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Waving the Red, White and *Azul*: The Political Transnationalism of Americans in Mexico

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"In the current period, we are witnessing the emergence of new forms of political action and citizenship that transcend the territorial and political boundaries of states."

José Itzigsohn 2000, 1127.

"I go to bed at night thinking, 'What if Kerry loses by 20 votes?' That's what is driving a lot of us."

Ana Maria Salazar, Chairperson, *Americans Overseas for Kerry*, September 2004

On a warm June 4, 2006, close to a hundred registered Democrats gathered in Finnegan's restaurant for their organization's monthly meeting. Chairperson Gretchen Sullivan presided over the meeting that included an invited speaker and agenda items pertaining to how the group would channel its fund-raising energies for the 2006 U.S. midterm elections. Many members were sporting anti-Bush paraphernalia, and more was for sale at the door. The scene itself was not entirely unusual. Groups of Democrats, Republicans, Independents and others gather regularly in cities and states throughout the U.S. But, these politically active Americans—the San Miguel de Allende chapter of Democrats Abroad—were meeting in the mountains of Central Mexico.[i] Their political buttons were in Spanish, though few actually speak the language, ("Pinche Bush," which translates as "Fu%#ing Bush"), and their guest speaker was U.S. Consul Ed Clancy who was on hand to answer questions about the import of prescription drugs, and the possibility of

extending U.S. Medicare benefits to Americans living abroad. In the months preceding the 2006 U.S. midterm elections, and again in the fall of 2007 in anticipation of the U.S. presidential primaries, scenes like this one played out across Mexico, as local chapters of Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad mobilized in support of the candidates and party that would represent them—thousands of miles away and on the other side of an increasingly militarized international border.[ii]

Emergent forms of political and cultural belonging that transcend conventional notions of the modern nation-state have captured intense scholarly interest over the past 15 years. By the 1990s, scholars of migration began to identify new patterns and trends not well accounted for by existing analytical frameworks. Not only were human beings crossing borders at unprecedented rates, they were crossing (physically and virtually) back and forth across those borders with greater ease and intensity than in the past. They were forging ties and enmeshed in networks that stretched the meaning and practice of nationhood as a form of imagined community, and challenged the territorial integrity of the state. Intrigued by these phenomena, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina S. Blanc were among the first immigration scholars to issue the subsequently well-heeded call: "The time has come for all of us—social scientists and immigrants—to rethink our conceptions of the migration process, immigrant incorporation, and identity" (1994, 3). Basch et al coined the term "transmigrants" to refer to those who "take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states;" and they defined transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (1994, 7).

A robust body of literature on transnationalism emerged in the years following these early analyses. Scholars engaged in productive debates regarding the extent to which the phenomena being described as 'transnational' were indeed new, how evolving information and communications technologies affected transitional ties, and whether territoriality and the nation-

state were being transcended, or merely reconfigured (Faist 2000; Mandaville 1999; Portes et al 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). These scholars also acknowledged and responded to the need for greater conceptual precision (Kivisto 2001; Mahler 1998; Portes et al 1999); and produced a range of case studies that illustrated well the empirical and conceptual complexity of transnationalism (Guarnizo 1998; Levitt 2001; Mountz and Wright 1996; R. Smith 2003, 2006). An important sub-set of this scholarship focused specifically on political transnationalism and the practice of extra-territorial citizenship. Although political and ethno-cultural boundaries have never been as congruent as many models of the nation-state assumed, the increased volume and complexity of global migration further heightened the disconnect. Residents of one state are increasingly voting in the elections of another. Candidates for political office in one country are campaigning, raising money, and meeting with constituents in another. Migrants who no longer reside in their country of origin are continuing to demand rights and recognition, and the governments of these states of origin are calling upon their citizens abroad to respect and uphold their responsibilities (economic, political, and cultural) to the homeland. Meanwhile, residents who do not possess formal membership in a given state or locale of settlement are nevertheless practicing substantive citizenship by engaging in the public sphere and making demands on the host government (Fitzgerald 2000; Itzigsohn 2000; Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003; R Smith 2003). Citizenship, as David Fitzgerald notes, is now being practiced "in a territorially unbounded imagined community" (2000, 10).

To date, the bulk of the analyses of political transnationalism have focused on migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean who move to the U.S. Mexican immigrants, in particular, figure prominently into the literature and the political and popular discourse in the U.S. about immigrants who live their lives across the borders of nation-states (Fitzgerald 2000; Gutiérrez 1999; Huntington 2004; Renshon 2001; Shain 2000; R. Smith 2003, 2006). Meanwhile, U.S. citizens who migrate to Mexico and maintain close ties to the U.S. have captured minimal political or scholarly attention. This article will reverse the lens of transnationalism to examine a

little known migration flow from an advanced industrialized country well known for receiving migrants to a less developed country better known for exporting them. Specifically, the focus is on how U.S. citizens residing in Mexico are practicing "extra-territorial citizenship,"—living in a country in which they do not claim citizenship and claiming citizenship in a country in which they do not live; or, as Fitzgerald describes in his analysis of Mexican migrants, claiming "membership in multiple polities in which they may be residents, part-time residents, or absentees" (2000, 10).

The analysis that follows has three primary aims: empirical, conceptual, and political. Empirically, this study adds to an already rich body of case studies a little known story of immigrant transnationalism on the part U.S. migrants in Mexico. Conceptually, "transnationalism" has been theorized largely on the basis of persistent power imbalances in the in the international system. This article does not deny those imbalances, but explores the implications of migration from an economically and politically powerful sending state to a less powerful receiving one. Finally, nativism in the U.S. has recently surged to astounding heights. Some towns in the U.S. have outlawed taco stands, others have prohibited flying a foreign flag, and scores of local and state governments have passed restrictive legislation declaring English the official language (Jonsson 2006). This article operates on the hope that citizens, politicians, and media pundits in the U.S. might benefit from an awareness that "we," too, migrate, and in doing so, maintain, as do "they," close political, economic, socio-cultural attachments to the homeland while residing in a new land. As with the better known flow in the opposite direction, the southward migration of U.S. citizens and the cross border ties to which it gives rise, have significant political and policy implications for both the U.S. and Mexico—and hence warrant greater attention not only from scholars, but also from politicians and policy makers on both sides of the border.

