

**A Comparison of Urban and Rural Transnational
Communities: California vs. Minnesota**

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January 25, 2007

Migration is no longer just a safety valve for developing countries but also a major source of income and a plentiful source of foreign exchange (Portes 2003). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that states have a stake in ensuring a steady flow of remittances. Naturally, expatriates sending money back home also have a stake in the well being of their home country due to economic, familial and emotional ties. How the two actors retain those ties across vast distances and across borders, and under what conditions those ties form is the study of transnationalism. While research has focused mainly on transnational links in urban American environments, immigrants living outside of cities, especially in small towns, often face negative experiences and have more trouble finding niches—a key theoretical factor in the formation of transnational politics. This is due to the relative youth of many immigrant communities in rural areas. Because of the young age of a rural community, and thus the social networks formed, one would expect low levels of participation in immigrant associations as newcomers get their bearings. However, the opposite appears to be true; despite the young age of many of these migrant communities, transnational migrant politics is surprisingly strong. What explains this apparent conflict?

I argue that a rural community faces the same forces pushing it towards transnationalism that an urban community does. The main difference is that cities generally have older immigrant communities with longer histories of institutionalized transnational practices. These communities might have an exceptionally good relationship with their consulate, or they have active hometown associations or some citywide immigrant federation. While the transnational enthusiasm of the new rural immigrants might be just as high, these sorts of institutions take a lot of time and effort to

build. The resulting difference, therefore, is not in the degree of transnationalism, but rather its institutionalization. Thus as these immigrant communities grow older they will have more and more opportunities to grow institutionally. Consequently rural communities offer a unique opportunity to study the development of political transnationalism in communities that have not seen such large-scale influx of immigrants for a long time, as they are largely newer cases.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that transnationalism is not merely the province of urban settlements. And, while no scholar has outright made that claim, current research consistently neglects rural communities, implicitly saying that transnationalism when there is migration from one rural environment to another is less likely to foster transnationalism. This hasn't been tested, and this paper seeks to lay the groundwork for a dialogue on this very issue by showing a case where transnationalism is forming in a rural community and comparing that to the formation in a well-established urban transnational community. The urban case is the Zacatecan community in Los Angeles, one of the oldest and most heavily studied cases, while the rural case is the Veracruzian community in Northfield, Minnesota, one of the largest and fastest growing Mexican communities in rural Minnesota.

The paper begins with a brief outline of the causal variables, followed by a definition section, then a section explaining the rationale behind the variables. After that follows an analysis of recent scholarly work, a discussion of the study's methods and the two case studies, the first of which is the Los Angeles case, the second being the Northfield case. The paper then explicitly compares the two cases, and then concludes by noting topics for further research.

Variables and Definitions

This paper synthesizes a number of factors noted by scholars into a simple model. Figure 1 explains the relationship in full: the identity and political institutions, along with the degree of geographic dispersion, the rural versus urban setting, the participation of the state or other preexisting institutions, and the age of the community are all treated as independent variables. The density of linkages throughout the community and to the homeland, along with the reception in the new home and the resulting personal identity are all intervening variables. The degree of transnational political action is the dependent variable.

‘Geographic dispersion’ estimates whether one group is located in a recognizable ethnic enclave. If the group is located in one or a few enclaves, rather than scattered over a large area, then they are considered geographically concentrated. ‘Age of network’ is how old the ethnic group is in the new country. In America, immigrant communities less than ten years old are fairly young compared to other communities that are still coherent even 80 years after their initial inception. ‘Reception’ indicates how locals react to immigrants moving in to their town, both positively and negatively. A negative reception might include anti-immigrant protests, race riots or legislation passed denying services to immigrants, and so ‘reception’ estimates the tenor of the welcoming committee, whether it’s positive or negative, and the tenor of the surrounding culture towards immigrants once they establish themselves. While these concepts may be easy to grasp, the key concepts of institutionalization and transnationalism need to be further explored.

A general definition of transnational is “the repeated interaction across borders by nonstate actors by social, economic or political means” (Portes, 2003).ⁱ The most precise

term to describe the phenomenon I am studying, therefore, would be ‘migrant transnationalism’ which studies how people who cross borders interact with people and institutions on the other side of the border.

