unionists have been interested in obtaining support for their struggles from foreign unions, but have offered precious little support in return” (ibid., 61). This is definitely an exaggeration, at least for the situation today. Many US unions have clearly begun to adopt a new approach to international solidarity in recent years: unions like SEIU and UNITE HERE have purposefully moved away from asking for favors on a short-term basis, increasingly engaging in building long-term alliances and networks in the context of conducting strategic campaigns against transnational employers instead (McCallum 2013; Tattersall 2007). Among others, SEIU has founded a global partnership unit within its structure and supported unions abroad such as the German ver.di in their organizing campaigns, which I will sketch out in further detail below (Dribbusch 2008; Greven 2006a). Nevertheless, overall US unions are still far from establishing substantial long-term relationships based on mutual commitments and trust with their partners abroad.

Importantly, although the labor movement has more actively engaged in international cooperation and pursued a more progressive international solidarity in recent decades, the understanding of solidarity of most (not only) US unions remains a narrow one. While the new AFL-CIO leadership’s “shift away from the narrow business unionism” (Zweig 2016, 177, see above) “has implications for a renewed approach to foreign policy as well, one that will advance global as well as US economic and social justice” (ibid.), to date these implications have only materialized to a very limited degree. Of course, initiatives such as USLAW express an understanding of unionism and an engagement in international affairs that go beyond a narrow focus on tactical cooperation for material improvements in the workplace, as does the UE-FAT alliance, which goes beyond concrete campaigns but aims at supporting workers abroad in their

struggle more generally. Indeed, although more examples of a broader approach to international solidarity exist,¹³⁸ they remain the exception rather than the rule. Most international solidarity pursued by US unions is “still oriented toward private industry and mutual support during confrontations with huge corporations” (Bacon 2016, 166), rather than opposition to neoliberal policies pursued by most governments (ibid.). In fact, as Zweig (ibid., 185) argues, unions today “define relevant foreign affairs in narrower terms related to international trade agreements, immigration, and tactical cross-border alliances in contract and organizing campaigns”, rather than considering their impact on democracy, self-determination and human rights (ibid.). Fletcher and Gaspasin (2008, 194) also write that the US trade union movement “treats neoliberal globalization as simply a matter of corporations and economics”, and when the US intervenes in countries as in Iraq or Central America, “the union movement is often paralyzed and cannot respond because its leaders view governmental foreign policy as separate from the aims and objectives of trade unionism” (ibid.). US unions “generally consider (...) foreign policy on the narrowest terms (...) rather than considering its impact on democracy, self-determination, and human rights” (ibid.). Moreover, although Zweig (2016, 197) considers both unions that I studied – SEIU and USW (as well as CWA and UE) – to belong among the few “unions (that) have already begun to express a foreign policy that more fully represents the interests of their members and working people in general”, international solidarity mostly remains connected to specific organizing and contract campaigns. Owing to this narrow view, Fletcher and Gaspasin (2008, 194) hence argue that “the global justice movement in the United States has grown up largely separate from the trade union movement”, and the lessons of Seattle were short-lived. The union movement’s efforts on issues such as austerity policies, the privatization of public services, US militarized foreign policy and the impact of trade policies on economies, the environment and living standards are “piecemeal and too often the province of leaders, without membership mobilization or affiliate involvement” (Zweig 2016, 187), while “the grip of Cold War tradition and narrow business unionism continues to characterize most of the labor movement” (ibid., 190; see also Fletcher and Gaspasin 2008, 195). “US unions often see their own needs first”, Bacon (2016, 166) writes, whereas “(a) heightened sense of solidarity requires fighting the battles prioritized by other unions, not just fighting your own battles in someone else’s country”.

4.3.3 *Solidarity with El Salvador and Mexico*

As previously mentioned, US union international solidarity has mainly focused on unions in the Global North, to which neither of the two migrant-sending countries that I studied belongs. Nevertheless, as hinted at above, many US

¹³⁸ Among many others, CWA and USW have supported Colombian workers threatened by death squads, and SEIU’s Local 1199 has a history of solidarity with Central American and Venezuelan unions (Zweig 2016, 191f.).

unions cooperate with Mexican unions, while solidarity with El Salvador has also long been a part of many US unions' international work.

Despite the economic importance that **Mexico** holds for the US in the context of NAFTA and the existing relationships with Mexican unions, solidarity with Mexico has historically been a challenge. On the one hand, this is due to the strong prevalent prejudices against Mexican workers – linked to the strong presence of Mexican “illegal” immigrants in the US that many US unions have long been hostile towards – as well as the protectionist and often racist stance of many US unions that constructed Mexican workers as stealing jobs (Kay 2011, 76ff). On the other hand, this is due to the problematic nature of the “official” labor union system in Mexico: since its foundation, the largest federation of Mexican unions – the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) – has been strongly institutionally interwoven with the Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada (PRI), which held government for 70 years, being its “official labor arm” (Babson 2000, 22). For decades, its function has mainly been to organize support for the PRI rather than promoting workers' rights, and it maintains clientelistic relationships with the government to date in which workers organized in it are provided with social services in exchange for political support, as “the working sector of the party in power as its electoral arm” (Guajardo 2001, 67, own translation; see also Bacon 2004, 49f.). Its leadership is considered highly corrupt, and “yellow” unions and so-called “protection contracts” – which the workers subject to are usually unaware of – are the order of the day¹³⁹ (Babson 2000; see also Stillerman 2003, 584f.). This usually means that where workers are represented by CTM union protection contracts, the union must first be thrown out and replaced by a real union before improvements for workers can be achieved (Bacon 2011). A factor further complicating cooperation is the fact that no national industrial unions exist in Mexico. Unions are organized by plant and affiliated to a national federation, and US national unions thus do not have national counterparts in Mexico, but rather have to deal with countless small plant-based unions (Kay 2011, 200; Babson 2000, 24f.).

However, cross-border labor solidarity relationships date back a century, especially in the border region and the US Southwest, which was a part of Mexico until 1848. In the 1930s and 1940s, strong relationships between workers on both sides developed between workers such as miners, railroad workers, factory workers and farm workers, and workers on both sides of the border practically supported each other in their struggles. Among others, Mexican unions helped to organize Mexican workers – who often worked on both sides of the border – in US copper mines in the Southwest (Bacon 2011; Bacon 2004, 50f.).

¹³⁹ With reference to the corrupted CTM union leaders, which are called “charros”, Guajardo (2001, 67) cites a “famous trilogy”: “Charro, government, and boss... are the same thief” (“charro, gobierno y patrón... son el mismo ladrón”).

However, during the Cold War, as the labor movements in both countries were increasingly purged of their more left-wing elements, the close relationships and practical support were severely hampered (Bacon 2011). Although AFL-CIO and CTM shared their anticommunism and Mexico was in fact considered by the AFL-CIO as one of the few Latin American allies in the war against communism, few practical activities took place at the level of national unions or federations¹⁴⁰ (Kay 2011, 40). The work with the CTM was mostly limited to declarative or signatory contacts, rather than practical cooperation. As one AFL-CIO official (quoted in Kay 2011, 43) explained on the relationship between the AFL-CIO and Mexican unions, “(b)asically there was nothing, or very little before NAFTA. (...) The transnational activities that existed prior to 1990 were not really linked to national unions, but rather were carried out by progressive locals, or dissident northern movements, and did not involve long-term relationships usually”. The same was true for relationships between individual unions, which were also mostly “sporadic contacts intended primarily to serve as ideological ballast against communism” (ibid., 44), rather than involving practical cooperation. Indeed, as the AFL-CIO only worked with the CTM, preventing relationships with independent Mexican unions, these in turn were suspicious of the AFL-CIO and often saw US unions as agents of the US government (ibid., 40ff).

However, the situation has changed: today, after the Cold War, with NAFTA in effect and with the end of the 70 years of the PRI government in Mexico, many US unions have established relationships with Mexican unions. In view of the importance of Mexico as a production site for US corporations – especially since NAFTA, but even before, with the maquiladora program that followed the Bracero Program in the mid-1960s and established countless low-wage factories at the US-Mexico border¹⁴¹ – cooperation with their Mexican counterparts has become an important issue for more US unions (Bacon 2004). Moreover, as the official CTM unions supported NAFTA, individual US unions began to turn to independent Mexican unions to work with (Bacon 2016, 156f.; Babson 2000, 24). Many unions and union members have supported efforts to organize independent unions in the maquilas at the Mexico-US border since the 1990s, among others in the aforementioned Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO)¹⁴² and Enlace, a coalition of Mexican

¹⁴⁰ However, at the level of progressive union locals and individual activists, some solidarity activities continued to take place. Among others, miners supported each other in their respective strikes in the US and in Cananea, Mexico, in the 1960s, and locals of the ILWU and UE supported some of the first efforts to organize workers in the maquiladoras along the border (Bacon 2011).

¹⁴¹ Today, 3,000 maquila plants in Northern Mexico employ over 1.3 million workers (Bacon 2016, 160).

¹⁴² The Border Workers’ Committee – or CFO – was created along the Mexico-Texas border in the late-1970s as an independent organization of women workers in the maquila industry that has a focus on organizing workers outside the plant and education on their rights

and US unions and NGOs that supported living-wage campaigns among maquiladora workers (Bacon 2016, 157ff; Stillerman 2003, 587). Moreover, as in the cases mentioned above, several US unions like the UAW, the Teamsters, the UE, CWA and the USW¹⁴³ have begun working with a series of Mexican unions, whereby some of them have developed into close alliances, as in the case of UE and FAT and the USW and the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMSRM, or “Los Mineros”), which I will discuss in further detail below. However, stable and close alliances remain the exception rather than the rule. This is also a consequence of the persisting difficult situation of unionism in Mexico, which prompts many US unions to refuse to work with CTM unions, thus severely limiting the possibilities for cross-border solidarity. Most substantial cooperation is with independent Mexican unions, such as the FAT, Los Mineros or the STRM, as well as with labor NGOs (Stillerman 2003, 584ff; see also Bacon 2016, 161ff). Hence, although NAFTA has promoted stable relationships with Mexican unions in some industries, in others it is hindered by the lack of counterparts: while unions such as UNITE, the Teamsters and the UAW have relationships with the FAT or the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT)¹⁴⁴, the latter do not represent significant numbers of workers in all of these industries, providing very few possibilities to engage in concrete joint activities, unlike – for instance – in the garment sector (Kay 2011, 224).¹⁴⁵ Moreover, although these unions have relationships particularly with the FAT, Kay (2011, 226ff) has detailed that this has not entirely led to the perception of pursuing common interests as North American workers and “a sense of mutualism does not fully permeate these unions’ cultures” (ibid., 227). In fact, despite being much less than before NAFTA, resentments and charges of racist rhetoric have continued to emerge (ibid., 76ff, 214f., 226ff).

In contrast to Mexico, **El Salvador** is not a highly relevant country for US labor unions in economic and industrial-strategic terms. The country and its economy are small and the informal sector makes up a large part of overall employment. In contrast to Mexico, no industry producing high value-added manufacturing

and Mexican labor law (Alexander and Gilmore 1994; Stillerman 2003, 587).

¹⁴³ Recently, SEIU has also worked with organizations in Mexico, although not with unions. From 2009 to 2011, it maintained an office in Mexico City to support organizing among janitorial workers (Interview with Elizabeth O’Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013).

¹⁴⁴ The UNT was founded by the FAT and other major independent unions in 1997 to build a counterweight to the official CTM (Babson 2000, 23f.; see also Kay 2011, 225).

¹⁴⁵ This was also confirmed by David Huerta – then-vice president of USWW – who explained in the interview regarding the independent Mexican unions that unions such as the “electricistas (...), those folks are the folks who are (...) out there doing the real work... but those are also the folks who don’t have the national relationships with the international companies (that we need to target)”. Interview with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

products exists. Manufacturing mostly comprises labor-intensive production in EPZs, particularly in the apparel sector. Already in 2004, EPZs made up 28 per cent of Salvadoran manufacturing employment (Anner 2011, 31). Furthermore, the Salvadoran labor movement is highly fragmented and ideologically divided between leftist unions and conservative unions linked to the business sector and the right-wing political party ARENA (*ibid.*, 53).

Despite the minor strategic relevance and the fragmentation of the Salvadoran labor movement, some US unions have engaged in solidarity with unions and other social movements in El Salvador. On the one hand, some more progressive parts of the labor movement joined the faith-based and political solidarity with the Salvadoran liberation struggle against the military government. In particular, many rank-and-file activists engaged in solidarity activities with Salvadoran (and other Central American) workers and the liberation movement in the 1980s and early-1990s (Zweig 2016, 185; Stillerman 2003, 588).

The most important focus of US unions' solidarity with Salvadoran workers has been the struggle for improved working conditions and pay in EPZs in the apparel sector in the 1990s (Anner 2011). Founded in 1980, the National Labor Committee (NLC) was one of the first and most visible anti-sweatshop NGOs, laying the ground for the anti-sweatshop movement in the 1990s. In it, NGOs and unions in the US and other countries like Canada partnered with unions and workers' groups particularly in Central America to combat disastrous working conditions and pay in the apparel EPZ. Besides groups like United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), USLEAP¹⁴⁶ and the NLC, UNITE and the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center were also involved in supporting workers in El Salvador, putting pressure on retailers like Gap and Nike (Anner 2011, 61-65; Frundt 2000).

Today, while some work with Salvadoran unions occasionally continues to take place at the level of individual US unions as well as the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, it is not at the same scale as the anti-sweatshop movement in the 1990s. Given that the apparel unions (above all, UNITE) have essentially withdrawn from the work in Central America, the sweatshop solidarity work is currently limited to collegial apparel, where some alliances between student groups and maquila workers still exist, albeit mostly without the involvement of US unions.¹⁴⁷ In recent years, among the unions engaged (mostly on the level of locals) in activities in support of Salvadoran unions – among others, organizing exchanges and conducting trainings – were CWA and the International

¹⁴⁶ USLEAP was founded in 1987 as the U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project (US/GLEP) and later renamed U.S./Latin America Labor Education project as it expanded its work to other countries. It is an independent non-profit organization that supports workers in Latin America, with a particular focus on workers who are employed directly or indirectly by US companies producing for the U.S. market.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Stephen Coats, then-Executive Director, US-Latin America Labor Education Project (US/Leap), Chicago, May 5, 2012.

Associations of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)¹⁴⁸ (CWA 2001). Also SEIU has more recently become involved in working with Salvadoran unions, as I will discuss further below.

4.4 Cases researched: United Service Workers West and United Steelworkers District 7

4.4.1 United Service Workers West of the Service Employees International Union (USWW)

The SEIU is the US' second-largest labor union, and the largest in the private sector. Today, it represents about 2 million workers in the US and Canada in three industries: health care, public services and property services.¹⁴⁹ It has over 150 affiliated local unions, many of them very large “amalgamated locals” (the product of mergers of smaller locals) that dispose of considerable power: SEIU has historically been a very decentralized union, being “structured more as a loose configuration of local urban fiefdoms than as a national union organization” (Fantasia and Voss 2004, 101, 92ff), and while this has changed to some degree, its locals maintain a relative high degree of autonomy.¹⁵⁰

USWW is a California-wide local comprising about 42,000 members.¹⁵¹ It is an amalgamated local that grew out of a merger of SEIU Local 1877 – which represented janitors and airport workers in the entire state – and the security officers local SEIU SOULA in 2010.¹⁵² Given its size,¹⁵³ the local is relatively autonomous (particularly when compared with smaller locals and more hierarchically-structured unions such as USW).

Today, USWW is constituted by five divisions: janitors, security, airport, allied and entertainment as well as multi-services¹⁵⁴. The janitors division is by far the

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Alexis De Simone, Senior Program Officer, Americas Region, Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, April 8, 2013.

¹⁴⁹ www.SEIU.org.

¹⁵⁰ Since John Sweeney's presidency, SEIU has gradually moved towards more centralization. Sweeney increased the number of national staff persons and used trusteeship (the power to take over a local's affairs when local leadership is corrupt or incompetent) as a measure to impose organizing against reluctant local leaders (Fantasia and Voss, 2004, 136; McCallum 2013, 51f.).

¹⁵¹ Interview with the coordinator of the USWW janitorial division, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

¹⁵² Interviews with the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013, own translation; the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013; see also <http://socialjusticehistory.org/projects/justiceforjanitors/timeline>; <https://www.peggybrowningfund.org/news/item/719-remembering-one-of-labor-s-great-organizers-pbf-remembers-mike-garcia>

¹⁵³ As USWW mainly represents low-wage service workers, the resources that it disposes of are nevertheless considerably smaller than other SEIU locals' that represent – for instance – health care workers such as SEIU-UHW.

¹⁵⁴ “Allied” represents industries such as markets and Disney workers, and “multiservices”

largest, with more than 20,000 members.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, while the goal of the merger with the security local is to eventually overcome the barriers separating the different industries and their workforces, at present each division still works relatively separately from the others, and only the most active members of the union regularly interact with the other divisions.¹⁵⁶

4.4.1.1 Migrant membership

SEIU is probably the union most widely associated with “organizing the unorganized”: particularly internationally, SEIU is known as *the* organizing union. In view of steadily declining membership numbers, it began to target the unorganized as well as mergers with other unions to regain agency from an early stage. From 1980 to 1995, SEIU was led by later AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, who strongly promoted a proactive organizing approach and devoted significant resources to organizing new members. During his presidency, SEIU membership quickly began to grow¹⁵⁷ (McCallum 2013, 51; Lopez, 2004, 9).

As a significant share of the industry that SEIU represents is low-paid services industries, organizing meant proactively targeting migrants from the beginning: the union simply had no option but to organize the increasingly migrant workforce in these industries. SEIU’s famous Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign was the first large-scale – and successful – organizing campaign targeting mainly migrant workers in the US. Having begun in Denver in 1985, the campaign was expanded to Los Angeles in 1988 (and then to other cities), where the industry workforce had become almost exclusively migrant in the 1980s, particularly Mexican and Central American. By 1995, 35,000 new members had been won into SEIU nationwide, and by the mid-2000s JfJ had organized 70 per cent of janitors in almost half of the 50 largest US cities (McCallum 2013, 54). SEIU has subsequently been at the forefront of unions representing migrant workers, and many more organizing campaigns have brought more migrant workers into the union.

Today, it is among the unions with the largest migrant membership. However, SEIU does not collect this data. It estimates that about half a million – or 25 per cent – of its members are migrants.¹⁵⁸ The majority of these – approximately 250,000 – are of Mexican descent¹⁵⁹, while the Salvadoran membership is also

comprises county workers. Interviews with the coordinator of the USWW janitorial division, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation; the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.seiu-usww.org/category/campaigns/justice-for-janitors/>

¹⁵⁶ Interview with the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Not exclusively by organizing new members, but also due to mergers with other unions.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Elizabeth O’Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013.

¹⁵⁹ These data are SEIU’s “best guess” on its migrant membership, based on a polling that the union conducted in 2009 in which “latino sounding last names” were assumed to be

large. According to estimations, approximately 50-60,000 members in SEIU are of Salvadoran origin.¹⁶⁰ The number is particularly high in major destination areas of Salvadoran migration, where Salvadoran members concentrate in “pockets”, namely cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, DC and Houston.¹⁶¹

In USWW, the membership is heterogenous, mirroring the workforce in the respective industries that it represents. Hence, while the security division membership has a mainly African American membership, and the airport division is mixed – comprising Anglo-Americans, African Americans and migrants from a variety of countries – the janitorial division has an almost exclusively Latino migrant membership. It is the successor of the janitorial division of the former SEIU Local 399 – that first merged with Local 1877 in 1995 and then with SOULA to form USWW in 2010¹⁶² – in which the JfJ campaign took place¹⁶³ and into which more than 6,000 mostly Latino migrant workers were organized in the first couple of years of the campaign (Milkman 2006, 147; see also Ruiz Cameron 2000; Waldinger et al. 1998). It thus has a long history of organizing migrants.

While no official statistics on the membership exist, USWW overall has a large percentage of migrant members; indeed, the numbers mentioned in the interviews varied from 90 to 99 per cent Latino membership in the janitorial division,¹⁶⁴ which reflects the fact that more than 95 per cent of the janitorial workforce in Los Angeles is Latino (Muñiz 2010, 213). Hence, the then-USWW Vice President explained that this division “has always had a very international flavor to it because of the fact that it is an immigrant movement (...) it’s a movement that is composed of a lot of immigrant workers, and people know

migrant members. In order to find out the percentage of Mexican migrants, in regions where “a decent amount of Mexicans” was assumed, 500 randomly-selected members were called and asked about their origin, and these numbers were then projected to the national union (interview with Elizabeth O’Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013).

¹⁶⁰ Interview with SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013, own translation.

¹⁶¹ Interview with SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013, own translation.

¹⁶² Following internal disputes and major conflicts after the successful organizing campaigns among janitors, Local 399 was put under trusteeship in 1995, with Mike Garcia as the trustee appointed to lead the local. Garcia was president of Local 1877 which represented janitors in Northern California. Under the trusteeship, the janitorial section split off Local 399 and joined 1877, whereas the healthcare section remained 399 (Milkman 2006, 160; Tait 2005, 200).

¹⁶³ Local 399 was the SEIU local with jurisdiction over the janitors in Los Angeles when the JfJ campaign was started. The local had almost completely given up organizing the (recently almost entirely migrant) janitorial workforce in the city, and the organizing campaign was basically led by international staff persons (Fantasia and Voss 2004, 148).

¹⁶⁴ Interviews with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013; the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013; David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

that.”¹⁶⁵ According to the assistant to the local’s president, of the migrant membership, about 40 per cent are of Mexican origin, whereas Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrants each make up about 30 per cent, and some interviewees estimated the number to be even higher, with up to 70 per cent Salvadoran membership.¹⁶⁶ This membership composition is relatively recent. As the assistant to the local’s president – the person with the longest history in the local – explained, it was in the 1980s that the membership went from being overwhelmingly African American to being mostly Latino immigrants with a large percentage of Central Americans.¹⁶⁷ The share of Latinos in the Los Angeles janitorial workforce went up from 28 per cent in 1980 to 61 per cent in 1990, with Central Americans then making up 26 per cent and Mexicans 31 per cent of the workforce (Waldinger et al. 1998, 107). This was a consequence of the influx of large numbers of Central American migrants in the 1980s fleeing civil wars in their countries, which the employers purposefully used in their strategy of getting rid of the union and led to a “flip-flopping” of the workforce from 80 per cent African American and 20 per cent Mexican to 70 per cent Central American and 30 per cent African American in a few years, as the assistant to the president explained¹⁶⁸ (see also Milkman 2006, 108; Fantasia and Voss, 2004, 138; Waldinger et al. 1998, 106f.).

While Mexicans make up the majority of the janitorial membership in other areas such as San Diego and Orange County, in Los Angeles, not only Latinos but particularly Central American migrants are over-represented, with the latter making up 50 per cent or more of the membership. The majority of these are Salvadorans, of which there are many large pockets, particularly in the center of the city.¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, most of USWW’s officers and staff persons are – with the exception of the security division – of migrant origin: about 90 per cent of the staff in USWW are bilingual, which means of migrant origin in most cases.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Interview with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Interviews with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013; USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

¹⁶⁷ In the Los Angeles area, the share of foreign-born Hispanics of the total janitorial workforce went from 10.3 per cent in 1970 and 28.9 per cent in 1980 to 56.2 per cent in 1990 (Milkman 2006, 108).

¹⁶⁸ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013; also interviews with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013; former SEIU organizer in the JfJ campaign, Local 399, Manhattan Beach, February 13, 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Interviews with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013, the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

¹⁷⁰ Interviews with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013; USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10,

While most officers and staff persons are Chicanos (such as then-president of the local Mike García and the then-vice president David Huerta), many others are Salvadoran migrants, particularly in the janitorial division.¹⁷¹

4.4.1.2 International solidarity in SEIU

As a services union, SEIU does not have the historical tradition of international cooperation that many manufacturing unions have. Services unions do not face as much direct competition by workers abroad compared with unions in the manufacturing sector, as production (i.e. the provision of services) cannot simply be relocated. However, with globalization, many firms have merged and services are now often offered by large TNCs, such as in the private security, janitorial or airplane catering sectors. This has impelled services unions around the world to establish relationships with their counterparts in other countries where employees of these firms work, particularly companies' home countries (McCallum 2013, 6; Tattersall 2007, 156).

Thus, in recent years SEIU has become strongly engaged in international solidarity, particularly in strategic campaigns, in an attempt to counter increasingly transnational employers by campaigning at a multinational level (Tattersall 2007, 161; Greven 2006a). In 2004, it founded its global partnership department, which is responsible for the international work and whose main aim is to cooperate strategically with other unions to build union power in the industry, particularly through supporting organizing efforts abroad (McCallum 2013, 48ff). It aims to engage more consistently in international relationship building, rather than relying on ad-hoc, one-sided requests for short-term favors (Tattersall 2007, 162; see also McCallum 2013, 63ff). The global partnerships unit "sought to shift away from ad hoc solidarity requests to create a systematic capacity for international work" (Tattersall 2007, 162) and intends to build stable inter-union networks around the campaigns that SEIU engages in (Greven 2006a, 266). Since then, global partnerships has coordinated several campaigns such as the Driving Up Standards Campaign with the British union T&G against the UK-based busing companies FirstGroup and National Express; fostered partnerships with individual unions such as the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) in Australia and the T&G in UK, whom SEIU helps in organizing campaigns; and promoted organizing capacity in the GUFs, particularly UNI (McCallum 2013, 58ff; Tattersall 2007, 162f.). Moreover, SEIU has deployed staff persons to support other unions and through its federation Change to Win¹⁷² and its office in Brussels it has supported

2014; former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

¹⁷¹ Interviews with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, November 25, 2013; USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation; the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

¹⁷² Change to Win formed in 2005 as a US labor federation by a split of seven unions (SEIU, UNITE, HERE, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC), the Teamsters, UFCW,

organizing efforts by European unions. At present, it not only has a permanent representative at UNI, but it has also created a global team supporting unions in their organizing campaigns in several European countries (McCallum 2013, 65, 48ff; Tattersall 2007, 169). Among others, SEIU has supported the German services union ver.di in their organizing efforts in the security sector in Hamburg in 2006 and 2007, and began supporting the Dutch union FNV Bondgenoten in their campaigns in the janitorial sector in 2007 (Dribbusch 2008; Bremme 2007; Greven 2006a, 266). One of the most important corporate campaigns has been UNI's campaign against Group for Securicor (G4S), in which SEIU played a major role, and in which a Global Framework Agreement was won in 2008 (McCallum 2013).

Most of SEIU's international work focuses on Northern countries, particularly the European countries where most TNCs in the services sector are headquartered; however, more recently it has also engaged in other regions¹⁷³ (McCallum 2013, 56ff). The G4S campaign was focused – to an important degree – on the Global South, including India, Indonesia and many African countries, given that the company had refocused its operations from Europe to expanding markets in the South (ibid., 6f.). In 2009, it established an office in Mexico City (which it closed again in 2011 due to lacking success), working with local organizations in an effort to promote organizing in the Mexican janitorial sector, which is in fact dominated by the same services multinationals as in the US, like the Danish ISS.¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, in the last few years, SEIU has engaged in working with Salvadoran unions: promoted by the Salvadoran president of Local 6 in Seattle, who is also a member of the Global Committee in charge of the international work, SEIU has begun establishing relationships with some unions in El Salvador such as the Federación de Asociaciones y Sindicatos Independientes de El Salvador (FEASIES). While the initiative is not very far advanced yet, the intention is to build stable relationships of solidarity.¹⁷⁵

and the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)) from the AFL-CIO, which it criticized for its lacking focus on organizing. Today, the coalition comprises the Teamsters, SEIU, UFCW and UFW.

¹⁷³ Interview with Elizabeth O'Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with Elizabeth O'Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013; David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

¹⁷⁵ In recent years, more or less regular contact has been established with unions and federations representing workers in different industries, such as public employees, healthcare and postal workers, among others. Several meetings have taken place, and SEIU representatives conducted trainings for 120 rank-and-file leaders in San Salvador on organizing and building strength. Interview with SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013, own translation.

4.4.2 *United Steelworkers (USW) District 7*

The United Steelworkers (USW) is a union that represents about 1.2 million workers and retirees in various industries such as metal, chemical, manufacturing, paper and oil in the US, Canada and the Caribbean. It has over 1,800 affiliated local unions organized in thirteen districts. In comparison to SEIU, the locals are smaller and the union is more hierarchically structured (e.g. Harrod 1972, 126).

District 7 comprises Illinois and Indiana and represents about 50,000-60,000 members in approximately 150 locals.¹⁷⁶ The industry that it represents here is mainly the steel mills in Northern Indiana and related manufacturing, but increasingly also other occupations such as office, technical and oil workers, as well as other manufacturing like packing materials and air conditioning and heating technologies.

4.4.2.1 Migrant membership

In comparison with SEIU, USW has a much lesser history of actively organizing migrant workers. Given that the main industries that it represents have a long history of unionization and are today relatively highly skilled and well paid – particularly when compared to the occupations that SEIU-USWW represents, like janitors and security officers – they do not traditionally have large numbers of migrant workers, as employers do not recur to employing migrants – let alone undocumented migrants – as a source of cheap and docile labor.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, due to the lower degree of autonomy of its locals, they seldom develop their own proactive migrant-organizing strategy (or policies more generally), unlike some SEIU locals; however, throughout history some locals have engaged on their own in activities supporting African American workers against their racist members (Goldfield 2008, 321). Furthermore, USW has a long racist tradition against black workers, with the leadership under president Philip Murray supporting racist structures in steel employment and in the union in the 1940s and 1950s (ibid., 320ff). However, USW has increasingly expanded its representation to industries such as transportation, food processing, retail and manufacturing, which has also meant organizing a more migrant workforce in some areas.

Furthermore, in some regions with large migrant populations, particularly in the Southwest and the Midwest, migrants – particularly from Mexico – make up considerable parts of the membership. In the Southwest, many of the miners that USW represents belong to those that were crossed by the border through the Treaty of Guadalupe. Moreover, after the annexation of the Mexican Northern

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

¹⁷⁷ Moreover, employers in the steel industry are increasingly requiring highly qualified workers, whereas in the 1970s, “all you had to do to get a job was show up”; interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

states by the US, many of them continued to move back and forth to work in mines on both sides of the border and they continue to have family in both countries. An important share of the membership of District 12 in the US Southwest is thus transnational in the full sense of the word.

District 7 also has a large Mexican-origin membership. While it is impossible to know the exact numbers, as USW does not collect data on its migrant members,¹⁷⁸ the district has the largest concentration of Hispanic members within USW, with Mexican migrants by far representing most of them.¹⁷⁹ On the one hand, this is due to the long history of migration to the Midwest and particularly the region's steel industry, with some employers such as Inland (now ArcelorMittal) historically recruiting workers directly in Mexico. On the other hand, several of the district's smaller locals represent workers in industries such as the production of cardboard boxes, where many workers are recent – often undocumented – migrants. The migrant membership is thus both first and second – and in some cases even third – generation; however, second-generation migrants constitute the largest group, as the employers in the steel industry did not significantly hire during the 1980s and 1990s, while at the same time it has become increasingly difficult for Mexican migrants to enter the US.¹⁸⁰

The migrant membership is distributed very unevenly among the district's locals, due to both regional differences in the migrant population and the variety of occupations that the union represents in the district. In most of Indiana, members mostly work in large steel mills, meaning that they are relatively highly skilled and crucially receive high wages and benefits. Here, most migrant membership – if any – is second and third generation, in some plants representing up to 25 per cent of the membership¹⁸¹, but mostly being significantly lower, with many locals in the heartland having virtually no migrant members. By contrast, in the Chicago metropolitan and Northwestern Indiana area, where the union represents workers in a variety of smaller shops, wages and benefits are often significantly lower and employers are more willing to employ (undocumented) migrants to squeeze wages. Here, recent migrants constitute a large share of the membership, and a significant number are undocumented. In the metropolitan area of Chicago, the Hispanic membership represents approximately fifteen to twenty per cent of all members, and many locals in the metropolitan and northern Indiana region have a migrant

¹⁷⁸ Interviews with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

membership of about 40 and up to 90 per cent, whereby “just about nobody speak(ing) English”¹⁸² in some locals.

4.4.2.2 International solidarity in USW

The United Steelworkers have a somewhat ambivalent history of international solidarity. On the one hand, they look back on a period of deep involvement with US government foreign policy and its fight against communism in the Cold War era (Harrod 1972, 126-34), as well as a strong tradition of protectionism, including repeated demands to impose higher tariffs on steel imports (Stillerman 2003, 585).¹⁸³ Furthermore, the USW was a “marginal player in anti-NAFTA coalitions and did not build significant relationships with Mexican unions until after 2001” (Kay 2011, 231), in contrast to other US unions, which established closer ties to Mexican unions beginning in the early-1990s. However, it has engaged in international campaigns since the 1990s, like the campaign against the Japanese-owned Bridgestone Firestone and against Ravenswood Aluminium Corporation (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 1999). Most of these have been short-term campaigns and despite being successful, they have at times rather taken the form of one-sided requests for help from European and other partners abroad and hampered by frictions and misunderstandings arising out of cultural differences, as in two campaigns against the German tire company Continental in the 1990s and 2000s, or even racist sentiments, as in the Bridgestone Firestone campaign (Greven and Schwetz 2011; Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 2001, 260).

More recently, the USW has turned more actively towards international solidarity. Under president Leo Gerard – in office since 2001 – the union has engaged in building stronger and longer-term relationships with unions abroad (Kay 2011, 246). Among others, in 2008 it merged with the Canadian and Unite in the UK and formed a new global union called Workers Uniting (McCallum 2013, 4; Workers Uniting 2011). It has also formed alliances with the German IG Metall, the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) and the largest metalworkers’ union in Brazil (CNM-CUT). Moreover, the USW has engaged in the Coca-Cola campaign in Colombia and in support of unions threatened by death squads, as well as helping some unionists to come to the US¹⁸⁴ (Zweig 2016, 192). More recently, hence, Zweig (2016, 197) considers the USW (next to SEIU, CWA, and UE) as among the “number of unions (that) have already begun to express a

¹⁸² Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014, own translation.

¹⁸³ In fact, most recently USW president Leo Gerard expressed a protectionist rhetoric against China when calling for tariff protection against Chinese steel, whose “subsidies violate international trade rules” (Gerard 2016).

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Luis Cardona, USW organizer, Chicago, February 15, 2013.

foreign policy that more fully represents the interests of their members and working people in general” (see also Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 2001, 264).