Waving the Red, White and *Azul*

A news story coming out of Chapala, Mexico on September 13, 2004 began as follows: "George P. Bush looked like a man on a mission . . . Dark, handsome and flashing a brilliant smile, the 28-year-old son of Florida Governor Jeb Bush had come straight from his honeymoon to this lakeside community outside Guadalajara to ask U.S. expatriates to vote for President Bush, the man he calls Uncle George" (Walker 2004). The Lake Chapala region, or what American residents there refer to as "Lakeside," is home to an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 U.S. citizens (Truly 2006); and hence a logical campaign stop for the Bush team in the months preceding the 2004 election. President Bush's nephew called on U.S. citizens living at Lakeside to "Please help us out," explaining that American expatriates in Mexico comprise a "huge untapped market" (Walker 2004). During his four-day swing through Mexico, the President's nephew also met with American retirees in San Miguel de Allende (home to between 11,000 to 12,000 Americans), and with U.S. businesspeople in Mexico City. John Kerry's campaign had representatives in Mexico as well. In July 2004, Kerry's sister, Diana, visited U.S. Democrats in Mexico City; and former Defense Department official in the Clinton administration, Ana Maria Salazar, organized and chaired *Americans Overseas for Kerry*. At a candlelight vigil in September 2004, Salazar worried whether Democrats Abroad in Mexico had done enough: "I go to bed at night thinking, 'What if Kerry loses by 20 votes?' That's what is driving a lot of us'" (Walker 2004).

As is the case with Mexicans in the U.S., establishing with certainty exactly how many Americans live in Mexico is an arduous task, and ultimately impossible (Croucher *forthcoming*). "Data about the numbers of U.S. citizens abroad . . . are meager and incomplete" (Migration Policy Institute 2006, 23). The agencies, U.S. and Mexican, who would likely maintain such data are seemingly disinterested. The U.S. State Department previously issued estimates of the number of Americans living abroad but now cites security concerns as a reason for no longer doing so. The U.S. Government Accountability Office studied the feasibility of counting Americans overseas in the U.S. Census, and the U.S. Bureau piloted such a project in 2004. Both agencies concluded that the effort was not cost effective (GAO 2004). The U.S. embassy in

Mexico only has access to data on Americans who register with the embassy, and doing so is voluntary. Richard Gonzalez of the American Consulate in Mexico City explained: "for each American that registers, there are up to five who do not" (Alcocer-Berriozábal 2000, 234).

In spite of these challenges, two points regarding U.S. migration to Mexico are not in dispute. First, of the total population of Americans living outside the U.S., (estimates range from 4 million to 10 million), Mexico is home to the largest number. In 1999, the Bureau of Consular Affairs in the Department of State estimated that of the 6.6 million Americans living abroad, 1,036,300 were living in Mexico (http://www.aaro.org/, http://www.overseasdigest.com/amcit_nu2.htm, Migration Policy Institue 2006, 23). Treasury Department officials in Washington estimate that the number of Treasury checks -- Social Security, Veteran Administrations, tax refunds -- sent to Mexico is "in the ballpark of 750,000" (Nayaer 2003). Organizations like the American Association of Residents Overseas, Overseas Vote Foundation, American Citizens Abroad, Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad also recognize Mexico as home to the largest number of U.S. citizens living abroad.[iii] Meanwhile, the 2000 Mexican Census reports that migrants from U.S. comprise by far the largest proportion (69 percent) of the country's total foreign-born population (XII Censo).

Secondly, the number of Americans, and particularly U.S. retirees, living in Mexico is increasing rapidly. The Mexican Census shows a clear trend upward (see Table One); and the increase of U.S. seniors migrating to Mexico is even more notable. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of U.S. citizens (age 55 and above) living in Mexico increased by 17 percent. Several locales within Mexico attract particularly large populations of American immigrants: San Miguel de Allende in the state of Guanajuato, Lake Chapala and Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco, Baja California, and Mexico City. The state of Jalisco saw its U.S.-born senior population increase by 138.6 percent between 1990 and 2000; and the municipality of Chapala (which includes the village of Ajijic on the shores of Lake Chapala) saw an increase of 581.4 percent. During the same 10-year period, the population of U.S. seniors in the state of Guanajuato increased by 26

percent, and by 47.7 percent in the municipality of San Miguel de Allende (MPI 2006, 28). Jalisco and Guanajuato were also the states where significant proportions of U.S. migrants were new arrivals (within five years of the census) (MPI 2006, 29). Because these figures rely on Mexican census data from the year 2000, they miss at least an 8-year period that by all accounts saw intensifying migration southward from the U.S.

Table One: Foreign Population in Mexico 1900 – 2000

	Mexican Population	Foreigners	Americans	Percent Americans
1900	13,607,259	58,179	15,266	26.24
1910	15,160,369	116,527	20,639	17.71
1920	14,334,780	108,482	21,740	20.04
1930	16,552,722	140,564	36,306	25.83
1940	19,653,552	177,375	9,585	5.4
1950	25,791,017	182,707	83,391	45.64
1960	34,923,129	223,468	97,902	43.81
1970	48,225,238	191,184	97,246	50.87
1980	66,846,833	268,900	157,117	58.43
1990	80,908,821	340,824	214,719	63
2000	97,483,412	492,617	339,717	68.96

Sources: Delia Salazar Anaya. 1996. *La Población Extranjera en México*. Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, pp. 99-106. *XII General Census of Population and Housing of Mexico*, 2000.