While immigrant organizations might crop up from time to time, many of these organizations claim that they are apolitical even when scholars disagree. Jones-Correa notes that many of these very organizations stress that they are apolitical and do their best to try to avoid any sort of political controversy (1998, pp.130-132). In fact, a number of scholars classify such action in a separate field from political and call it socio-cultural (Guarnizo, Luis Eduardo, Arturo Ignacio Sánchez and Elizabeth M. Roach, 1999) or civil-societal (Itzigsohn, José, Carlos Dore Cabral, Esther Hernández Medina and Obed Vásquez, 1999). Even so, many of these organizations do engage in political activity. These activities include parades and rallies with nationalistic overtones (Guarnizo et. al 1999, pp. 387) and building schools, churches and roads in the hometown (Goldring 2002, pp. 60). Nationalistic parades are political because they publicly express a different identity and solidarity alternative to the mainstream, American identity. Likewise, sending money back to the hometown to fund one type of public improvement means that some other improvement is overlooked and that, ultimately, there are winners and losers to the decision. Also, apolitical organizations participate even more overtly in political organization as they have been known to advocate for policy changes such as implementing dual citizenship, keeping close ties with the motherland and voting abroad in elections in the home country (Jones-Correa, 1998, pp. 130-135). This gives us a very broad, all-encompassing definition of transnational politics as one that transcends

national borders and includes both participation in electoral politics and participation in civil-societal organizations.

The degree of institutionalization is another way to describe transnationalism. Some make the distinction between 'narrow' transnationalism and 'broad' definitions of transnationalism. The only real difference being how institutionalized that particular action is within the state. Voting is narrow political transnationalism as it requires a low level of involvement whereas being part of a hometown association or club is broader (Itzigsohn et al 1999).

Another way of describing institutionalization of transnationalism is through a level or stage system. The first stage of transnationalism is the least institutionalized and most spontaneous: informal networks of people aiding one another in times of need, but these lack regular meetings or a consistent organization. The second stage includes small organizations with regular meetings. A second-stage organization would be a hometown association. The third stage, the most institutionalized, is an umbrella federation that joins together multiple second-stage groups for common direction. An umbrella organization for hometown associations for a certain Mexican state would be considered a third-stage organization. The three stages are progressive and cumulative, in that the higher stages require the presence of the lower ones in order to exist (Alarcon, 2006). This study will use the stage typology, rather than the 'narrow-broad' typology because the former concentrates more on general, structural formations and development of the transnational community while the latter concentrates more on individual actions made by immigrants.

The variables in the model come from the joining of several empirical observations made by scholars who have identified many of the major influences, and as such deserve further explanation. Immigrants, whether they plan on staying in the host country or not, form civic, social and political organizations to create a sense of belonging in an otherwise disorienting and alien culture. Oftentimes when Latinos move to America they see a loss in status compared to their social status in their home country as they take jobs, typically in low-skill manufacturing, that they would not have taken in their home country except under dire circumstances. As relative outsiders, immigrants may also be subject to xenophobic and racist natives. To compensate for this loss in status, Jones-Correa argues, expatriates can either stay within an established ethnic enclave or similar social network, or form immigrant organizations and “perpetuate the socialization patterns in the home country” (1998, pp. 156-157). In this way their personal identity is affected, and that makes transnational politics more likely to occur. It is important to note that Jones-Correa explicitly tied the loss of status as an impetus with men, and he notes that women often see an increase in status. However, as men are more likely to engage in politics in Mexico, this effect can lead to an overall increase in transnational politics in general (Guarnizo et al, 2003).

However, many other factors influence the formation of a transnational community. The formation of transnational practices by Salvadorans in America was largely shaped by what regime was in power at the time. Emigration was prolific during the civil war that lasted from 1981-1992. Due to the nature of the exile and the fact that many Salvadorans thought of themselves not as immigrants but as sojourners—temporary, one-time visitors—as they maintained very close ties back home. This and

the fact that the Reagan administration gave the exiles a chilly welcome by refusing to recognize them as refugees meant that Salvadorans had little choice but to look to their homeland for a sense of belonging and purpose (Landholt, Patricia, Lilian Autler and Sonia Baires, 1999). This fact helps explain how the context and reception in the new home can influence how immigrants think of themselves and their place in the world. Under the right circumstances, immigrants might be more inclined to engage in transnational politics.

A comparative study of Colombians in New York and L.A. also emphasizes another important factor in the formation of transnational communities: the degree of geographic dispersion. In L.A. the Colombian population is spread thin and is virtually unnoticeable, whereas New York's Colombian community is much more geographically concentrated in Queens. Due to the stigma of the drug trade, Colombian migrants generally mistrust one another. This mistrust was overcome in New York City from the easy contact Colombians had with one another. In L.A., however, their population is so spread out that getting to know other Colombians and organize productively is incredibly difficult. As a result New York has a much more robust Colombian transnational community than Los Angeles, largely due to this difference. (Guarnizo et al 1999).