Importantly, in 2005, USW officially formed a strategic alliance with the Mexican miners’ union SNTMMSSRM (“Los Mineros”). It is based on the understanding that international solidarity is increasingly important, particularly in the NAFTA region. Its goal is “to strengthen the close working relations between the unions and increase communication, collaboration and coordination across national borders” (<http://www.usw.org/union/history>) and it organizes joint actions against common employers such as ArcelorMittal and Grupo México (who bought ASARCO, the American Smelting and Refining Co.) (Bacon 2015b; Kay 2011, 161ff).

While the decision to form the alliance is clearly a strategic decision taken by the national leadership, its roots date back further and are located in the US Southwest and the Mexican North, where – as hinted at previously – close relationships of mutual support and even family relationships, have existed for decades between workers in the copper industry in Arizona and Sonora¹⁸⁵ (Bacon 2016, 161f.). As copper miners in the US are organized in the USW, during strikes such as that in the Cananea copper mines in 1998 and previous ones, USW locals supported the striking workers in Mexico¹⁸⁶ (ibid., 162). Hence, while ties at local and regional levels existed for a long time, the relationship grew stronger with the formal alliance and particularly with a long strike in Cananea in 2007 and the explosion in the mine of Pasta de Conchos in the Mexican state of Coahuila in February of 2006, in the aftermath of which the Mineros president Napoleón Gómez Urrutia was forced into exile, which the USW offered him in Canada¹⁸⁷ (Gómez Urrutia 2013, 108-11; Kay 2011, 161f.). Since then, many rallies in the US as well as joint activities have taken place, the USW national union as well as locals have supported Mineros sections in their struggles, USW lawyers filed two NAO submissions¹⁸⁸ and – as I will lay out in chapter 6 – regular visits of large numbers of USW members to the Los Mineros

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Manny Armenta, Subdistrict 2 director, USW District 12, Tucson, Arizona, February 17, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ On February 19, 2006, 65 workers were killed by an explosion in the coal mine of Pasta de Conchos in the Mexican state of Coahuila, after being forced to work despite the presence of explosive gas in the shaft which the union Los Mineros had previously denounced. The employer, a subsidiary of Grupo Mexico, refused to take actions to save workers buried in the mine. Los Mineros president Gómez Urrutia accused the employer of committing “industrial homicide”, followed by attacks by the Mexican government that charged him with fraud, and replaced him at the leadership of Los Mineros by someone loyal to the employer. To escape arrest, USW first offered him a home in Arizona and then in Canada (Kay 2011, 161f.; Bacon 2015a; Gómez Urrutia 2013).

¹⁸⁸ Under the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) in the context of NAFTA, organizations in each of the three countries can jointly file complaints with the National Administrative Offices (NAOs).

section in Michoacán take place (Kay 2011, 162). In fact, the aim is to eventually build one single North American industrial organization, i.e. to merge both unions¹⁸⁹ (Bacon 2016, 163).

¹⁸⁹ Interviews with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013; Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

5 USWW: broadening the understanding of solidarity and overcoming the little relevance of international solidarity through transnational ways of belonging, transnational political networks, and social remittances

The research in the two case studies brought to light two different ways in which transnational migration influences unions' international solidarity with migrants' countries of origin and helps to overcome some of the obstacles that solidarity faces: while in one case, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of solidarity and unionism and promotes international solidarity work where it did not play an important role before, in the other, it contributes to overcoming some crucial impediments to a perceived "community of fate" among workers.

In the case of the SEIU local USWW in Los Angeles, migration has contributed to broadening the understanding of solidarity and promoted international work where it did not exist before.

In the past fifteen to twenty years, Salvadoran migrants have initiated a series of activities in solidarity with the FMLN in El Salvador. In so doing, they have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of unionism and international solidarity, as the FMLN is not a labor union but rather a political party and former guerrilla organization. Furthermore, El Salvador is a small country that does not hold much strategic relevance for US unions in economic-material terms. Moreover, in promoting this solidarity work and making it a regular element of USWW's work, migrants have initiated solidarity relationships – albeit on an *ad-hoc* basis rather than a strategic formal alliance – where they did not previously exist, thus contributing to overcoming the little relevance that international solidarity usually holds in unions' everyday work, particularly for unions in the North with such in the South. As I will lay out in detail in this chapter, three factors explain migrants' promotion of this solidarity work and their ability to do so: their transnational ways of belonging, their embeddedness in transnational political networks and their social remittances.

In the following, I will first briefly lay out the local's solidarity work with the Salvadoran FMLN (chapter 5.1). Subsequently, in the analysis section, after arguing that this solidarity work has contributed to broadening the union's concept of unionism and international solidarity and giving more priority to international solidarity, I will analyze how migrants have done this (5.2). I will first concentrate on migrants' transnational ways of belonging as the basis for their motivation (5.2.1), before laying out migrants' embeddedness in political networks as the crucial factor in promoting this work in practice (5.2.2). Subsequently, I will focus on how migrants' social remittances contributed to broadening the union's concept of solidarity (5.2.3.1) and how they provided migrants with sufficient influence in the union to promote the solidarity work (5.2.3.2). Finally, the chapter ends with a brief summary (5.3).

5.1 USWW's solidarity work with the FMLN as a regular element in the local's activities

With Salvadoran migrants making up an important share of the membership, in the course of the last ten to fifteen years¹⁹⁰ activities in solidarity with the FMLN in El Salvador have begun to constitute a regular element in the local's activities. Most of it comprises support for the FMLN's campaigns in the run-up to presidential elections. For Salvadoran politicians, the Salvadoran exile community is a crucial constituency in elections: as laid out in chapter 4.1, the Salvadoran exile community in the US makes up about one-fifth of El Salvador's population and a quarter of this community lives in Los Angeles. As previously mentioned, Salvadoran politicians have thus long campaigned in the US and particularly in Los Angeles, both due to migrants' influence on relatives in El Salvador and owing to their economic importance for electoral campaigns; indeed, they have done so even more since the exile community gained voting rights in 2014. Particularly for FMLN candidates, the strong support networks in the country and especially in Los Angeles that were organized by civil war refugees in the 1980s and 1990s constitute an important asset.

Activities conducted in the USWW Local in support of campaigns comprise – among others –organizing information events on the FMLN's policies and electoral campaigns and inviting FMLN representatives and such of the Salvadoran government (since it is FMLN) to give talks at the USWW hall. Furthermore, election observers have been sent to El Salvador to ensure fair and transparent elections, and a delegation was sent to attend the inauguration of the new president of El Salvador – Mauricio Funes – when the FMLN won the election for the first time in 2009. The FMLN representatives giving talks at the union hall have included – among others – the Salvadoran president Mauricio Funes himself who attended a dinner that the local organized for him, as well as other FMLN candidates such as Oscar Ortiz who was running for vice president during the time when the research was conducted, an office that he has held since 2014.¹⁹¹ Such invitations to candidates to talk at the union do not imply the payment for travel costs, although they involve the provision of premises, buffet and beverages, as well as the mobilization of networks within the Salvadoran community to attend the meeting. Moreover, they often entail collecting donations for the campaign during the events.¹⁹² Of particular importance – and probably the most frequent activity – is conducting fundraising events for the

¹⁹⁰ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

¹⁹¹ Interviews with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013 and USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

¹⁹² Interviews with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013 and with the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014.

FMLN, particularly in the context of electoral campaigns. For this purpose, a series of parties and dances have been organized in the union hall. During my research in the local, discussions were proceeding about what activities to carry out in support of the FMLN's campaign for the elections in March 2014, as well as whether to send election observers.

Moreover, outside the election campaign context, FMLN politicians are frequently invited to speak at the union (and, occasionally, representatives of Salvadoran labor unions such as the congress employees union Sindicato de Empleados y Empleadas de la Asamblea Legislativa de El Salvador (SEAL), as well as the social security services employees union Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Seguro Social¹⁹³). Furthermore, on several occasions the local has lent its rooms for the Los Angeles FMLN committee to hold meetings and strategic discussions, as well as their own fundraising parties.¹⁹⁴

The activities take place on a fairly regular basis, albeit “whenever things come up” and someone takes the initiative, rather than following a strict timetable. Clearly, they do not constitute some sort of official policy or strategic program put together and pursued by the local leadership; rather, it is groups or individual members and staff persons who push the activities forward. Nonetheless, they extend beyond sporadic ad-hoc initiatives initiated and organized by individuals in their own or a small group's interest and that are disconnected from the rest of the union. What makes these activities remarkable is their frequency as well as their broad acceptance by the membership, staff and leadership. Moreover, importantly, they are in fact to some degree institutionalized in the union structure and as part of the union's political work: all of this despite the work not being with a labor union, but rather a former guerrilla organization and now political party.

While it is usually individual members or staff persons who come up with ideas, they carry them out through and with the support of the union's bodies. On the one hand, the fact that it is frequently staff persons – who are directly accountable to the elected leadership – who initiate and conduct such activities is itself an expression of the leadership's support. On the other hand, it is mainly in the union's Committee on Political Education (COPE) that the activities are discussed, decided upon and organized.¹⁹⁵ The COPE is part of each division's structure and the “political wing of the union”¹⁹⁶ and the body in charge of organizing the local's political activities.¹⁹⁷ It is led and supervised by a staff

¹⁹³ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los

person on the political department, the local's political director, who defines the policy lines, puts together the committee's campaigns and convenes the meetings.¹⁹⁸ In its monthly and sometimes more frequent meetings, decisions on activities are taken together with the political director and the secretary-treasurer and they ultimately need to be approved by the president.¹⁹⁹ In principle, while the goal is to ultimately have only one COPE for the entire local²⁰⁰, every one of the five divisions within USWW currently has its own COPE; however, some are more active than others and de facto only those of the janitors and the security division are functioning.²⁰¹ The COPE is thus the body to pursue the local's political view going beyond the strictly economic goals. These are largely domestic: most of the activities involve endorsing political candidates in national or local elections and supporting campaigns for or against specific policies. A varying number of 20 to 30 COPE members organize and mobilize for rallies and marches, conduct money collections and mobilize for paying home visits in support of political candidates. In the case of this local, the COPE work is a very important element in the local's activities, and particularly the janitorial COPE is known for being very active.²⁰² Given the local's membership composition, one of the most important political topics has long been immigrants' rights, and the promotion of immigration reform is one of the COPE's main objectives. In the case of the janitorial COPE, in recent years the activities have gone beyond domestic affairs, including activities in support of the FMLN. Nonetheless, the work is still considered to stand for the local's political view, as the coordinator of the janitorial division said when explaining the COPE's role in the local:

The (task of the) COPE committee (is) ... to move the political program, but sometimes it is connected with doing a fundraiser (for the FMLN) or whatever activities, to move the vision of the union, you know. (...) For example, right now, on the election next year, I know, we maybe send members, or start to collect money to send to the campaign of the FMLN²⁰³

Angeles, November 20, 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Interviews with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013, USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013; the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014, and USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013.

¹⁹⁹ Interviews with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013, USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013; and USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013.

²⁰⁰ As the merger of SEIU SOULA and Local 1877 in 2010 is still recent, the different parts the process of growing together.

²⁰¹ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

²⁰² Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

²⁰³ Interview with the coordinator of the USWW janitorial division, Los Angeles, October

Furthermore, the local's then-vice president (today president) David Huerta – himself Chicano – expressed the view that the FMLN solidarity is seen as part of USWW's political work, rather than isolated activities by individual members. In the interview, he spoke about the solidarity work “we are” or “the organization is doing” with the FMLN:

We did different support for... you know, I would say like El Salvador, a lot of our members are from El Salvador, (we have lent) our office here for fundraising (...) for the FMLN, (...) we've done work with them like that. (...) We sent our members down there to do poll watching, part of an international delegation to make sure that the elections in a just way without violence and fraud. We also... we've done fundraisers here for FMLN, so members themselves have used this hall to raise funds for the party in El Salvador, with the inauguration of the president, our president and several others were part of a delegation from Justice for Janitors to go out there and were very well received by the president. The president actually of El Salvador actually came here and spoke to our members one time. So this organization in particular, not just SEIU, but this organization, has always had like I said, has always had a very strong tie to its home country.²⁰⁴

This quote clearly expresses strong institutional support for the FMLN solidarity work by the union leadership, not only in stressing that “this organization” has always had strong ties to “its home country” and in explaining that the local's president has repeatedly supported this work, but also in consistently speaking of “us” doing that work.

However, not only is the FMLN solidarity work decided upon in the union bodies and viewed as part of the local's political program; moreover, it also involves the spending of union funds. While the local does not (and – like any other union local in the US – is not allowed to) donate dues money to FMLN (or other political) campaigns, it contributes its infrastructure and pay for food and beverages.²⁰⁵ Occasionally, it pays for activities such as sending election observers to El Salvador, which is paid by the local's Political Action Committee (PAC) fund, or a delegation to the president's inauguration.²⁰⁶ In such cases involving union funds, it is the executive board that decides about the activities.²⁰⁷ However, most activities are paid for with funds that the janitorial COPE raises for political activities. While these are not dues money, they are part of the local's funds for its political work.²⁰⁸ The COPE regularly conducts

29, 2013, emphasis added.

²⁰⁴ Interview with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013, emphasis added.

²⁰⁵ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁰⁶ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013, with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

²⁰⁷ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁰⁸ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los

fundraising activities such as dances and parties on occasions such as Valentine's day, the end of summer or Christmas, which are earmarked for the local's political work (but not for specific activities such as the FMLN work).²⁰⁹ The FMLN solidarity activities are thus funded – like any other political activities – by the local's political fund.²¹⁰

Importantly, the work in support of the FMLN is widely accepted by the membership, staff and leadership. Among the membership and the union bodies where the activities are decided upon, they are rarely questioned, as several staff persons as well as COPE members told me.²¹¹ Moreover, I was repeatedly told that not only Salvadorans but also other members attend the activities, although clearly the main participants are Salvadorans.²¹² The interviews with non-migrant union members, staff and leadership showed that while not all – and particularly not many African Americans – know much about the Salvadoran civil war and the FMLN, they rarely oppose the work with it.²¹³ Rather, those to whom I spoke generally supported the FMLN solidarity. In general, most members accept it as a natural part of the union's politics, as “sort of a natural thing”²¹⁴, given the large number of Salvadoran-origin members, or they even show curiosity to learn about their colleagues' history.²¹⁵ The assistant to the president described the rest of the membership's attitude towards the FMLN solidarity as follows:

the African American members, they are kind of curious (...) as to how the folks you know (do) politics cross border... there hasn't been, it's been pretty friction-free outside, I mean, the only friction is between the two internal, Salvadoran, groups (those supporting the FMLN and those supporting the government during

Angeles, November 20, 2013.

²⁰⁹ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²¹⁰ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

²¹¹ Interviews with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013, with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013, with the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013.

²¹² Interviews with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013, USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013, the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013; the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014.

²¹³ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²¹⁴ Personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²¹⁵ Interviews with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013, USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013, the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013; the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014.

*the war – author’s note). But the rest of the folks of the union members are not, certainly not against it*²¹⁶

Indeed, even a rank-and-file leader who had been on the government side during the civil war explained that he has not witnessed occasions on which the spending of money for FMLN solidarity activities were questioned, but that rather the importance of political activities is acknowledged:

*To date, to my knowledge, I have not seen a group saying, why do you bring this, a specific group from El Salvador, or wherever (...) I have not seen any discontent, right?, people saying, why are they doing this? The majority of the members have supported the events (...) and those who don’t like these things, like I don’t like political events, then simply I don’t participate. But I need it is necessary. Really, politics is necessary for the union, yes, for the union, for everybody.*²¹⁷

In the description that an African American rank-and-file leader gave of his view of the FMLN-related activities, it becomes clear that although he does not know much about the political processes taking place in El Salvador, he views the FMLN activities as naturally connected to the union’s objectives:

*There was also a situation where over in... (...) El Salvador, where they were getting a new regime, that was like 2 or 3 years ago. And... That was a big deal because the previous regime, wasn’t, I don’t think they were union-minded, they were... some other stuff. And this new crew was like, yeah, we wanna do things differently in our country. And so they had, they were some representatives from the new folks that came to our union as well, and spoke. And I sat in that as well. Yes, I’ve had the... many times I take it up on myself just to see what’s going on, and... Yeah, (the political director) even helped (...). That’s another thing. if the folks in the union who are leaders, if they let you know what’s going on, what would be good for you to participate in, then.... you can make the choice to, do I wanna go, be a part of that or not? (...) And like I said, it has benefited me*²¹⁸

Importantly, all interview partners stressed the strong support by then-president Mike García – who ultimately took most of the decisions to conduct activities – and the rest of the leadership for the FMLN work.²¹⁹ The coordinator of the janitorial division explained:

Often, (...) when a group of the members of the committees, and leaders (...) goes to Mike (...) and say, look, we want to do this and that (...), can the union fund to

²¹⁶ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²¹⁷ Interview with the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013, own translation.

²¹⁸ Interview with the USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014, emphasis added.

²¹⁹ Interviews with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, and the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013.

*send one or two colleagues to go there to support the campaign, he says yes, he supports them very much*²²⁰

In fact, as mentioned in a quote above, then-president Mike García traveled to San Salvador to attend Mauricio Funes' inauguration as president of El Salvador after the 2009 electoral victory of the FMLN. Furthermore, he took the initiative and decided to send election observers to El Salvador in the 2009 elections. Indeed, others among the leadership and staff strongly also support this work, viewing it – as several interview partners stated – as a natural consequence of the local's membership composition. The fact that the FMLN solidarity activities encounter such broad support among the leadership as well as the membership is partly due to the local's character: as described, the local has long history as an “immigrant local” with not only the membership but also the majority of the staff being migrants or their descendants; thus, migrants' concerns constitute an essential element in the local's everyday work. Political aims like immigration reform cannot be separated from other “bread and butter” goals like higher wages or benefits, and the local regularly mobilizes its members for rallies and marches for broader political issues. This is strongly supported by then-president Mike García: of Mexican descent himself, he had a background in the Chicano rights movement and has been a strong advocate of immigrants' rights throughout his entire career: already as president of Local 1877 – which later merged with SEIU SOULA to found USWW – he strongly supported the struggle for immigrants' rights.²²¹

5.2 Analysis: broadening the understanding of solidarity and promoting international solidarity work through migrants' transnational ways of belonging, transnational networks and social remittances

In promoting these activities and making them a regular element in the local's political work, the Salvadoran membership has contributed to overcoming two empirically interrelated but analytically different difficulties in international labor solidarity discussed above.

Firstly, they have contributed to broadening the union's understanding of unionism and international solidarity: El Salvador is a very small country holds little economic relevance in terms of strategic union cooperations for material interests in the services industry. However, most importantly, the solidarity activities conducted are not with a labor union, but rather with the FMLN: while this organization is close to – and during the civil war was supported by – labor unions, it is a political party that formed out of the guerrilla front leading the struggle against the military government during the Salvadoran civil war in

²²⁰ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

²²¹ Interviews with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013; former SEIU organizer in the JfJ campaign, Local 399, Manhattan Beach, February 13, 2014.

1980-1992. The FMLN solidarity is thus not an industry-based strategic solidarity, and by supporting this organization the union clearly cannot expect any immediate (or in any way foreseeable) material gains for its members like those usually pursued in union cooperations; rather, we are witnessing the support of an organization that struggles (or has struggled in the past) for social justice and improved conditions for the poor in a foreign country. The FMLN solidarity thus stands in sharp contrast to the usual focus on “bread and butter” issues that guides most US unions: it stands for a comprehensive concept of unionism that frames broader political and social matters as part of the interests to be pursued by unions and that entails a willingness to give without immediate material return. Clearly, this local views its tasks as going beyond the defense of directly workplace-related material improvements, whereby goals such as immigration reform and political electoral campaigns form important parts of its work. While the “political” character of this union is not new, it is essentially a consequence of the increasingly Salvadoran – and other Central American – migrant membership composition since the late-1980s. The FMLN solidarity has recently extended this concept of unionism to the international scene: in supporting what is seen as a social justice movement – even if only on an *ad-hoc* basis rather than a long-term formal alliance – it expresses a conception of international labor solidarity that is not limited to the cooperation with labor unions for a specific material goal; rather, it extends to other social movements and includes the support of struggles against oppression, as these are perceived to be part of the common struggle for social justice. Indeed, even if the solidarity with the FMLN is not part of an official political program, but rather is promoted and conducted by the Salvadoran community in the union itself, the fact that it constitutes a regular element in the local’s work – and that it is widely accepted and supported by the membership and leadership – is remarkable: like most unions, the local did not previously maintain solidarity relationships worth mentioning with non-labor organizations in other countries. While international cooperation with organizations around not directly labor-related topics occasionally took place, such as a handful of cooperations with unions on topics such as amnesty for the Cuban Five²²², they did not constitute a significant and regular element of the local’s limited international work. It was not until the beginning of the solidarity work with the FMLN that regular and notable solidarity work with a non-labor organization abroad has come to form part of the local’s work.²²³ Furthermore, while it is possible that a significant section of the membership (or even leadership) does not share Salvadorans’ understanding of international solidarity, the decisive fact is that the activities arising out of this understanding do not meet any relevant opposition, but are – in contrast – widely accepted by the rest of the union.

²²² The Cuban Five – or Miami Five – is a group of Cubans arrested in Miami in 1998 and convicted for conspiracy and espionage in 2001.

²²³ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

In so doing, Salvadoran migrants have *secondly* contributed to mitigating the problem of the minor importance usually assigned to international activities in general and local unions in particular. They have made international solidarity – despite not being a strategic priority – a regular element of their local union’s everyday work. The regular conduction of international solidarity activities is new in the local: as in most local unions, international activities had little priority in USWW before. Indeed, as described above, given the character of SEIU as a services union, international solidarity work has also only recently become an important part of the national union’s strategic work. Even now, local unions are barely involved in it. Thus, while this local has been more engaged in international activities than most local unions, and then-president Mike García has long shown an interest in international relationships – for instance, it sent an organizer to the national SEIU’s efforts to organize janitors in Mexico City (see chapter 4.4) and conducted an attempt (with only limited success) to work with a local of the Mexican telephone workers’ union (STRM)²²⁴ – the international work carried out was limited and above all the regular conduction of such work is new. In promoting the solidarity work with El Salvador and thus initiating solidarity relationships with a country where no such relationships existed, the migrant membership hence promoted an openness towards international work in the union that was not previously present. It is also remarkable that with this work, solidarity with a country of minor economic importance like El Salvador has come to constitute a regular element of the local’s work. The novelty of this solidarity work was expressed by the assistant to the president, who said that the solidarity activities today carried out in “the old days I would have been absolutely (...) out of the question, that never would have happened”.²²⁵

As I will show below, three interrelated factors account for the FMLN solidarity work in USWW.

First, migrants’ *transnational ways of belonging* constitute the basis for their commitment to promoting solidarity work with the FMLN. In the case of Salvadorans, these ways of being are *political*: owing to the specific character of Salvadoran migration to the US as mainly an escape from civil war, many migrants maintain a political connection and concern for the country that they

²²⁴ The relationship with Local 87 of the Mexican telephone workers’ union STRM – which also organized janitors – was a rather symbolic partnership, as the assistant to the president explained. It was initiated by the former SEIU Secretary-Treasurer Eliseo Medina and Local 1877 president Mike García in the late 1990s. Although García regularly met with his Mexican counterpart, almost no concrete activities were carried out, as there were no strategic opportunities to work together (interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013). But STRM Local 87 supported SEIU Local 1877 in the Justice for Janitors campaign as well as in its campaign against Hewlett-Packard (Kay 2011, 240).

²²⁵ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

left behind, and they still politically identify with the FMLN. This political identification with El Salvador and the FMLN constitutes the basis for their strong commitment to promoting the international solidarity work within USWW.

Second, Salvadorans' political identification with the FMLN means that many of them are involved in transnational migrant organizations, particularly political groups and organizations, as well as being embedded in transnational political networks. These make initiating, planning and conducting these activities possible in the first place. Arising out of the political character of Salvadoran migration, many refugees were already part of organization networks upon arrival in the US, or they became involved in political and social groups and organizations shortly afterwards. Indeed, it is through this involvement with the FMLN groups in Los Angeles as well as in El Salvador and their broader support network that migrants have access to the necessary contacts and relevant information that make conducting such activities possible.

Third, migrants' *social remittances* lead them to promote a more comprehensive concept of unionism and international solidarity to include social justice struggles abroad. These constitute narrative resources that influence the way in which the union's "collective identity" – or "what the organization stands for" – is framed in USWW: given their politicization and social activism experiences in the Salvadoran civil war, where the struggle for workers' rights was inseparably linked to the fight for liberation and against oppression, many Salvadoran migrants in USWW have an understanding of unionism that differs from the typical business unionism, in that it views unions' goals as extending far beyond immediate material interests. For these migrants, labor unions are closely connected to broader struggles such as social justice and liberation, including abroad. At the same time, their social remittances have allowed Salvadorans to influence the negotiation process within the union regarding the understanding of unionism and the interests underlying it: given their political activism experiences, Salvadorans are not only particularly engaged in the union; moreover, they are willing to stand up for their goals and know how to pursue them, being well organized within the union as they "know how to organize politically". The most important rank-and-file leaders are thus Salvadorans, as are many staff persons. Salvadorans have come to "control" some of the local's decision-making bodies, allowing them to promote the solidarity work with the FMLN, make it an accepted element of the union's regular work and anchor it – to some degree – in the local's institutions.

5.2.1 Transnational ways of belonging motivating solidary action: Salvadoran refugees' political concern and identification with the FMLN

The first important factor explaining the FMLN solidarity in USWW is Salvadorans' transnational ways of belonging. As described in chapter 2.2, migrants frequently maintain a strong emotional connection and identification

with their country or community of origin. In this case, this identification clearly constitutes the motivational basis for migrants' promotion of solidarity activities with their country of origin. The Salvadoran membership in USWW has a strong emotional connection to and strongly identifies with El Salvador. This is unsurprising given that most Salvadoran members came in the 1980s and early-1990s and are thus first-generation migrants. As mentioned in chapter 4, many Salvadorans had to leave the country abruptly, leaving behind family and friends with whom they maintain close contact.²²⁶ Most Salvadoran USWW members send remittances "back home" on a regular basis and those who are able to visit the country regularly.²²⁷ Furthermore, in the interviews it was clear that they have very strong emotional ties to their country and much of their thinking was directed at El Salvador. Among others, they clearly and repeatedly referred to El Salvador as "mi país" (my country), despite having lived in the US for 25 or 30 years.

However, as I will argue in this section, Salvadoran USWW members' transnational ways of belonging are clearly *political*: as has been acknowledged by other research, Salvadoran migration to the US has a particularly politicized character (Burgess 2012; Baker-Cristales 2008; Landolt 2003a). As laid out in chapter 4, the majority of Salvadoran migrants came to the US as refugees fleeing from the Salvadoran civil war in the 1980s and early-1990s, and many of them had been politically involved in the guerrilla or other opposition groups, thus having to flee persecution and repression. While not all had been active in the guerrilla struggle against the military government – a minority had even been on the side of the military government – many were, while many more supported the FMLN or other left-wing organizations without being involved in the armed struggle (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 8f.). The brutality of the war meant that almost everybody was – in one way or another – affected by the ruthless military government violence, and the widespread violence against the civilian population, mass displacement and ruthless persecution by paramilitary groups (the death squads) drove masses to support the opposition, whether by providing logistical support to the guerrilla itself or supporting other opposition movements such as the labor or the student movement. Salvadoran migrants thus usually identify as being *political* refugees and they have a strong political consciousness. This means that many Salvadoran migrants maintain not only a strong concern for their country and communities of origin, but also a particularly strong concern for the political developments in El Salvador. As the former leader of one Salvadoran solidarity organization explained: "The solidarity between the Salvadorans that came here and their brothers and sisters back in El Salvador was very strong. They didn't come here to get jobs and try

²²⁶ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013.

²²⁷ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013.

to save money. They came here to fight for their brothers and sisters in El Salvador” (former CISPES leader Don White, quoted in Perla Jr. 2008, 154). Their transnational ways of belonging hence thus extend beyond the usual cultural transnational identity that characterizes other migrant members such as those of Mexican origin. Besides their personal relationships with family and friends “back home”, many Salvadorans remain strongly politically connected to El Salvador and particularly identify with the FMLN and its struggle for liberation and social justice, whereby they continue to view themselves as part of it despite being in exile. Landolt (2003a, 308) thus speaks of the “hyperpoliticization” of Salvadoran migrant flows and migrants, explaining that “the FMLN managed to maintain a strong political presence abroad, and the level of political commitment that the migrant population maintained remained (...) constant. This produced a hyperpoliticization of everything related to migrant flows and migrants” (own translation). Indeed, Landolt et al. (1999, 295) explain: “out of the experiences of the 1980s have emerged new political and social actors committed to a transnational social justice and community development agenda that embodies the distinct vision of the Salvadoran migrant citizenry.”

It is this concern for political developments in El Salvador and the political identification with the FMLN that constitute the motivation for Salvadorans’ strong engagement in promoting FMLN solidarity activities in their union.

Almost all Salvadorans with whom I spoke had personally suffered the consequences of the civil war, with many of them experiencing brutal violence and repression against members of their families. While not all wanted to talk in detail about what happened to them and their families during the war, for many the civil war experiences remained a very vivid memory. The civil war and violence in El Salvador (as well as in Guatemala and Nicaragua) were recurring topics in the interviews. Several of my interview partners told me that they lost their parents, siblings, friends and sometimes their entire family, or that they were internally displaced during the war. Some spoke about the persisting fear of persecution even after leaving the country.²²⁸ The traumatic experiences that Salvadoran USWW members had gained during the war were summarized by one former organizer (himself a Mexican migrant):

In many aspects, when I came to the local, the culture of the people coming from El Salvador is different from the culture of people from Mexico, the culture of people coming out of a civil war is different from the culture of other people. So... I remember that when I came here, I saw many problems that the people had... many of them escaped war and they saved themselves because they hid under the bodies of relatives that had been murdered. Imagine the traumas they have. And

²²⁸ Interviews with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013 and the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013.

*they come here, and when have they gone to a psychologist, when have they receive help? Never. That's the people that you work with there.*²²⁹

Many Salvadoran USWW members have a history of involvement with the opposition fighting the military government. While some had not actively supported any of the parties but rather were “only” civilian victims of the generalized violence and repression, and a significant minority of the Salvadoran USWW members had even been supporters of the military government side during the war – with some serving as soldiers²³⁰ - most of them had been at least sympathizers of the FMLN. Many had been active supporters of FMLN or other left-wing political groups, with some being involved in the guerrilla itself and many others active in other opposition groups such as labor unions or the Christian Democratic Party.²³¹ Many thus looked back on a history of armed and/or political struggle against the military government. One woman who had worked as an informant for the guerrilla explained the civil war’s long-lasting consequences for many refugees, as well as how she could not apply for political asylum:

I could not be identified that way, not everybody. Because there is enemies, because the guerrilla with the government... and things happen that you do not want to happen. So you can be identified, and that is what happened to a comrade from Nicaragua (...), they killed his two children, here (in the US) they hang them. (...) So that's the problem, one has to hide the past and live in the present. In appearance. There, I am Maria Galia, here, I am Maria Aguilar. When I was in tailoring, Galia, when I became janitor, Maria (...). I never disclosed my identity because of fear that they could kill (my nephews in El Salvador), because one protects one's family in this regard. So when I escaped, my mother did not know. (...) Later, (...) after having lived here for nine years, I went to El Salvador. The guerrilla was still there. Still. So my sister had a restaurant and there they strafed some of our comrades, on that bridge. And I... it is sad to see... without being able to do anything because you don't have arms, you don't have anything. They show you the handling of weapons, they show you everything. So that you can defend yourself. They show you how to suicide in case they want to squeeze the truth out of you. They show you to be strong in weakness. (...) It's preferable

²²⁹ Interview with SEIU-UHW organizer, previous USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013, own translation.

²³⁰ However, while some were still supporters of the right-wing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), would not usually be willing to admit. Interestingly, despite the mortal hostility and all the crimes the military committed against the FMLN and its supporters, as well as against the civilian population, in the union, both sides seem to work together well. Nevertheless, several interviewees stressed that the most politically involved and the strongest leaders in the union are those who had been supporters of the guerrilla.

²³¹ Interviews with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013; SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013; USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 1, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013; the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013.

*to die than to be tortured. That's the guerrilla. (...) the training is strong, thank God.*²³²

This political background in the civil war in El Salvador, their politicization and previous involvement in with the FMLN or other opposition groups lay the basis for Salvadoran USWW members' commitment to supporting the FMLN. Clearly, the civil war experiences form an important part of most Salvadoran members' identity. Given the brutality of the war and the ruthless persecution by the military and paramilitary groups, the traumatic experiences during the war left their mark upon those arriving in the US, even more so as many of them had left family and friends behind. Based on the experience of the social and political conflict in El Salvador in which they were socialized, a strong identity of being *political* refugees thus arose in most cases. The identity of civil war refugees was in fact deeply engrained in all Salvadoran migrants (and also the one Guatemalan migrant) with who I spoke. Even if they had not been actively involved in the guerrilla or other opposition groups, having closely experienced the brutality of the civil war and having lost family and friends in it is the basis of Salvadoran members' strong political consciousness (or "culture", in the terms of the above-cited organizer). For many, the struggle against the armed forces and for social justice thus did not end upon arriving in exile; rather, they maintained a strong concern for political and social developments in El Salvador.

The political character of Salvadoran migration and the strong political connection that Salvadorans maintain with their country of origin was stressed by the then-vice president and now president of the local:

*Our members, and particularly members from El Salvador, are still very connected to the politics of their country. They came here as a result of revolution, they came here as the result of the destabilization of their country. And it doesn't necessarily mean that all are from FMLN, some are more government, some are more pro-revolution, but their kinship or solidarity with their country and the politics of their country is still very (important) to them. Particularly because a lot of them left family behind. And so it's not just a family tie, but it's the fact that they came out of a political revolution.*²³³

In fact, the Salvadorans with whom I spoke clearly maintained a strong concern for – and some involvement in – political developments in El Salvador. With the exception of the one person who had been on the government side during the war, all interviewees were closely following every single political development in El Salvador, time and again touching on the political and social situation in the country in the interviews.

²³² Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation. The original names in the quote were replaced by fictitious names.