These American migrants, like others, identify a variety of factors (economic, socio-cultural, personal and political) that pulled them to Mexico and pushed them from the U.S.; but whatever their motivations for being in Mexico a large and growing number of these Americans abroad engage in activities consistent with the models of transmigrant politics and the exercise of

extra-territorial citizenship. They are voting across borders, raising money for and meeting in Mexico with candidates for political office in the U.S., organizing and attending rallies and participating in public debate in support of or in opposition to U.S. policies, and forming associations in Mexico such as the U.S. Democrats Abroad, Republicans Abroad, American Legion, and the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution focused on preserving and promoting political and cultural values of the U.S. and building community among Americans in Mexico and abroad. U.S. migrants are also exercising forms of substantive citizenship in Mexico by engaging in the public sphere in towns and cities where they reside but do not possess formal political membership.

The U.S. presidential elections in 2000 and 2004 shined a spotlight on the population of Americans living abroad and their potential to influence U.S. electoral outcomes in increasingly tight races. After the ambiguous election results of November 7, 2000, the country sat literally waiting for the arrival of overseas absentee ballots in Florida that would decide the election outcome in that state and, ultimately, the country. As Taylor Dark explains: "Indeed, when the final results in Florida were certified, it was clear that the late overseas vote had been crucial. . . . If all the late overseas ballots had been put aside, Al Gore would now be president" (2003, 735-6). Once the 2000 Florida vote was certified, any focus on the role of Americans abroad quickly faded from media and public view. Politicians, political parties, and politically minded Americans abroad, however, had clearly taken note. Prior to the 2004 U.S. presidential elections, not only did candidates Bush and Kerry extend their campaigns across the U.S. border, but chapters of the Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad geared up for another close race, and U.S. citizens living in Mexico and elsewhere outside of the U.S. requested ballots in record numbers.

Both the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. maintain contact with and work to mobilize their partisans abroad, and their commitment to doing so, particularly in the case of U.S. voters in Mexico, has intensified in recent years. The Democrats Abroad and the

Republicans Abroad both have headquarters in Washington D.C. that maintain close relations with chapters located throughout the world. The Democrats Abroad, founded in 1964, but active in Mexico as early as the 1950s, has 76 overseas chapters. The Democratic National Committee [DNC] recognizes Democrats Abroad as a "state," and Democrats Abroad are represented on the DNC by eight voting members. Democrats Abroad in Mexico has a country-level chairperson and four regional chapters: Mexico City, Young Democrats in Mexico City, Lake Chapala, and San Miguel de Allende. As of January 2007, membership in Democrats Abroad Mexico totaled 1,500 (Minaya 2007). The organization's official website explains:

> "Democrats Abroad is the official Democratic Party organisation for more than six million US citizens living overseas. We work to advance the principles of our Party by spreading the Democratic message to Americans abroad and encouraging them to vote for Democratic candidates back home. Over seventy countries throughout the world organize local events and activities to encourage participation in the American political process" (http://www.democratsabroad.org).

Republicans Abroad was founded in 1978 and now has chapters in over 50 countries. The organization is registered as a 527 nonprofit fundraising group, not an official GOP entity. Republicans Abroad in Mexico has a country chairperson and regional chapters in both Lake Chapala and San Miguel. The official website explains:

> "Membership in Republicans Abroad provides a unique opportunity for Americans living overseas to communicate their concerns to Republican leaders in Washington. Republicans Abroad has fought for issues of concern to Americans abroad like repatriation issues, strong support of Section 911 foreign earned income exemption, anti-terrorism legislation, fair trade policies, and the inclusion of the expatriate population in the United States Census. Republicans Abroad members are vital to representing the concerns of Americans abroad to our nation's leaders while helping the Party to win close elections with the absentee ballots" http://www.republicansabroad.org/.

In Mexico, the Republicans Abroad and Democrats Abroad kicked into high gear in the months preceding the 2004 election—registering voters, raising money, and purchasing political advertisements in English-language media across the country. Ana Maria Salazar, of Americans Overseas for Kerry, and Larry Rubin, of the Mexico Chapter of U.S. Republicans Abroad, debated on Mexican television on behalf of their favored candidates for U.S. President.

Republicans Abroad helped support the visit by President Bush's nephew that led to the formation of the organization's Lake Chapala chapter. Former president of the chapter, Norm Pfifer reported that by December 2004 they had registered at least 200 paid members (interview Jan 30, 2007). Another U.S. citizen and lifelong Republican living in Chapala characterized the point of the Republicans Abroad international advertisement campaign as "simple:" "Be an expatriate. Vote." (Walker 2004). For their part, Democrats Abroad in San Miguel de Allende raised over $10,000 for the Kerry campaign; and Democrats Abroad in Lake Chapala met in private homes to participate in international conference calls with Democratic hopefuls (including Wesley Clark, Howard Dean, John Kerry (twice), and Dennis Kucinich (Chaussee 17 Jan 2004). In an interview with a CNN reporter covering the expatriate vote in Mexico in 2004, many American voters and long-time residents of the Lake Chapala area agreed that never before had their votes been so courted (Chaussee 2004).