The length of time the immigrant community stays in the host country and the longer the sustained the relationship between the host and home country is, the more likely that strong, institutional ties will appear. The premiere example of this is the Zacatecan community in Los Angeles; with a history going back to the Depression Era, Zacatecan transnational organizations were involved in political activities such as hometown associations and regular meetings with the Mexican Consulate (Goldring,

2002). Over the course of the century the Zacatecan organizations were so institutionalized that they regularly received visits from the governor of Zacatecas. Mayors from Zacatecas also frequently visited, and the transnational community has been considered by several candidates to be an important, influential part of the Zacatecan constituency (Goldring, 2002). As we can see, these very institutionalized political relationships formed in a large part from the sheer age in these organizations. With more time, more institutions had the chance to form.

The institutions formed by transnational politics itself need not be the only institutions that can affect transnational politics. Other organizations can bring their resources to bear and aid in the proliferation of transnationalism. The Mexican state's two-for-one program is an example of the role of the state. With it the Mexican state promised to pledge 2 dollars for every 1 dollar donated by a participating hometown association (HTA). Los Angeles HTAs took advantage of this deal and, as a result, the total number of HTAs in Los Angeles increased dramatically in a short time span (Goldring, 2002; Alarcon, 2006). This is not to imply that outside institutions like the Mexican state created transnationalism; that existed beforehand. It merely indicates that when transnational migrants partner with another actor, their effectiveness can increase.

The relationship between the variables, however, is equally important to understanding the model laid out in figure 1. The degree of geographic dispersion of the immigrant community increases the costs of interaction and reduces the density of the social network, whereas the age of the community increases, the more time it has to build up social capital and make the social network denser. A positive or negative reception in the new home informs the personal identity and status of the expatriate, along with any

cultural baggage an immigrant takes with him or her. A bad reception in the new home, along with a nationalist pride in the home country would create a personal identity more disposed to engaging transnationally, whereas a good reception and shame in the host country would have the opposite effect. Lastly, transnational politics, especially formal politics, is heavily informed by how immigrants interact with preexisting institutions such as host and home governments. If the home government, for instance, brings its resources to bear it changes transnational politics dramatically. Some scholars also assert that transnationalism is more likely to happen in urban communities because the transition from a rural community in the homeland to an urban community abroad is harder to adapt to. It is unclear, however, whether this last variable has much influence on the overall outcome of transnationalism, as little research has been devoted to this claim.

Thus we would expect an old, geographically concentrated immigrant community with a negative reception in the host country and a large degree of internal trust, nationalist pride, and assistance from the home country would be exceedingly likely to engage heavily in transnational politics. Some scholars assert that the community is even more likely to engage in said politics if it is in a rural area, although this study finds no evidence to support that claim and concludes that urban and rural transnational communities share a lot of the same structural development.

Previous Scholarly Work

The literature on immigrant transnationalism is written in reaction to assimilation theory. While assimilation does occur, that's not the whole story. Studies largely focusing on urban areas note that far from switching from one nationality to another, transnational theory suggests that immigrants oftentimes not only hold on to two or more

identities, but they also interact economically, politically and socially in both countries. The failure of transnational research, however, is that it analyzes by and large urban communities, whereas transnational politics is also a distinct possibility in rural communities as well. The silence of the literature raises the question: is transnational politics possible in a rural setting? If it is possible, does it differ in any major way structurally or functionally?

Assimilation theory has been around for decades and it's such a universal concept that scholars sometimes don't always justify why they use this theory as a general framework (see Baker, 1995: 87). As summarized by Fernández "assimilation was expected to be a natural, evolutionary process that as time passed would yield an inevitable outcome (1987: 70)."ⁱⁱ Transnationalism, on the other hand, posits that there is a third way in which immigrants can affect both the home and host countries by creating and maintaining economic, social and political linkages between the two countries, defying the all-or-nothing principle of assimilation theory. These migrants, even as they create contacts with the host country simultaneously maintain contacts with the home country. In doing so they create something new, something transnational (Guarnizo et al, 2003).

The research in this new field has been wide-ranging and innovative, but it tends to privilege studies in urban areas over those in rural areas. Arguing from the principle that context of settlement matters, they make an assumption mentioned before about research in rural areas when they say: "Hence, it can be expected that people emigrating from remote rural places to metropolitan areas in the United States will be less likely to adapt easily and, by the same token, will remain more closely attached to their past"

(Guarnizo et al, 2003) leading them to be more likely to be transnational. While true, there is nothing that suggests that adapting to American life in an insular rural area is any less difficult.