²³³ Interview with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

Particularly, most – albeit not all²³⁴ – strongly identify with the FMLN. Given their personal histories, many of the Salvadorans in USWW naturally maintained a connection with the FMLN after their arrival in the US, viewing themselves as a part of the FMLN’s struggle for justice and against oppression despite being in exile, although not all are necessarily actively involved in it. Moreover, despite the FMLN’s turn away from its radical guerrilla past and towards a rather social democratic political party, most of them continue to view it as the radical social movement that it used to be.²³⁵ If any, the FMLN government is seen to have a communication problem, as this former USWW rank-and-file leader explained:

I see that they say on the news that they have done many things, that Funes said he would do when he became president, and he has accomplished them. But they haven't yet publicly said so the way they should²³⁶

The political developments in El Salvador in recent years – and particularly the FMLN’s electoral victories in the presidential elections in 2009 and 2014 – were a source of much enthusiasm and recurrent topics in the interviews. Many of the interviewed expressed the hope that with the FMLN holding power, the situation in El Salvador would change. This was also emphasized by the then-vice president when talking about the Salvadoran membership:

and so many feel very strongly still, especially with FMLN, (...) that FMLN now won the election, to be part of the leadership without having to resort to violence is a sense of pride... so, there is that, and it's more on election time that that happens, election time in El Salvador that that (...) starts to show itself²³⁷

Salvadorans’ politicization and strong political tie with their country of origin and the FMLN was particularly emphasized when compared with other migrant groups.²³⁸ While other migrant groups – especially other Central American migrants (most of which in USWW are Guatemalans) – were in general considered to be relatively politically conscious, they did not share the Salvadorans’ strong concern for political developments in their countries of

²³⁴ One member explained that some prefer to forget about the past to overcome the suffering lived in the war: “many have none of the guerrilla anymore. Because of losing parents, siblings, they lost many, sometimes their entire family. So they do not want to get involved anymore.” Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

²³⁵ The FMLN government has been criticized for giving up many of its social justice goals and doing moderate politics, as well as for deploying the military inside the country in the fight against gang violence.

²³⁶ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

²³⁷ Interview with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

²³⁸ Interviews with David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013; the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

origin.²³⁹ However, as many of the interviewed emphasized, the sharpest contrast exists with the Mexican-origin members. In this context, a former USWW organizer (himself a Mexican migrant) stressed the Salvadorans' fundamentally political connection with their country of origin when compared with other migrant groups: whereas Mexican-origin members would only be supportive of solidarity activities with organizations in Mexico if they saw a direct personal benefit, in the case of Salvadoran members' solidarity with the FMLN he explained that: "it's an ideological issue. With the FMLN, it's an ideological issue, that's why this connection exists".²⁴⁰ Similarly, the former political director of USWW said that there are huge differences between Mexicans' and Salvadorans' interest in political topics in their countries of origin:

Well, mexicanos, no. I mean, I'm mexicano, so... I always say, that's our problem, we're not revolutionary at all. No. I mean I think the big uniting issue for Latinos is immigration. But if you would say, the embajador (ambassador – author's note), or whatever, from Mexico is coming, members would not be excited. When Funes came, FMLN Salvadoran delegation does come, the FMLN supporters do get very excited. We do do a big event at the janitors union hall doing a welcoming, that kind of stuff. So there is a lot more, I would say, activity within the centroamericano membership than Mexican. I mean on immigration I have members that are down, they'll turn out, they'll do everything. But outside of immigration, when we start talking about issues in Mexico, it seems like such a huge disconnect, you know.²⁴¹

As one former USWW organizer explained, this concern for their country's political development is a result of the goals that Salvadorans were fighting for in the civil war, which distinguishes them from other migrants:

It has a lot to do with that the Salvadorans practically come out of a civil war, very recent. (...) the type of war it was, what kind of leadership was there in the war, and what were the motives for that war? (In contrast), when was the last civil war in Mexico? In the revolution, in 1900. (...) So, the methods of repression in Mexico have existed and still exist. In El Salvador ... it was a brutal war, and the reasons why the people fought were different, so people understand that an organization can only function if they get involved. They understand more clearly. For the Mexicans it is a little more difficult, and I am Mexican myself, but it's true.²⁴²

²³⁹ Moreover, the fact other Central American members like Guatemalans and the few Nicaraguans had also had many experiences of violence was common sense among the persons with whom I spoke. The Guatemalan member who I interviewed had migrated to the US after her husband had been murdered and she was not able to raise her daughters by herself in Guatemala (interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013). Also interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁴⁰ Interview with SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013.

²⁴¹ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁴² Interview with SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles,

Given their previous political and social activism experiences in the Salvadoran civil war, their politicization through it and their persistent commitment to the FMLN's political goals, for many Salvadoran members the union is a natural vehicle for supporting the FMLN. They view their labor activism as a natural prolongation of the social movement and political activism in El Salvador. While they do not always agree on the details of political visions and priorities, the continued concern for their home country's politics lays the ground for their commitment to promoting activities in solidarity with the FMLN.

5.2.2 *"The connection that we the migrants working here have": migrants' involvement in transnational political organizations and networks*

At the same time, migrants' political identification with El Salvador and the FMLN has led to a continued involvement with political groups and organizations involved with the FMLN both in Los Angeles and "back home". Many of the Salvadoran members and staff persons in USWW are actively involved in organizations and groups targeted at their country of origin and they are/were involved in the various FMLN support groups established by Salvadoran exiles since the 1980s, while some remain closely connected to them. It is through this involvement in transnational political organizations and networks that migrant rank-and-file leaders and staff persons can practically organize the solidarity work: their connections with the FMLN in El Salvador and particularly the FMLN community in Los Angeles allow them to establish contact with the Salvadoran partners to conduct activities such as inviting FMLN representatives to the local or supporting them with fundraising events. Moreover, through these networks, they are continuously informed – for instance – about visits of FMLN candidates to Los Angeles or opportunities to send election observers, and they are approached by the FMLN community with requests for a variety of support activities. While this does not necessarily mean that no FMLN support work would be done in USWW without these connections to transnational political migrant organizations, they play an important role in making its conduction possible and probably for the initiation of many activities in the first place.

5.2.2.1 Background: Salvadoran transnational migrant organizations and the Salvadoran political community

As mentioned in chapter 2.3 for Latin Americans more generally, Salvadoran migrants are considered to have very strong community and organizational networks and – as previously mentioned – numerous Salvadoran migrant organizations exist in the US (Burgess 2012, 122-3). As Landolt (2003a, 301) explains, the context of Salvadoran migration from the 1980s as an escape from civil war implied that migration was usually seen as a short-term strategy to escape violence, which translated into particularly strong connections that

migrants maintained with their families and friends “back home”. As mentioned in chapter 4, the conditions of war and the context of fear and uncertainty that it entailed resulted in particularly strong transnational social relations that Salvadoran refugees maintained with those left behind in El Salvador, while refugees’ initial mechanisms of maintaining contact with their communities over the years developed into a variety of transnational institutions such as businesses, political parties, charity organizations or youth groups, giving migrants the possibility to remain strongly involved in their home country’s affairs (Landolt 2003b, 633ff).

Most crucially, an important section of Salvadoran transnationalism is strongly political, as Salvadoran migrants are well known for being strongly involved in transnational political activities (Portes et al. 2002, 288ff). While naturally not all Salvadoran migrants are politicized or engage in political transnational organizations, a large section is, and most of the migrant organizations established during the civil war were: the context of Salvadoran refugees’ exit from El Salvador led to a highly politicized character of large parts of the Salvadoran community and many of the migrant organizations and groups that formed (Burgess 2012, 132; Baker-Cristales 2008, 355). Landolt et al. (1999, 313) state:

El Salvador is the only country in the region that waged a civil war on a transnational stage. It is this element that has conditioned every sphere of Salvadoran transnationalism including migrants’ rapid and massive flight from El Salvador and their hostile reception in the United States, the high degree of politicization among certain sectors of the migrant population and the deep-rooted fear of politics among others, the Salvadoran government’s mistrust of migrants and later their keen interest in co-opting migrants’ autonomous political projects. Hence, the particularities of Salvadoran transnationalism are largely explained by the socio-political conjuncture in which transnational practices first emerged on a large scale and were consolidated.

Clearly, given the context of Salvadoran migration, many exiles wanted to remain actively politically engaged in El Salvador after arrival in the US, and – as mentioned in the theory section – they established countless political groups and organizations involved in politics “back home”. As explained, many Salvadoran refugees did not leave their country in an attempt to save money and improve their families’ economies, although while they were forced to leave the country they maintained the intention to actively support their comrades’ political struggle in El Salvador. In studying the agendas of migrant organizations from different countries in Canada, Landolt et al. (2011, 1246) conclude that “(m)igrants who left countries with well-defined political conflicts and entered Canada as refugees tend to maintain fairly stable, and quite overtly political, mandates and forms of organizing. Examples of this pattern include refugees from Chile and El Salvador. In both cases, the migrants experienced intense and direct premigration political socialization within leftist political parties, guerrilla forces, and grassroots social movements. This premigration

socialization is reflected in the agenda and form taken by Chilean and Salvadoran ethno-national organizations.” Hence, dense transnational political relations and networks developed in the Salvadoran exile community, and over the years a strong transnational exchange between migrants’ organizations and different social actors in El Salvador institutionalized, arising out of a long trajectory of mobilization by the migrant community during the civil war (Landolt 2003a, 302; see also Burgess 2012).

Most of the political organizations that Salvadoran exiles formed are – unsurprisingly – linked to the FMLN and strongly opposed to the military government: they are part of the extensive transnational political and financial solidarity networks that the FMLN established through exiled Salvadorans since the 1970s (Burgess 2012, 132; Baker-Cristales 2008; Landolt 2003b, 632). The large number of migrant organizations and groups supporting the FMLN’s struggle “back home” is a consequence of the FMLN’s domination of the transnational spaces that developed between the US and El Salvador through migration, as Landolt (2003a, 306) explains (see also Baker-Cristales 2008). With the Salvadoran government being absent from the transnational arena, the FMLN and NGOs close to it easily monopolized transnational political relations (Landolt et al. 1999, 304): as the Salvadoran government accused all Salvadoran refugees of being rebels, it did not engage with them, whereas the FMLN cooperated with a series of local and US-wide groups that supported its liberation struggle (Baker-Cristales 2008; Perla Jr. 2008, 144). Landolt et al. (1999, 304) hence write on the political and partisan character of Salvadoran transnationalism: “Contemporary Salvadoran migration has been inherently politicized. (...) Organizations such as CARECEN and El Rescate that were affiliated with the different factions of the FMLN advocated on behalf of Salvadoran migrants, denounced the US foreign policy in Central America, and condemned human rights abuses in El Salvador. Logically, under these conditions, there were few spaces for non-partisan, transnational civic engagement.”²⁴³ Since the 1970s, political exiles in the US had promoted the formation of such local FMLN support groups involving both the Salvadoran exile community and the wider US population. “(S)ince its inception, the FMLN

²⁴³ In what seems to be a contradiction to this, other authors found Salvadoran collective migrant transnationalism (i.e. HTAs) to be *less* partisan and linked to national-level political parties than, for instance, Dominican HTAs (Guarnizo et al. 2003). This is a consequence of the strong political polarization in the country and Salvadoran HTAs’ “deep distrust of national partisan politics” (Burgess 2012, 130). Clearly, given the history of the country that made “the state (...) irrelevant at best and hostile at worst in the eyes of ordinary Salvadorans” (Burgess 2012, 129), Salvadoran HTAs work rather with NGOs than with the government (as Mexican HTAs usually do), as “Salvadoran HTAs have no historical basis for concluding that collaboration with the state is worth the risk” (ibid., 130). This is also a result of the Salvadoran state’s matching funds program “Unidos por la Solidaridad” that was in place until 2005 being strongly associated with the right-wing ruling party ARENA that introduced it, with most funds going to ARENA-governed municipalities (ibid., 127).

was a transnational organization with strong links to groups outside of El Salvador”, as Baker-Cristales (2008, 353-4) writes. These organizations engaged in activities focused on both the host and origin country. Already in 1984, the FMLN solidarity network in the US was integrated by thousands of local groups that raised money for Salvadoran organizations including the guerrilla, mobilized political support, organized emergency actions, offered education programs in line with the popular movement’s strategic priorities and worked on awareness-building regarding the US government’s politics in El Salvador: in many cases, they even mirrored the divisions among the five groups integrating the FMLN in El Salvador (Perla and Bibler 2009, 11; Landolt 2003a, 306). As Coutin (cited in Baker-Cristales 2008, 354) states, these organizations were part of “(an extrastate) order (with the goal of eventually establishing an official but revolutionary state” and included “the FMLN’s international diplomacy and solidarity networks, and even the quasi-governmental functions assumed by the community organizations (...) providing refugee services” (ibid.).

Given the large concentration of Salvadoran migrants in California and particularly the Los Angeles area, these groups were particularly strong in Southern California (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 9f.). The multitude of local groups across the country were coordinated by various national-level organizations, among others the Sanctuary movement and the 1980-founded Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) (Landolt 2003a, 306). Particularly CISPES was crucial in conveying information from the FMLN to support organizations in the US, as well as coordinating US-wide campaigns against the US government’s Central America policy (Perla Jr. 2008, 148f.). The organization took US delegations to El Salvador to meet with popular organizations and organized tours by Salvadoran activists through the US (ibid., 150).

The support for the FMLN liberation struggle in El Salvador was frequently closely interwoven with helping the Salvadoran community in the US, as organizations engaged in activities in both areas (Baker-Cristales 2008). On the one hand, while community groups less closely linked to the FMLN – like the Sanctuary movement – also engaged in political issues, denouncing the Salvadoran military government’s human rights abuses, lobbying for an end to US intervention in El Salvador and promoting the legitimacy of the popular struggle in El Salvador (Perla and Bibler 2009, 16f.), organizations like CARECEN and El Rescate – in view of the increasing number of Salvadoran refugees – not only engaged in support to the FMLN but also provided practical support such as legal advice and material support to the community in the US, besides up-to-date information on the guerrilla struggle (Landolt 2003b, 632, see also Perla Jr. 2008, 153). Moreover, political exiles have founded social service organizations committed to supporting the migrant population and maintaining it informed on the situation in their home country. Most importantly, these are the *Centro para Refugiados Centroamericanos* (CARECEN) with offices in many

US cities, as well as *El Rescate*, which focused on California, particularly the Los Angeles area. Besides political education work, these organizations focus on providing legal advice on residence issues and information on public health and employment issues, as well as migrants' rights advocacy (Perla Jr. 2008, 153; Landolt 2003a, 306). On the other hand, they strongly engaged in publicizing violence and human rights abuses by death squads and government forces, denouncing US intervention in it and organizing visits by opposition representatives to the US as well as delegations of congressional representatives, church groups or lawyers to El Salvador (Landolt 2003a, 306; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 9).

After the signing of the Salvadoran peace accords in 1992, ideological polarization softened and new actors and groups appeared on the scene (Landolt et al. 1999, 304), but dense transnational political networks persist. Indeed, the Salvadoran transnational community is still strongly political, now being constituted by both partisan (i.e. mostly FMLN) groups or their successors and "autonomous" ones, or "self-generated immigrant groups that often work with, but distinguish themselves from, openly partisan associations" (ibid., 305). Of the previously-existing organizations, some dissolved while many others did not but often expanded their focus to new areas. Some organizations maintain a focus on supporting the FMLN and other progressive forces in El Salvador and – like CISPES – they continue organizing delegations to that country.²⁴⁴ After the FMLN takeover of power in El Salvador, many organizations focus on supporting the FMLN government. Many others extended their work towards a stronger focus on improving the situation of Salvadoran migrants in the US. Among others, groups like CARECEN and El Rescate – which had essentially reflected the FMLN's politics during the war – expanded their services to the Salvadoran community, among others launching counseling services and programs to reach disadvantaged populations and incremented their work for empowerment of immigrants in the US. Furthermore, new forms of transnational political organizations and networks have emerged, particularly around migrants rights issues and Salvadoran exiles' citizenship rights, such as the right to vote (Landolt 2003a, 308-16; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 13ff). New organizations such as Salvadoran hometown associations and new immigrants rights organizations in both El Salvador and the US continue to engage in transnational political and social work and have "fostered the continued circulation of activists, scholars, students, and religious workers in El Salvador" (Perla and Bibler 2009, 15). Moreover, some of the old organizations have become involved in these issues, viewing it as a new way of promoting social change (Burgess 2012, 133; Chinchilla and Hamilton 1999, 17). Among others, El Rescate became involved with the Salvadoran hometown associations

²⁴⁴ While in the beginning CISPES' main goal was to support the FMLN's struggle against the military government and US intervention, today it supports the FMLN as a crucial factor in "creating an alternative vision of society" (www.cispes.org).

and promoted the foundation of the umbrella organization COMUNIDADES in 1994, aiming to build more stable institutional structures, providing counseling and promoting information exchange among the organizations (Landolt 2003b, 644f.). As Perla and Bibler (2009, 16) view it, the “transnational civil society circuit” that has developed over the course of time “is critical to the continued mobilization of social justice work in El Salvador and in the United States” and has led to a growing courting for the Salvadoran community’s political and financial support by Salvadoran political party representatives (ibid.).

5.2.2.2 FMLN solidarity in USWW: building on Salvadorans’ transnational political networks

These transnational political groups, organizations and networks constitute a crucial resource for Salvadorans’ ability to initiate and conduct the FMLN solidarity work within USWW. Many Salvadoran USWW members and staff persons are strongly involved in these groups. They have remained involved in the FMLN’s liberation struggle after leaving the country and engaged in establishing the numerous Salvadoran refugee organizations and political groups in Los Angeles supporting the FMLN. Several are – or were previously – engaged in groups carrying out conscientization work regarding the civil war and promoting solidarity with the FMLN’s struggle against the military government, among others in CISPES and El Rescate. Nonetheless, many of those not directly engaged in these organizations are connected with them in many cases, as they are involved in the broader political community of Salvadoran migrants that has close relations to these organizations.

In fact, Salvadoran members’ involvement with these organizations and their embeddedness in the broader political community connected to the FMLN had held utmost importance in Salvadorans’ organization in SEIU from the very beginning. The fact that Salvadorans – having fled from political persecution – “came here already organized (...) they were already part of an organization framework”²⁴⁵ when coming to the US significantly facilitated their organization during the JfJ organization campaign in the Los Angeles property services industry in the 1980s and 1990s: during the campaign, the union largely built on existing Salvadoran political networks, most importantly CISPES. The assistant to the president explained the following when talking about the JfJ organizing efforts:

There were a couple of Central American communal organizations here that were really key in helping to sort of build, like a community of workers that eventually became the union. CISPES was the main one that we worked with (...) And they helped us, they really helped us, you know, organized social gatherings and getting networks of people, knew the networks of people, we finally had... were able to build an infrastructure that was able to, you know, compete with the companies’ supervisory hiring... so that Central American, and others, too, you

²⁴⁵ Interview with the David Huerta, then USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

*know... (...) Sort of the first workers who responded (...) is Salvadoran and Guatemalan. (...) So they really... rather than the sort of the way, traditional way to organize, slow, step by step, building committees, and building it up, we built it from the outside*²⁴⁶

Although the situation has changed since the end of the Salvadoran civil war in 1992, and even more so since the FMLN's first taking of power in 2009, many Salvadoran USWW members and staff persons have remained involved in these organizations and the wider Salvadoran political community in Los Angeles. They engage in a variety of activities, mobilizing around political issues in El Salvador like election campaigns and human rights issues or they work with labor unions and other organizations in El Salvador. Most importantly, many Salvadoran COPE members and staff persons are "very strong in the Salvadoran community"²⁴⁷, well known in the political community or directly involved with and have personal relationships with the FMLN groups in Los Angeles or even in El Salvador^{248 249}. The coordinator of the janitorial division explained that these political relationships often date back to migrants' personal relationships, as many Salvadorans who were active in the guerrilla maintain personal connections with people in El Salvador with whom they were jointly involved in the civil war:

*You know that many of the FMLN came fleeing, and many with a different identity, because they were threatened, or leaders, or in another way they were strongly involved. (...) And they knew each other well. Y there are still connections to relatives, or with people, friends that in one way or another they were together in the war, and one of them is still there and the other one is here, and they maintain that communication.*²⁵⁰

This connectedness to political migrant organizations and the embeddedness in the wider transnational political community constitutes the practical basis for the FMLN solidarity in USWW. Clearly, as one Salvadoran staff person said, rather

²⁴⁶ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁴⁷ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁴⁸ In fact, they continue to maintain the divisions between the groups formerly integrating the FMLN. As one Salvadoran-origin staff person strongly involved in the FMLN solidarity explained, "all politics brought from El Salvador get here about a year later (...) the leaders of the Salvadorans here, the three organizations of Salvadorans that exist, don't unite because they have different political visions (...). Somebody was telling me, we should do a Salvadoran caucus in SEIU. And the truth is, it's difficult, because it's not the same to fight for a contract and to build a political organization" (interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013).

²⁴⁹ Interviews with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013; SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013; the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013.

²⁵⁰ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

than being a strategy of the local's leadership, the FMLN solidarity work "is born out of (...) the connection that we the migrants working here have"²⁵¹. The connections with the Salvadoran political community and the FMLN support groups constitute the link to the FMLN and its representatives, providing Salvadorans in USWW with the necessary contacts to key individuals, as well as information to carry out the work.

While many more staff persons and COPE members are strongly embedded in the political networks, their importance for the solidarity work was laid out in most detail by one staff person. This person had been in charge of the COPE and its activities for several years, thus being in a critical position in the union for promoting the FMLN solidarity work. He is not only one of the most committed promoters of the FMLN work, but also among those in USWW most strongly involved with the Salvadoran political community and the FMLN section in Los Angeles. While he is also connected with a variety of political and social groups in the Salvadoran community more generally, he has most of his direct contacts with the FMLN through his years-long work in El Rescate, which he left as its director when starting to work at USWW in 2008. He summarized the crucial role of these networks for conducting the solidarity work in USWW:

The truth is that I had a close relationship with the FMLN. My experience has been more working with a non-profit, I worked for El Rescate for seventeen years, which was founded by a group of Salvadoran migrants, Salvadoran refugees (...). In the (...) union, I have been working about five years. But three of the years that I have been working here I worked in the political department. So that allowed me to have relations ... not only with the FMLN, (...), but also at the level of the Salvadoran government. So, that way we could bring Mauricio Funes in his first term as president (...) that is part of the work that we have done. But again, my main contact has been through working in that organization (...). So we promoted visits of union leaders, visits of... it was mainly at a community level, there was a solidarity network that the organization had created (...) I left that organization being the director of El Rescate, but I also got to know a person in the visits taking place, he was one of the founders of El Rescate (...) he was practically part of the FMLN, he represented the FMLN when he lived in Washington, at the international level (...). And he is currently the director of El Rescate.²⁵²

These relationships provide Salvadorans in USWW with the necessary contacts to organize FMLN-related activities, which make the solidarity work possible: although this staff person is occasionally approached by Mexican migrants asking him to organize Mexico-related activities, his lack of relationships with the Mexican community impedes him from doing so, as he explained:

For me it's easy to do with El Salvador because of my... network that I have of people that work with El Salvador. But many have approached me and said, why

²⁵¹ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

²⁵² Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

*don't you bring people from Mexico? Why don't you bring ... governors, mayors from Mexico? Well, because I don't know them...*²⁵³

Furthermore, the networks in which Salvadorans are embedded constitute a crucial source of information for the solidarity work: it is usually through their relationships with the Salvadoran community that Salvadorans in USWW actually *learn* about opportunities to conduct solidarity activities. As this staff person explained, often it is former colleagues at El Rescate or some of the numerous acquaintances that he made during his seventeen years in that organization that inform him about – for instance – FMLN representatives visiting the area. More often than not, it is by mere chance that he learns about such opportunities:

*When someone comes visit from El Salvador, that I become aware of, I invite him to speak. (...) It's been events that I learned about by chance and I have tried to help and do something (...) So we have..., the colleagues from SEAL²⁵⁴ also brought some people from the social security union, so what we did was share...*²⁵⁵

Furthermore, his contacts in other organizations keep him informed about their activities, allowing for the joint planning of events:

*What I did with them was that when somebody came from El Salvador (...) I brought them here and we did a... a hanging out together, one hour, two hours, with food, and talk about the reality in El Salvador. And sometimes we collected some money, as a help (...) That was opportunities that I... and sometimes there is people, as I said, of organizations, non-profits, that I know, who let me know when somebody is coming, if they are bringing someone, and we do meetings with the members*²⁵⁶

Importantly, the strong rootedness of many Salvadoran USWW members and staff persons in the Salvadoran political community in Los Angeles means that the union is frequently approached from the outside with requests for support, i.e. often the initiative for such activities comes from the FMLN community in Los Angeles rather than within the union. Several staff persons explained that they are frequently asked by colleagues from outside the union to move the local to collaborate with a campaign around the Salvadoran elections.²⁵⁷ As one

²⁵³ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

²⁵⁴ Sindicato de empleados y empleadas de la asamblea legislativa de El Salvador.

²⁵⁵ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, emphasis added. Own translation.

²⁵⁶ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, emphasis added. Own translation.

²⁵⁷ Interviews with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013.

Salvadoran rank-and-file leader and former COPE and executive board member stated when asked about the FMLN solidarity activities:

They call us, right? They call us (...), the comrades of the FMLN. (...) Lately (...) they have not called us much, but they won't fail to do so soon (...) to invite us to a meeting (...). (People of the FMLN) of Los Angeles, (...), the FMLN has been the one trying to maintain involved the janitors.²⁵⁸

Clearly, USWW holds strong interest for the FMLN in both Los Angeles and El Salvador. Not only does the local have a large membership that is – when compared to other unions – known to be very active and thus interesting for any political actor given its political leverage in the city, but most importantly, the local's involvement with the broader Salvadoran community means that USWW is able to mobilize beyond its own membership, moving large sections of the Salvadoran community to participate in political actions and attend solidarity events. This was expressed by one Salvadoran staff person who said that other actors – among them the Salvadoran consulate – approach the union with requests for activities, as they know that USWW has a large Salvadoran membership:

Sometimes the initiative (...) has come from (...) other people (...), for instance, the Salvadoran consulate is now basically FMLN. So they know we have much membership that is Salvadoran, the Consul has been here²⁵⁹

5.2.3 Social remittances: promoting a comprehensive understanding of solidarity and explaining migrants' influence in the union

While Salvadorans' political transnational ways of belonging explain their motivation to promote solidarity activities with the FMLN, and their involvement in transnational political migrant organizations and networks provide them with the necessary contacts and information to do so, the social remittances that they bring along entail a view of labor unions and their struggle that contributes to broadening USWW's understanding of unionism and solidarity. Moreover, they explain migrants' influence within the union, and thus their ability to push this work within the union.

5.2.3.1 Social remittances broadening unions' understanding of solidarity

Salvadorans' social remittances are at the root of the expansion – or the partial reframing – of USWW's concept of international solidarity and unionism and their promotion of solidarity work with an organization that is not a labor union, but rather a political party and former guerrilla organization. As previously described, a union's collective identity or “what the organization stands for” is variable and a matter of narrative framings. Salvadorans' previous political activism experiences and their political convictions provide the narrative

²⁵⁸ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

²⁵⁹ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

resources and the “cultural material (...) relevant to movement framing processes includ(ing) the extant stock of meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives, and the like, all of which can be construed as part of Swidler’s metaphorical ‘tool kit’” that Snow and Benford (2000, 629) refer to (see chapter 2.1).

Evidently, Salvadorans promote the work with the FMLN in the first place due to their political and emotional tie to *their* country: as described above, their political identification and personal connection with that organization and their concern about the developments in their country of origin constitute the motivational basis of promoting the solidarity activities. Nevertheless, this emotional and personal motivation is associated with a different view of unions and international solidarity, as it is not only migrants’ desire to contribute to improving the situation “back home” that motivates it, but also the view that the union has a responsibility to engage in broader social and political struggles: Salvadorans’ pushing of the FMLN solidarity is *also* an expression of the social remittances that they bring along, in terms of both the “normative structures” and the “systems of practice” (Levitt 1998) mentioned above. Clearly, based on these, Salvadorans frame their union’s tasks and the interests motivating solidary action as significantly broader than most unions in the US: resulting from their political socialization and previous activism experiences, their understanding of unionism and international solidarity significantly differs from the narrow one that most US unions have, in terms of both the values and goals that they view the labor movement to struggle for and what they understand labor activism to comprise, including their role in it.

In the interviews, in line with what the anecdotal and superficial evidence stated on migrants’ receptivity to and understanding of unions laid out in chapter 2.3, it became clear that Salvadoran migrants have an understanding of unionism that extends beyond the typical business unionism approach and that non-material interests play a crucial role in motivating it: many of them understand the labor movement as being a *social movement* that cannot be separated from other social and political struggles. For them, it is a movement fighting for political ideals such as social justice and the ending of political and economic oppression. Arising out of their previous political and social activism in El Salvador and their political consciousness, they – and the Central American membership more generally – have a stronger mentality of solidarity and view unions as being about the broader struggle for social justice, as one former USWW organizer explained:

*These people more strongly have that mentality. There is a stronger mentality of solidarity, of doing the right thing, of fighting for social justice. (...) Generally, the members have that consciousness more strongly developed.*²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Interview with SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013, own translation.

In fact, migrants' broader understanding of unionism and the higher degree of class consciousness underlie not only the revitalization of the Californian labor movement as described in chapter 2.3, but also that of USWW in particular – the successor of the JfJ Local 399 – and its transformation into a union extending beyond “bread and butter” issues. By the 1990s, the local had “become the most politically active union in town” (Fantasia and Voss 2004, 148). Central American migrants played a crucial role in this, as they brought their understanding of unionism and action repertoires from “home”, which were important factors contributing to the success of the JfJ campaign. In Local 399, “JfJ's more spectacular showing in Los Angeles was due to a special dynamic created by the presence of vast numbers of immigrants from Central America and Mexico” (Waldinger et al. 1998, 112) who had a “high level of class consciousness” (ibid., 117) and “a sizable component of seasoned activists with a background in left-wing or union activity back home” (ibid.). This influence led to the gradual transformation of the local's tactics during the campaign in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Bacon 1995). The numerous sit-ins in large Downtown offices building, the many direct confrontations with the employers as well as countless marches and rallies through Los Angeles were mainly led by migrant workers, and the spokespersons were Central Americans in most cases. One of the main organizers during the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles told me that the role that Central American migrants played was absolutely crucial. As they had a history of direct action and protest, certain forms of struggle were natural to them while they were completely challenging to American workers:

Some of the tactical approaches, things that we did in our campaign, particularly in L.A. (...), were much easier to move and (...) were much more logical to the workers, because they came out of their experience. So the idea of voting for a union²⁶¹ if you're from Salvador, you don't vote for president, (...) how are you gonna vote for a union, right? So you don't have to convince somebody that an election is a bad idea. They all know that elections are bad ideas. (...) You know, and the experience and history of direct action and protest throughout (...) Mexico, Central America, Latin America, is just much more engrained into the sort of culture of what people do. So the idea of doing protests was, yeah, we should do a protest, right? (...) just tactically, a lot of the activities, (...) it was like, when we got to a building, the idea of going inside the building versus staying outside the building was a no-brainer. When we did that with American workers, (...) as soon as we opened the doors to go in, it was like panic among the American workers. Oh, we can't go in there, that's trespassing. (...) And the first time I experienced that, it was shocking. Because I had only been doing it with Latin American workers, so going into a building was a natural thing. (...) It's just such a classic thing, so we were like, it was like revolutionary for American workers to go inside working to protest. and it was sort of standard practice for Central Americans. So I think that was a piece in the domestic respect where the immigrant reality made a big difference.²⁶²

²⁶¹ In the US, workers have to pass an election to win union recognition; see footnote 77.

²⁶² Interview with former SEIU organizer in the JfJ campaign, Local 399, Manhattan Beach, February 13, 2014.

Furthermore, some of the contributions mentioned in chapter 2.3 found that Salvadorans are particularly willing to actively engage in unions, even when compared with other migrant groups. For instance, Waldinger et al. (1998, 117) cite an organizer stating that “(w)ith the Salvadorans, you find different attitudes. Sometimes you found people who fought there. And there, you were in a union, they killed you. Here, you (were in a union) and you lost a job at \$4.25”. In her analysis of migrant workers organizing in the San Francisco hotel industry, Wells (2000, 119f.) quotes a union organizer who explained: “(my) perfect union drive would be with Salvadorans. I’d pick them over Mexicans any day, though Mexicans tend to be positive toward the union too. Salvadorans have been in revolution for the past fifteen years or so. They are in for the long haul. They are more solid and committed on some deeper level to the union. They know the need to fight and have a deeper faith that they will win.”

Indeed, this strong commitment to the union still holds true for many Salvadorans in USWW today. Most importantly, many of them view unions as fighting for more than servicing members’ immediate workplace interests. Clearly, their past in the civil war still strongly influences their activism in the union and their understanding of the labor movement. As one former guerrilla informant explained when talking about her social and political activism in the US, despite having left El Salvador, it is impossible to let go of the struggle for social well-being and against oppression that they led there:

*(In exile) one has to hide the past and live the present. In appearance. Because that remains with you, the struggle for social well-being, for not having to live under somebody’s boots who got rich simply by bearing a name. Who ride roughshod over the people, although it is the people who put him in place, but they don’t work for the people, but for themselves, for the businessmen. So that is where the anger comes from.*²⁶³

As becomes clear in this quote, political oppression is understood as being inseparable from what she calls “entrepreneurs” or “employers”, i.e. for her, the struggle for social well-being comprises the fight against both political and economic oppression, against all those “ride roughshod over the people”. In fact, for many Salvadorans in USWW, the labor movement is inseparably linked to the broader struggle for social justice. In El Salvador – as in other Central and South American countries devastated by civil wars and dictatorships – unions’ struggle has been closely linked to the struggle against political oppression for decades, as well as the fight for a more just society. The dictatorships that ruled countries like El Salvador for decades have led to “the radicalization of a segment of the union movement and a more militant class-based worker identity” (Anner 2011, 13) where many unionists “believe that ultimately improvements in the conditions of working people could only be achieved through radical social transformation” (ibid., 14). Clearly, during the civil war in

²⁶³ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

El Salvador, unions and the FMLN, “we worked together (...) because in those days, it was not a pure union work (...) the union work did not make much sense if you did not do it with a political work of opposition to the dictatorship”, as the Salvadoran president of another SEIU local told me.²⁶⁴

One Salvadoran migrant member of USWW supported this view when explaining that in El Salvador the different social and political movements – including the labor and the student movement – were fighting the same popular fight against exploitation:

*You know that the unions are involved with the guerrilla. (...) Many think that the guerrilla is against the people. On the contrary, the guerrilla is the people. Tired of seeing so much exploitation. The students began because their parents are humble.*²⁶⁵

Furthermore, several staff persons stressed this understanding of the labor movement, explaining that the Salvadoran members cannot separate the defense of workers’ rights from the struggle against oppression and the broader political goals that they fought for in the war, given that they were killed in their countries simply for defending their rights as workers:

*This division, in property services of the janitors, ... was created in the eighties, by all the immigrants from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, who were fleeing from the war. So there is a lot of people who have a tremendous social consciousness, there is people who fled so that they didn't kill them ... it's more conscious people. And for defending their rights labor or social rights, in their countries, they killed them. So they come to this country, and they notice that they can struggle and they don't kill them.*²⁶⁶

The Salvadoran coordinator of the janitorial division explained that due to their personal histories and sacrifices Salvadorans are more willing to stand up for their convictions, rather than the material benefits that motivate other groups such as the Mexicans:

The commitment is really interesting. (...) Especially with the members who have sacrificed a lot in their country, when you touch these people on their personal life, they are very moved, (...) why they are involved in the union, they trust the union, they have the union in the blood you know (...) I have a coworker from Mexico (...), he says wow, I see these people from Central America, especially from El Salvador, they don't care (about) anything (...), they always fight if they believe in something (...) the people from Central America are more personal(ly connected) with the world and (...) the struggles, because obviously countries in South America struggle a lot (...) When you explain to people in Central America, they say, right away, (...) I know how we fight, (...) I'm ready to fight, something like that. When I organize people from Mexico, they say, oh yes, the union is

²⁶⁴ Interview with SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013, own translation.