U.S. citizens living in Mexico responded to these mobilization efforts with unprecedented enthusiasm. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City and the Consulates in San Miguel de Allende and Merida ran out of ballots as early as June 2004 and had to make additional, in some cases repeated, requests for more. Consular Agent Philip Maher, who represented the U.S. government in San Miguel for twenty years, remarked: "It's far more active than I've seen before. There's more discussion about the election at cocktail parties. There's more discussion at dinners" (Walker 2004). By July 9, 2004, the number of Federal Post Card Applications for absentee ballots sent in response to requests from voters abroad reached 340,000—90,000 more than the number of requests for the entire 2000 presidential election. In the 2000 presidential election, absentee ballots comprised 15 percent of the votes cast—which was double the figure in the 1992 presidential race. The Foreign Voter Assistance Program, within the U.S. Department of Defense, estimates that among non-government American civilians living abroad, voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections ranges between 31 and 38 percent of eligible voters. Voter turnout

among U.S. military personnel abroad is estimated to range between 64 to 69 percent; and between 64 and 79 percent among government-employed civilians (www.fairvote.org/righttovote/prnewswire.htm). Some sources reported that by 2004 overseas registration for both parties was up by 400% over 2000 ("Surpressing the Overseas…" 2005). A *Newsweek* reporter covering the overseas vote in 2004, noted: "Ironically, the real battleground states of this election could end up being countries like Canada, France and Mexico" (Conant 2004).

Even between election cycles in the U.S., Americans abroad and their global political party organizations remain active. On March 2 through 5, 2006, five members of Democrats Abroad Mexico (3 from Lakeside and 2 from San Miguel) joined 100 members of Democrats Abroad at the organization's international meeting in Washington D.C. Traveling from their homes in Mexico and other parts of the world, these delegates passed a resolution calling for the U.S. Congress to investigate whether President Bush and Vice President Cheney committed impeachable offenses (Chaussee 2006, march 11). Months later, a contingent of Democrats Abroad from Mexico traveled to Chicago for the meeting of the Democratic National Committee where they helped sponsor a resolution against the use of torture by the U.S. (Chaussee 2006, Sept 2). In June 2007, Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad joined organizations like American Citizens Abroad, FAWCO, (Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas), AARO (Association of Americans Resident Overseas), for "Overseas America Week" in Washington D.C. Seeking changes to legislation and regulations that adversely affect Americans overseas, including tax laws and Medicare guidelines, the delegates held 84 meetings with Congressional offices and research institutes, including the recently formed Americans Abroad Congressional Caucus (cite?).

Democrats and Republicans Abroad and others make the case that, in terms of numbers, U.S. citizens living abroad comprise a constituency at least as large as the state of Colorado, with its 4.7 million people. "We're a rather powerful state in numbers," said one American delegate

who was on Capitol Hill during Overseas Americans Week. "We are probably the 20th largest state" (Abruzzese 2007). Although this constituency of Americans living abroad has felt slighted in the past, there is evidence that Congress and aspiring politicians are taking notice. The bipartisan Americans Abroad Caucus, formed in March 2007 by Representatives Carolyn Maloney, Democrat of New York, and Joe Wilson, Republican of South Carolina, now counts 11 members and is making inroads. Representatives Maloney and Wilson have changed their Web sites to accept comments from Americans overseas and have written a joint letter asking fellow lawmakers to follow suit. Some analysts, like Susan MacManus, a political science professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa, believe that the time might be ideal for this caucus with the 2008 presidential and congressional elections approaching and the overseas vote having been an important factor in recent ballots. Americans Abroad can be influential, in her view, both because of numbers they represent and the noise they are willing to make (Abruzzese 2007).

Voting in home country elections while residing in a new country challenges the territoriality of politics, but the practice of extra-territorial citizenship extends even more broadly. Americans in Mexico have formed and actively participate in a range of organizations which have as their purpose or founding goals the promotion of American political values and cultural ideals, and that seek to unite Americans on the basis of their shared nationality irrespective of their residence outside of the U.S. The American Society of Mexico (AMSOC) was founded on August 26, 1942 in order to “maintain a patriotic spirit and promote interests of our country in the expatriate community in Mexico.” Still active today, the AMSOC works to support activities that promote U.S. culture and foster a sense of community to benefit U.S. citizens living in Mexico” (http://www.amsoc.net/). The American Legion also maintains an active presence in Mexico with 13 posts throughout the country—including two each in the Lake Chapala area and San Miguel de Allende. This organization’s preamble reads as follows:

> For God and Country we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; To maintain law and order; To

> foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; To preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the great wars; To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state, and nation (http://www.amlegion-mexico.org/).

The Daughters of the American Revolution have established four active chapters in Mexico: Baja, Lake Chapala, Guadalajara, and Mexico City. Founded in 1890, the DAR describes itself as "a volunteer women's service organization dedicated to promoting patriotism, preserving American history, and securing America's future through better education for children". The group in Lake Chapala, christened the Thomas Paine Chapter, was formed in April 1999, with the goal of serving DAR members in Ajijic, Chapala and neighboring communities in Jalisco, Mexico, and promoting American history, education and patriotism (http://www.geocities.com/thomaspainedar/about_our_chapter.htm). In interviews with the Thomas Paine chapter of DAR in Ajijic, one of the regents responded to my curiosity about the existence of a DAR chapter in Mexico, by explaining that: "Our ancestors gave the world a great gift – the American Revolution. Those ideals are universal" (author interview, 3 Feb. 2007).