Unfortunately, there has been little to no research conducted on rural immigrant communities, save for a brief article analyzing how Chinese entrepreneurs in rural Canada rely on international networks for job training, marketing, and recipe innovation in Chinese restaurants (Smart, 2003). While this study is useful in suggesting that transnational ties in rural communities are possible, it does little in the way of explaining how these ties form and how, if at all, they grow more institutionalized.

Other studies have, however, examined reception and identity formation of immigrants in small town and rural areas. Lionel Cantu describes the small Iowan hamlet of Midtown, which has a total population just over 1,000. Approximately 10% of the population is Latino. For such a small town and ethnic enclave it has attracted a good deal of attention; to residents of neighboring towns it's known as 'Little Mexico' and it has had multiple visits by the U.S. immigration service, to the point that whenever an unfamiliar car with an Nebraska license plate came to town all Mexicans, documented or not, would lock themselves inside their homes.ⁱⁱⁱ Members of the Latino community there routinely refer to the white members of the town as if they belonged there, and the Mexicans did not (Cantu, 1995).

At least one of the necessary conditions seems to be prevalent in small, rural communities: the marginalization and sometime voluntary separation of immigrant residents. Transnational politics could find fertile soil in an environment such as this. What needs to be seen now is whether transnational politics forms in a new, rural

community given a degree of geographic concentration and negative reception. If it does form, does it form in the same way?

Methods

This study compares the development of one of the oldest and most institutionalized examples of transnational politics, the Los Angeles Zacatecan community with the Mexican community in Northfield, Minnesota, which is largely from a small town in Veracruz. For the Zacatecan community I describe the transnational roots in Los Angeles, explain how the community is similar today and then describe the recent increase in hometown associations in Los Angeles through help of the Mexican state. I then use my research in the Northfield area to describe how many of the same processes of marginalization, institution-backing, and development over time make it likely that formalized transnational politics could form and may already be forming.

The holy grail of transnational political action is a high degree of institutionalization. While transnationalism is thought to occur informally across America, institutionalized transnationalism is a tangible, measurable example of it that represents a greater commitment to the practice and makes the phenomenon less spontaneous and more deliberate. In a study such as this that does not collect survey data on the number of households engaging in transnational activity, the degree on institutionalization becomes a good way to get an impression of how widespread transnationalism is. A useful way to measure the degree of institutionalization is through the 'level' typology of institutionalization mentioned before, as it describes the breadth of transnational power in an area.

Empirical Work

The following section compares the growth of Mexican political transnationalism in Los Angeles, specifically in the Zacatecan community, to the emerging political transnationalism in the Mexican community in Northfield, Minnesota. Similar patterns emerge in both cases even though they differ widely in age and degree of urbanization.

Zacatecan Community in Los Angeles

The L.A. Zacatecan community has seen a great deal of political interest by Mexican state actors in recent years. Mayors of cities in Zacatecas hold court once or twice a year in L.A., Zacatecan gubernatorial candidates, like Moreal in 1998, have campaigned there and Mexican presidential candidates have visited Los Angeles in 1988 and in 2000. Furthermore the amount of migrant-led transnational action has been high and has continued to increase since the 1930's. This is especially the case after the 1970's and 80's when the number of Zacatecan hometown associations exploded and were later subsumed underneath a state-wide Zacatecan association in L.A. (Goldring, 2002).

The formation and consolidation of the hometown associations was a deliberate process with roots back in the 1930s. The early 1930s, right after the collapse of the stock market, was an incredibly difficult time for all people of Mexican descent in L.A. In an effort to free up jobs for Americans, American authorities began a heavy-handed mass-deportation campaign that rounded up thousands of people who 'looked like' they were Mexican and then carted them off to jail for questioning and possible deportation. This was exacerbated by newspapers that often failed to differentiate in their stories between undocumented Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, leading to wide-spread fear

that one was likely, documented or not, to be deported without due process of law. After the raids ended, from 1931 to 1934 over 13,000 people from Los Angeles voluntarily repatriated in Mexico (Balderrama, 1982).

The Los Angeles Mexican community, was misrepresented and conspicuous in the traditional media, faced overt discrimination and acute economic hardship, and was concentrated in a number of enclaves (Balderrama, 1982). This early twentieth century community faced many of the same problems and fulfilled many of the same requirements for transnational communities today: a forced identity as Mexican, acute marginalization, and a concentrated population that had been in Los Angeles for long enough to form and solidify its social networks. Then the Mexican Consulate came along as an established institution to create one of the first Mexican transnational associations, the *Comité Beneficencia Mexicana*.