²⁶⁵ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

²⁶⁶ Interview with SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013, own translation.

*important, the union is important to benefits, and this and this... but it's not (...) I need to fight for this, I need to fight for my justice*²⁶⁷

Salvadoran USWW members thus view unions' tasks as not being limited to "bread and butter" issues, but rather they believe that unions should engage in a variety of political issues. Salvadorans – who make up most of the most pronounced rank-and-file leaders (I will discuss this in further detail below) – thus constantly promote activities in USWW around issues such as immigration reform, electoral politics and other political questions. The crucial role that politics is considered to play for labor unions was emphasized by one of the most pronounced Salvadoran rank-and-file leaders, who said that political issues like electoral campaigns and immigration reform are an important element of the union's work, whereby she views her own duty in mobilizing other members for such issues:

*I am a.. I know the politician (...). Our union doesn't have money. We are 40,000 members (...), but we don't have the money that (Local) 721 has to through millions to politicians. The only thing that we have is our feet to walk, ok? And that's the power. Because if I tell a politician, I will bring you ten people, well, he keeps those ten. (...) I was calling all these (members participating in a rally) these days. Because this is political, ok? (...) What I tell them is that we have to participate. Because if we don't... if we support a politician, when our contract comes, that politician for sure... I know what we have to do. (...) So for me, politics is very important in this country.*²⁶⁸

The extremely active and engaged membership of USWW promoting strong political activism in their union – particularly through the COPE – was also highlighted by the former political director:

*The janitors' union is different than the rest. (Name of another union) does not have a member-driven COPE committee that says, let's throw a party and raise money (...). (There), that's all driven by the political director. (The janitors union) is one of the few unions where you will meet the (name of a Salvadoran rank-and-file leader), the members that are, "Damn!, the election is next week, what are we gonna do?", no. Most unions you have to activate the membership. Here the membership is like, "let's do a fundraiser to raise money for COPE".*²⁶⁹

Through such work, political topics extending beyond workplace-related issues have come to constitute an essential part of USWW's work, transforming this union into one of the most politically-engaged locals in the state. Particularly the janitorial division is widely known for being strongly involved in political matters. In contrast to other unions, USWW 's politics extend far beyond unions' usual economism, as the former political director explained:

²⁶⁷ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

²⁶⁸ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 1, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013, own translation.

²⁶⁹ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

*I went from a (different union) that (...) had a white leader (...) and the majority of the staff was white, and there was really no talk about immigration reform... it was all about economic justice, not any of (...) justice. So when I moved (to USWW), it was different because, you know, the janitors, I mean, immigration reform... everything, every kind of justice. So I really liked it.*²⁷⁰

Importantly, this comprehensive understanding of unionism extends to the international level, as they framed many issues in global rather than local or national terms, thus giving international politics a greater importance than it has in most unions. Given their migration history, it is hardly surprising that migrants are more strongly aware of international connections compared with non-migrants, as “(i)mmigrant workers are a rich source of knowledge and experience about the global economy”, (Brecher et al. 2006, 17; see also Hinojosa-Ojeda 2002).²⁷¹ In my research, Salvadorans – as well as the Mexican and Guatemalan migrants who I interviewed – were strongly aware of international interdependences. Not only did they time and again point out the miserable situation in their countries of origin that forced people to migrate – and that the goal thus needed to be to improve living conditions in those countries to allow people to stay at home, but interestingly none of the Central Americans viewed their own country’s situation in an isolated way: they tended to talk about Central – or even Latin America – as a whole, expressing a strong concern for political and social developments in the whole region, always highlighting the histories of violence and suffering that most of these countries have gone through. Some of the Salvadorans framed their own country’s problems in international terms, linking its hardships to US foreign policy and calling for a struggle against US politics at the Central American level:

*We would have to talk on a Central American level (...) Because one country’s struggle is everyone’s struggle. All Central America. It’s everybody’s struggle. Because if one country wins, we all win. If one country loses, we all lose. Because you see how we are in the other countries due to the Republicans here. (...) Much dirty politics. Supported by the Republicans. (...) Imagine our countries how they are. Because it is there where this (US) government has the boot on the people*²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁷¹ This was repeatedly stressed by many of my interview partners, including other unions. For instance, the United Electrical (UE) Western Region president Carl Rosen explained that migrants have a stronger awareness of international connections and more easily understand the need to act at an international level to defend workers’ rights. Interview with Carl Rosen, Western Region Director, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE), Chicago, February 7, 2013. Hinojosa-Ojeda argues that the Latino community played an important role in providing a transnational perspective on the debate around NAFTA before its passing.

²⁷² Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation. Interestingly, this view on international connections – and the criticism of US foreign policy – was shared even by the Salvadoran rank-and-file leader who had been on the government side during the civil war. When asked about Salvadoran refugees’ residence status in the US, explained with regard to the NACARA program in 1997: “Many people qualified for NACARA. Especially the Nicaraguans. Look,

Importantly, this understanding of the social struggles in different countries as being connected explicitly extends to the area of workers' struggles, i.e. the labor movement. As one Salvadoran member explained, the struggle of working people in the US is closely connected with the struggles in migrants' countries of origin. She stated that people's problems in the US depend on those of the people in those countries, as all of them are part of the same popular struggle against oppression and injustice:

*If we don't solve the problems here, it's because there they are also not solved. Right? If we start organizing there, they (the powerful – author's note) get afraid here. Because united, we, the peoples, are strong. So, there is the base of our struggle here. Because we came here to improve our families' lives there. And that there, they are (oppressing) them, and here we are in an equally bad situation because of our apathy... So I believe we have to mobilize on an international level, right, to achieve the interest of the worker here.*²⁷³

As this quote indicates, this understanding of the international entanglement of social struggles translates into an expectation of their own union to support social struggles abroad. In this understanding, the struggle for workers' rights in the US necessarily needs to be linked to that in Central and South America. Accordingly, unions in the US – and explicitly their own union SEIU – have an obligation to help improve the situation in migrants' origin countries. This expectation of SEIU working with unions in Central America and viewing the struggles in the US and the Central American countries as one was clearly expressed by one Salvadoran member and former rank-and-file and executive board member:

*I believe that (...) we have to talk about getting involved as unions here (...) with the unions there, in El Salvador. (...) With all Central America. Because if we don't get involved with the unions there, employers there can have a different policy. (...) So what we have to do is find a way to organize and unite more strongly with SEIU (...). If we say we are an International union,²⁷⁴ we should really struggle and organize internationally, and not see ourselves as a North American local that has grown, no. Let's unite (...), because South, Central, and North is America. (...) And without the Central American and South American, the North American would not have risen (...). Let's fight for Central America, let's start by one country, then another, so that we are united. (...) I came to this country without anything, thank God now I belong to a union (...), we are bettering ourselves, but we do want the same for them.*²⁷⁵

we killed your family, we hurt your country, we went to burn everything down, but now we will help you, we will make up for all the wrong we did. NACARA was for that, for those who had much persecution, agony and those things (...) of the war in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, all were covered by NACARA". Interview with the USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013, emphasis added, own translation.

²⁷³ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

²⁷⁴ In the US, many national unions call themselves "International union", reflecting that they represent (or did so in the past) members in Canada and/or Puerto Rico.

²⁷⁵ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles,

Clearly, this view of the international interrelatedness of social struggles – including the labor movement’s – is shared by many Salvadoran rank-and-file leaders and staff persons, constituting an important basis of their promotion of the FMLN solidarity work. Based on such an understanding of unionism, it seems natural for USWW to support not only labor unions but also other social movements abroad such as the FMLN in El Salvador. Hence, Salvadorans’ political views and previous experiences contribute to providing what Lévesque and Murray (2010a, 240f.) have called the “overarching narratives as a frame of reference for local union action (e.g. in the way that they think about commonality of interest and approach alliances within their global companies and beyond)”.

Given that the effect that Salvadorans’ view of the labor movement as being linked to social struggles abroad has on the individual attitudes of other members was not the focus of this investigation, I cannot be certain whether it has led to an alteration of other members’ view. While the rest of the membership may not actively promote such a view, it has led, however, to a more comprehensive understanding of unionism and solidarity as expressed in the union’s *practice*, as have Central Americans’ class consciousness and radicalness in the 1980s and 1990s. As described above, Salvadorans’ view is not contested but generally considered part of “the vision of the union”, and in fact other migrants – who themselves make up a large portion of the membership – generally share it. It is very probable that many members reject this understanding of unionism and international solidarity, and would prefer the union to focus on domestic issues and matters directly affecting their workplace. However, the crucial point is that they do not usually openly oppose the Salvadorans’ activities in the union. Indeed, more important than whether other members share this view is that with Salvadorans making up a large percentage of the local’s membership and being the most active group in the local and its bodies, their understanding of solidarity has led to an alteration of the union’s policies with practical and tangible effects, leading to an expansion of the local’s international work.

5.2.3.2 Social remittances explaining Salvadorans’ influence in the union

At the same time, Salvadorans’ social remittances lay at the heart of their influence in the union, which explains why they were able to push through the FMLN solidarity work. As described in chapter 2.1, the understanding of unionism and solidarity that prevails in a union depends on the interests that are perceived to be salient, which is itself the result of an internal negotiation process. The fact that Salvadorans in USWW were able to impose this comprehensive view of unionism in the internal negotiation process over the union’s interests and conduct the solidarity activities with the FMLN is – to an important degree – a consequence of their politicization and activism

experiences. While the influential position that Salvadorans have in the union is made possible by SEIU's tradition of strong local autonomy, which permits "radical labor leaders and innovative organizational experiments" (Piore 1994, cited in Fantasia and Voss 2004, 101f.), and is favored by the migrant character of the local and the supportive leadership, this character is itself – to an important degree – a result of the large migrant membership and Salvadorans' strong position in the union, who "wouldn't lift a finger" if they did not agree.²⁷⁶ And clearly, it is their social remittances that explain their influence in the union: arising out of their politicization and their experiences in armed struggle or political activism, Salvadorans bring along "normative structures" and "systems of practice" – in Levitt's terms – which lay the basis not only for the more political understanding of unionism laid out above, but also for their strong engagement and determination within the union. It gives them both the willingness and the capacity to impose their convictions in the union. On the one hand, Salvadorans tend to view the union as *their* union, i.e. they want to push through their interests and convictions, and are willing to fight for it: they have "left-wing ideas (...) about how unions should function and (...) expectations that the union they were fighting for would be responsive to the base", as Bacon (2015) writes about the Central American migrants in Local 399 during the JfJ campaign. On the other hand, Salvadorans are experienced in political activism and know how to make their point: they "know how to organize politically", as the assistant to the USWW president explained.²⁷⁷ These have led to a situation – as I will show below – in which most of the most influential rank-and-file leaders are Salvadorans and Salvadorans virtually "control" some of the union's decision-making bodies. Moreover, Salvadorans have gained several staff positions in the union that give them a direct way to the local's president.²⁷⁸

In the interviews that I led with Salvadoran rank-and-file leaders, it was clear that many of them had experiences of political activism in El Salvador that had taught them to speak up and fight for their convictions. Based on these

²⁷⁶ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁷⁷ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁷⁸ Gonzalez (2009) stresses a similar point in arguing that the "mounting political power of the Salvadoran American community" – particularly regarding the successful pressure that the FMLN community in the US put on Obama's foreign policy – is largely a result of the history and experience of political organization and lobbying that the Salvadoran migrant community has: "This capacity for action did not develop overnight. Rather, it is the product of 30 years of political experience cultivated in the United States in various social and political struggles. Indeed, Salvadorans were at the forefront of the struggle for amnesty for undocumented immigrants in the 1980s, the Justice for Janitors strike in Los Angeles in the 1990s, the campaign against the Central American Free Trade Agreement in 2005, and the May Day immigrant marches of 2006, among other struggles. This rich organizing experience gave transnational Salvadoran civil society the political foresight, networks, and resources necessary to hold the U.S. government accountable to the principle of nonintervention (in the Salvadoran elections)" (ibid., 5).

experiences, for them political engagement in the union and US politics is a natural continuation of their previous political work, which explains why Salvadorans are more strongly engaged in the union than other groups of members:²⁷⁹ they are simply used to it. One Salvadoran rank-and-file leader who was called the “number one” by other USWW members explained that she had always been strongly involved in politics and struggles in El Salvador, and she continued her political engagement upon her arrival in the US:

I was a politician there (...) I was a street vendor at the national level. I was involved in all political issues there (...). That's how I started politics. And I have always been involved in politics already in my country. Because in El Salvador, street vendors, we are all politicians. (...) Ok? And when I came to this country (...) I began working as a janitor in 1995 (...) always in activities for the union, fighting (...) I started in the movement. I began getting involved in everything. Because I liked politics. (...) I started being involved in this, in that, I went to the marches, I went to shout (...) in 1990 and Clinton's second round, I really started knocking doors.²⁸⁰

One former COPE member who had strongly been involved with the guerrilla in El Salvador and undergone its training explained that her strong involvement in USWW and its predecessor unions grew out of her history in El Salvador:

The civil arrests (...) that you get for civil disobedience, and I have many (...) 5 civil arrests or so. (...) We were (Local) 399... I am working strongly with the union since 1989 already. Since 1989, I have not rested for being involved. (...) (When I came to the US), I was not used to being anybody's servant. I worked for myself (...) I bought and sold fish, I was independent. But here I came to learn of masters, and I did not put up with it, right? Why should they treat me like... And that's how I started... and I came to the janitors.²⁸¹

Beyond leading to a strong engagement in the union, Salvadorans' political background results in a strong sense of ownership and willingness to fight for their goals. Generally, interviews with Salvadorans revealed a determination to push through their opinions, even against the union leadership and staff. As one former executive board and COPE member explained about her role as rank-and-file leader:

²⁷⁹ While this is probably exaggerated, one former rank and file explained that already in the JfJ campaign, those strongly involved were almost exclusively Salvadorans, as Mexicans and Guatemalans “did not want to get involved” (interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation), and still today the Salvadorans are the ones who “turn out more, yes, yes. Since we came, the union has risen” (ibid., own translation). This view was, in a different way, also expressed by a Mexican-origin rank-and-file leader who explained Salvadorans' stronger involvement simply with their “being Salvadorans”: “What is happening is, look. They are Salvadorans. That is why they are more involved” (interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013, own translation)

²⁸⁰ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 1, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013, own translation.

²⁸¹ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

*Sometimes they call me trompuda (somebody with large lips, or mouth, i.e. loud – author’s note)... somebody who makes a lot of trouble, yes, if I do not like something, I say so (...). For members’ issues, yes, I fight. With the staff (...) I have fought very hard.*²⁸²

Similarly, the former political director explained that what distinguishes USWW from other unions is the presence of strong rank-and-file leaders, particularly Salvadorans, who “know politics” and are determined to take their own political decisions, he explained:

*(Name of a COPE member) was my political right hand as far as the member-leader that understands politics. An amazing woman. Salvadoreña, can’t read or write, but she knows politics, oh God. Chingona. So there is that element of USWW, where these leaders (don’t) give a shit what any political director tells them, they’re like, this is our vote, this is our process. We’re gonna do what we want, you know? so that’s where this union is very different than others. In other unions, like, you know, the political director says, we’re voting this way, all the members have no idea (...) about politics, they follow*²⁸³

Similarly, the case of the conflict around USWW’s endorsement of Eric Garcetti as the candidate for Los Angeles mayor in 2013 demonstrates this sense of ownership among Salvadoran migrants. Against the will of then-president Mike García and the International SEIU’s leadership (who favored candidate Wendy Greuel), the COPE committee members – and particularly one Salvadoran rank-and-file leader – pushed through the local’s endorsement for candidate Eric Garcetti, as this leader explained²⁸⁴:

*Eric Garcetti, the Los Angeles mayor (...), I was involved in that (...). Mike, I say (to the local’s president), look, this is going to be the next mayor of Los Angeles. My president says, we’re going to have problems. Why?, I ask him. I like Wendy, he tells me. Wendy Greuel. Well, we will be on opposite sides, you with Wendy, we with Eric (...). So I convinced three more local unions (...) and that’s how we endorsed Eric. (...) Mike said, if my members are going to support... I stand with my members. And he sent out the release. And in the release, he put, “(this leader’s name – author’s note) says this and that”, because it was me. In other words, I had a pressure with them.*²⁸⁵

²⁸² Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013, own translation.

²⁸³ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁸⁴ This was confirmed by the former political director, who explained, in the interview: “(the COPE members) do play a role (in the local’s politics) in the sense that they are very powerful leaders. Like for example, the mayor, Eric Garcetti, during the primary endorsement process, all the SEIU leaders wanted to go with Wendy Greuel, she was the opposition. The janitors union was like, hell no, no-no, (...). So they organized other workers from other unions in the endorsement townhall, all the other union political directors had already told their members how they were gonna vote. Well, like (name of this rank and file leader – author’s note) gets up (...) in the face of other latino members, ‘ustedes pendejos se dejan que los (engañen)’, you know, like, ‘you guys should vote like this’, so she was able to flip the vote”. Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁸⁵ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 1, Los Angeles,

Interestingly, this sense of ownership and willingness to stand up for their convictions sharply contrasts with the declarations that the Mexican and the Guatemalan COPE members gave, who rather view the staff persons as those taking the decisions. They said that decisions taken in the COPE were generally presented as a package of proposals by the president and the group surrounding him, and that COPE members merely discussed the proposals and either accepted or rejected them.²⁸⁶ The Mexican member essentially explained that the role of the members is limited to giving their opinion:

We have a political director in the union, and they are the ones who take us (...), it's a team, and they are always supporting us. So they convene us for meetings, and there they tell us, look, this and that is happening comrades, we need to support this politician, or we have to endorse... (...) Our director or who is chairing the committee presents the topic and we all give our opinion, and at the end, we reach an agreement. How we have to do it, how we have to walk, but... that's why it's called union, we have to unite for one purpose (...). Yes. We can opine.²⁸⁷

It is clearly Salvadorans' background in political activism that accounts for their sense of ownership. Moreover, it also explains Salvadorans' influence in USWW and particularly why many of the leaders in the union are Salvadorans, as one Salvadoran organizer explained:

Many were part of unions (in El Salvador), yes, much of the dynamic and of the fight in this union really (...)... maybe not based on union participation, right, but participation in a social movement, of being exposed to the war and all that, the student organization. So many of the Salvadorans here are in leadership positions in this union (...) due to their experience of having been part of a social movement.²⁸⁸

The coordinator of the janitorial division further explained that the strongest strong rank-and-file leaders in the union are previous FMLN supporters who today use their experiences during the civil war for the union's fights:

The strong leaders are from the guerrilla side, because obviously, (...) with members of the FMLN, (...) these are the more aggressive members, whether we're fighting... (...) (at) the frontline, it's the members, (it is) always the people (who) have experience from their countries. And they use them, you know? Obviously it's not the same, the fusil (rifle – author's note), (...) obviously we have a pancarta (sign – author's note), and we move forward to move the issues.²⁸⁹

December 7, 2013, own translation.

²⁸⁶ See also interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013.

²⁸⁷ Interview with USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013, own translation.

²⁸⁸ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

²⁸⁹ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013, own translation.

This has led to a situation in which Salvadorans dominate some of the union's bodies, which gives them considerable influence on some of its decision-making processes. Given that Salvadorans "came to the union already organized",²⁹⁰ they are much more organized within the local than other groups of members, who do not have a structure promoting their political issues. In the context of the FMLN solidarity work, the most important body is the COPE, where most of the FMLN activities are planned and organized. As the assistant to the president explained, Salvadorans "control" this body, as most of its leaders are from El Salvador:

*The Salvadoreños are very, they are very well organized within the union (...). As I said, they control our political committee... I mean, they don't control..., but the main leaders on the political committees are from El Salvador... yeah, they have a very vibrant social network*²⁹¹

This was confirmed by the former political director who explained that in contrast to most other unions, in the janitors' division "their member power is real".²⁹² During his time in charge of that body, he had to take every decision to the COPE as was impossible to push through decisions against their will:

*When I used to run the COPE committee (...) I would bring everything to them. (...) Most unions don't do this... (President Mike García) and his crew, including me, directors, would come together and lay out the plan, and this is what I'm saying, USWW is different than most other unions, we're gonna support this candidate or that candidate, or we're gonna do this that or that, I would have to take it to (the COPE) and get them to agree. If they didn't agree, they wouldn't lift a finger for that person. Even if I instructed them to... (...) They used to agree or disagree, and when they disagreed, I would go back to Mike and say, x these three things, they're not gonna do it.*²⁹³

Furthermore, while it is still the president and his leadership team who ultimately take the important decisions in the union, while the degree of members' influence on the COPE significantly depends on the political director's willingness to leave them the scope for it, over the years rank-and-file members have attained a considerable degree of influence, especially when compared with other unions where members usually have little say.

Indeed, this influence in the union's bodies – particularly in the COPE – has put Salvadorans in a position to push through the FMLN work in the union. As the assistant to the president explained, the FMLN solidarity work is a direct consequence of the Central American membership first taking control of the union internally and then extending their influence on the international sphere in the past 10-15 years:

²⁹⁰ Interview with the then USWW vice president, Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.

²⁹¹ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁹² Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

²⁹³ Interview with the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.

This level of solidarity and collaborations (with the FMLN), that really only started in the last 10 to 15 years. (...) I mean, the first 20 years, or the first 15 years (that Central American immigrants made up the majority of this union's membership), (...) the members were actually spending their political energy in taking control of their union. It was internally focused (...). Now it's... they run the union, I mean, the union has a completely rank-and-file executive board, (...) the lady who runs the janitorial division here in Los Angeles is a Salvadoran immigrant²⁹⁴

As this quote hints, it is not solely through the membership's involvement in and domination of the COPE that Salvadorans promote the FMLN solidarity work: Salvadorans' political organization has also led to a significant number of Salvadoran-origin staff persons in the union, some of whom are strongly involved in the FMLN work. While the majority of the staff working in the local are of Mexican origin – mostly second and third generation – and African American (mostly in the security division), several staff persons are Salvadorans, particularly in the janitorial division.²⁹⁵ The strong presence of Salvadoran staff is a crucial factor in the promotion of the FMLN solidarity work: many of them are strongly involved in initiating and organizing activities, and – to an important degree – it is staff persons who take the initiative and organize activities, while their support of the COPE's work is also crucial.²⁹⁶ Clearly, the presence of Salvadoran staff gives the political interest in supporting the FMLN a weight and ensures continuity within the union, which it would not have otherwise. It significantly facilitates the implementation of activities, given the staff's direct access to the union leadership and ability to constantly persuade the president of the importance of supporting the FMLN.²⁹⁷ Being in the position of staff gives these Salvadorans a more direct influence on the local's leadership and decision-making compared with the regular membership, and even strong rank-and-file leaders. At the very least, staff persons have an influence on agenda-setting that regular members do not have.

One organizer who previously worked in the political department was in fact referred to by some of my interview partners as “*the person*” promoting the FMLN solidarity work in the union. Through his direct contact with the union leadership, he had – among others – initiated activities such as inviting Mauricio

²⁹⁴ Interview with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

²⁹⁵ Interviews with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013; the former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013, USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.

²⁹⁶ Interviews with the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013, the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013.

²⁹⁷ Interviews with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013; the personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.

Funes and other Salvadoran politicians to give talks at the local.²⁹⁸ In the interview, he stressed the influence that staff persons have on the union's political activities by explaining that the FMLN solidarity activities are clearly not initiatives that the president Mike García takes himself, but rather they are promoted by the migrants working in USWW. He explained that the solidarity activities are often “idea(s) that I sell him”²⁹⁹, particularly when it comes to spending union funds for activities such as sending election observers to El Salvador, which are decisions that the president has to take. He said that this gives an important role to “those who have access to him”, particularly those working in the political department:

*(Who takes these decisions) is the president. It's... the structure of unions is really vertical. The president and who has access to him... When I was in the political department, I met... practically, my supervisor was Mike García, so it was easy for me... Still, but now I am not in that department anymore, but the political department has a lot of... I don't want to say authority, but perhaps like, not autonomy, but... it's inside the everyday decisions in terms of politics.*³⁰⁰

This is even more the case as generally there is no clear structure or procedure for taking decisions on such activities; rather, as this staff person continued to explain, the position within the staff gives him a direct channel to the union leadership. He uses this to promote FMLN solidarity activities and influence the president, “keeping him educated” on the importance of this work, as he put it:

*There is no structure for taking this type of decisions. I went directly with Mike García (...) And the other part is that I keep him educated in terms of what is happening in El Salvador, in the Salvadoran community here (...). What he does if, even when they are hiring a Salvadoran here, he asks me if I know him, where he comes from, he makes like a background check (laughing). But it does have to do (...) with my interest in keeping him updated, at least with what is happening with the Salvadorans, and that allows me to say, hey, it's a good idea to...*³⁰¹

Altogether then, Salvadorans' political activism experiences and politicization explain the influence in the union, which allows them to promote solidarity work like that with the FMLN. Salvadorans' political background and experiences imply that many of them are strongly engaged in the union and have clear political goals that they are willing to fight for, as they have a strong sense of ownership of the union. Furthermore, having political activism experiences, they know how to defend their goals, and they are well organized in the union. This gives them significant influence in some of the decision-making bodies,

²⁹⁸ Interview with the coordinator of the janitorial division of USWW, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013.

²⁹⁹ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

³⁰⁰ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

³⁰¹ Interview with USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013, own translation.

some of which are “controlled” by Salvadoran rank-and-file leaders. Furthermore, several of the local’s staff persons are Salvadoran migrants, which gives them a direct channel to the leadership and an influence on the union’s agenda-setting, putting them in a position to more directly initiate solidarity activities with the FMLN.

5.3 Summary: broadening unions’ understanding of solidarity and promoting international solidarity work through migrants’ transnational ways of belonging, political networks and social remittances

I have argued in this chapter that migrants can contribute to broadening the narrow understanding of solidarity that most unions have, as well as overcoming the minor importance that international activities usually enjoy in unions’ work.

In the case of USWW, Salvadoran migrants have – *on the one hand* – contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of unionism and solidarity. As El Salvador economically and industrially holds little relevance and particularly as the FMLN is not a labor union but rather a former guerrilla organization and now political party, the solidarity with it is an expression of an altered understanding of unionism and international solidarity: it expresses a view on unions’ goals as going beyond material self-interests and encompassing broader struggles for social justices and against oppression, including abroad. This extends beyond the international realm, and the character of USWW as a “political” union advocating for broader social justice issues – while dating back to the 1990s – is clearly a result of the influx of migrants, a large part of them Salvadorans. Indeed, clearly international activities with movements other than labor unions did not form part of USWW’s regular work before Salvadoran migrants came to make up a significant share of the membership. The solidarity with the FMLN is thus remarkable, and while there might well be many members (and possibly staff and/or leaders) who do not agree with this work, they do not openly object and the solidarity work is accepted and even supported by a large section of the union; in fact, several staff persons and officers stated that this solidarity expressed the vision of the union.

Through it, Salvadoran migrants have – *on the other hand* – promoted international work where it did not exist before, thus contributing, to some degree, to overcoming the little priority usually assigned to international solidarity. Previously, international work did not play an important role in the local, and in fact the activities with the FMLN “would never have happened”. By contrast, now the activities in solidarity with the FMLN constitute a regular element in the local’s work and are anchored in the union’s bodies and decision-making structure: they are decided upon in the local’s structures and generally accepted not only by the membership, but also the leadership and staff, sometimes involving the use of union funds.

I have argued that migrants have accomplished this through their political transnational ways of belonging, embeddedness in transnational political networks and the social remittances that they bring along.

First, Salvadorans' transnational ways of belonging constitutes the motivational basis for their promotion of the solidarity work. In this case, these ways of belonging are political: given the character of Salvadoran migration, many migrants in USWW were politicized in the Salvadoran civil war and maintain a strong concern for political developments in that country. Their transnational ways of belonging thus extend beyond the usual "cultural" identification with the country of origin: many migrants politically identify with the FMLN and its struggle for liberation and social justice. For them, their engagement in the FMLN solidarity work in USWW is thus a natural prolongation of the struggle that they led in El Salvador before leaving.

Second, their embeddedness in transnational political networks make conducting solidarity work possible in practice: many Salvadorans left their country as political refugees with existing connections with political and social organizations and engaged in the numerous FMLN support groups that developed in the US during the civil war. Many Salvadorans in USWW are thus closely connected with the FMLN in El Salvador and Los Angeles, as well as to the broader Salvadoran political community in Los Angeles. These connections provide them the necessary contacts and information that allow them to conduct the solidarity activities.

Third, the social remittances that Salvadoran migrants bring along lay the basis for both their comprehensive understanding of solidarity and their influence in the union. While the solidarity with the FMLN is also a consequence of Salvadorans' political concern for their country of origin and the FMLN, it is also an expression of the broader understanding of unionism and international solidarity that Salvadoran migrants bring along. Given their politicization and political activism background in the civil war, many Salvadorans have an understanding of unions as going beyond material "bread and butter" issues. For them, unions are inseparably linked to broader social struggles and encompass struggles for social justice and against oppression abroad. At the same time, the social remittances have helped the Salvadorans to attain a significant degree of influence in the union, which allows them to make the FMLN solidarity part of the local's regular work: based on their political trajectories, Salvadorans not only strongly engage in the union, but they also have clear political objectives that they are willing to stand up for and that they know how to pursue, while they are well politically organized within the union. Consequently, most strong rank-and-file leaders are Salvadoran migrants, Salvadoran members have considerable influence on some important decision-making bodies in the union, and many of the staff persons in the janitorial division are Salvadoran migrants.

6 USW District 7: overcoming the obstacles to a perceived community by promoting a practical solidarity with rank-and-file involvement and establishing cross-border relationships through migrants' cultural skills

One indispensable part of education and solidarity is greater contact between Mexican union organizers and their U.S. counterparts. The base for that contact already exists, in the massive movement of people between the two countries (...) But to use their experience effectively, unions on both sides of the border need to know who they are, and where they're going, and see them as potential organizers. (Bacon 2011)

In the case study of the United Steelworkers District 7 and its alliance with the Mexican miners union Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos, Siderúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana (SNTMMSSRM, "Los Mineros"), transnational migration has contributed to overcoming the usual obstacles to a perceived community of fate with the partner union in two ways.

On the one hand, it has facilitated the promotion of practical solidarity with rank-and-file involvement taking place at the level of the district and locals, thus helping to make cross-border collective action and communication among workers possible, as well as laying the basis for the experiencing of collective strength, the generation of narrative resources, the collective framing of situations and the management of difference that constitute the preconditions for developing a perceived community of fate among workers. On the other hand, in the course of their participation in the solidarity work, migrants have developed personal relationships and friendships with the partners in Mexico: the kind of social interaction *par excellence* constituting an immediate source of emotional commitment and trust, as well as providing for a sustained cross-border communication. These relationships ensure a constant information flow and exchange on each others' situation, goals and challenges facing them, which constitute the basis for the framing of issues in collective terms. Through it, the solidarity is also connected with members' everyday union work and it gains practical relevance.

As I will show in this chapter, the factors accounting for this are the cultural skills and – to some degree – the transnational ways of belonging that migrants bring along. While their transnational ways of belonging played some role as a motivating factor for migrants to engage in the solidarity work and strengthening their emotional commitment to it, it is their cultural skills that account for promoting practical solidarity and establishing personal relationships.

In what follows, I will first briefly describe the district's solidarity work with the Mineros (6.1). In the analysis section, I will subsequently turn towards transnational migration's role in the union's alliance with the Mineros (6.2). After briefly touching upon the role that migrants' transnational ways of

belonging played in this case as a factor motivating them to engage in the solidarity work and strengthening their emotional connection with the Mineros (6.2.1), I will first discuss migrants' promotion of practical solidarity at the district and local levels through their cultural skills (6.2.2) and then their development of personal relationships with the Mineros through these skills (6.2.3). The chapter ends with a short summary (6.3).

6.1 Mineros solidarity in the district

The work with the Mineros in the researched district takes place in the context of the strategic alliance at the level of the national union described in chapter 4.4. However, the district has strong solidarity work with the Mineros and the alliance is particularly advanced. The district has its own relationships with individual Mineros sections and conducts its own solidarity work with the Mineros, with numerous activities conducted at the district level each year. This is thanks to the former district director Jim Robinson, who served from 2001 to 2014 and began to strongly promote this solidarity work out of the acknowledgment of the need to cooperate with Mexican workers in 2002, particularly in the context of NAFTA as well as vis-à-vis numerous common employers. In fact, the district's first contact to the Mineros took place three years before the alliance was formally established at the national union level: already in 2002, the district first became involved in supporting the community organization Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO) in organizing workers in sweatshops along the Mexico-US border, which would then become a section of the Mineros.³⁰² Indeed, many practical activities in support of the Mineros are conducted in the district, as well as exchanges and joint activities that involve regular members. Still, most activities are planned, organized and – importantly – funded by the district leadership; thus, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the solidarity work is bottom-up and member-driven. Moreover, symbolic activities and political pressure – such as protest letters to the Mexican president and rallies in front of the consulate – continue to form part of the district's solidarity work. However, the bulk of the activities comprise practical support, strongly involving regular members and local officers. The former district director described this turn towards concrete solidarity work during the Mineros strike in Cananea in 2007:

You know, it started, (said with a bored tone – author's note) “yeah that's great, we got a solidarity alliance with the Mexican mine and steelworkers, solidarity forever, now we get back to what we were doing before”. When the Mineros started to, when they were under attack, it became clear, you know, what kind of support we could actually provide, for example, you know about the strike in Cananea? We went a number of times to Cananea, and (...) we went to rallies and marched with them. (...) they used to tell us, we're so glad you are here (...) So we sent teams of two international observers. And they brought a little tent (...) and

³⁰² Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014.