The Sons of the American Revolution founded their first Mexican Chapter in Ajijic in 2002, with 70 founding members. The organization hopes to establish at least four more chapters in Mexico in the near future. In an interesting twist on the 'imagined community,' the SAR in Mexico decided recently to recognize descendents of New Spain as American Patriots. "We hope to form a Spanish-speaking chapter, which will conduct meetings in Spanish and say a pledge to the Mexican flag. Many Mexican nationals are eligible to join the SAR because they are descended from Carlos III -- King of Spain in 1775, from General Bernardo de Gálvez, or from donors or members of the Spanish armed forces in New Spain" (http://www.sar.org/mxssar/mxssar-e.htm). The relevant resolution reads as follows:

> WHEREAS, Spain was a valuable ally of the colonists during the American Revolutionary War - even before July 4, 1776; her soldiers and militia men fighting the English in what is now Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida; and because there were incursions along the Texas Gulf Coast by the British; and Spanish Galleons searched for Captain Cook, along the California coast; and because Spanish soldiers and militia were required to remain vigilant against attack by both the British and the Indians being supplied by the British, and

> specifically were required to guard the Camino Real, lifeline between Mexico City and Galvez' army in Louisiana; http://www.sar.org/mxssar/memguide.htm

U.S. citizens living in Mexico also regularly publish political commentary regarding U.S. politics and policies in local English-language outlets, and organize local rallies or protests focused on the U.S. In the Lake Chapala area, for example, Americans have access to the English-language *Guadalajara Reporter* (published weekly), the *Ojo del Lago* and *Lake Chapala Review* (published monthly) and, more recently, to an English-language section in the back of the local Mexican newspaper, *El Charral*. In San Miguel, the English-language *Atención*, founded in 1970, comes out each Friday and American immigrants line up outside the public library or in the jardín, the town's central garden plaza, to collect their copies. Americans living in Mexico City have long had access to a special Mexico insert in *El Herald*, and as of 2006 enjoy a new publication, *Inside Mexico: The English Speaker's Guide to Life in Mexico*, with a distribution of 50,000. These publications announce an array of cultural and social events, but also provide space for Americans to debate U.S. foreign policy—NAFTA, the Middle East, the war(s) in Iraq and immigration, and to discuss U.S. presidential candidates. Americans in both communities have also held peace marches over the years protesting U.S. military adventures, sponsored vigils in support of or opposition to U.S. Presidents or presidential candidates, and organized marches focused on U.S. policies such as immigration.[iv]

In addition to exercising their American citizenship from abroad, U.S. migrants in Mexico, like immigrants in the U.S., engage in the public sphere in their host country and practice a form of citizenship not delimited by official state membership (which very few pursue). The context for political transnationalism in Mexico, however, is somewhat unique in that the country has written into its Constitution an Article 33, which expressly prohibits foreigners from involving themselves in Mexican politics:

> Foreigners are those who do not possess the qualities determined in Article 30. They have the right to the guarantees of Chapter I of the first title of this Constitution, but the Executive of the Union has the exclusive right to expel from the national territory, immediately and

> without necessity of judicial proceedings, all foreigners whose stay it judges inconvenient. Foreigners may not, in any manner, involve themselves in the political affairs of the country.

U.S. citizens and the Mexican government both profess to take this prohibition seriously, but Americans in Mexico have found countless ways to exercise influence and make their voices heard regarding issues that affect their social, political, and economic wellbeing. Moreover, accounts of U.S. citizens being sanctioned for political activities in Mexico are rare.

In both San Miguel and in the Lake Chapala area the local Mexican governments maintain offices dedicated to serving the foreign community. Mayors and other local Mexican officials meet with the American community, appoint leaders within the community to their advisory councils, and provide services to the immigrants in English. When a new Chapala mayor was sworn in on 31 December 2007, the *Guadalajara Reporter* noted that "a significant number of leading members of the expatriate community were on hand as special guests" (Palfrey 2007). Weeks before, Chapala mayor-elect Gerardo Degollado had met with a group of American residents at the Chapala Country Club, announcing: "If we all get together, we can do it. Can I count on your help" (Palfrey 18 Nov 2006)? San Miguel maintains a municipal level department of International Relations to oversee relations with the town's foreign community. When law enforcement in San Miguel struggled to capture a rapist in 2006, local officials established a special security task force to meet regularly with the American community to hear their concerns and keep them apprised of the investigation and efforts to improve security. And, in January 2007, when Americans in San Miguel joined in local effort to stop a multi-story condo project, a specialist on national patrimony was present to clarify that foreigners were constitutionally permitted to participate in the effort (Ibarra 2007).

Finally, not all Americans in Mexico accept passively the prohibitions against their involvement in Mexican politics. On July 2, 2006, as millions of Mexicans went to the polls to choose their country's next president, some foreigners living in Mexico (Americans among them) participated in a mock election to challenge Mexico,s prohibition against political participation

by foreigners, or, in one organizer's terms "test those limits." Eighty five mock voters stuffed ballots into a cardboard box designed by visual artist Daniel Knorr. The curator of the project, George Springer, remarked: "The candidates said that July 2 should be a day of celebrating democracy. If that's true, then why should we shut out the opinions of foreigners living in Mexico" (Flores 2006)?

This discussion offers only a truncated portrayal of the multiple memberships and extended political ties of Americans living in Mexico. Nonetheless, it reveals that U.S. citizens, like Mexicans, Colombians, Dominicans, El Salvadorans, and Haitians, are moving across borders and leading transnational lives. The ties they forge are not only social, cultural and economic, but also political. The evidence suggests that both the numbers of Americans in Mexico and the density of their transnational ties are increasing. Hence, despite some peculiarities, the case warrants analysis via the lens of transnationalism.