*some vests, it wrote, 'international observers', and they had American Steelworkers standing there, and it was right on the side watching, to document what the cops were and weren't gonna do. And they maintained the foothold until the court showed up.*³⁰³

Already in this three-year-long strike in Cananea in the Mexican state of Sonora, as the Mineros came under fierce attack from the government, the district repeatedly sent members to support the Mineros in marches and rallies, as well as international observers to monitor the police activities around the clock.³⁰⁴ The Mexican government and the owner of the mine – Grupo México – not only attacked Mineros leader Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, whom they charged of fraud, but also cut off the whole town in an attempt to starve out the strikers and their families, and after three years of strike, the Mexican government and Grupo Mexico used armed force to reopen the mine (Bacon 2016, 162). On this occasion, as well as during other strikes and attacks by the government, money collections in support of the Mineros and their families were conducted, whether through fundraising events or raffles and T-shirt sales.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, many locals “adopted” a striking family that they supported with money as well as goods like milk and diapers for the children.³⁰⁶

Beyond the support in such extreme situations as strikes and violent government attacks, many other activities take place regularly in the district. They range from sending protest letters to the Mexican president and conducting rallies in front of the Mexican consulate to protesting against the attacks on the union, organizing fundraising events such as T-shirt sales and repeatedly sending organizers to support organizing and bargaining campaigns in Mexico, or conducting health and safety trainings at Mineros plants. Among others, the district has sent organizers to support Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña in the Mexican state of Coahuila in their organizing efforts and with advice in the contract negotiations process, or workers at Johnson Controls plants in Ciudad Acuña.³⁰⁷ Moreover, the district organized joint labor classes with the Mineros for several years. For these, groups of around 12-15 Mineros

³⁰³ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³⁰⁵ Interviews with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014, volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁰⁶ Interviews with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014 and March 1, 2013, Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014, Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

were brought to the district to attend classes covering topics such as contract negotiations, health and safety issues as well as labor rights.³⁰⁸

The single most important practical activity is the conduction of yearly visits to the steel mill town Lázaro Cárdenas in the state of Michoacán. Each year, about 75 regular members and local officers of the district participate in these trips. They began in 2008 as a solidarity trip of the district's four ArcelorMittal locals to the ArcelorMittal Mineros section in Lázaro Cárdenas. However, they soon developed into a yearly participation in the Mineros' section 271 commemorative march for two miners killed by the police during a strike in 2006, which takes place every year in April. During these visits, the Steelworkers tour the Mineros' plant and they have joint workshops and trainings with them.

Importantly, in many cases, solidarity activities also take place at the level of so-called sister plants, i.e. plants in both countries owned by the same TNCs. In such direct collaboration at the local level on topics such as collective bargaining and health issues, the solidarity becomes significantly more concrete and practical. At present, three common employers with plants in the district and in Mexico exist. The largest one is the steel-manufacturing corporation ArcelorMittal, which operates four plants in Indiana, as well as the steel mill in Lázaro Cárdenas. The ArcelorMittal locals are thus also the locals most strongly engaged in the Mineros solidarity.³⁰⁹ The other two are a Dana Corporation plant in Lafayette, Indiana,³¹⁰ with a sister plant in Tlalnepantla (State of Mexico), and an American Steel Foundries plant in Granite City, Illinois, with a sister plant in Sahagún (Hidalgo). Another common employer until 2008 was Alcoa Inc. with plants producing wiring harnesses for the automobile industry in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña (Coahuila), but the company sold the Mexican plants to another owner.³¹¹ Through repeated visits to their sister plants in Mexico, the leaderships of those locals have established direct relationships with those Mineros sections. While the strongest relationship is that between the USW ArcelorMittal Local 1010 and its counterpart in Lázaro Cárdenas,³¹² the local

³⁰⁸ Interviews with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014 and March 1, 2013.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³¹⁰ Interview with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

³¹¹ Interviews with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013, Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³¹² In fact, the yearly trip to Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacán is still – in part – an ArcelorMittal trip, with half of the participants coming out of ArcelorMittal locals, in order to strengthen the relationship to the ArcelorMittal section in Lázaro. During the visits, they have an additional one-day meeting with their Mineros counterparts that the rest of the group does

leadership of the American Steel Foundries plant has also repeatedly traveled to Hidalgo where they met with the four Mineros sections in the region, the Dana local leadership visited their counterparts in Mexico City and the Alcoa leadership visited the plants in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña up to 2008. In return, Mineros from those plants visited their sister plants in the district.³¹³ Similar to the Lázaro Cárdenas trips, during these visits the participants meet with the local Mineros section, tour the sister plant and have joint workshops and discussions on how they can support each other.³¹⁴ Furthermore, in some cases, the USW locals have conducted collective bargaining trainings and health and safety work with the Mineros.³¹⁵

Moreover, on some occasions locals have become active on their own with solidarity activities for Mineros, such as organizing fundraising events and T-shirt sales. For instance, Local 1010 has a voluntary strike fund to which officers voluntarily donate a certain amount regularly, and which has in the past repeatedly been used for supporting the Mineros; for instance, during the strike in Cananea and other strikes.³¹⁶ During the strike in Cananea, particularly some female members and officers of various locals were strongly engaged in organizing donations to striking families and particularly the women, who needed diapers, milk and other basic supplies for their children.³¹⁷

The alliance with the Mineros is generally accepted among the USW membership, at least in the urban and highly immigrant northern part of the district. While some members would definitely prefer to use the resources spent on the Mineros solidarity for other purposes,³¹⁸ while racism against Mexicans

not participate in (interviews with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; and the personal assistant to the District director, Chicago, January 29, 2014).

³¹³ Interviews with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013 and Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014; president, USW Local 7717, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013, Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

³¹⁴ Interviews with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013.

³¹⁵ Interviews with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013, Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³¹⁶ Interview with USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³¹⁷ Interviews with the financial secretary, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

³¹⁸ Interviews with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; see also Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013; Vice Chair, Women of Steel, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation; USW

and workers in Mexico is widespread among the membership in some of the district's areas³¹⁹ – such as the conservative rural regions of Indiana – the solidarity work is – while sometimes criticized – rarely openly challenged, and most members seem to understand the strategic sense of cooperation for the defense of common interests vis-à-vis globalization and the economic interconnections within NAFTA.³²⁰ This was explained by one member as follows:

We in our local never get a backlash from the colleagues because we want to spend some of our funds for supporting... for instance, there was a time when we supported families in Cananea, we adopted them (...) our local has always participated in that because... also because of the president's leadership, because he understands what it's about, right? Because... once you understand (...) that if you have workers here and in, say, Mexico, who are doing the same work, and sometimes technology is even more advanced in Mexico in some of the companies, they are doing the same work, and they are doing it for significantly lower wages than those paid in the US, what makes you think that you are better than them? If you start analyzing, you are not better than them. So you have two options. One is to bring them to your level, or at least raise their level, and the other one is that they pull you down. Which is what is happening really. So when Jim (Robinson) explains it this way, you find yourself thinking, true, right?³²¹

6.2 Analysis: promoting a practical solidarity with rank-and-file involvement and developing personal cross-border relationships through migrants' cultural skills

As I will show in the following chapters, the presence of migrants in the district has – through the cultural skills that they bring along – contributed to overcoming some notorious obstacles to the development of a perceived community of fate, as they laid the basis for social interaction and collective action across borders: on the one hand, they contributed to making the solidarity a practical one that involves the rank and file; and, on the other, they have developed personal relationships with the Mineros.

First, migrants have contributed to overcoming the lack of a practical solidarity at the regional and local levels. As has become clear in the description of the solidarity work in the district, the solidarity comprises numerous concrete

Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

³¹⁹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014; personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014, Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013; Manny Armenta, Subdistrict 2 director, USW District 12, Tucson, Arizona, February 17, 2014.

³²⁰ See also interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³²¹ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

activities that involve regular rank-and-file members, rather than being some detached “letters and resolutions of undying solidarity and love” of some remote national union leadership. As I will show, migrants have significantly contributed to making this possible, thereby allowing for numerous possibilities for regular members to participate in solidarity activities and experience joint action and cross-border social interaction and communication with the Mineros, as well as exchanging experiences and perspective, overcoming differences and discovering similarities, experiencing collective strength and developing narrative resources. It is – to a significant degree – thanks to migrants that members “are exposed to the actual Mineros, the real people, it isn’t, you know, a videotape of (Mineros president – *author’s note*) Napoleon Gómez speaking, it’s real”, as the district director put it.³²² They have done so mainly through their cultural skills: while migrants were not the driving force behind the promotion of a practical solidarity – this credit goes to Jim Robinson – their Spanish skills and their knowledge of Mexican culture and politics help to overcome the language barrier and cultural obstacles, hence making practical solidarity at the district and local level – and a strong rank-and-file involvement – possible. Migrants are usually in charge of the communication with the Mexican partners, thus enabling an easy, regular and direct communication and information exchange and functioning working relationships. Furthermore, the district depends on migrants’ bilingualism and cultural skills to conduct many practical activities in support of the Mineros, such as sending organizers or health and safety trainers to Mexico or conducting labor classes. During the regular exchange visits to Lázaro Cárdenas, migrants serve as translators for the non-migrant participants, facilitating communication between them and the Mineros in both the official program of the trips and the less formal parts of it. Given migrants’ familiarity with Mexican culture, towns and people, they also act as “cultural translators” and alleviate non-migrants’ culture shock upon arrival in Mexico.

Second, in the course of the solidarity work migrants have become strongly involved in this work and – in many cases – they have developed personal relationships with the Mineros, which is highly unusual in international labor solidarity and constitutes the kind of social interaction *par excellence* in enabling a cross-border exchange on each others’ situations. Those migrants involved in the solidarity work describe individual Mineros as their “friends” and they regularly communicate with them via social networks, email or on the phone regarding a variety of personal, work and union-related topics. Evidently, such personal relationships constitute a strong basis of a sense of togetherness, as friendships entail an immediate emotional connection, mutual trust and willingness to support each other. Those involved in them are “transformed by their new understandings and new friendships, and committed to the enduring

³²² Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

cause of transnational solidarity” (Hathaway 2000, 7, see chapter 2.1). Knowing the Mineros’ concrete situation and current developments affecting them, including their lives and families, for these Steelworkers these are not “abstract others” (Ferguson 2011, 18, see chapter 2.1), but rather individuals who they know well and whose fate concerns them personally. Most crucially, these relationships entail a regular communication and interaction across borders: a constant exchange of information takes place on both directly work- and union-related matters and broader social and political topics. This allows for learning about each others’ situation, challenges and goals, as well as their connection to own issues, and hence for a constant awareness of commonalities. Furthermore, constantly being aware of developments and new challenges facing them, the alliance and its consequences on the Mexican side obtain for them an everyday relevance and are closely linked to their own daily union work and lives. Again, it is migrants’ cultural skills that make developing these relationships possible and explain why no non-migrants establish such relationships. Particularly migrants’ Spanish proficiency allows them to more easily and colloquially relate to the Mineros, both in the initial contact and – crucially – in the aftermath, as they allow maintaining regular communication at a distance and over time via email, the phone and social networks. Furthermore, in many cases, migrants’ knowledge of Mexican culture, politics and society allows them to have discussions based on a common knowledge base with the Mineros, whereby not everything needs to be explained “from scratch”, thus making pleasant and easy communication possible.

6.2.1 Note on transnational ways of belonging contributing to a perceived community of fate

In contrast to the other case study, migrants’ transnational ways of belonging do not play a crucial role in this case. While clearly Mexican migrants do not show the reluctance to work with the Mineros arising out of racist views that some of their non-migrant colleagues hold (although they might be racist against Guatemalans or other migrants),³²³ their ways of belonging do not play a role across the board as a motivating factor for their engagement in the Mineros solidarity work and as a source of an identification with the Mineros. While they do so in some cases, migrants’ background alone does not automatically lead to an emotional commitment with Mexican workers and a support of the international solidarity work with their – or their parents’ – countries of origin.³²⁴ Most importantly, this is probably a consequence of most Mexican-

³²³ Interviews with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation; Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

³²⁴ Interview with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

origin migrants in this district being of second generation, as well as their lack of politicization compared to Salvadoran migrants', and negative – if any – experiences with labor unions in Mexico: while Mexican migrants identify with their country of origin, most of them do so to a lesser extent than Salvadoran migrants in USWW. Despite preserving many Mexican traditions, in particular many second-generation migrants clearly see the US as their country. Moreover, as explained in chapter 4, Mexican migration has a less political character than that of civil war countries like El Salvador: most Mexican migrants are not political refugees – although they might flee poverty and hardship – but rather they come to the US primarily in search for work. Furthermore, few Mexican migrants have previous experiences with labor unions: until recently, most Mexican migration was from rural areas in the so-called “traditional” migration states such as Michoacán, Jalisco and Zacatecas, and from the 1990s onwards also from Oaxaca, Chiapas, as well as the informal sector in Mexico City, meaning that most migrants were not previously unionized.³²⁵ In addition, given the corrupted character of the official Mexican labor unions organized in the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) laid out in chapter 4, if migrants had previous union experiences, these were usually negative, in view of the widespread yellow unions and protection contracts (see also footnote 78).³²⁶

Hence, for all migrants with whom I spoke, the primordial motivation for engaging in the solidarity work was the understanding of the strategic need to do so and support fellow workers, rather than some pre-existing general concern for Mexico and its people.³²⁷ For all of them, the solidarity is based on a clear consciousness of common conditions as workers confronting the same employers and economic pressures in the context of trade and financial liberalization and the attack on workers that go along with it.

³²⁵ This is also the case with most Mexican-origin members of USW District 7. Interviews with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014, Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

³²⁶ This was expressed by the Subdistrict 1 director who explained that most migrants coming from Mexico distrust labor unions: “Many of those coming from Mexico here I have seen that (...) they do not trust the unions. Because when they come from Mexico, they think that all unions are crooked, you understand? How they call them there, yellow unions, because you know the system of unions there in Mexico (...) When you try to organize (them) in the US, they do not trust them. They think that they are a bunch of thugs, that they want to steal their money, just as they did over there”. Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013, own translation.

³²⁷ Interviews with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation; volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

Despite not being the primordial factor, for some migrants the identification with Mexico still plays a role as a factor strengthening the motivation for supporting and engaging in the solidarity work, as well as a basis for an emotional commitment to it. Although most of the migrants were second generation, and although the degree to which the transnational social space was a relevant point of reference for them in their daily lives varied, all of those with whom I spoke were engaged in transnational social practices and maintained a strong emotional connection to Mexico: even if they feel as if they are “from here” and “Americans”, as most second-generation migrants do, their Mexican heritage plays a role for them, whereby they usually identify with both countries, with some of them identifying themselves as “Mexicans” and speaking of “us” when talking about Mexican or Latin American migrants.³²⁸ They engage in a variety of transnational practices, such as sticking to Mexican festivities or other cultural traditions such as food and music, several raise their children in Spanish and as “Mexicans”, intending to convey them their Mexican background, while some engage in HTAs to support social development projects in their home communities. These transnational ways of belonging and transnational practices were expressed by one second-generation migrant who explained sticking to Mexican culture such as music, clothing and food is an expression of her Mexican identity:

I'm always Mexican. whether I go to Mexico, whether I'm in Texas... I mean, I wear my boots (laugh). You know what I mean. I am who I am. What (another second-generation migrant) is talking about, orgullo, that (Mexican) pride... I am. You know, (...) I listen to Mexican music, you know, I'm eating Mexican food, you know, I dress, 'Mexican', you know? that's part of... I captured that one a long time ago, who I am. (...) you know I'm Mexican. you look at me, I'm Mexican. I may be fair skin, but I am who I am. so... when I go (to Mexico), I already have that orgullo of being mexicana³²⁹

Clearly, “the Mexican population still loves Mexico”, as the personal assistant to the district director – himself a second-generation migrant – explained:

The Mexican population still loves Mexico. (...) Like me, I was born here. But I was raised under of a lot of the philosophies of Mexico. (...) Yeah, there is still a large segment of the Mexican population here... well, first of all, there is a part here that is from Mexico. And they love their country, but they can make a living, that's why they're here. Then you got the generation that was born here. We love it because of our parents.³³⁰

On the one hand, the emotional connectedness to Mexico translates into an interest in and support of the solidarity work with the Mineros: “we have lots of

³²⁸ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³²⁹ Interview with the financial secretary, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³³⁰ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

Mexican American Steelworkers who, even if they don't have a personal historical connection to los Mineros, they certainly have a personal connection to Mexico", as the district director explained when talking about the reasons for the strong relationships with the Mexican partner union in the district.³³¹ Indeed, Ben Davis – director of International Affairs at the USW national leadership level – emphasized the role of the Mexican migrant membership's "cultural and linguistic identity" in explaining why the solidarity with the Mexican union is particularly advanced in this district and Subdistrict 12 in Arizona:

Our relationships with unions in Mexico, and particularly with the Mineros, have really been (...) built around a common political program (...). With that said, I think that it is quite true that the parts of the Steelworkers that historically have a Mexican presence, the Southwest, particularly Arizona, but also Los Angeles to some extent, and Northern Indiana, Chicago area, but really Indiana (...), in those areas we do have Spanish-speaking members, we do have people for whom the Mexican heritage is still a significant part of their identity, even if they've lived 50, or in the case of Arizona, you know, 200 or 300 years in the US, the family, there is still family ties, and there is still people who go back, and people who have the language and the identity. So, (...) having made that political commitment to solidarity, it certainly helps, and I would say that the relationship has been more advanced in the parts of the union where you have people with the cultural and linguistic identity. (...) the fact that we have immigrant members and folks in the local leadership, those were the first people who, they said yeah, you know, let's..., this is great, we have a relationship with a Mexican union, let's build on it³³²

Something similar was explained by one second-generation migrant president of a local, who said that his migrant members are usually supportive of the Mineros solidarity, in contrast to others who were skeptical at the beginning:

Maybe the majority (of the members) were pretty skeptical, as to, (...) why are we even getting involved, we have plenty of problems here with labor (...) but there was a few that, (...) we watch the news, we got family, they're involved over there, that still live over there, and they wanted to find out what was going on there, like, you know, what are they doing over there, why are they going there... you know, let me know what's going on in the future, if you hear anything³³³

On the other hand, for those migrants with whom I spoke who *are* engaged in the solidarity work, participate in visits to Mexico or other solidarity activities such as rallies and marches or communicate with the Mineros, their Mexican background strengthens their identification with them. For them, the fact that it is about their own (or their parents') country of origin is –albeit to varying

³³¹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013.

³³² Interview with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013. Also interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³³³ Interview with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.

degrees – a factor strengthening the emotional commitment. When compared with work with other countries, the Mineros solidarity, “because of my background, being Mexican, (...) does feel more... special”, as one second-generation migrant member explained.³³⁴ Interestingly, this was particularly stressed by some second-generation migrants. The assistant to the district director stated that his parents’ background indeed plays a very important role for him in the work with the Mexican partners:

My dad was born here, not my mom, but my dad, and since I was born here, it's not that obvious (...) So, I've always wanted to... so when I go there, I swear to God the Mineros treat you like you are from there, and I even tell it myself, when I'm here, I feel like a true Mexican, and to me that means a lot. 'Cause it would have meant a lot to my dad and my mom. So yes, that's the personal... that I give (...). I just feel proud.³³⁵ (...) When I go to (visit the Mineros in) Mexico, I feel like I am a Mexican born in Mexico. (...) 'Cause for that time that I'm there, I'm a Mexican, you know? I am a Mexican here, but there is Mexican and Mexican. And (a first-generation migrant I had interviewed) don't understand it cause he is from Mexico. But for me... it means a lot.³³⁶

Moreover, one other second-generation migrant explained that during the visits to the Mineros, he enjoys being in Mexico and talking to them, as this is an opportunity for him to learn more about his parents’ country:

I'm interested in (the Mineros and their families), cause that's how my parents went through it. You know, and I always like to learn what they're doing. I still feel like I'm part of them. I'm Mexican, but I don't live there. But I still, I raise my kids the same way. We're Mexicans. (I tell them) you're citizens, and you have every right here as that, but, the way I tell them is, this is your country, that's where you're born and raised. But your blood is from there. Ok? Yeah, and they know that. They understand that. So that's how I... and I always like to learn more about what my people are doing (...). Based on what part of Mexico you're from, you have different ways of living and different small traditions. And I am always curious on what those are. That's what I like to learn.³³⁷

6.2.2 Promoting a practical solidarity involving members at the local and district level

In this section, I will show how migrants – through their language skills and cultural knowledge – have contributed to making the Mineros alliance a practical solidarity involving the rank and file, as well as how they have thus allowed for members’ experiencing of joint action and social interaction with the Mineros, which is the precondition for experiencing collective strength,

³³⁴ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014; also interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³³⁵ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³³⁶ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³³⁷ Interview with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; also interview with the financial secretary, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

generating narrative resources, managing differences and reservations, as well as the common framing of situations.

As described above, the alliance has a very practical character in the district and strongly involves regular members. Strong direct relationships at a regional level exist to sections of the *Mineros*, and the solidarity comprises numerous concrete activities of practical support that involve members and rank-and-file leaders, as well as locals.

To be clear: the argument here is not that migrants are the *driving force* behind making the alliance a practical solidarity, nor that it is a bottom-up solidarity. As previously mentioned, the solidarity in the district largely remains a top-down one, as it is decided upon, funded and planned largely at the district leadership level (and some, the local leadership level), and regular members generally do not take part in decision-making processes. However, they are strongly involved in the conduction of practical solidarity activities. The initiation and promotion of practical solidarity extending beyond the usual rhetorical level is clearly an accomplishment of Jim Robinson. Being convinced that “solidarity is a great song to sing, but it always means actually taking actions to support workers in other parts of the world”³³⁸, his principal aim was to develop solidarity taking place at the grassroots level involving regular members to give it stability:

*If you're going to build solidarity, the best way to do it is at the grassroots level. It's easy to make speeches and tell people why it's important that we're supporting African miners or something like that. And everybody says 'yeah, yeah, yeah'. If I go to a union meeting, and I say there are Steelworkers on strike in California and we're gonna pass the hat to help them out, everybody is gonna put a couple of dollars in the hat. (...) But if I get a bus and get a bunch of people to get on the bus and go to a rally (...) on the picket line, and then we come back, and then we pass the hat at a union meeting, I'll get 20 dollars and 50 dollars. Cause it's personal. If you've been there, and you've met the people, and you've seen what's going on, it's personal. (...) I think that we need to make the international work more personal. You know, if we have a relationship with the *Mineros* that is limited to (USW president) Leo Gerard and (*Mineros* president) Napoleón Gómez, (...) the first time there is a little puff of wind, that relationship is gonna end. If that relationship goes from the top to the bottom, you know, then that relationship would be solid. My goal is to get us to, or has been, to get us to where the relationship can't be broken.*³³⁹

During his office, Robinson thus initiated numerous practical activities with the *Mineros* involving rank-and-file members as well as locals. Among others, he initiated the yearly visits to the Mexican steel mill town Lázaro Cárdenas, promoted the development of solidarity relationships at the level of sister plants and repeatedly sent USW organizers to support the *Mineros* in organizing campaigns.

³³⁸ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013.

³³⁹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

Hence, the argument here is that migrants *facilitated* conducting these concrete activities at the level of the district and locals in practice: it is – to an important degree – thanks to their cultural skills that the conduction of much of the solidarity activities were made possible in the first place, whereby regular members have the possibility to experience collective action and personal communication. It can be doubted whether the district director would have been able to promote such a close and practical solidarity work without the Mexican-origin membership. In the interviews that I conducted with him, Robinson explained that a major reason for the district’s strong involvement with the Mineros is that it is “easy to do”. Besides the geographical proximity to Mexico, the large Spanish-speaking membership in the district is the most crucial factor making the building a practical solidarity and motivating people to become active much more easily than with other countries:

*We have lots of Steelworkers who speak Spanish. So building that kind of solidarity, inspiring and motivating people to then take action is much easier with the Mineros than it is with other things.*³⁴⁰

Clearly the most important factor making the practical solidarity work and rank-and-file involvement in the district and the local level possible is migrants’ language skills. These fundamentally enable the district’s practical engagement in the Mineros solidarity, conducting concrete solidarity activities and establishing functioning direct working relationships. Through them, one of the main factors hindering the development of substantial relations of international solidarity and a practical solidarity work is thereby overcome: as “there is not that many that speak English”³⁴¹ on the Mexican side, rather than recurring to interpreters in the cross-border communication, the working language in the district’s alliance with the Mineros is Spanish, in contrast to that at the national union level.³⁴² Thus, whereas international labor cooperation usually takes place in the “lingua franca” English (particularly when a US union is involved) or with laborious and costly interpretation, here migrants enable direct and smooth communication with the Mineros at the level of the district and locals. This accounts for much of the ease in the cross-border relationships between the two unions. However, in some areas, migrants’ other cultural skills are also important in promoting a practical solidarity with rank-and-file involvement, particularly their knowledge of Mexican culture, society and politics.

Migrants’ skills facilitate conducting the Mineros solidarity at different levels. In the following, I will highlight four particularly relevant areas in which they facilitate a practical solidarity: the regular communication and flow of information that allows for the conduction of the solidarity work at the district

³⁴⁰ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013.

³⁴¹ Interview with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁴² At the level of the national USW and Mineros, communication takes place in English, as Napoleón Gómez Urrutia speaks fluent English.

leadership level; conducting practical activities in support of or with the Mineros; the yearly trips to Lázaro Cárdenas to commemorate the killed Mineros, which constitutes a particular important concrete activity of solidarity; and the development of relationships of cooperation at the level of locals.

6.2.2.1 Ensuring a cross-border communication and information flow on the district leadership level

The majority of practical activities are planned and organized at the level of the district leadership, in consultation with the Mineros counterparts in Mexico. Here, migrants support the planning and organizing of the solidarity work and have hence allowed for the development of a close solidarity with the Mineros in the district in the first place. Crucially, migrants' Spanish proficiency made the establishment of direct relationships with both the national leadership of the Mineros and individual Mineros sections possible. They enable direct and easy communication that allows for an exchange of information on each other's situation and perspectives and hence constitutes the basis for most of the activities carried out: the regular communication on the phone of the district leadership with the Mineros' national table³⁴³ is – to an important degree – thanks to a migrant staff person and some rank-and-file leaders who essentially lead the everyday communication with the Mineros. The district director's Mexican-American personal assistant – who called himself the director's "point man" – is in charge of that communication. He directly talks to the national table every other week, while the district director communicates with Mineros president Gómez Urrutia:

Jim headed it up, but I was his point man, since I was bilingual and I was the assistant. Say, ok, work with... and Jim more discusses it with Napoleón. I was... I meet with the national table, over the phone, we talk (...) Over the years, it has been different guys (...), and I deal with them. (...) He comes with (ideas), I run and put them together. And I do anything, Jim maybe tied up, go take care of that, and I take care of it to free him up to do even more of this stuff³⁴⁴

In view of his retirement, more recently much of the phone communication and travels to Mexico have been taken over by a first-generation migrant leader of a local.³⁴⁵ The director's assistant has increasingly involved him in maintaining the district leadership's communication with the Mineros, aiming to establish him as his successor in charge of the relationships with them, given his bilinguality and that he is Mexican and thus "naturally easy with the communication with the Mineros".³⁴⁶ The director frequently takes him to

³⁴³ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³⁴⁴ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³⁴⁵ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³⁴⁶ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29,

Mexico to support him in the communication at executive board meetings with the Mineros or other events such as the strike in Cananea in 2007.³⁴⁷

Furthermore, through their language skills, regular migrant members act as transmitters of information from the Mineros to the USW district leadership and facilitate an information flow. The role that migrants play in the cross-border communication was highlighted by the district director, who stressed that it takes place at different levels and that beyond the official communication at the leadership level, the exchange taking place on the membership level – mainly via Facebook – forms an important part of the communication.³⁴⁸ Migrants keep the leadership informed on developments in Mexico and with the Mineros and raise issues with them that they consider important. He stressed that one of the major problems in international solidarity is that it is difficult to learn about issues taking place in other countries, especially without speaking the language. While he reads Mexican newspapers and is usually well informed on Mexico and the Mineros, he also receives information from the district's Spanish-speaking USW members, who are strongly connected to the country through their various information channels. They thus play an important role in transmitting information to him:

I have had people (...), especially the Spanish-speaking people, raise issues with me because they hear about them. (...) A major problem in international stuff is that you can't know what you don't know. The average union member is not going to know what's going on in another country. And first of all, there, even if they wanna make the effort, it's hard for, would be hard for me to follow events in the German trade union movement, cause I don't speak German. And I certainly don't read German. So for someone who doesn't speak the language of the country they're interested in, it's gonna be just very hard to hear about things. I do hear about things from Spanish-speaking steelworkers cause you know, they read maybe the local hometown paper online, you know, or they're on Facebook or emailing people, they get information. But the biggest problem, for the average non-bilingual member is... how you gonna find out? How do you know?³⁴⁹

Similarly, the director of one subdistrict stressed that he receives most of his information on the Mineros as well as developments in Mexico more generally from migrant members and low-level leaders:

(Name of a Mexican-origin member) is my (...), he's always the.., he is always emailing stuff like that from the... (...) he keeps us up to date with all this Facebook... (...) he is the, he is a Facebook fanatic, he puts articles about the Mineros in Facebook and what's happening in Mexico and what's on (...) he's got his mother and some family live out there. (...) he knows a lot of (the Mineros), yeah. (Name of another migrant member) is the one, she really is the one that

2014.

³⁴⁷ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24,

2014, own translation.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24,

2014.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24,

2014.

*really is involved with them as far as communicate back and forth with them. I get a lot of information from her.*³⁵⁰

Furthermore, migrants constitute a point of connection for Mineros members to the USW, if these shy away from contacting the USW leadership directly with requests for support or advice. One first-generation migrant member explained that the Mineros sometimes approach him with requests for support or advice, bypassing the official channels:

*So, for example, they have an issue where they want us to support them, be it with training or with ideas, so sometimes they have gotten in touch directly with me and then I pass it on to the district, and the district to the International, and sometimes we have had colleagues go to Mexico and help them with the training.*³⁵¹

In this way, information and requests are transmitted to the USW leadership. An example is the kidnapping of a Mineros leader, about which the district director said that “I wouldn’t have known about it if wasn’t for the fact that somebody around here was paying attention (...) on what was going on down there”³⁵²; when this leader was kidnapped, the information reached the USW district and national leadership through a migrant member who was asked by her Minero friend to establish a connection with the USW leadership, whereby only then could Steelworkers become active.

6.2.2.2 Conduction of practical solidarity activities

Beyond facilitating communication with the Mineros and the planning of the work at the leadership level, migrants’ language skills also make the conduction of numerous concrete solidarity activities possible that involve USW members as well as Mineros. This lays the basis for members’ social interaction with the Mineros, their experiencing of practical solidarity activities and joint action.

An important part of the district’s practical support to the Mineros involves assisting them in organizing campaigns or conducting trainings that the Mineros ask for. The district is able to promptly react to such requests and send organizers or trainers to Mineros sections to support them largely thanks to the presence of migrants: it is generally bilingual – i.e. Mexican-origin – members and local leaders who are sent to Mexico to conduct health and safety or other trainings, assist the Mineros in the contract negotiation process or support their organizing campaigns.³⁵³ Among others, migrants have supported the organization of female workers in a Johnson Controls plant in Piedras Negras

³⁵⁰ Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014.

³⁵¹ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁵² Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³⁵³ Interviews with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014.

producing harnesses, as well as an organizing campaign in a large Johnson Controls harnesses and accessories plant in Ciudad Acuña in 2012.³⁵⁴ Moreover, the district has sent migrant organizers to support Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña in their organizing efforts and with advice in the contract negotiations process.³⁵⁵ Migrants' role in the solidarity activities was stressed by the director of Subdistrict 1, who explained the process of how the district reacts to requests for help by asking migrant volunteers:

the Mineros might say, oh we got a campaign over here, maybe me das una manita (you lend me a hand – author's note), then they call Jim, and Jim says, calls Juan, and Juan, you wanna go and help out, or this and that, and you know, we take two or three different guys³⁵⁶

As he went on to explain, the district specifically trains migrants to be what they call “member-organizers”, as it is these bilingual members and local officers that it usually recurs to for supporting the Mineros in concrete activities:

the way the Steelworkers do it, we look what they call member-organizers. In other words, we look at different locals, how many people are bilingual, like... we got Ernesto belongs to Local 9777, we have Jorge who belongs to 7773, José (...) from 7234, who else have we sent up there? Mirna (...), she is out of local 1216, so... we kind of look for members that are bilingual. And we... usually try to, it's like train-the-trainer type of deals, we put them through the classes (...) and you know, the advantage is, they're bilingual, and (...), we need you to go³⁵⁷

Sometimes, the relationships that migrant Steelworkers build with the Mineros and the constant communication that they engage in with them are also crucial assets for solidarity activities. For instance, during the Cananea strike, as the Mexican government had cut off the whole town, one second-generation member's relationship to the Mineros' wives was crucial for organizing the solidarity work, explained the director of one subdistrict:

(Name of a migrant member), she's really... we even sent her a couple of times to Cananea, during the strike, they cut everything off, and (she) was instrumental because she is involved with the women's group from Cananea (...), they've been communicating back and forth and stuff like that. (...) She worked there in

³⁵⁴ Interviews with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013 and Bridgeview, January 30, 2014, Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013; Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁵⁵ Interviews with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014, Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014, also interview with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

³⁵⁶ Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013.

³⁵⁷ Interviews with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014, and Bridgeview, March 1, 2013. Original names in this quote are replaced by fictitious ones.

*Cananea, with the women over there from Cananea, the wives or the spouses, contacted some of the widows from the mine disaster and stuff like that*³⁵⁸

While only a limited number of Steelworker members or rank-and-file leaders participate in this kind of support activities, for those participating such activities provide strong opportunities for social interaction and experiencing joint activities. Furthermore, the experiences of such activities constitute narrative resources for developing cross-border collective action frames, particularly as the migrants conducting such activities are regular members or they are expected to spread their experiences after returning.

Migrants' language skills are also crucial in the activities conducted on the US side of the border. Among others, the district leadership drew on their language skills in organizing the joint labor classes with the *Mineros* at the University of Illinois, in which USW members regularly had the possibility to get to know in person and closely interact with the *Mineros* during their stay in the district. While these classes no longer take place due to increasing difficulties in obtaining visa for Mexican citizens, for several years groups of around 12-15 *Mineros* were brought to the district and attended classes that covered topics such as contract negotiations, health and safety issues as well as labor rights.³⁵⁹ The classes were given in Spanish by migrant staff and members, while migrants also fulfilled more informal tasks such as being guides for the *Mineros*, driving them around and acting as interpreters.³⁶⁰

6.2.2.3 Facilitating the yearly trips to Lázaro Cárdenas

Migrants also play a crucial role in facilitating the yearly trips to Mexico for the commemoration of the workers killed in the steel mill town of Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacán. These visits constitute the single most important activity involving the rank and file, as it is in them that the largest number of members participate. While the trips are organized, participants ultimately picked (albeit with advice by the local leaderships) and – except the time off work of the participants³⁶¹ – mostly paid by the district leadership, through them USW members and rank-and-file leaders have the possibility to closely interact and participate in various activities with the *Mineros*, as well as experiencing collective action. Among others, they participate in the *Mineros*' rally for the commemoration of the killed workers, have discussions and workshops with

³⁵⁸ Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014, and March 1, 2013.

³⁶⁰ Interviews with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁶¹ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

them on their respective work and employer relations and spend leisure time together on evenings and beach days.³⁶²

In this case, both migrants' language proficiency and their familiarity with Mexico and its culture are crucial in facilitating conducting the trips and rendering them concrete and "real" for the approximately 75 USW members taking part. Most importantly, migrants' Spanish proficiency allows for the communication taking place between the Steelworker participants and the Mineros, both in the official parts and – crucially – the informal parts of the trips. While participants are usually only allowed to attend once – in order to give as many members as possible the opportunity to participate – a number of Spanish-speaking members and local leaders have gone to Lázaro Cárdenas repeatedly, serving as translators. In workshops and classes in the official part of the program, their task is to interpret the official meetings, tours and workshops, each of them translating for a number of participants. Through it, they make the exchange on differences and similarities in their working conditions and work processes, their union contexts and cultural backgrounds, as well as challenges and employer strategies significantly more fluent and direct. Through it, migrants hence strongly contribute to making these trips "a training, one can say a training, one can say an exchange of ideas or of the things that are happening to them over there and the things that are happening to us over here", as one participant explained.³⁶³

In the "unofficial" parts of the trips, migrants ensure informal communication between Steelworkers and Mineros, thereby contributing to a personal getting-to-know each other and a low-threshold, more personal exchange. During the leisure time, migrants translate conversations on the partners' respective work and employers, their unions and labor relations systems, as well as cultural differences and personal issues. As one second-generation migrant who has been to the trips to Mexico seven times explained, during the trips she translates informal communication between Mineros and Steelworkers, as well as serving as a guide:

*Let's say we're in the beach, there is the tables there, people sit down and they wanna have a good time, try to sit translators in there, in case they need (...) translation. One of the guys, the new members, want to speak to the Mineros, you know, get them acquainted, so you are there, every Spanish-speaking person, or when we meet in an assembly, you sit with a white person, as a translator, you know, he has no idea of what's going on, I mean, what they're talking about. (...) there is also translation, but you know, you explain certain things like, this is the salon of the Mineros, and you have a big group...*³⁶⁴

³⁶² Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

³⁶³ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁶⁴ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

One translator explained that during his last trip to Mexico, his main task as a guide for a group was to make informal communication between Mineros and Steelworkers possible, as the Mineros would ask their US colleagues many questions on the nature of steel mill work in the US:

the second time I went, my group was 22 people. Going out in town, I was making sure they were ok, they understood everything, where not to go, where to go, how to ask for food... but the main things was the meetings and the rally... cause people would come up and ask them questions about, you know, what it's like working at a steel mill in Gary Indiana, Indianapolis or Chicago. And I'm talking about men, women, and children. The children were actually the ones that asked the most questions³⁶⁵

In such informal communication with the Mineros, an exchange on the differences and similarities of work and life in the two countries becomes possible. One participant told me about her conversations with the Mineros:

(W)e can sit by the beach and just talk to them in groups, (...) All they tell me about their experiences over there, and I tell them what I do over there, and they're very amazed, because, I don't know if you know, but in Mexico, there is no women miners. (...) I joke around, man, I come around and get a job at ArcelorMittal here, you think you can get me a job in the mining industry? And they laugh, and I go, why? And they say, well there is no women. (Here), it used to be a men's job, but now, in America, you see women in mines, you know. (...) When I tell them that (...) you meet women that are electricians, crane operators (...) but in other countries, women don't have these opportunities.³⁶⁶

Importantly, through their familiarity with Mexican culture, migrants also facilitate the management of differences as they act as “cultural translators” between the two cultural contexts. Given that the cultural differences between countries often constitute a major obstacle to a perceived community particularly in North-South contexts, this is crucial. While migrants do not necessarily fulfill this role regarding the labor relations systems,³⁶⁷ they do regarding the cultural differences between the two countries: as migrants usually move around more easily in Mexico, the district director asks them to serve as guides for the other participants. They are assigned groups whom they support in finding their way around in the city. In this way, they also assist them in

³⁶⁵ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

³⁶⁶ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

³⁶⁷ Most migrants with whom I spoke did not have a particular knowledge of the Mexican industrial relations and labor movement systems, and if they did, they had mostly achieved it through the solidarity work itself, rather than knowing it from before migrating or through their transnational ties to relatives and friends. However, as I will discuss further below, most migrants involved in the solidarity work were in a significant advantage when compared to their non-migrant counterparts regarding their access to information on Mexico: they were being kept up to date on the situation regarding labor relations and policies in Mexico both by their personal transnational networks and through their ability to watch the Mexican news and read Mexican newspapers.

whatever questions may come up on Mexico and explain to them “how things work there”.³⁶⁸ They not only ensure that participants behave properly while in Mexico, that nothing happens to them and that they are not taken advantage of due to their ignorance of the country;³⁶⁹ moreover, they translate the Mineros’ (and Mexicans’) mentality and “what life was there”, as one first-generation migrant explained:

I noticed that apart from me translating in the meeting about what they were actually saying, when we were out and about town, or talking at the hotel, I was translating what life was there, what life was like, where they’re at, what the mentality is... cause a lot of people would say (...) ey, why’re those guys doing that? Or, why is he only doing that? And I tell them, cause that’s what they do in their union (...) that’s what that guy is doing over there by the wall, that’s what the guy is over there doing on the street, they’re union too. “Oh....” What they didn’t realize was, down in Lázaro, people... you’re in a union there, you’re in a union everywhere. In other words, in the street, whatever... out here, unfortunately it’s just at work. And (...) people (over there) take it out, do actions, whether they ask them to or not. They’ll go. At rallies at informational pickets, at actions.. it’s fun. Our people say, you’re crazy. I just enjoy it.³⁷⁰

Through this translation, migrants contribute to bridging cultural differences, overcoming the prejudices that white and African American participants sometimes have, as well as generating mutual understanding. They help the non-migrant colleagues to overcome their “culture shock”:

Obviously some of the people I was translating for, they’d never been to Mexico, they’ve never been out of their hometown. So, a lot of them were in culture shock, and they were trying to figure out what’s going on. But I would ask them, you know, what it was like for them to be over there...³⁷¹

Having the possibility to get to know the Mineros and learn about cultural and social differences leads to the overcoming of prejudices that hinder the development of a mutual identification. The Mexican-origin contract coordinator of one local who had participated in the trips several times explained how the participants realize that Mexican workers are not their opponents, and develop a better understanding of their situation:

Once they get there, they start learning about wages, they see how they work, and then they start understanding why is it that over here we have this, and over there they don’t have that. And then they come to the realization that it’s not the worker that’s taking our jobs away, it’s not the worker that somehow is attacking us. (...) They could see similar companies, how they treated... (...) One remark I got from one guy, anglo, he told me, because they go there and they think, these guys

³⁶⁸ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

³⁶⁹ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁷⁰ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

³⁷¹ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

*should be able to make it with they pay, it's a different country. They assume that because you make a dollar a day, you only pay a penny for the products. They assume that. And when they see the conditions they're in, the one guy remarked, if that was me, I would have killed somebody by now. And he started understanding how it's not, again, the worker (...), but the rich guys, the owners*³⁷²

An African American Steelworker member explained how this experiencing of the Mineros' reality allowed for a linking of their struggles to their own history, as well as how it led to support of their struggles:

*being there (in Lázaro Cárdenas), (...) it kind of took you back that these people have not gotten up to where we are at this point. So they are still like in the back, fighting their way back to get to where we are. So you have, you have great appreciation for them, and you understand the struggles cause you've already been there. (...) My heart was out for them because I know the struggle. And I think the Steelworkers are doing a fantastic job with trying to get them up to where they should be, where they deserve to be. (...) We have to do that. Because... (...) You want people to have unionism like you have, you understand the importance of it... (...) So to me it's very important and very real that they should get that.*³⁷³

Participants' experiences during the trips and the conversations that they have with the Mineros constitute the narrative resources for the framing of issues in collective and solidary terms. Learning about each other lays the basis for overcoming differences and linking the others' struggles with their own. Furthermore, experiences such as the Mineros' rally for the commemoration of the killed workers – i.e. the “experience of marching side by side” with partners (Tarrow 2006, 178) – is a crucial element of “socialization through collective action” (ibid., see chapter 2.1) and has an important impact on the participants. As the district director explained, most of them are highly impressed by the “5,000 people all dressed in red marching through the town (who) make a very proud point of the fact that they don't need police permits, they just take over the town, 'cause it's their town”³⁷⁴. Such experiences constitute the “stories that inform the way the actors think (and) a living organizational heritage (...) (and) a basis for actions in response to new situations” (Lévesque and Murray 2010b, 339; see chapter 2.1).

Indeed, the narrative resources that are generated during the trips are transmitted to the membership at home. While the number of participants in the trips to date – and hence, of members having these experiences of collective action and social interaction – is in itself impressive, their major purpose is their spill-over effects on the rest of the membership: participants are selected in their function of multipliers. They share their experiences and their knowledge on cross-border

³⁷² Interview with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁷³ Interview with the Vice Chair, Women of Steel, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

similarities with their locals and networks in discussions and presentations after returning from Mexico. The district director strongly emphasized that experiences transmitted by their co-workers make a much stronger impression on members and “create a more durable form of solidarity” than if he or somebody else from the remote leadership level tries to convey the experience.³⁷⁵ Indeed, clearly, participants with whom I spoke saw their main task in transmitting their new knowledge, the stories and experiences that they had gained to the rest of the membership, engage them in discussions on the Mineros solidarity and counter false information that they have acquired from the media with their own knowledge and personal experience.³⁷⁶ One of them explained his intentions when he first became involved:

My interest first and foremost was... I wanted to get the information what was going on there and, you know, pass it along, to the other guys that weren't that privileged to go to Mexico. And... I couldn't bring it all back with me (lough), little by little. (...) We get a lot of backlash from that as well, (people) saying that, you guys could be spending the money on other things... (...) That was one of my goals was, try to get my local more active, and whether if it's from video, pictures, or actually going down there, let them realize what it's about³⁷⁷

6.2.2.4 Promoting local-level solidarity relationships

A further important area in which migrants play an important role in making the solidarity practical and enabling social interaction is the solidarity work at the level of so-called sister plants. This cooperation is particularly important for overcoming differences and direct competition between workers, experiencing collective strength and linking solidarity with their own reality.

Here, migrants facilitate establishing direct working relationships between USW locals and Mineros sections on topics such as collective bargaining and health issues, while they also enable conducting concrete solidarity activities. Given that the non-migrant leadership and staff usually do not speak Spanish (let alone dispose of the cultural skills that migrants have), similar to what has been described for the district level, it is usually migrants' language skills that enable direct communication and conducting concrete activities.

The local with the strongest relationship with its sister plant is Local 1010, which is the largest ArcelorMittal local and has a close working relationship with the Mineros section in Lázaro Cárdenas. This is partly due to the Joint Global Health and Safety Agreement at ArcelorMittal,³⁷⁸ which is chaired by the

³⁷⁵ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³⁷⁶ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

³⁷⁷ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

³⁷⁸ The Joint Global Health and Safety Agreement was signed in 2008 by ArcelorMittal, IndustriAll, and member unions, and it involves regular Joint Global Health and Safety

president of Local 1010. However, clearly the local's large Mexican-origin membership helps to cement the relationship, as it is not by accident that Local 1010 is the local with the largest Hispanic membership, as Jim Robinson explained.³⁷⁹ It is clearly migrant staff and members who – at a practical level – ensure direct communication and information exchange across the border that is independent from the district leadership. In particular, one Mexican-origin member and contract coordinator of the local is in charge of the communication. He translates the communication with the Mexican partners both via email and in documents that they send, hence allowing for an easy information exchange on topics extending beyond strictly workplace-related issues, which enables keeping each other updated on the current situation and developments. Furthermore, he always accompanies the local president to visits to Mexico and if he is unavailable, a first-generation migrant replaces him.³⁸⁰ However, his role also extends beyond translating, as he functions as the connective link to the sister plant's safety committee, as well as between them and the Global Safety Committee:

Our president (...) is also on the safety global team. They go there. So he asks me to go. And as part of my translation, he asks me to take a more active role in working with their safety committees. So I work with their safety committees, and then I report to (our Local president), and he reports to the global committee on all the things they cannot get accomplished through their committee. So I am like a go-between, with the global committee and the Lázaro safety committee (...). When they send us their documents on safety meetings that they have, on issues they've gone over what are completed, I'll translate them into English, then I sit down with (the Local president) and we go over them, and... He then takes it to the global committee. Then... he'll plan a trip there, I'll go with him, we meet with the committee, ask them what's going on, stuff like that. That's my role (...) I'm like, I just work with (our Local president), and the safety committee from Lázaro.³⁸¹

The consequence is that in this local, “the Mineros don't even call me or Jim”, as the district director's personal assistant explained regarding that Mineros section; rather, they directly call the local leadership.³⁸² Mainly through the contract coordinator, it regularly discusses issues and activities with the Mineros in Lázaro Cárdenas, they keep each other informed on current developments, exchange information particularly on health and safety issues as well as employer tactics, but also on a variety of more general topics such as the

Committee meetings with union representatives and the ArcelorMittal management to deal with health and safety issues.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³⁸⁰ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁸¹ Interviews with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014 and January 31, 2014.

³⁸² Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

Mexican drug war – i.e. the escalating violence in the aftermath of President Calderón’s declaration of war on the drug cartels and the employment of the armed forces into the conflict in 2006 – the security situation or the establishment of militias by citizens in Michoacán, originally formed as a defense against the drug cartels.

Migrants are also involved in facilitating a variety of concrete activities in support of the Mineros, joint activities at the grassroots level and exchange visits to the sister plant in Lázaro Cárdenas. Among others, the president and others from the local have repeatedly visited the plant in Lázaro Cárdenas for concrete activities to work on safety issues and “issues they can’t resolve” by themselves, as the US side can exert stronger pressure on the employer and has a close relationship with the Global Union Federation IndustriAll.³⁸³ As at the district level, during these visits the president always takes a number of Spanish-speaking members and officers to translate to strengthen the relationship with the Mexican colleagues.³⁸⁴ Regular Local 1010 members have conducted various safety trainings with Mineros. Moreover, during the last trip to Lázaro Cárdenas, it was some Spanish-speaking members who conducted a safety training with the workers in the sister plant, whereby such activities clearly strengthen the relationship, as the local president explained:

*This last time we went down there for the rally, we took three of our folks here that speak Spanish, and they’re trainers, and did the safety training on rail, lockout, (...) combined space (...). So it was union to union on the safety training, in Spanish. So it was very effective and it really helped to cement the relationship.*³⁸⁵

Furthermore, migrants allowed for conducting large investigation on health and safety issues in the partner plant. Together with a person of the health and safety department of the International USW, a Mexican-origin member of the Local’s Health and Safety Committee was sent to Lázaro Cárdenas to conduct the investigation, and will undertake the evaluation of its effect, as the former district director explained:

we arranged (that) one of the members of the safety and health committee from (the) Local who is bilingual, and the assistant director from the safety and health department of the (USW) International in Pittsburgh spent a week down there working with the local and touring the plant and doing an investigation, wrote a big report and (when) we go in April, one thing I wanna make sure gets done is that (...) (the migrant member who had conducted the investigation) Eddie

³⁸³ Interviews with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014; USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013.

³⁸⁴ Interview with USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁸⁵ Interview with USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; see also interview with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

*Medina goes and tours the plant and sees what effect it's had. I mean, those are the kind of concrete things.*³⁸⁶

Clearly, the close relationship and the possibilities for many members to visit the Mineros in their plant has given members the possibility to learn about each others' working conditions and employer strategies, as well as contributing to overcoming mutual reservations and prejudices. A Mexican-origin member who had repeatedly participated in the trips as a translator explained how the discovery of the similarity in the work done on both sides of the border helps to overcome prejudices (in this case, from Southern workers towards Northern workers) and leads to an awareness of being equal and facing the same challenges:

*We get there and people are reserved, a little nervous, like... somehow they have a barrier when they first arrive. The second day, all those barriers are broken down. Because people start to understand. Particularly when we have the walks through the companies, where you see that they do exactly the same work as in the United States there in Mexico, exactly the same work. So a worker who goes in that delegation does exactly the same, he is no more and no less than you. Right? When you see that, I imagine, you live in Mexico, and you say, the gringos are coming, right? And that the gringos are this and that, you have a stereotype about them, right? When you start seeing that they treat you as equal, they are workers just like you... that here in the US there are workers, because sometimes I believe (...) they think that all Americans will be bringing money over there, that they have a lot of money, but that is not the reality, right? So when (...) that connection starts, people's skepticism ends (...) you see them chatting, I don't know how they do it, because neither do these speak Spanish nor the others English, but they are chatting. (...) So we have a, I don't want to say common problem, but we have things in common, all in common. The same scourges that they have, we have. Maybe to differing degrees, but it's the same scourges, right?*³⁸⁷

Moreover, the regular exchange leads to joint experiences of success and allows for the development of a sense of collective strength vis-à-vis the employer. For instance, the local president explained that they have unmasked many lies by the employer:

2008 was the first year we went down there with the global joint committee, visited the plant, seen some of the conditions they were working on, raised issues, met with the Mineros and... come back and addressed the company on their failings. (...) Since that time, things have improved a hundred per cent down there, they get the equipment, the contract of safety is much improved and (...). And we haven't had a fatality there since I think (...) 2009. So that is a good thing. (...) I keep in touch with the folks there, (...) we visit there every year and (...) one of my members here, he's (the director's personal assistant's) brother, he goes with me and speaks... (...) he speaks good Spanish, and they can't (fool us) down there on

³⁸⁶ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

³⁸⁷ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

*what they tell they're doing, we go out and speak to the actual folks, and we've caught them in a lot of lies that they said they would be doing.*³⁸⁸

Migrants not only facilitate working relationships in Local 1010, but also in other locals with Mexican sister plants. Migrants have been sent to Mexico to help with establishing sister-plant cooperations in the first place. One second-generation local president explained about the beginning of his involvement in the Mineros solidarity, whereby he was sent to Mexico to support the establishment of relationships between locals of the autoparts-producing company Dana:

*We also went to some meetings where they had like sister plants, where they had some plants here and I believe it was Dana in Indiana, and they had a sister plant in Mexico. And they took a group from here, and we went to the plant and did a tour of the plant (...) and had a discussion with the local union that was there, on what was happening there and what was happening in the US and how they interact (...) even though they're making the same product, (...) how they're pitting each other against each other, or how things are working here, and they're trying to make them work over there, they were working out ideas to make them work in Mexico (...) when I have gone with them, many times I go, I assist in language barriers, one. And another is to sit, sit and have discussions with the workers, like at that time, we had the workers from... I think it was Dana.. it's so many years we've been doing all these things... and they were trying to make an alliance with them too. Try to, what works here and what works there, and what they could work on together to make them both work.*³⁸⁹

Hence, similar to the district-level Lázaro Cárdenas trips, at the level of sister plants, migrants allow for social interaction and discussions between Mineros and Steelworkers on their respective work and current developments at both sites, as well as how they can support each other.³⁹⁰ The visits to the Mineros' plants have hence given many members the opportunity to learn about the similarity of the work that they do, exchange experiences in their respective work contexts and discover common challenges and goals.

6.2.3 Developing personal cross-border relationships through migrants' language skills and knowledge of Mexican culture and politics

Besides facilitating practical solidarity involving the rank and file and level of locals, transnational migration has also led to the establishment of personal cross-border relationships between the two unions. In this section, I will show how migrants – through their language skills as well as their knowledge of Mexican culture, society and politics – developed personal relationships with the Mineros that not only constitute an immediate emotional connection with them, but also ensure regular cross-border communication and social interaction that

³⁸⁸ Interview with USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁸⁹ Interview with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.

³⁹⁰ Interview with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014; Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013.

lays the basis for an awareness of common situations and goals. I will first sketch out the character of these relationships and their content, as well as how they constitute an emotional connection and facilitate a cross-border information exchange (6.2.3.1), before subsequently discussing how migrants' language skills (6.2.3.2) and knowledge of Mexican culture, society and politics (6.2.3.3) facilitate their development.

6.2.3.1 Personal cross-border relationships: generating an emotional connection and facilitating a cross-border information exchange

All migrants involved in the solidarity work whom I interviewed had personal relationships with *Mineros* going beyond the work context directly related to the alliance. The relationships include members, staff and officers on both sides. Besides a number of cases where actually family relationships between *Mineros* and *Steelworkers* exist,³⁹¹ in most cases the starting point for establishing these relationships is the yearly visit to Lázaro Cárdenas, where they meet the *Mineros* for the first time and with whom they maintain regular exchange after returning home. The relationships involve strong confidence and personal bonds, as the migrant assistant to the district director explained:

*You build relationships once you're there. (...) I call them once every other week, we talk, (...) you build a friendship with them. You know? You invite them over here, they come over here, after the meetings, and then we go out and we got to entertain them. 'Cause that's the way they take care of us. And... you build strong confidence. And a lot of the... we always take like five translators for the regular local people, and they end up (...) in the evening you get so close to them, and then we're drinking, I couldn't drink here, but when I go over there, (...) I always drink tequila and... (...) And there is countless of guys over here that email and... You gotta remember, the *Mineros* are kind of like steelworkers from East Chicago that just happen to live in Mexico. (...) Even after I retire, I might call them, ey, what are you doing, you've done that and... Hey, come over here (...) you know... just like... you build bonds³⁹²*

³⁹¹ Some steelworkers in the district have family relationships to *Mineros*. During the visits to Mexico, the *Steelworkers* have repeatedly met either relatives of USW members or return migrants who had been members of District 7 during their time in the US (interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014). District director Jim Robinson explained about some of these occasions: "one year we went down there, we took a tour in the mill, and we stopped (...) to use the washrooms. (...) we went in, and a guy met his uncle. (...) and he didn't know (...) and we've had that a bunch of times. another time... they built a monument to the two guys, a memorial monument to the two guys, right at the entrance to the mill. the first time we went down there (...) they took us to the monument, and... I am from Local 1010, and lot of guys had their Local 1010 shirts on, and guy walked over, and started saying in English, are you guys from Local 1010?, and it turned out, he was working in the mill, he was a *Minero*, but he had lived in East Chicago and worked.. and been a member of Local 1010" (interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014).

³⁹² Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

The frequency with which they communicate with their friends in Mexico varies from once a month to once every other week, or even more frequently.³⁹³ Some communication takes place on the phone; however, most of it takes place via email and especially social networks, particularly Facebook.³⁹⁴ At first sight, communicating via email and Facebook might not seem to be a very close way of relating to each other. However, the migrants who I interviewed stressed that they indeed view the Mineros that they communicate with as friends. Usually, it is a combination of meeting in person during the regular visits to Mexico and staying in touch during the rest of the time via Facebook – and meeting again during the trip in the following year – that these friendships rest on. They usually meet the Mineros’ families during the trips to Mexico, and their communication both there and in the aftermath includes a variety of personal matters. For instance, some migrants explained that after returning to the US both sides frequently post pictures and information on happenings in their daily lives, such as photos of their families, their vacation or some neighbors shoveling snow off their roofs, through which they take part in each others’ lives, doing a “we’re there but we’re not there type thing”.³⁹⁵ The relationships also entail favors that they make for each other. The Mineros usually bring their friends in the US all kinds of gifts from Mexico when visiting, while the steelworkers regularly do the Mineros favors such as bringing them items that are difficult to obtain or more expensive in Mexico, such as mobile phones or other technical gadget; moreover, the Steelworkers help the Mineros to find relatives living in the US that they have not seen for many years.³⁹⁶ In this vein, a second-generation migrant member explained that despite the distance, he views the Mineros as friends, and that he views Facebook as a very helpful tool in establishing friendships as it allows to keep up to date on:

I consider them friends, you know... I mean, we're not friends like I'd see them every day obviously, but... the way I connect with them I see them like friends. (...) I think Facebook helps out in international friendships, like... I mean, if you become friends on Facebook you can see pictures of what I'm doing (...) and the same with them, they'll show a picture, maybe him and his family, or... all the guys that I hung out with out there, they're in the picture doing something else so, I'll write something, like, hey, you know, it's been a while, how've you guys been, obviously in Spanish. (...) And then they'll write back... we kind of do that, you know, just... kind of like we're there but we're not there type of thing, just writing

³⁹³ Interviews with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014; personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

³⁹⁴ Interviews with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

³⁹⁵ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

³⁹⁶ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

*each other. And... that's how it started really, it's just, if I post something, they'll write something, or if they post something, I'll write something*³⁹⁷

Similarly, one first-generation migrant member explained that he communicates with Mineros in different cities and at different levels both via Facebook and on the phone, and that he considers these relationships to be friendships:

*I have relationships with ... the workers in Lázaro Cárdenas, with the workers here in Hidalgo, in the Mineros national Executive Committee, so almost with everybody, say on the phone, via Facebook, yes, always... they post an article, I always comment.. no, no, I have a relationship with them of friendship, right? (...) All of a sudden, they call me from Mexico, right? The workers, we have this relationship of, can you bring me this? Can you bring me a phone? Can you.. Sure, sure. Yes, I am very connected with them, constantly.*³⁹⁸

Clearly, these relationships constitute an immediate personal and emotional basis for the solidarity work, constituting the “emotional experience” that is necessary to move people “to take actions which they have been taught all of their lives are not appropriate” (Yates 1998, 37, see chapter 2.1). They make the Mineros solidarity in the district “personal”, the district director explained, as it is not – in contrast to that in the rest of the union and that with other countries – based on stories and videos or having met Mineros in person during visits:

*The difference is that the relationship with the workers in Liberia, for almost everybody in the union except a handful of people, is based on stories and videos they have seen. The relationship with the Mineros (...), for a lot of the people in the union (...), is based on having met some people when they come here. And... because we've done a lot to support them, they've heard the stories. But in District 7 and in some other places, the relationship with the Mineros, for a lot of people, not just the International staff and leadership, the relationship with the Mineros is personal. We have a whole... District 7 has a big Spanish-speaking membership in northwest Indiana and Chicago. And we have all kinds of people who are friends on Facebook with people they met when we go down there every year. Because they speak Spanish and so... you know. They are on Facebook all the time, there is this big network of Spanish-speaking Steelworkers and Mineros in Lázaro Cárdenas.*³⁹⁹

Beyond this personal and immediate emotional element, most importantly, the relationships ensure regular communication and interaction. A constant cross-border exchange of information takes place on both directly work and union-related matters and on broader social and political topics, which lays the basis for a constant awareness of common situations, challenges and goals.

The topics that migrants communicated about with the Mineros encompassed a broad variety of issues currently concerning the other side, ranging from

³⁹⁷ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

³⁹⁸ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

³⁹⁹ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

countless work and union-related issues to broader social and political developments affecting them.⁴⁰⁰ Among others, they exchange information on their respective working conditions, the concrete work that they do in their plants, their pay and benefits, as well as sending each other pictures of their work sites, as one second-generation migrant explained:

well they ask me too, you know, how does it work in your plant, you know, what kind of benefits, and you know, (...) by pictures they showed us the environment, their working conditions, their pay, other things they had, that came better, into better negotiation, you know, they came in, they saw their raises, they saw their voice getting heard, they saw their working conditions better...⁴⁰¹

Moreover, workplace safety is an important topic in the communication. The situation is much worse in Mexico than the US and the union is trying to promote improvements in Mexico. Hence, a first-generation migrant explained that recently the most important topic in his conversations with the Mineros is the current safety situation in Mexico, including accidents:

Lately, the one thing I've noticed we have been talking quite a bit about, is safety. Up here, we're in leaps and bounds ahead in safety in the workplace. Down in Mexico, no. They're lacking. They're making improvements. They're doing a better job. (...) And right now, that's what a lot of the companies stress, safety is our number one goal. Now we're trying to push that down there. Sometimes you just hear some of the accidents, and you say, why?⁴⁰²

In discussing topics like union politics and contract negotiations, they become aware of many of the similarities that they face in terms of employer strategies.⁴⁰³ As one first-generation migrant explained about the topics that he communicates about with his Mineros friends, at the beginning they were mainly talking about the weather, but they then proceeded to union business such as contract negotiations and the employer strategies that both sides face:

That's how we started. For instance, he saw that picture (of my neighbor shoveling snow off his roof that I had posted on Facebook) and says, oh good that I'm not up there. Then, you know, I sent him a message saying, how have you been, how is it going? And.... one thing we always have in common is... cause that guy, he is part of the negotiating team and so am I where I work at,... and he's like, doing any negotiations this year? I go, yeah, obviously, we got some in the end of February this year. So, he say, oh, get ready, cause this and that, this and that... we relate a lot on that. 'Cause you feel a lot of the things, a lot of the tactics that companies use here, they do the same thing down there. It's no different

⁴⁰⁰ Interviews with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

⁴⁰² Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

⁴⁰³ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

*there. They're trying to see what they can get away with, and what they cant, and just like us. Trying to see what we can get and what we cant.*⁴⁰⁴

With workers on both sides frequently being employed by the same companies, or companies moving from one side of the border to the other, such communication reveals the immediate connections between workers and allows for exchanging advice on dealing with employers:

*Once in a while, my friends from down there, they'll say, hey man, I see one of your companies is moving out here, or... we've had some guys that have some companies out there, come to our local meetings and you know, ask for advice on this and that. It's always something like that.*⁴⁰⁵

Beyond the immediate work-related context, general socioeconomic and political developments are also discussed, such as the attempts of Mexican official unions to discredit or weaken the Mineros, as well as the drug war and corruption in Mexico. An important topic that was much discussed while I was conducting the research was the escalating violence and corruption in the context of the drug war and its consequences for the Mineros. For instance, one second-generation migrant staff person of one local explained that they talk about a series of topics such as the government coming after the Cananea Mineros leaders, work safety issues and kidnapping:

*I get to see and know how people are and how they're doing. We still get information on a lot of the... especially of the leaders, they're coming after them. (...) There was a time when we were discussing safety, because that was a big issue for both of us, for both sides. (...) They would give us the latest, and what was happening with the leaders, and you know, that the struggle was still there, and they were still fighting and (...) There was a lot of kidnapping (...) they were not only kidnapping the leaders, but the families, and holding them to ransom which is a really big thing right now in Mexico. And so they would tell us, you know, where they were at as far as... had they gotten the individual back...*⁴⁰⁶

Similarly, another second-generation migrant explained that she had recently spoken much with her Mineros friends about the drug cartels' attempt to infiltrate the Mineros:

With the Mineros, I usually get some of this (information) from the guys themselves (...) with the cartels and the corruption, (...) last time I heard, they're pretty hit with, you know, cartels trying to get into the Mineros, and trying to bribe them, you know, (...) they actually kidnapped one of the guys. (...) I'm friends with his daughter in Mexico. (...) she (was) texting me (...) she said, I need Napoleón, (and) I said, wow, I don't have Napoleón's number (...) the only one who has access is Jim, you know. (...) Then she told me, my dad is missing (...), I need to get a hold of the Steelworkers. So I referred it to Jim, and (told) Jim (...)

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with the financial secretary, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

he was being kidnapped. (...) It was cartels, you know, trying to kill him. I think this was the second time, they had kidnapped his wife, and they were to the point, he better move out of there cause they are going to do it again. Extortion, you know. (...) From what I hear from the Mineros and stuff, there've been threats of the cartels trying to get in there (...). I was talking to co-workers over there, like in pharmacies (...) it was man (...) here, we have to pay, we call it a "mordida", it's like a fee to the cartels (...). And in the police across the street, they also had to pay them. (Otherwise) you see a body next door, the next day.⁴⁰⁷

These migrants were hence usually well informed on the Mineros' current situations and issues coming up regarding work and union business. Clearly, being kept up to date first hand by their friends on topics affecting them – whether work safety and working conditions, the union's situation and its activities or the government's and cartels' attacks against its leaders – enhances the understanding of the partners' situation and challenges faced, as well as the linking to one's own issues. Indeed, the continuous exchange on work-related issues and employer strategies makes them time and again realize that they face many similar situations and share challenges and goals.

Being aware of the developments and challenges facing the Mineros connects the alliance to their everyday union work. It is not some remote union officials' solidarity work, but rather it is linked to their own daily practice, has an everyday relevance and they feel responsible for it. This was expressed by one first-generation migrant who explained that through staying in touch with the Mineros, he has come to a profound understanding of the confusing developments taking place in Mexico, which impedes him from "disconnecting" from them, and he strongly feels responsible for them:

now I do (understand). Now I know exactly what they're saying. And the only reason that is because obviously I know... either reading the websites or something like that, or.. (talking to them), what's going on at that time over there, you know how is it going, say hi to somebody and they're like, if it wasn't for this guy, I'd be ok. You know, something like that. You just gotta... you go there and you can't disconnect, or at least for me, you can't disconnect after you left. You stay in touch, so... you're up to (...) next time you go, if you go, or just.. know what's going on (the Mineros solidarity) is not just about a trip, going down there and enjoy yourself and relax. (...) I see it that way, keep in touch, cause you never know, you never know, when you say something or do something, that helps them out in the long run. Whether it's minimal or if it's great, or if it might save their life.⁴⁰⁸

It is exclusively migrants who establish such relationships.⁴⁰⁹ For the non-migrants who participate in the visits to Mexico, the relationship with the

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014; interview with the Vice Chair, Women of Steel, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

Mineros is generally limited to the duration of their stay in Mexico. The crucial factor allowing migrants to establish and maintain these personal relationships is their cultural skills: most importantly, migrants' Spanish proficiency and secondly their familiarity with Mexican culture and – in some cases – politics and society, allow them to easier relate to the Mineros.