Power Imbalance in Reverse

If all identifying labels were omitted from the discussion above, the activities and relationships described would read like so many of the case studies on immigrant political transnationalism. Americans living in Mexico vote in U.S. elections, hold political rallies in Mexico focused on U.S. politicians and U.S. policies, and meet in Mexico with political candidates and party representatives from the U.S. In fact, the emergent global organizing of Democrats and Republicans Abroad constitutes a new form of extra-territorial representation and an example of transnational citizenship remarkably similar to that which captures the attention of scholars who study the political transnationalism of Mexicans in the U.S. (Dark 2003; Shain 2000; R. Smith 2003). Just as former Mexican President Vicente Fox and other candidates for Mexican political office campaign in the U.S., U.S. Presidential candidates send their campaign representatives to meet with their American constituents in Mexico. Mexicans migrants living in the U.S. register and vote in Mexican elections, and U.S. citizens living in Mexico do the same in

U.S. elections. Mexicans in the U.S. form migrant organizations designed to assist newcomers, maintain contact with the homeland, and coordinate communication with the governments of their host society (Orozco and Rouse 2007). Americans in Mexico do the same. Mexicans who are residing in the U.S. continue to make demands on their home government including requests for formal representation in the Mexican government (Smith 2003). U.S. citizens living abroad have asked the same of their homeland government (Olson 2004)

The case of Americans in Mexico mirrors other cases of political transnationalism in many respects, but notable differences do exist. Unlike Mexico and many other countries, the U.S., as a sending state, is largely disinterested in its co-nationals abroad. The associations that U.S. immigrants form in Mexico are not focused on supporting civic projects in the homeland. The reception that Mexico as the receiving state extends to these American immigrants ranges from neutral to welcoming. There is nothing similar, either on the part of the Mexican government or society, to the nativism that exists and that has escalated in recent years in the U.S. Ultimately, these variations in the U.S. case can be explained by accepting one of the guiding assumptions in the literature on transnationalism—power imbalances in the international system—but turning it on its head.

Running throughout the analyses of transnationalism is the notion of inequality–between sending states and receiving states and between immigrants and members of their host society. Transnationalism is typically portrayed in terms of migrants moving from poorer countries to richer ones; receiving states that are more powerfully positioned in the world economy than sending states; and migrants who find themselves marginalized relative to the "natives" in the host society. Alejandro Portes et al, for example, begin their introduction on the study of transnationalism by noting that: "The events in question pertain to the creation of a transnational community linking immigrant groups in the *advanced countries* with their respective sending nations" (*emphasis added* 1999, 216). They also characterize transnationalism as a "set of responses and strategies by people in a condition of disadvantage to its [the world economy]

dominant logic" (1999, 227). And in the conclusion to the special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Portes writes: "it is clear that the sending governments do not want their immigrants to return, but rather to achieve a secure status in the wealthy nations to which they have moved" (1999, 467). Faist, in his discussion of dual citizenship, contends: "Given the asymmetric relationships between countries of emigration and immigration, the position of the latter proves decisive" (2000, 209). Meanwhile, several scholars identify transnationalism as a site of potential resistance against the hegemony of global capitalism and racial discrimination (Basch et al 1994; Glick-Schiller et al 1992). Many of these analyses operate on the assumption, explicit and implicit, that the U.S. is the host society, or receiving state.

The premise of a power imbalance as it pertains to migration and transnationalism generally holds. Overwhelmingly, immigrants are leaving less wealthy and less powerful states to establish lives in wealthier and more powerful states. The willingness of these sending states to reach out to and accommodate co-nationals abroad (in the form of extending dual citizenship and other forms of political and economic rights) can be attributed to their current form of insertion in the world economy. Specifically, the strategy of export oriented economies pursued over the past two decades by many countries on the periphery of the world economy has left these countries heavily dependent on the influx of foreign capital. As such, migrant remittances become key to securing hard currency and providing subsistence to low-income households (Itzigsohn 1995; Portes, Dore Cabral and Landolt 1997). And, as Ostergaard-Nielsen maintains, migration provides sending countries, particularly those peripherally positioned in the global economy, "with new options for reconfiguring the reach of the nation-state through transnational economic, social and political ties with nationals abroad" (2003, 767).

If the incentive for sending state participation in, and encouragement of, transnational politics is the state's current form of insertion in the world economy, then the relative lack of interest or involvement of the U.S. with its citizens abroad can be explained by the fact that the U.S. does not occupy a peripheral or dependent position in the world economy. The U.S. is not

reliant upon remittances from its emigrants, nor are American expatriates sending remittances. It is worth pointing out, however, that the U.S. government does require citizens living outside the country to pay U.S. income tax. Many Americans abroad complain that the U.S. is one of only a few developed countries in the world that levy taxes based on citizenship as opposed to residency ("Costing more…" 2006). and some resent the requirement so much so that they have renounced their U.S. citizenship (Carvajal 2006).

This power imbalance, albeit in reverse, also helps explain another peculiarity of the case of American migrants in Mexico: the relatively tolerant reception of American immigrants by the Mexican host society and state. A variety of complex factors likely explain nativism in the U.S. and its recent rise, but certainly the perception that immigrants are taking jobs from U.S. workers is one key factor. The historical, cultural, and political emphasis in the U.S. on assimilation is likely another factor since Mexican immigrants are often portrayed by some U.S. politicians and media pundits as not melting properly into the American pot. Such public perceptions of U.S. migrants in Mexico are rare, or very muted. For their part, American migrants tend to claim that they are improving the lives of the Mexicans. One American woman in San Miguel explained to me that: "forty more Americans here means forty more maid jobs" (author interview, June 12, 2006). Another American in Ajijic explained: "We are a national treasure . . . a national treasure for Mexico because of all the money we bring to this country" (author interview, Feb. 3, 2007).