6.2.3.2 Migrants' language skills

Clearly, the single most important factor is migrants' language skills, as they allow for communication to take place in the first place. As the communication takes place in Spanish, migrants are at a considerable advantage compared to their non-migrant colleagues who – with few exceptions – do not speak Spanish.⁴¹⁰ While not all migrants – particularly of the second generation – speak Spanish as fluently as they speak English (some do, however), their ability to speak it at all makes it significantly easier to relate to the Mineros during their visits to Mexico. Indeed, this evidently allows them to “figure out what is going on down there a lot faster by being able to have that direct conversations”, as USW International Affairs Director Ben Davis stated.⁴¹¹

Migrants' language skills take the communication with the Mineros out of the official program of the solidarity work and bring it to a personal level, as they allow them to easily communicate with them about topics not directly related to the solidarity work, which makes it significantly easier for them to relate to the Mineros on a personal level. As one second-generation migrant explained, it is thus usually migrants who “hang out” with the Mineros in Lázaro Cárdenas:

*(After the official part) they'll take us out to eat, (...) and then after that we just do whatever (...). I'd still hang out with those guys, or we'll go somewhere else, or... the three of us that I told you that were close to them, they'll come to our hotel and stuff, we had a little bar in our hotel, we would just hang out there (...) at that time it was me, Mario (...), and Eddie (...), who all spoke Spanish.*⁴¹²

Clearly, thanks to the district director's emphasis on ensuring translation in the informal parts of the trip, non-migrants also communicate with the Mineros, either through translators or with the help of tequila: the “international language” that makes verbal communication secondary, as one of the

⁴¹⁰ Interviews with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014; USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014; personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014; financial secretary, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014, Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

⁴¹¹ Interview with Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.

⁴¹² Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

interviewed explained.⁴¹³ Nevertheless, such communication is evidently much more complicated and difficult to maintain. The need to recur to a translator for asking questions about families and other personal matters is a considerable hurdle, making communication a dragging conversation rather than a lively chat. It is thus unsurprising that essentially only migrants communicate with Mineros about families and other personal topics. In this vein, one second-generation migrant who himself talks a lot to the Mineros stressed non-migrants' difficulties in communicating:

(O)ut of the twenty of us of our local (that went to Lázaro Cárdenas), I'd say probably five or six spoke Spanish. so that's a good majority that didn't. you know. so that's why (the local's Mexican-origin contract coordinator) had us (...) just to kind of translate (...) but it's just hard, like I said, cause, it's just... as much as they want to try to talk, you just, it's hard cause you have to translate it, and maybe people weren't wanting to do that, I don't know.⁴¹⁴

Therefore, while the non-migrants understand the need to cooperate with the Mineros, he went on to explain that they are unable to communicate with them:

I know they understand that we have to get with these people, so that they don't get screwed and we don't get screwed. They understand that part and I know they'll be there to fight if they had to. But as far as communicating with them, they can't, because they don't speak Spanish. And I know one guy last year said, I'm gonna learn Spanish, you know. I don't know if he has, but... I know he felt, you just feel like you're missing out. They see me talking to these guys all night, they're like, you know, I feel bad cause I can't talk to them, and I got to sit here in this corner by myself.⁴¹⁵

However, migrants' advantage extends beyond the ability to communicate at all: their familiarity with the language allows for communication that is significantly more direct and less formal than the communication through interpreters. As one migrant explained, his language skills put him at a considerable advantage compared with his non-migrant colleagues:

It is a little different because I, you know, I can fit right in, because if they start joking around, or whatever, I got it. And even Jim sometimes, he speaks Spanish, and he understands, most of it, but if you're joking around, it's a little different, and he misses a lot of parts when they're joking around. I don't. So I can relate a lot easier with them. (...) I'm there, you know? (lough) cause I was born there and I was raised there, I went to school there and stuff, so... so yeah, it's a little easier for me⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Interview with the personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

⁴¹⁵ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

Particularly in the case of first-generation migrants, the ability to communicate colloquially and with ease in Spanish makes the Mexican interlocutors feel more comfortable than when talking to non-migrants; however, also one second-generation migrant explained that she felt that the Mineros felt more comfortable talking to her than to non-migrants.⁴¹⁷ As one first-generation migrant explained, the fact that he can speak Spanish exactly as the Mexican colleagues makes them feel much more comfortable:

In a conversation with a Mexican worker, I believe, if I don't want him to, he does not even notice that I am from the US. I can talk to him in Spanish without using a word in English, and without showing what I am today. I do believe that what makes a difference is the way of speaking. That is definitely different. Because (...) Jim (Robinson), if he speaks to you in Spanish, and he can get along in Spanish (...), he can communicate. But you know? People aren't comfortable when he is speaking, so they don't get it. So, in that regard, it helps me (...) and (...) they get involved in your conversation because you are having it as if you were just one of them. (...) I believe, for them, the guys in Mexico (it is easier to talk to me than to the leadership), too, because... like, they wanna relate certain messages to Jim or to the Steelworkers, or one of our members or one of our representatives that go over there, and I think they feel comfortable relating their message to me more than relating it to (the personal assistant of the district director) or somebody that (does not speak Spanish as well)⁴¹⁸

Evidently, such colloquial communication where the partners feel comfortable makes it considerably easier to relate to each other. While this level of Spanish proficiency is limited to a few persons and most second-generation migrants probably do not reach this level of colloquial language, the informal way of communicating with the Mineros was also stressed by some second-generation migrants. The second-generation assistant to the district director explained that the Mineros communicate differently with him and other migrants compared with non-migrants:

When me and (name of a migrant member) talk with them... when Jim talks and Napoleón talk, it's this formal... attitude. When I talk to them, we jive, too, you know. And with (the migrant member), cause we... it's a whole different level of discussion. Now, when Javier (Zuñiga, Los Mineros executive board member) talks with Jim, it's formal. (And when I talk) with Javier, it's 'órale mi gordo', you know that stuff like that, yeah.⁴¹⁹

Crucially, the language barrier is an even greater impediment for *maintaining* contact after returning: communication at distance via social media, email or the phone is essentially verbal, which renders it extremely difficult without speaking the same language or being able to recur to translators. This is fundamental in explaining why exclusively migrant-origin members maintain relationships to

⁴¹⁷ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

⁴¹⁸ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

⁴¹⁹ Interview with the personal assistant to the district director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.

Mineros after returning from Lázaro Cárdenas. Jim Robinson explained the problem of non-migrants for maintaining friendships at a distance:

I've made some pretty good friends, working with the Mineros. Well, it's hindered because of... I can stumble around in Spanish, (understand) what's going on, and I can do fine in restaurants and bars (...) you know, I get by. But for really good communication, I'm not that fluent. (...) Of the people in District 7 who don't speak Spanish who go (to the trips to Lázaro), it's less of a... they're making (...) personal connections, but it's not on that friendship level, it's more of a... what I get from people is that when we do this, what they get is... 'they're just like me. I'm just like them'. You know, I mean, people who don't speak Spanish aren't gonna get home and learn Spanish so they can go on Facebook.⁴²⁰

6.2.3.3 Knowledge of Mexican culture, society, and politics

However, it is not only migrants' Spanish proficiency that allows them to build friendships with the Mineros; moreover, other cultural skills and knowledge that migrants dispose of make it easier to relate to the Mineros, particularly their familiarity with Mexico and Mexican culture, as well as – in some cases – their knowledge of Mexican politics and society.

On the one hand, these skills lower the initial barrier when meeting the Mineros. Some migrants stressed that their background constituted an immediate point of connection with the Mineros that helped overcome initial reservations: Their Mexican background provided an immediate point of reference in the initial communication with the Mineros and constituted a common topic that made the conversation easier.⁴²¹ One second-generation migrant explained that besides his language skills, the fact that his parents are from Mexico made the Mineros relate differently to him than to non-migrant Steelworkers. When they asked him why he could speak Spanish, he explained that he grew up in a Spanish-speaking household and that “when we were little, we had to speak Spanish (...) just to keep the bilingual don't-forget-where-you-come-from kind of thing”⁴²². He explained that the fact that his family is from Mexico “just kind of broke the ice with that topic, and then we just started talking and then went on from there”⁴²³. Clearly, migrants are familiar with Mexican culture, know the country and its people, as most of them grew up in a family network where Mexican habits and traditions were upheld, and many repeatedly travel to Mexico, or did so in the past. One second-generation migrant explained:

⁴²⁰ Interview with Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.

⁴²¹ Interviews with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

⁴²² Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

⁴²³ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

*I knew what to expect, you know... (...) People, people-wise. I was able to go out by myself, (...) So I wasn't afraid, as opposed to somebody else that didn't have that advantage, needed to go with somebody else and... I think that was an advantage.*⁴²⁴

On the other hand, beyond their background “breaking the ice”, migrants have a knowledge of Mexico that makes establishing relationships easier, as it facilitates the communication described above. They have a basic understanding of Mexican society and politics and are – in many (though surely not all) cases – more or less up to date on current developments in the country. Clearly, most of those with whom I spoke have a general knowledge of Mexican society and politics and many of recent social and political developments. This was emphasized by the president of the ArcelorMittal Local 1010, who said that particularly the younger ones have a better understanding of conditions in Mexico:

*Definitely (...) there is a closer connection, better understanding on the conditions and the country and the government. (...) I'm talking about the younger ones (who) have a better insight of... of what is going on as far as the country... now, whereas you're right, some of the older ones don't (...). but (...) we try to take the younger ones (...) they grew up here, right. And they heard a lot from their parents.*⁴²⁵

Migrants' knowledge that I found in the interviews extended to a broad variety of areas, such as social conditions in Mexico, current political and social developments such as the drug war, the security situation or the debate over the Mexican labor law reform, the corrupted nature of much of Mexican politics and media and their involvement with the drug cartels, as well as the involvement of most labor unions with government and companies. They have this knowledge on political and social issues in Mexico through both their own background in Mexico (in the case of first-generation migrants) and visits to Mexico, as well as through watching the Mexican news and/or reading Mexican newspapers and talking to families and friends. Particularly in the case of second-generation migrants, it is often their US-based migrant networks that they receive their information from.⁴²⁶ One second-generation migrant emphasized the role of his personal network of migrants in the US as a source of information, given the media's involvement with politics and the cartels:

Friends that I've (...) over there (...), they've been involved in politics there, small local politics... and you know, the discussions that go on, you know, not everything's said over there, especially with news, (...) and sometimes, some of the information is not given out to people (...) (But) I have a lot friends that are from Mexico, so ... we talk and, or they go over there and... they have family that

⁴²⁴ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

⁴²⁵ Interview with USW Local 1010 president, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

⁴²⁶ Interview with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.

*still live there, they come back with information, and (...) you start looking at things (...) you have to be a little skeptical about what's going on*⁴²⁷

To begin with, migrants are naturally aware of the social conditions and widespread poverty in Mexico. Even if they have not – as most first-generation migrants – experienced them themselves before migrating, they usually know the conditions from visits to relatives or through their parents' narrations, and some through their engagement in non-profit or charity organizations supporting social projects in Mexico. Indeed, most migrants also have at least a basic understanding of Mexican politics. One second-generation migrant explained that she learned about Mexican politics through her parents and the way in which she was raised:

*you know, I was, my parents are Mexican, (...) I was raised here, and parts in Mexico, and that's how I understand a little bit about how their political system works over there, you know, and what affects them affects us...(...) they... taught me, I mean, they came here as immigrants, (...) my dad, he was in labor and stuff, (...) He will read the newspapers about Mexico's politics (...) I have cousins over there, they're single moms. You have no option, you know, in certain areas, keep the kids, stay at home, and that's it. (...) There is no such things like in America, I'm getting my own apartment, I get welfare if I can't work. Over there, it's just not that many aids that the government will give you, you're screwed, you stay at home and deal with it.*⁴²⁸

Clearly, migrants' background knowledge comprises many of the recurrent topics in the communication with the Mineros, providing the basis for regular communication on the topics described above. Particularly the drug war, government corruption and the media's involvement with politics and the cartels are topics that migrants keep themselves up to date on through following the news and reading newspapers, as well as through their migrant networks. One second-generation migrant explained that he keeps informed on the drug war and security situation through talking to his father, watching Mexican news and visiting Mexico:

*My family lives out there, so my dad talks to my cousins on a regular basis, and... They've experienced things (...) it was just the point of what's going on out there, you know. (...) The government there is just... It's totally changed. When I was little, you could walk the streets without to worry about that, now, it's... (...) And then obviously (...) he watches the news in Mexico, he watches Spanish channels, and he is very updated, he'll tell me, or if I'm over there, visiting, you know, I'll watch them with him, so you can become aware of what's going on over there*⁴²⁹

As government corruption and its involvement with the drug cartels is a crucial topic for the Mineros, many migrants followed these issues closely. One second-

⁴²⁷ Interview with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.

⁴²⁸ Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.

⁴²⁹ Interview with rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.

generation president of a local explained that he had much information on the 2006 mine disaster in Pasta de Conchos from watching the news and talking to his mother:

It's very very limited what they were showing here (on the mine disaster). (...) And there was information on the news of what was happening, but it was kind of... I don't know if you know politics in Mexico, they really don't tell you what's going on over there. (...) I at times watch the Spanish news, in the afternoon, and then watch the local news at night. So I would keep up to date what's going on. (And my mom, (I) speak to her, she's like, ey, did you hear what happened over there, bla bla bla? (...) There was information that I was seeing in the news, (...) the government switched the information around to cover the eyes of the people, you know, so that these allegations would be pursued as what the government was saying. Which I understood, because I had gone to Mexico several years before as a kid, and I understood, you know, what the politics are over there⁴³⁰

In some cases, migrants had known about the Mineros even before getting involved in the solidarity work. Particularly after the Pasta de Conchos mine collapse and the forced exile of Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, which was a major topic in Mexico, some of them had followed the Mineros' story in the news.⁴³¹ Indeed, many of them continue to do so, keeping themselves informed on developments such as the Gómez Urrutia's exile or current Mineros' campaigns and negotiations, both through the news and by following the Mineros' websites. Furthermore, in many cases, migrants also have a general understanding of the corrupted nature of Mexican official unions. While clearly their background does not lead to a particular knowledge on the Mexican labor movement or the industrial relations system, they usually have at least an awareness of the problematic nature of Mexican labor relations and unions. This was expressed by one first-generation migrant who explained that unions are different for people in Mexico than in the US:

The union for them is a little different than what it is for us (...), because the government is corrupted, the companies are, the government (...) companies, and they are always (doing) things to make things hard for them⁴³²

Indeed, this background knowledge of political and social issues in Mexico as well as the familiarity with its culture and “how things work” play a crucial role in establishing personal relationships to the Mineros. They are an important factor in explaining migrants' ease in establishing friendships to the Mineros, as well as maintaining them over time. They constitute what Zoll (1991, 395) has called “pre-trust” (“Vorvertrauen”), an existing “trust base” or leap of faith that he sees everyday communication to be based on and that develops in shared “life-worlds” (“Lebenswelten”): “We know that the other person knows the

⁴³⁰ Interview with USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.

⁴³¹ Interviews with rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014; USW Local 7717 president, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.

⁴³² Interview with volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014, own translation.

same contexts, traditions, and information that we have. Communication with him does not have to start from scratch, he ‘is in the know’. On the basis of the ‘pre-trust’ that he shows to me, the communication can develop; not everything has to be said, we can quickly get to the point. When this ‘pre-trust’ lacks, however, it needs to be worked out through communication” (own translation).

In this sense, while migrants’ familiarity with Mexican culture makes moving around and the initial establishing of contact easier when first meeting the *Mineros*, it is their background knowledge and their following of current developments in Mexico that makes conversations easier content-wise. It allows for the above-described constant, low-threshold communication with the *Mineros* on a variety of social, political and union-related issues. Their knowledge on political and social issues extending beyond those accessible to the average person in the US makes easy communication possible during the visits to Lázaro Cárdenas, as well as making the continued communication on these developments possible after their return: it enables a constant exchange on issues like the drug war, the cartels’ infiltration attempts or government attacks on the labor movement, based on a common basis of knowledge in which not everything has to be explained at length from the beginning. Having a general understanding of the corrupted nature of official Mexican unionism or knowing of the authorities’ and media’s involvement with the drug cartels evidently makes a communication on these topics easier, as it enhances migrants’ understanding of the developments affecting the *Mineros*, and the topics that the latter talk about. The general understanding of the situation in Mexico makes it easier for them to situate the information that they receive from the *Mineros* on issues such as the cartels’ and the government’s attack on them, the battles between the *Mineros* and CTM unions or the latest of government corruption, as well as having a discussion about these topics.

Furthermore, it allows for communication based on making reference to issues known to all concerned: most crucially, much of the communication that migrants have with the *Mineros* after returning to the US is based on making reference to common knowledge on current developments, often comprising sharing information by emailing each other newspaper articles and reports, as well as commenting on issues that the other side sends, mentions or posts in social networks. In this way, an easy and constant information exchange across distance and time takes place on issues such as political party debates, the drug war or the militias in Michoacán, with both sides keeping the other informed about their own situation.⁴³³ The director of one subdistrict explained this way of communicating back and forth on current developments between the migrants and their *Mineros* friends, in which they often only refer to newspaper articles or posts on Facebook:

⁴³³ Interviews with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014; volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014; rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.

Marta is always contacting, always emailing the..., (Mexican newspaper) La Jornada from around that area where the Mineros are at. (...) you know, somebody emails, or somebody puts, sends her a Facebook thing what's going on or what's happening. (...) Just recently Jerónimo sends to me, sends me an email, I don't know if you saw what's going on in Mexico right now, (...) there's been militias in Michoacán. Michoacán, different towns are so upset at the government, they don't do anything about it, so they're putting their own together. So (Jerónimo) sends to me a video one of the guys sent him in Lázaro Cárdenas, where they had the federal troops with all the trucks and everything, you know, coming into Lázaro Cárdenas⁴³⁴

As the second-generation migrant contract coordinator of Local 1010 explained, the Mexican counterparts in Lázaro Cárdenas usually simply send him newspaper articles on topics such as the building of militias in the state of Michoacán, and they then follow the issue on the internet:

We usually get... through the Internet, we get information from some of the guys over there. They'll send it to us (...) emails with (newspaper articles)... for example, we got some on the vigilante stuff going on there. (...) We'll pick it up from the Internet⁴³⁵

6.3 Summary: overcoming barriers to a perceived community: promoting a practical solidarity at the district and local level and building personal relationships through migrants' cultural skills

I have argued in this chapter that migrants have contributed to overcoming the usual obstacles to a perceived community of fate among workers in two ways.

First, they helped to realize a practical solidarity at the level of districts and locals, thereby helping to overcome the notorious lack of a concrete solidarity that involves rank-and-file members and usually precludes them from experiencing solidarity and collective action in practice and from communicating with the partners abroad. While the driving force behind it was the former district director, migrants contributed to making the solidarity in this USW district a solidarity comprising numerous concrete activities in support of – or jointly with – the Mineros, and that regularly involves members as well as locals. They have thus laid the basis for members' experiencing of solidarity in practice, collective action with the Mineros and interaction with them, which constitute the basis for experiencing collective strength, generating narrative resources, a collective framing of situations and managing differences.

Second, migrants developed personal cross-border relationships with the Mexican partners, the kind of social interaction *par excellence* in enabling an exchange on similarities and differences as well as discovering commonalities. Many migrants established friendships with Mineros, communicating regularly

⁴³⁴ Interview with Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014. Original names in the quote were replaced with fictitious ones.

⁴³⁵ Interview with contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.

with them via social networks, email or the phone on a variety of issues. Such relationships not only constitute an immediately emotional foundation for the solidarity work, but also ensure a continuous cross-border exchange of information and perspectives on work- and union-related as well as broader social and political topics, thereby promoting a constant awareness of commonalities and a framing of issues in collective terms, among migrants and Mineros.

Migrants have done so mainly through their cultural skills. While their transnational ways of belonging played some role in migrants' support of the solidarity work, constituted a motivating factor for some of them and strengthened their identification with the Mineros in some cases, they did not – in contrast to the other case study – play a decisive role in most migrants' engagement in the solidarity work, mainly because most migrants here are second generation and due to the different character of Mexican migration, which is generally not a political migration as the Salvadoran migration; furthermore, most Mexican migrants have no or negative previous labor union experiences. In this case, thus it was mainly migrants' cultural skills that were crucial in promoting practical solidarity and developing personal relationships.

On the one hand, their language skills and their knowledge of Mexican culture and politics practically facilitate conducting concrete solidarity activities and communication with the Mexican partners at the levels of the district and locals, thereby making practical solidarity possible that members can participate in. It is usually migrants who are in charge of the communication with the Mineros, as their language skills allow for regular and direct cross-border communication and information exchange in Spanish. Furthermore, it is migrants who conduct concrete activities in Mexico such as supporting the Mineros in organizing campaigns or with trainings. Migrants also act as translators in activities bringing workers of both sides together, hence facilitating an exchange on work- and union-related as well as personal issues. Given their familiarity with Mexico, migrants also act as 'cultural translators' for non-migrant colleagues.

On the other hand, migrants' Spanish proficiency and their knowledge of Mexican culture, society and politics make developing personal relationships possible, as they make it easier for them to initially relate to the Mineros and – importantly – enable easy, direct and informal communication with them, which builds on a common knowledge base on political and social developments in Mexico and in which not everything has to be explained from the beginning. Along with their language skills, this makes it possible to have continuous communication at a distance and over time, which is frequently based on simply making reference to current developments through newspaper articles or posts on social media.

7 Discussion: reflections on the value of transnational migration (research) for international labor solidarity (theory) and needs for future research

The starting point of this thesis has been a striking disconnect between two strands of literature: international labor solidarity and transnational migration research. Despite the apparent impact that transnational migration today has on countless areas of human life and societies, the debate on transnational migration has barely been dealt with in international labor solidarity research, which to date has neglected transnational migration as a potentially significant factor. Although most migrants are workers, labor movement scholars have rarely dealt with *transnational* migration (albeit with migrants to some degree), and even less so with the impact that it has on unions. On the other hand, transnational migration research has hardly focused on labor unions – let alone unions' international solidarity work – as an entity of social life upon which transnational migration can have an important impact.

This investigation has started out by showing that bringing together international labor solidarity theory with findings from transnational migration research is highly fruitful in a context of increasingly migrant union memberships. As labor unions around the world struggle to realize significant cross-border solidarity vis-à-vis an increasingly transnational capital, my point of departure was the assumption that some of the phenomena highlighted by transnational migration research could play an important role in – and potentially help overcome some of the problems of – international labor solidarity: transnational migration research has shown that migrants' transnational ties, practices and identities, as well as the transnational social spaces that they form, have social, political, economic and cultural impacts on individuals, organizations and institutions in host and home societies.

This thesis' research object was the role that transnational migration plays in international labor solidarity. Understanding this role necessitates a perspective on international labor solidarity informed by transnational migration research, i.e. an extension of the research focus beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. This approach implied taking the transnational social spaces into account that migrant union members and staff persons are involved in when analyzing unions' international solidarity work. More concretely, it meant focusing on migrants' transnational ties, practices and identities, as well as the role that they play in their unions' international work. This was achieved by empirically conducting exploratory research of two US labor unions and their international solidarity work with their migrant members' countries of origin.

In bringing together findings from international labor solidarity and transnational migration research, the thesis contributes to closing gaps in both labor movement research and transnational migration research.

In the realm of labor movement research, I contributed to closing the blind spot that migrants' transnational connections constitute in international labor solidarity research and – more broadly – in research dealing with labor unions. Labor relations research in general – and that on unions and international labor solidarity in particular – has a focus on nation-states. In contributing to an understanding of international solidarity in times of transnational migration, this thesis moves beyond this focus. Taking a perspective on international labor solidarity informed by transnational migration research underlines the role that transnational identities or ways of belonging, transnational ties and networks, social remittances and the skills and knowledge that migrants bring play in unions' international work. These concepts highlighted by transnational migration research have allowed me to carve out the wealth of knowledge, skills, attitudes, worldviews, identities, ties and networks that migrants bring along and which not only affect many areas of social life such as culture, economy and politics, but can also be highly relevant for labor unions: not only, but also, for their international solidarity work. I have shown how migrants' transnational relations, practices and identities influence unions and their work, their international relations and – in fact – even their identities and political orientation. The findings clearly demonstrate that unions can significantly benefit from their migrant members if they are willing to recognize the skills, ties and perceptions that migrants bring along.

These insights are relevant for theory development on unions and international labor solidarity: through the social remittances that they bring along, migrants can and *do* transform unions' understanding of solidarity both at home and across borders. As noted by other authors, migrants' background can transform unions' character and action repertoires. Moreover, they can help to overcome some of the critical obstacles to international labor solidarity discussed in the literature: in this case, the narrow understanding that prevails of international solidarity, the low priority it has in most unions' strategies, as well as the lack of a perceived community of fate, which is linked to the limited rank-and-file involvement and little practical character of most solidarity work. Where migrant members exist, an understanding of unions and their work as naturally being confined to the boundaries of nation-states – unaffected by migrants' transnational connections – is thus misconceived. Research focusing on international labor solidarity – and, in fact, on labor unions in general – needs to be broadened to include the increasingly transnational memberships and their transnational ties and identities. Widening the perspective is pivotal for international (labor) solidarity theory: clearly, any theoretical discussion of solidarity and its challenges today needs to take migrant memberships and their transnational ties into account.

At the same time, the thesis addresses blind spots in the realm of transnational migration studies. Unions are important organizations not only for migrants' struggles for their rights, but also for societies' social, political and economic

structure more generally. However, they – and, in fact, organizations more generally – have largely been neglected in transnational migration research to date. Furthermore, while in the transnational migration research strand dealing with work, employment and working conditions, labor unions are sometimes touched upon, this literature predominantly focuses on their contribution to migrants' struggle, rather than asking how transnational migration influences unions. This study takes a step towards closing this gap: in focusing on the interaction of transnational migration and labor unions, it sheds light on the effects that transnational migration has on important organizations in destination countries in the realm of labor relations. Given that the vast majority of migrants are workers who increasingly organize in labor unions, migrants' transnational connections are highly relevant for unions. This includes the transnational social spaces that migrants are embedded in, the transnational practices and relationships they engage in, the transnational identities that many of them have and the social remittances and cultural skills that they bring along. In highlighting how these can contribute to the gradual transformation of unions and particularly their international work, this study enhances our understanding of the interaction of transnational migration and important organizations in destination societies and their transnationalization.

7.1 Summary of the findings

This research has brought to light several ways in which transnational migration can influence unions' international solidarity work and particularly how it can help to overcome three obstacles to international solidarity: as laid out in chapter 5 and 6, in the cases researched, *first*, migrants and their transnational connections have contributed to overcoming the narrow understanding of (international) solidarity prevailing in most unions that views solidarity mostly as a strategic short- to medium-term collaboration for the attainment of a specific, mostly material, benefit; *second*, they have helped to overcome the minor importance of international solidarity in most' unions strategies, which are generally focused on national or local matters; and, *third*, they have promoted practical solidarity involving the rank and file as well as the establishment of personal cross-border relationships. The lack of both of the latter is a major pitfall in most instances of international labor solidarity, as it hinders the development of a “perceived community of fate” among the workers involved, which is necessary for stable relationships of solidarity based on mutual trust that endure beyond the attainment of short-term material goals or challenges like hostile employer tactics.

Four features highlighted by transnational migration research lie at the basis of this: 1.) migrants' transnational identities or ways of belonging, i.e. their sense of belonging and emotional attachment to more than one country, community or locality; 2.) their transnational ties and networks with individuals and organizations; 3.) the social remittances that they bring along, i.e. the ideas,

values, information and identities that are exchanged across borders; 4.) and their cultural skills and knowledge such as language skills and knowledge of the culture, customs and society of their country of origin. In what follows I discuss these features in both of these researched cases.

In the case of USWW laid out in chapter 5, Salvadoran migrants initiated a series of regular solidarity activities with their country of origin, promoting international solidarity activities where they did not previously exist: like most unions, particularly at the local and regional level, the USWW Local previously did not engage in much international work. Since Salvadorans have come to make up a significant share of the membership, they have initiated solidarity activities with the FMLN a regular element in the local's work. These activities include inviting FMLN representatives to speak at the union and conducting fundraising events for the FMLN's electoral campaigns take place regularly, or sending election observers from the local to El Salvador. Moreover, the local's president has attended the presidential inauguration of FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes. Clearly, the FMLN solidarity is not part of an official program or policy of the local (let alone of the national SEIU), and it is not a formal alliance planned for the long term. Nevertheless, the solidarity work clearly extends beyond some sporadic activities carried out by a few individuals for a small number of members: many of the activities are initiated and organized by union staff and even the former president himself, and they are broadly accepted by both the rest of the membership and the local leadership. Crucially, they are decided upon within the local's decision-making structures, and some activities are funded with union resources. Importantly, many staff persons and officers express an identification of the local with that work, as they speak of "the union" conducting the activities, and that these express "the vision of the union".

At the same time, the solidarity work expresses a broadened understanding of international solidarity and – in fact – unionism: as the FMLN is not a labor union but rather a former guerrilla organization and now political party in El Salvador, the solidarity with this organization extends beyond a narrow industrial cooperation based on a material benefit-oriented rationale. Solidarity with the FMLN does not promise any direct material gains for USWW members, and clearly not in the short term; rather, it shows a view of solidarity as based on a common struggle for social justice and against oppression of the socially deprived, or "el pueblo". This includes non-union social movements struggling for this goal, both at home and abroad. While the question of whether this has led to a transformation of non-migrant union members' and leaders' concept of international solidarity and unionism was not the focus of this research, it is remarkable that the regular activities arising out of such a view are widely accepted and even supported by the rest of the union.

In this case study, three of the four transnational features mentioned above that migrants bring along account for their promotion of the work with the FMLN, and this view of international solidarity:

First, it is Salvadorans' transnational ways of belonging that explain their strong commitment to the solidarity with the FMLN: in this case, a political way of belonging, i.e. an identification with the FMLN rather than with the country. While Salvadorans in USWW clearly show a strong emotional connection to El Salvador, their identification with the FMLN constitutes the basis of their commitment to promoting the solidarity work. Given the context of Salvadoran migration to the US that is predominated by the civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, as many Salvadorans in USWW had to flee their country, they had supported the FMLN in one way or another during the civil war, and lost relatives and friends through government violence. Hence, many identify as political refugees and continued to support the FMLN after their migration to the US. It is this commitment to and identification with the FMLN and its liberation struggle that motivates Salvadorans in USWW to promote the solidarity activities.

Second, migrants' transnational political networks lie at the basis of their ability to carry out this work. Salvadoran exiles in the US built a strong network of organizations providing support for the guerrilla in the 1980s, with its strongest base being in Los Angeles. Many of the Salvadorans in USWW are – or were previously – involved in these organizations, and many more are embedded in the broader Salvadoran transnational political community, which is de facto a FMLN community. Through these organizations and networks, they maintain contact to the FMLN in both Los Angeles and El Salvador, and continue to engage in political developments in El Salvador, with the FMLN election campaigns having replaced the guerrilla struggle since the mid-1990s. The relationships with the FMLN community provide Salvadorans in USWW with the necessary information and contacts to plan and carry out activities such as inviting FMLN representatives to the local or supporting them with fundraising events. These relationships make it possible to establish contact with partners in El Salvador and maintain Salvadorans in USWW informed on visits of FMLN candidates to Los Angeles or opportunities to send election observers. The FMLN and its support community for their part approach USWW with requests for conducting solidarity activities through these networks.

Third, the social remittances that Salvadorans bring along explain their understanding of international solidarity and unionism that lie at the heart of the promotion of a broader understanding of solidarity in the union. While their motivation to promote the FMLN solidarity is strongly connected to the personal and emotional ties that they have to their country and the organization, it also expresses their understanding of the labor movement: given their politicization and activism experiences in civil war in El Salvador, many of these migrants have an understanding of unionism and international solidarity that differs from

the narrow one prevailing in most US unions. As unions' struggle for worker rights in El Salvador could not be separated from the broader struggle against political oppression and military brutality, Salvadorans consider the struggle against economic oppression to be linked to that against political oppression, and the labor movement to be inherently connected to the struggle for social justice and ending oppression. This understanding extends to the international realm. Salvadorans within USWW view labor unions as connected to social justice movements abroad, whereby particularly many Salvadorans view their country's fate as being closely linked to other Central American countries' and – crucially – to US foreign and economic policies. At the same time, their politicization and previous activism experiences lie at the heart of Salvadorans' influence in the union and hence their ability to promote this work within the union, as it leads to most of the important rank-and-file leaders being Salvadorans, as are many staff persons: as many Salvadorans had been active politically in El Salvador, whether in political parties, labor unions or in supporting the guerrilla in one way or another, they “know how to organize politically” and are willing to stand up for their interests, which explains their influence on the union's decision-making.

In the case of USW District 7 laid out in chapter 6, Mexican migrants have helped to promote practical solidarity with the Mexican partner union “Los Mineros” that strongly involves the rank and file, thus contributing to overcoming a major factor hindering a perceived community among partners across borders: Mexican migrants facilitate solidarity involving numerous practical activities such as yearly exchange visits of regular members to the Mexican counterpart, supporting organizing campaigns by sending USW rank-and-file organizers and the direct local-to-local cooperation between plants on both sides of the border belonging to the same transnational company – rather than the typical “letters and resolutions of undying solidarity and love” – taking place at the level of the district and of locals. While this practical solidarity is a policy initiated and strongly promoted by the former district director, my research casts doubt on whether its conduction would be possible without the Mexican-origin members and staff persons. Through these activities, migrants facilitate cross-border collective action and communication among workers. This lays the basis for the experiencing of collective strength, the generation of narrative resources, the collective framing of situations and the management of difference, all of which are – as solidarity research has laid out – preconditions for the development of a perceived community of fate among workers.