The response on the part of Mexicans is more ambivalent. Mexican officials recognize the benefit of the capital influx and have initiated various measures to facilitate the arrival and settlement of Americans in Mexico. At the same time, officials in towns with large foreign populations have been concerned by the prevalence of undocumented economic activities by American migrants. Cristobal Finkelstein Franyuti, Director of International Relations in San Miguel Allende estimates that the city loses thousands of dollars in tax revenue from illegal real estate activity, and explained that city officials would begin cracking down. Similarly, during January and February 2006, Mexican immigration authorities in the Lake Chapala region

launched an investigation of foreigners engaged in undocumented business in the real estate sector. Immigration chief Jose Luis Gutierrez Miranda explained: "Real estate promotion has always been an activity that we review carefully. . . It is probable that some people have dared to get into this activity without permission" (Palfrey 14 Jan 2006). The Mexican inhabitants of these towns also offer ambivalent responses to questions regarding the impact of American immigrants. One Mexican woman, born and raised in San Miguel, remarked that: "The foreign community does a lot for this town. They are very generous." Another native of San Miguel offered a more somber assessment. She said simply; "From them we eat." Similarly, a Mexican woman born and raised in Ajijic, on Lake Chapala, noted that the influx of Americans does bring more jobs, but she and several others complained that prices for food and other staples have increased as a result of American migration, while wages have not kept pace. In no case, however, did Mexicans express outrage at Americans speaking their language or celebrating their culture in Mexico—whether in the form of large Fourth of July parties, Thanksgiving extravaganzas, Superbowl bashes, or public commemorations of the deaths of American soldiers.

Some readers may wish to attribute the different responses to newcomers in the two countries to the fact that Mexican immigrants in the U.S. are, in fact, taking jobs from U.S. citizens while the reverse is not the case; or that Americans in Mexico are assimilating into the host culture in a way that Mexicans in the U.S. are not. Neither assumption is defensible. Questions about job displacement, while arguably empirical ones, are incredibly complex, and definitive proof in support of either proposition is hard to come by. Volumes of research have been devoted to examining the economic impact of immigration on the U.S., and scholars still cannot confirm whether immigrants act as substitutes for U.S. workers, or complements (Borjas 1999; Jacoby 2006; Lowenstein 2006; Simon 1999). And while U.S. migrants southward do not likely take jobs from Mexican workers, the long-term sustainability of an economy based on maid jobs is debatable; and the rising cost of living, including real estate, in Mexican towns heavily populated by Americans is a legitimate concern (Migration Policy Institute 2006). As to the

cultural assimilation of Americans in Mexico, there is generally very little. Remarkably few speak the language, and most reside and socialize in isolated American enclaves (Croucher *forthcoming*).

The most convincing explanation for the variation in responses is, again, the imbalance of power and the perceptions associated with it. In reality, the U.S. may be as economically reliant upon Mexican migrants to the U.S. as Mexico is upon the capital influx and development that accompanies U.S. immigration to Mexico. However, Mexico is now and has historically been economically and politically disempowered relative to the U.S. This power imbalance affects the nature of transnationalism on the part of American migrants to Mexico and their general sense of entitlement, the host country's relatively tolerant embrace of them, and their wealthy sending state's seeming disinterest in them.

Still, the discussion above begs an important question. If the U.S. as a sending state is not promoting transnational ties with its citizens in Mexico, and if the migrants themselves are not marginalized in Mexico in a way that fuels their persistent attachment to the U.S. homeland (the two most prominent explanations for immigrants' political transnationalism), then what does explain transnationalism and the practice of extra-territorial citizenship on the part of Americans in Mexico? Several factors appear significant, and are consistent with the general literature on transationalism. First, the increasing interest of U.S. political parties in their constituencies abroad, and vice versa, certainly plays a factor in forging a transnational political field. As Itzigsohn maintains, the incentives for political parties in the country of origin to participate in transnational politics include the presence of large constituencies residing abroad and the consolidation of competitive party politics. Although the precise numbers are elusive, both the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. have become aware of the growing numbers of U.S. voters residing outside of the U.S., and the increased competition between the parties has intensified the search for party faithful. Dark makes the insightful observation that the absence of hard data on the numbers Americans abroad and their partisan preferences may actually fuel the

efforts of the parties to organize globally: “in the absence of data, hope springs eternal” (2003, 244). Meanwhile, growing migration southward will increase the constituency of U.S. voters concerned about issues such as Medicare abroad, overseas taxation, citizenship regulations, voting procedures, representation, and Census counts.

Second, this case and many others attest to the persistent appeal of national belonging and to the continued relevance of the sovereign state in spite of, perhaps even because of, an increasingly globalized world. During the mid to late 1990s, some scholars proclaimed the advent of postnationalism and the end of the nation-state (Appadurai 1996; Soysal 1994; 2000; Strange 1996). Yet, ample evidence has pointed instead to an altered, but not necessarily diminished role of the sovereign state, and to how the very same fragmentation and global reconfiguration that facilitates multiple forms of belonging simultaneously fortifies reliance upon and attachment to the nation-state (Croucher 2003). Americans living in Mexico may be transcending territory in their political, economic, and socio-cultural lives, but they are still celebrating the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, speaking English, identifying as Americans and electing U.S. politicians. Nor has their embrace of multiple, postmodern, trans-territorial belongings freed them from having to navigate the governmental bureaucracies of both states, the U.S. and Mexico, in terms of taxes, visas, license plates, inter-state commerce, census-taking, and Medicare, to name a few examples. It is in this way that several scholars of transnationalism have distinguished the phenomena they study from that of globalization more generally. “Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific nation-state territories and take place in a world context above and below states, transnational processes are anchored in and span two or more nation-states, involving actors from spheres of both state and civil society” (Faist 2000, 192).

Conclusion

This case study confirms Gutierez's observation that: changing social contexts…are continuing to destabilize fixed and unitary notions of community, culture, nationality, and, indeed, of the territorial 'nation' itself" (483). In an interview in January 2007, one officer of a Mexico chapter of Democrats Abroad who has lived in Mexico for 10 years discussed his enduring identity as "American," and his solid commitment to mobilizing for political change in the U.S. But when asked, he remarked that his most essential sense of identity and belonging was as a "*Chilango*"—a Spanish term for residents of Mexico City. Another officer of a different chapter of Democrats Abroad has lived in Mexico for 8 years, and assured me that he has no plans to ever leave. Nevertheless, he holds dual citizenship in both the U.S. and Britain, and remains strongly committed to effecting political change in the U.S. Meanwhile, in interviews with Americans, loyal Republicans, and long-time residents of Ajijic in their colonial Mexican homes, I encountered large glass-encased American flags mounted over or next to large flat screen televisions tuned to satellite broadcasts of Fox news. I was also told that in the recent past, the Chapala, Mexico chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution chose as its woman of the year, a Jewish Canadian. In none of these cases did the migrants seem to perceive any irony in their situations, nor did they comment on any sense of incongruity in how they lived their daily lives.

Americans living abroad have formed organizations and mobilized in ways similar to immigrants from countries throughout Latin America who are living in the U.S. They are focused in various ways on extending and reconfiguring the field of citizenship. This is the case not only in terms of demands they make on their sending state, the U.S., but also in how they engage the governments in their state of residence, Mexico. Their transnational mobilization is both encouraged and facilitated by political parties in the U.S. Americans, in other words, are practicing citizenship in a polity where they do not reside, and also in a polity where they reside but do not have formal political membership (Fitzgerald 2000). They are doing so, however, from a position of relative privilege in comparison to other transmigrants.

Both the political and theoretical implications of this case are significant and warrant further analysis. Political parties in the U.S. will likely continue to increase their engagement with and global mobilization of Americans in Mexico and elsewhere. The numbers of Americans living in Mexico seem certain to increase given the growing population of baby boomers reaching retirement, the pull of bargain prices south of the border, ideal climates, and growing social networks of Americans in Mexico. The flip side of these pull factors is the push of migrants, particularly retirees, from the U.S. due to climbing health care costs, shrinking pensions, and the perception of a declining quality of life—whether rooted in economic, cultural, or political factors in the U.S. As a sending state, the U.S.'s relative disinterest in Americans abroad will likely change as both the size and the political mobilization of that population increase. In addition to continued demands that Medicare be extended across the border and that U.S. citizens abroad be included in the U.S. Census, the U.S. will face questions such as how campaign finance law and voting procedures should be adjusted, debates about overseas taxation, and concerns over the proper role in American politics of citizens who have lived many years abroad and intend to do so indefinitely (Dark 2003). Nor is it out of the realm of possibility that some individuals and groups in Mexico will come to resent the growing U.S. presence south of the border and act politically on that resentment; or that the Mexican government might at some point find it politically advantageous to respond to or even fuel that resentment.[v]

Some analysts have made a convincing case that transnational political ties and the practice of extra-territorial citizenship need not be perceived as threatening to the host society (Portes 1999; Shain 1999). Whether or not this presumption holds in the case of wealthier immigrants from more politically and economically powerful states who are exercising plural citizenships across borders and in multiple locales remains to be seen. From what might seem now like a provocative extreme, more observers may begin to pose the question recently explored by philosopher Cladio López-Guerra: "Should Expatriates Vote?" He writes: "If we accept—as perhaps all contemporary democratic theorists do—that long-term residency in a democratic state

is what should entitle people to full political rights . . . then we must also endorse the idea that permanent non-residents should be disenfranchised" (López-Guerra 2005, 217). At the very least, analysts of migration and transnationalism should take seriously Ostergaard-Nielsen's call that immigrants' transnational networks everywhere be subjected to greater democratic transparency and accountability (2003).

Globalization is opening up new realms of political action and alternative formations of political and cultural belonging. Neither the nation-state nor territoriality is erased from this equation, but the roles and relevance of both are reconfigured (Croucher 2003). As scholars of transnationalism have argued, we are witnessing the birth, perhaps now arguably the adolescence, of plural forms of belonging that extend beyond the confines of membership in a single state. In order to properly understand the broad implications of these changes, scholars must expand their assumptions about transnational practices and the institutional matrices that under gird them beyond the restrictive focus on migrants who are marginalized relative to their hosts and sending states that are disadvantaged politically and economically in the global system. Shampa Biswas gestures in this direction when he writes:

> "It is important to note the enormous disparity in the experiences of those economically and culturally privileged immigrants able to migrate at will from those both escaping various degrees of persecution and exploitation in their homelands and facing hostility and often further persecution in their host states (Biswas 2005, 62).

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[i] Using the term "American" to refer to people from the U.S. is problematic because technically inhabitants of North, Central and South America are all "Americans." Unfortunately, the English language does not provide a word for people from the U.S. that functions in the way terms like

Colombian, Mexican, or Nicaraguan do to identify individuals that hail from those countries. Due to the lack of a preferable alternative, and the fact that "American is so widely used as a referent for U.S., I will also use it as such here.

[ii] This analysis is based on six months of intensive fieldwork, between June 2006 and June 2007 in Ajijic, Mexico City, and San Miguel de Allende, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, review of published sources including English language newspapers in each locale, internet lists, and blogs by Americans living in Mexico.

[iii] http://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/;http://www.aaro.org/map.html;http://www.democratsabroad.org; http://www.republicansabroad.org/

[iv] *Inside Mexico*, The *Guadalajara Reporter*, which serves Lake Chapala, and *Atención* in San Miguel provide electronic access and archival searches with examples of the stories and editorials referenced here. See http:www.guadalajarareporter.com/chapala.cfm and http://www.atencionsanmiguel.org/ and http://www.insidemexico.com.

[v] The reaction of Mexicans to American migration southward was not a specific focus of this project, but in the course of the research I did encounter evidence related to this question. For example, in the summer of 2006, the English-language weekly in San Miguel, *Atención*, did a cover story on how local Mexicans were reacting to immigration politics in the U.S. Their responses revealed a sense of injustice regarding the harsh treatment Mexicans face north of the border while U.S. citizens in San Miguel de Allende and elsewhere in Mexico are warmly, or at least politely, received. See Croucher 2007.