In the course of the solidarity work, Mexican migrants within the USW District 7 have established close personal relationships with partners in the Mexican union. Such relationships are highly unusual in international labor solidarity and the kind of social interaction *par excellence* constituting an immediate source of emotional commitment and trust across borders, fundamental elements of a perceived community among the workers involved. Furthermore, the

relationships ensure a constant information flow and exchange on each others' situation, goals and challenges facing them, which constitute the basis for a framing of issues in collective terms and thus a perception of "sitting in the same boat".

The *fourth* transnational feature mentioned above – the cultural skills and knowledge that migrants bring along – accounts for their role in overcoming the lack of a perceived community in this case.

On the one hand, their cultural skills allow the union to conduct practical solidarity that involves locals and regular members. Particularly their Spanish proficiency – but also their knowledge of Mexico and its people and culture – facilitate planning and conducting most of these activities at the level of both the district and of individual locals. As migrant staff and rank-and-file activists are employed as interpreters and are frequently in charge of the communication with the partner union altogether, they allow for a constant information exchange and cooperation on a day-to-day basis.

On the other hand, migrants' cultural skills allow for developing personal relationships. Their knowledge of the language as well as Mexican culture, society and politics make them relate to the Mexican partners significantly more easily than their non-migrant colleagues who are often in a "culture shock" when in Mexico during the exchange trips. Both their Spanish skills and the fact that they are usually informed on current social and political developments in Mexico – whether through watching the Mexican news or by talking to parents, relatives and friends in both Mexico and the US – allow them to easily maintain a regular communication at distance with their *Mineros* counterparts in which not everything has to be lengthily explained from scratch. In many cases, this leads to stable personal relationships and even friendships, which non-migrants do not maintain, as for them communicating with the *Mineros* is a complicated and time-consuming task.

In sum, this investigation has shown that the transnational connections of migrants can play a crucial role in international labor solidarity: the transnational identities, ties and networks as well as the social remittances and cultural skills that migrants bring along can help to overcome some of the obstacles that international labor solidarity faces. Given many unions' growing migrant membership, these connections can play an important role in the international solidarity work of many unions in the US and beyond.

7.2 Reflection on the significance of such variables as migrants' country of origin, union type and migrant generation

As explained in chapter 3.2, the selection of cases ensured significant variation in a number of characteristics and conditions to gain an impression of as many ways as possible in which this influence can take place. A secondary aim of this variation was to gain tentative insights into factors affecting the specific shape

of migration's influence: I assumed that characteristics – or independent variables – such as the degree of autonomy that a union entity has from the national union and migrants' country of origin could be relevant for the way in which migration influences international solidarity. In other words, the investigation aimed to unearth and explore a large number of independent and intervening variables rather than establishing clear causal mechanisms between variables and their outcomes. This approach allowed me to identify some variables that seem to be significant factors influencing the way in which migrants affect their union's solidarity work. Given the exploratory approach, the research did not explicitly involve comparison groups; hence, testing the validity of the variables in other cases requires further investigation. In sum, these variables provide a basis for future research. By reflecting on the findings in both case studies laid out in chapters 5 and 6, this section draws some conclusions on the relevance of the five variables that the case selection was based on: *migrants' country of origin and the character of migration, the type of union and that of international solidarity, the union structure and degree of local autonomy, migrants' resident status and migrant generation.*

First, migrants' country of origin and character of the migration most clearly seems to be relevant for their involvement in – and influence on – union's international solidarity: it is apparent that in the case of Salvadorans, the specific context of their migration that accounts for their motivation to engage in the solidarity work, their strong network embeddedness and the kind of social remittances that they bring along to an important degree. The character of these migrants as political refugees lends their transnational ways of belonging a highly political character: for many of them, the main identification underlying their motivation to engage in solidarity is with the liberation movement's struggle against the military government and for social justice, rather than with the country and its people more generally. Similarly, their embeddedness in transnational political networks and organizations involved in supporting their former comrades in the struggle “back home” results from the context of their flight from El Salvador. Finally, their broader understanding of international solidarity and unions more generally is a consequence of their politicization and previous social activism experience in the civil war. Indeed, this activism experience and politicization explains – to a significant degree – Salvadorans' ability to gain influence in the union and push through their interests.

These features are clearly related to this particular country of origin and the specific context of its migration, which became evident when compared with both other migrants within USSW and the Mexican migrants in the other case study. In USWW, migrants from other countries than El Salvador whom I interviewed in USWW differ from Salvadorans. For instance, none of the Mexican migrants – neither staff nor regular members – have previous activism experiences, ties to political organizations or movements in Mexico, and while the Guatemalan who I interviewed has a social justice view of labor unions, she

has not previously been politically active and is not involved in transnational political networks. In the other case study, Mexican migrants USW neither show political transnational ways of belonging nor an embeddedness in transnational political networks or organizations. By contrast, migrants' references to Mexican politics and the political system (and labor unions, for that matter) are – if any – clearly negative. While this may vary in other cases,⁴³⁶ in the present ones, no identification with a political movement or organization exists. Moreover, Mexicans in the cases researched here do not have *political* transnational ties, although they evidently have personal (family and friendship) transnational relationships and some of them are involved in transnational organizations. However, the latter are rather charity organizations engaging in activities such as support for school children or health care, and migrants' motivation to engage in them is based on an emotional connection and/or social-moral responsibility rather than political goals. Moreover, while Mexicans evidently bring along many cultural skills and are influenced by social remittances brought from Mexico, these do not seem to comprise the realm of labor and social movements: many interviewees explained that Mexicans mostly have no experience with labor unions and social movements, and if they do, they are mostly negative experiences. This was explained to lead to a lack of a vision and understanding of the labor movement and the role that unions should have. This is unsurprising, as it is often said that given the corrupted labor relations and political system in Mexico resulting from the 70 years of PRI government, Mexican migrants generally have a negative view on politics and unions and are reluctant to get politically engaged (see footnote 78). The country of origin – and the associated characteristics of the migration – are thus clearly a relevant factor in shaping migrants' role in their unions' solidarity work.

Second, the type of union – manufacturing or services – seems to play a role insofar as it implies different *types of international labor solidarity*: in the case of USW, a long-standing strategic alliance with the Mexican partner union exists at the level of the national union, whereas in USWW, no such alliance – and, in fact, no international solidarity more generally – exists. Hence, this allows Salvadorans in USWW to more proactively engage in international solidarity and *initiate* solidarity relationships where they do not exist. By contrast, in USW, a formal alliance existed in which the then-district director was very actively engaged. Mexican migrants can thus only *participate in* a strategic solidarity mostly promoted, planned and carried out by the district leadership. Their scope of action for proactively influencing that work is much more reduced than it is for Salvadorans.

This is likely to be closely related to the *third* variable, the differing *union structures and the degree of local autonomy*. These organizational features determine the degree to which members can influence their union's work. This

⁴³⁶ Mexican migrants can have previous activism experiences and identify with social movements in Mexico, as is likely in the case of migrants coming from Chiapas or Oaxaca.

variable seems to be an important factor explaining the way in which migrants (can) influence international labor solidarity: USW is a much more hierarchically-organized union than SEIU, whose (often very large) locals have a relatively high degree of autonomy. This translates into a much more centralized and hierarchically-organized process of planning and conducting the solidarity work in USW, where most activities are not only planned and organized but also funded by the district rather than individual (mostly small) locals. By contrast, USWW is a large, state-wide local that encompasses all of California. The large amount of autonomy that it possesses due to its size (and thus, funds) and to SEIU's decentralized structure allows it to conduct its own activities and independent policies much more so than USW. Autonomy is an important factor allowing the local to assume the political and "migrant" character it has today, i.e. to view its work as being inherently linked to migrants' concerns, particularly immigration reform. In the realm of international solidarity, this means that initiating solidarity activities promoted by Salvadorans is accepted as a legitimate concern of the migrant membership.

Fourth, migrants' residence status does not seem to play a significant role in the way in which migrants engage in and influence their unions' solidarity work. A number of interviewees in USW complain about the problem whereby in the district's locals where a major share of the members is undocumented, members are unwilling to engage in the union. While this suggests that where migrants are – to a significant degree – undocumented, they refuse to take an active role and are thus less likely to play a relevant role in international solidarity, the other case study proved this to be wrong, at least at a general level: although most of the Salvadorans in USWW are first generation, many of them undocumented, their status does not prevent them from actively engaging in the union and the solidarity work, as well as publicly standing up for their goals. Hence, the criterion of residence status alone does not seem to explain transnational migrants' role in international solidarity.

Fifth and finally, the findings regarding the impact of the *migrant generation* on the way in which migration influences unions' solidarity work are ambiguous: the emotional connection and transnational ways of belonging play a greater role as a motivating factor in the case of the mostly first-generation Salvadorans, which seems to confirm the widespread assumption that transnational ties tend to diminish with migration generations. However, for some of the second-generation Mexican migrants, the emotional connection to their parents' country of origin strongly motivates engagement in the solidarity work. What is more, it is difficult to isolate the variable "migrant generation" from the different types of migration that Salvadorans and Mexicans represent in these cases: Salvadorans' strong connectedness to their country of origin is likely to be not only a result of their being relatively recent migrants, but also the political character of that migration, which contrasts with the case of Mexican migrants.

Studying two very different cases has thus brought to light a variety of ways in which migrants and their transnational ties can influence international labor solidarity, and it provides tentative insights into a number of factors affecting this influence in different ways. However, an important caveat needs to be highlighted: as the variables did not occur independently, the exact effect of each of them is difficult to isolate from others'. For instance, the country of origin and character of migration went along with a specific migrant generation (Salvadorans are mostly first, Mexicans mostly second generation) and type of union and international solidarity (strong local autonomy without previous solidarity work in the case of Salvadorans vs. hierarchically-organized union with an existing alliance at the national union level in the case of Mexicans). Therefore, it is difficult to determine which of the variables – the politicized character of Salvadoran migration; USWW's local autonomy and non-existence of previous solidarity work; first-generation character of the migration – is most relevant for explaining the strong role that Salvadoran migration plays in USWW's international solidarity work. Hence, the exact role and weight of the variables thus need to be analyzed in further detail through explicit comparisons in future research.

7.3 On the findings' generalizability and its limitations

As laid out in detail in chapter 3, given the lack of investigation on the relationship between international labor solidarity and transnational migration, the investigation followed an exploratory approach. This meant that rather than testing hypothesis, it comprised an open research process aimed at gaining insights into the relationship between transnational migration and international labor solidarity. Through it, it has provided a broad picture of relevant processes and mechanisms at work and has given insights into many ways in which transnational migration affects international labor solidarity. However, exploratory research has limitations. The cases are chosen for their theoretical richness rather than as (however defined) "representative" cases, and the research does not intend to establish clear causal mechanisms, i.e. to reach conclusions on *whether or not* migrants and their transnational connections play a role in unions' international work, how widespread the found phenomena are, or under which conditions they do so.

Evidently, the degree and shape that transnational migrations' role takes in unions' international solidarity work depends on the concrete circumstances in each union, migrant group and country of origin. Given the small number of cases and particularly the large number of independent and intervening variables whose effects cannot unambiguously be established in detail in exploratory research, it is difficult to exactly predict how the found mechanisms will work in other cases and under different circumstances.

It would clearly be nonsensical to assume that a strong presence of migrants leads – across the board – to a transformation of unions into social movement

unions and their support of non-labor organizations abroad as it did at least into one of the cases that I researched. This would not only require all migrants to share the understanding of unionism and solidarity that Salvadorans in the case studied here have; moreover, it would presuppose union leaderships to be willing to take up the influences migrants that bring and make them part of the union's policy. This is less likely the higher one gets in the union hierarchy. I focused on local and regional entities precisely because migrants' influence is more likely to have effects at this level than at the level of national unions. Importantly, the limited resources that unions have for international solidarity will always – particularly at the national union level – be used for strategic cooperation with unions in the same industry to an important degree, as it is here that tangible improvements for the membership can be achieved in the short term.

In line with the intention to choose theoretically-rich cases allowing to explore as many ways as possible in which transnational migration affects international labor solidarity, the conditions in the studied cases are favorable for an influence of migrants and their transnational connections on unions' work: the degree to which migrants are able to influence their unions is clearly not only a question of their membership share, but also one of internal democracy and leaderships' openness towards migrants and their concerns, as well as their willingness to build on migrants' skills. Indeed, in view of the general under-representation of migrants and their concerns in union leaderships and the structural constraints that migrants (as other minorities) face in advancing their interests, the openness towards migrants of the leaderships in both case studies thus constitutes favorable conditions that are far from being the rule in unions, particularly at the level of national unions. Furthermore, given the role that the specific context of Salvadoran migration played for these migrants' role influence in their union's solidarity work, it might be asked whether Salvadorans constitute an exceptional group in terms of their politicization and previous activism experience. As most migrants are not political refugees but rather "escape poverty", they do not necessarily have such a strong identification with political and social developments in their country of origin, and such strong ties to organizations there. They might not share Salvadorans' view of unions as being part of a broader movement for social justices and against oppression. Moreover, other migrant groups may not "know how to organize politically" as well as Salvadorans do, thus not being able to influence decision-making in the union. Indeed, as described above, at least the Mexicans in the other case study were not involved in transnational political organizations as networks as Salvadorans were.

Nonetheless, the cases that I researched are not exceptional cases: they are not the only unions whose leaderships are willing to build on migrants and their skills, take their interests into account and concede them an influence in the union. Many unions – particularly at the local and regional levels – have

progressive leaderships that are willing (or forced) to take into account migrants' concerns and interests, as well as conceding them an active role in the union. At the same time, given the growing number of migrants in the membership and – gradually – in the staff and (low-level) leadership, they gradually transform unions and force them to open to migrants and their concerns, as can be easily seen in many US unions' active engagement for immigration reform. Hence, despite not being the rule, a context of “immigrant-friendly” leadership and union identity promoting migrant involvement also exists in other cases, particularly in unions with large migrant memberships.

While Salvadorans are – as repeatedly mentioned – a particularly politicized group of migrants, they are not the only ones. Not only were European migrants to the US the early-20th century strongly politicized and politically-influenced US unions. Today, other Central Americans – and, in fact, Latin Americans more generally – have also come out of civil wars and/or contexts of political oppression and violence, and have a history of political activism, as explained by many of my interviewees and mentioned by some authors (see chapter 2.3). Migrants from other geographic areas also bring along activism experience: as laid out in chapter 2.3, the literature has documented cases in which Mexican migrants had been politically active before migrating, and where they continue to be in the US. The same is true for other migrant groups, such as Filipinos. Clearly, migrants from a variety of countries maintain a social and political concern and engage politically in their country of origin. As discussed in chapter 2.2, political “refugees may wish to leave political activism behind while so-called economic migrants can become politicized from afar” (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a, 266). In short, Salvadorans hardly constitute the one exception to the rule: they are not the only ones who have political experience and know how to influence decision-making in their union. Not least, a strong engagement for the country of origin need not necessarily emerge from a politicization and activism in the country of origin; moreover, an emotional attachment to – and identification with – a country or community can be an important motivation for promoting solidarity with it, as was the case with some of the Mexican migrants in the other case. Furthermore, whether or not migrant groups are able to “organize politically” and gain influence in the union does not exclusively depend on their activism experiences prior to migration, but can also be based on activism in the destination country and arise – for instance – out of shared experiences of discrimination and struggles for migrants' rights.

Hence, it would be wrong to think that the processes that I found are unique. On the contrary, transnational migration is also likely to influence unions and their international solidarity work in many other cases, at least at the local and regional levels. The exact ways in which it does and the conditions on which the shape of that influence depends are questions that need to be further researched in future investigations, to which I turn now.

7.4 Questions for future research

This thesis' findings provide a starting point to understanding the nexus of international labor solidarity and transnational migration beyond the two specific cases studied here. In order to fully close the gap that the impact of transnational migration on international labor solidarity has constituted in research thus far, some questions need to be addressed in future investigations. On the one hand, the ways in which migrants and their transnational ties influence international labor solidarity and the concrete processes at work that I found need to be systematically concretized and possibly corrected, which means studying a larger number of cases including a broader variety of different migrant groups, types of union and solidarity work. At the same time, a focus of this research should be to explore additional ways in which transnational migration affects international labor solidarity.

On the other hand, beyond the verification, concretization and correction of the findings and the identification of additional roles that transnational migration plays, two important pending tasks are to more systematically track the role of the independent variables and analyze further variables, as well as explicitly analyzing under which conditions migrants *are able to* influence their unions' international solidarity.

Independent variables

While I gained first insights into the impact that the five aforementioned variables have (or not) on the way in which transnational migration influences international labor solidarity, their role needs to be studied in greater depth through a systematic comparison of various migrant groups and unions, explicitly focusing on the differences and similarities in outcomes that they produce.

An important variable that needs to be further studied is migrants' *country of origin and the character of the migration*. It needs to be researched how differing sending countries (and communities) affect the outcome, i.e. the ways in which migrants and their transnational connections influence international labor solidarity. This refers to a broad variety of characteristics that might differ across countries, such as the strength and intensity of transnational ties that migrants maintain, the degree of their emotional connection to the country and community, as well as the character of their transnational ways of belonging. Aspects such as geographical proximity can influence the viability of solidarity activities. The country of origin variable also entails questions about the political character of migration: on the one hand, it needs to be researched how other politicized migrant groups concerned about their country of origin engage in their unions' solidarity work, and what this depends on. On the other hand, a focus should lie on researching migrant groups usually not considered to be politicized and/or having an interest in their country's political developments: not only can these have activism experiences either brought from "home" or

gained in the host country that might affect their role in their union; moreover, non-politicized migrants also have strong transnational relationships and networks, cultural skills and emotional connections to their countries of origin, which might motivate them to engage in solidarity work in the union with those countries, as is the case of several Mexicans I interviewed, for whom the emotional connection to their (or their parents') country of origin is a very important factor strengthening their engagement. These questions need to be further researched including a larger number of migrant groups from different countries and communities.

Importantly, the impact of *migrant generation and residence status* on the role that migration plays in international solidarity requires further research. In fact, the role that the migrant generation plays for migrants' transnational practices, identities and relationships is a question not sufficiently studied yet in transnational migration research. Indeed, it is also an open question regarding their role in unions' international solidarity work: in this case, it is difficult to separate the influence that the variable migrant generation has separate from the character of migration, as the first-generation migration is associated with a strongly politicized character of the migration. It needs to be further studied whether significant differences exist between first-, second- or even third-generation migrants regarding their motivation towards – and engagement in – unions' international solidarity, the transnational ties and networks they build on, as well as the social remittances and cultural skills they bring along. The same is true regarding the residence status of migrants. In the cases that I researched, this variable does not play a significant role, as both residents (or even citizens) and undocumented migrants are involved in the solidarity work. However, also here, undocumented status was associated with a politicized character of migration. It needs to be researched whether the same would be true for other groups of undocumented migrants that are usually considered less politicized, such as Mexicans or other Central American or Asian migrants.

Clearly, future projects should also focus on different *types of union, international solidarity work and union structures*. This relates to both unions with different histories and experiences of international solidarity and union types and structures. For instance, is it always – as in the cases that I researched – easier for migrants to proactively influence their union's solidarity work if no such work is previously in place and no long history of international solidarity with established routines and strategic planning exists, whereas in existing strategic alliances migrants less proactively participate in the activities taking place? Or are the differences that I found rather related to the degree of local autonomy, i.e. union structure, namely is the role of transnational migrants linked to the degree of autonomy that their union entity has from the national union?

Future research also needs to be open to the role of *variables that I have not analyzed*: as one example, while the two cases that I studied differ regarding the

gender composition of migrants (in USWW, the gender composition of the membership is relatively balanced, whereas USW has few women), this does not seem to play a significant role. In both cases, both women and men are involved in the solidarity work, and their motivation, networks, skills or social remittances do not seem to differ. However, gender might play a more significant role in other cases, and needs to be more explicitly studied, while the same is also true for other factors, such as rural vs. urban origin of migration, migrants' education level, etc.

Migrants' ability to influence unions' international solidarity

Second, an important focus of future research should lie on analyzing the conditions under which migrants and their transnational features *are able to* influence unions' international work in the first place: under what conditions is transnational migration more likely to influence unions' international solidarity and under which ones less so? What factors impede migrants and their transnational connections to play a significant role in their unions' work, and what factors facilitate such a role? What does it depend on whether a union leadership is willing to concede migrants a say, and build on their skills, connections and knowledge, in the realm of international solidarity? Evidently, this is related to union democracy and the representativeness of staff and leadership of their membership more generally. While it is evident that migrants – like other minorities – are under-represented at staff and leadership levels in most unions, few contributions explicitly analyze the factors facilitating and hindering migrants' ability to “having a say” and putting their concerns on the agenda in unions in general, let alone in the international realm. For instance, crucial questions are: what role does leadership play in facilitating this? What role does migrant leadership play, as well as progressive leadership coming out of other social movements? What is the role of structures facilitating members' democratic participation? Moreover, the role of migrants' political networks and organization needs to be analyzed in further detail and in comparison with other migrant groups.

This is also relevant for the question of whether (and if so, to what degree) the impact of transnational migration translates to the national union level, which was not the focus of this thesis. Given the lower number of migrants in leadership positions at the national union level and the more strategic character of international solidarity at that level, it is necessary to research the degree to which the influence that migrants and their transnational features have on local and regional union entities extends to national unions. Can migrants influence their national unions' policies and understanding of solidarity? Are they able to initiate solidarity relationships where they did not exist before? Moreover, do national union leaderships explicitly build on migrants' skills and knowledge for the international work as they did at the regional level in the USW case? Do

personal relationships between migrants and partners abroad also play a role in facilitating solidarity at the national union level?

Finally, this investigation has focused on the US and migration from Latin America. Hence, the research question must be studied in other geographical areas. For instance, it should be explored whether transnational migration plays a similar role in European unions, where most unions have not been at the forefront of organizing migrant workers, and migrants are – in most countries – undocumented to a much lesser degree than in the US, but where, at the same time being undocumented more strongly restricts the access to employment and social services. At the same time, by and large European unions do not have such a strong recent history and reputation of imperialism compared with US unions have. Furthermore, depending on the country, an important share of migration to central and northern European countries did not – at least until very recently – not come from so-called “Third World” countries, but rather from Eastern bloc and Balkan countries, which have their own specific labor movement history. Indeed, where migrants have come from “Third World” countries, such as migration to France, Italy and Spain from Africa and Latin America, the geographical distance is much larger than in the US case.

For most of the questions sketched out as well as others, the present investigation provides an important first step guiding future research.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Systematization of interviews

	Case study 1: USWW	Case study 2: USW District 7
(Migrant) rank-and-file activists, officers and staff involved in the solidarity work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rank-and-file activist and COPE member 1 (first-generation Salvadoran migrant) 2. Rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2 (first-generation Guatemalan migrant) 3. Rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3 (first-generation Mexican migrant) 4. Janitorial industry vice president (first-generation Salvadoran migrant) 5. Coordinator of the USWW janitorial division (first-generation Salvadoran migrant) 6. USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW (first-generation Salvadoran migrant) 7. USWW security industry vice president (non-migrant) 8. Rank-and-file activist and former COPE member (first-generation Salvadoran migrant) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rank-and-file activist, USW Local 1010 (second-generation Mexican migrant) 2. Volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777 (first-generation Mexican migrant) 3. Vice Chair, Women of Steel, USW Local 1010 (non-migrant) 4. Rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773 (first-generation Mexican migrant) 5. Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7 (first-generation Mexican migrant) 6. Contract coordinator, USW Local 1010 (second-generation Mexican migrant) 7. Volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216 (second-generation Mexican migrant) 8. Financial secretary, USW Local 1010 (second-generation Mexican migrant) 9. Personal assistant to the District director (second-generation Mexican migrant) 10. President, Local 7717 (second-generation Mexican migrant)
Experts a) whose position or role in the union gives or gave them a particular knowledge on processes and decisions taken b) whose position gives them influence on decision making and perceptions and routines; who express the logic of the	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal assistant to USWW Local president 2. David Huerta, former USWW vice president (current president) 3. UHW organizer, previous USWW organizer 4. USWW janitorial industry vice president 5. Organizer, SEIU Local 775 6. Coordinator of the USWW janitorial division 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director 2. Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director 3. Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7 4. Contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7 5. Manny Armenta, Subdistrict 2 director, USW District 12 6. Financial secretary, USW

<p>organization <i>(theory-generating expert interviews)</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Former SEIU organizer in the JfJ campaign, Local 399 8. USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW 9. Former USWW political director 10. SEIU Local 6 president 	<p>Local 1010, District 7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Personal assistant to USW District 7 director 8. President, USW Local 7717, District 7 9. President, USW Local 1010, District 7
<p>Experts outside the target group (researchers and representatives of other unions and labor organizations) <i>(exploratory expert interviews)</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alexis De Simone, Senior Program Officer, Americas Region, Solidarity Center 2. Andrew Dinkelaker, Secretary-Treasurer, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) 3. Austin Lynch, organizer, UNITE HERE Local 11 4. Baldemar Velázquez, Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) 5. Bruce Kipple, General President, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) 6. Carl Rosen, Western Region Director, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) 7. Clete Kiley, Director for Immigration Policy, UNITE HERE 8. Dan Kovalik, USW lawyer 9. Dan La Botz, journalist and author 10. Dave Campbell, USW Local 675 11. Debbie Anderson, International Affairs representative, UNITE HERE 12. Elizabeth O'Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office 13. Francis Engler, organizer, UNITE Here Local 11 14. Fred Pascual, UNITE HERE Local 11 15. Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), Labor Center 16. Immanuel Ness, Brooklyn College, City University of New York 17. Jamie McCallum, Middlebury College, Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Middlebury College 18. Janice Fine, Rutgers University 19. Jennifer Gordon, School of Law, Fordham University 20. Jorge Mujica, ARISE, Chicago 21. José Oliva, networks director, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United) 22. Judy Ancel, Institute for Labor Studies, University of Missouri-Kansas City 23. Leah Fried, organizer, UE Western Region 24. Lorraine Clewer, Solidarity Center Mexico Office 25. Luis Cardona, USW organizer 26. Magdalena Ortiz, Chicago Community and Workers' Rights 	

	<p>27. Margarita Díaz, Workers United</p> <p>28. Marta Santamaria, UNITE HERE Local 11</p> <p>29. Martin Unzueta, Chicago Community and Workers' Rights</p> <p>30. Molly McCoy, Solidarity Center</p> <p>31. Nik Theodore, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)</p> <p>32. Pete DeMay, organizer, United Autoworkers (UAW)</p> <p>33. Peter Rossmann, Director of international campaigns and communication, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)</p> <p>34. Richard DeVries, Union Representative, Teamsters Local 705</p> <p>35. Robin Alexander, International Affairs Director, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE)</p> <p>36. Rocío, New Era Windows and United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) Local 1110</p> <p>37. Ruth Milkman, City University of New York</p> <p>38. Stephen Coats, then-Executive Director, US-Latin America Labor Education Project (US/Leap)</p> <p>39. Tamara Kay, Harvard University</p> <p>40. Teófilo Reyes, Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC-United)</p> <p>41. Tim Beaty, Global Campaigns Director, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)</p> <p>42. Trina Trocco, Organizing Coordinator, Change to Win (CtW)</p> <p>43. Yanira Merino, Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)</p>
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9.2 List of interviews

1. Alexis De Simone, Senior Program Officer, Americas Region, Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, April 8, 2013.
2. Andrew Dinkelaker, Secretary-Treasurer, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE), Pittsburgh, March 11, 2013.
3. Austin Lynch, organizer, UNITE HERE Local 11, Los Angeles, March 15, 2013.
4. Baldemar Velázquez, Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Toledo, Ohio, March 9, 2013.
5. Ben Davis, USW International Affairs Director, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 11, 2013.
6. Bruce Kipple, General President, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE), Pittsburgh, March 11, 2013.
7. Carl Rosen, Western Region Director, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE), Chicago, February 7, 2013.
8. Clete Kiley, Director for Immigration Policy, UNITE HERE, Washington, D.C., April 9, 2013.
9. Contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.
10. Contract coordinator, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.
11. Coordinator of the USWW janitorial division, Los Angeles, October 29, 2013.
12. Dan Kovalik, USW lawyer, Pittsburgh, March 11, 2013.
13. Dan La Botz, journalist and author, Chicago, May 5, 2012.
14. Dave Campbell, USW Local 675, Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.
15. David Huerta, former USWW vice president (current president), Los Angeles, March 13, 2013.
16. Debbie Anderson, international affairs representative, UNITE HERE, Skype, February 27, 2013.
17. Elizabeth O'Connor, former head of SEIU Mexico City office, Skype, July 1, 2013.
18. Financial secretary, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.
19. Former SEIU organizer in the JfJ campaign, Local 399, Manhattan Beach, February 13, 2014.
20. Former USWW political director, Los Angeles, November 25, 2013.
21. Francis Engler, organizer, UNITE Here Local 11, Los Angeles, March 15, 2013.
22. Fred Pascual, UNITE HERE Local 11, Los Angeles, December 16, 2013.
23. Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), Labor Center, Los Angeles, March 14, 2013.
24. Immanuel Ness, Brooklyn College, City University of New York, Skype, May 17, 2012.
25. Jamie McCallum, Middlebury College, Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Middlebury College, Skype, July 19, 2012.

26. Janice Fine, Rutgers University, Skype, February 18, 2013.
27. Jennifer Gordon, School of Law, Fordham University, New York, June 21, 2012.
28. Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Skype, March 22, 2013.
29. Jim Robinson, then-USW District 7 director, Gary, Indiana, January 24, 2014.
30. Jorge Mujica, ARISE, Chicago, February 22, 2013.
31. José Oliva, networks director, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United), Chicago, January 30, 2013.
32. Judy Ancel, Institute for Labor Studies, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Chicago, May 4, 2012.
33. Leah Fried, organizer, UE Western Region, Chicago, February 26, 2013.
34. Lorraine Clewer, Solidarity Center Mexico Office, Skype, February 21, 2013.
35. Luis Cardona, USW organizer, Chicago, February 15, 2013.
36. Magdalena Ortiz, Chicago Community and Workers' Rights, Chicago, May 10, 2012.
37. Manny Armenta, Subdistrict 2 director, USW District 12, Tucson, Arizona, February 17, 2014.
38. Margarita Díaz, Workers United, Chicago, March 1, 2013.
39. Marta Santamaria, UNITE HERE Local 11, Los Angeles, December 13, 2013.
40. Martin Unzueta, Chicago Community and Workers' Rights, Chicago, May 10, 2012.
41. Molly McCoy, regional program director for the Americas, Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, April 8, 2013.
42. Nik Theodore, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Chicago, February 13, 2013.
43. Organizer, SEIU Local 775, Seattle, December 10, 2013.
44. Personal assistant to USW District 7 director, Chicago, January 29, 2014.
45. Personal assistant to USWW Local president, Los Angeles, November 21, 2013.
46. Pete DeMay, organizer, United Autoworkers (UAW), Chicago, February 20, 2013.
47. Peter Rossmann, Director of international campaigns and communication, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), Skype, February 22, 2013.
48. President, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.
49. President, USW Local 7717, District 7, Chicago, February 10, 2014.
50. Rank and file activist, USW Local 1010, District 7, Hammond, Indiana, February 5, 2014.
51. Rapid response coordinator, USW Local 7773, District 7, Chicago, January 28, 2014.
52. Richard DeVries, Union Representative, Teamsters Local 705, Chicago, February 22, 2013.
53. Robin Alexander, International Affairs Director, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE), Pittsburgh, March 11, 2013.
54. Rocío, New Era Windows and United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) Local 1110, Chicago, March 6, 2013.

55. Ruth Milkman, City University of New York, New Brunswick, New Jersey, March 18, 2013.
56. SEIU Local 6 president, Seattle, December 9, 2013.
57. SEIU-UHW organizer, former USWW organizer, Los Angeles, November 13, 2013.
58. Stephen Coats, then-Executive Director, US-Latin America Labor Education Project (US/Leap), Chicago, May 5, 2012.
59. Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, January 30, 2014.
60. Subdistrict 1 director, USW District 7, Bridgeview, March 1, 2013.
61. Tamara Kay, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 11, 2013.
62. Teófilo Reyes, Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC-United), Skype, February 21, 2013.
63. Tim Beaty, Global Campaigns Director, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), Skype, February 21, 2013.
64. Trina Trocco, Organizing Coordinator, Change to Win (CtW), Chicago, February 8, 2013.
65. USWW janitorial industry vice president, Los Angeles, November 27, 2013.
66. USWW organizer, previously political department of USWW, Los Angeles, November 20, 2013.
67. USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 1, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013.
68. USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 2, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013.
69. USWW rank-and-file activist and COPE member 3, Los Angeles, December 7, 2013.
70. USWW rank-and-file activist and former COPE member, Los Angeles, November 14, 2013.
71. USWW security industry vice president, Los Angeles, January 10, 2014.
72. Vice Chair, Women of Steel, USW Local 1010, Hammond, Indiana, January 31, 2014.
73. Volunteer organizer, USW Local 1216, District 7, Chicago, February 7, 2014.
74. Volunteer organizer, USW Local 9777, District 7, Chicago, January 24, 2014.
75. Yanira Merino, Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), Chicago, May 6, 2012.

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Transnational migration and international labor solidarity

On migrant union members' impact on unions' cross-border work

Labor and Globalization | Volume 12

Jenny Jungehülsing

This book sheds light on the role that migrant union members and their transnational connections play in unions' cross-border work.

By bringing together concepts from (international labor) solidarity theory and transnational migration research, it shows that migrants organized in labor unions and their manifold cross-border ties and networks, transnational ways of belonging, and the social remittances and cultural knowledge they bring, can help overcome some major obstacles to international labor solidarity.

Based on exploratory empirical research in two very different US labor unions with large migrant memberships – the United Service Workers West (USWW) local of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in California and United Steelworkers (USW) District 7 in Illinois and Indiana –, the book shows that migrants and their transnational connections can: (1) promote international solidarity where it did not exist before; (2) contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of unionism and solidarity that includes political and social justice goals, including abroad; and (3) promote a practical solidarity work including the rank and file, and thereby the development of a sense of togetherness of workers across borders.

Key words: solidarity theory, international solidarity, transnational migration, labor unions, social remittances, transnational ways of belonging, transnational migrant organizations, transnational networks, perceived community of fate, exploratory research

Jenny Jungehülsing holds a PhD in political science from Kassel University. She studied political science in Berlin and Mexico City and is the co-editor of "Last Call for Solidarity: Perspektiven grenzüberschreitenden Handelns von Gewerkschaften."

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