The *Comité* was an organization started by the Mexican consulate but it also relied heavily upon community leaders in Los Angeles mainly for the purpose of aiding Mexican nationals and Mexican-Americans in the Los Angeles area in making ends meet. From its inception, however, it also had a transnational bent. At its first meeting it earmarked ten percent of its budget to benefit survivors of an earthquake in Oaxaca and it organized, improved and drew funds from Mexican national holidays like *Cinco de Mayo*. Despite some early financial difficulties, the *Comité* survived into the 1980's as a positive force linking Los Angeles to Mexico. It is important to note that this specific organization was started using preexisting institutions such as the Mexican Consulate, but once formed it served a very real purpose that took on a life of its own. In fact, once the Depression ended several different Mexican consuls argued that the *Comité* had outlived

its usefulness. But the board members time and time again refused to end the program (Balderrama, 1982).

The Comité, as a pan-Mexican transnational organization, helped start a tradition of large umbrella organizations that brought together disparate hometown associations and political organizations so they could get more attention back in their state capitals. Even more importantly, it serves as an early example of how as communities are forming they utilize other established institutions to grow but also can gain a degree of independence afterwards.

While the tradition of transnationalism in Los Angeles has continued on throughout the century, so has a tradition of exclusion and racism persisted in California. Two notable examples of this are the Zoot Suit race riots of the 1940s and Proposition 187, a referendum in California to deny basic social services, like schooling, to illegal immigrants in the 1990s. The consistent pattern of exclusion contributed to the growth of a robust transnational community. And we see a standard story of transnational political growth: small formal and informal organizations originally started as a fund to repatriate the deceased to their hometown, or as a sports club or a church-improvement project which all quickly turned to other interests like paving streets, improving schools, designing streetscapes or drilling wells back in Mexico (Goldring, 2002). These small clubs at the very beginning were what Zabin and Escala call in the very first stage of a hometown association—informal groups that held a few events but weren't very organized. They then turned to the second stage—institutionalized hometown associations that routinely interacted with the home community (Alarcon, 2006). While prevalent beforehand, the number of hometown associations since the 1990's increased

dramatically; with over 170 hometown associations registered in all of L.A. for various municipalities throughout Mexico and 51 solely for the state of Zacatecas. Scholars attribute this rapid rise to a renewed interest by the state of Mexico in its nationals abroad (Alarcon, 2006; Goldring, 2002; Smith, 2003). Note that here is an example of migrant-led transnationalism supplemented and reinforced by the state, underlying the reciprocal relationship the state has with its communities abroad.

In 1985 the Zacatecan community in Los Angeles achieved the third stage of institutionalization: the federation level. At the behest of the governor of Zacatecas, the Zacatecan community reformed and added to the number of hometown associations under its aegis, moving from 6 in 1986 to 42 in 1996 and over 51 currently. This is an especially notable achievement as the Zacatecan community, while older than most Mexican communities in Los Angeles, represents only 10 percent of the Mexican population in Los Angeles even though they have in total more associations than any other group. (Goldring, 2002).

The reason why the Zacatecan transnational community is so organized and successful is due in part to the age of the community and how the statewide government of Zacatecas interacted with the organization. Even before the formation of the 1985 Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos Unidos, there were hometown organizations dating as far back as the 1950's and another Zacatecan federation that lasted from 1972 to 1980 before becoming a pan-Mexican federation. The current Zacatecan federation thus is a product of both the age and the special relationship with the community has with the government of Zacatecas. Because of this relationship they enjoy annual visits and summits with the governor of Zacatecas and other government officials, an annual picnic

where anyone can talk to the governor, and a special matching fund program for hometown associations that continued after the original federal 2-for-1 program ended (Goldring, 2002).

The summits, the picnic, the special 2-for-1 program are all tangible products of a political transnationalism that has been 50 years in the making. Furthermore, once one transnational institution is established it breeds increased institutionalization until we get to the point where the governor of Zacatecas believes that it would be worth his time and energy to talk to Mexicans in America as a way of serving his constituency. In fact, the Federación has been known to endorse candidates for office and has even used the threat of withholding endorsements to gain greater leverage on other issues (Goldring, 2002). Transnational politics for this community is strong, serves a very real purpose and shares several characteristics that we also see in the newly formed Mexican community in Northfield.

Veracruzian Community in Northfield, MN

The following information on the Mexican community in Northfield is taken from interviews and informal conversations I had with both members of the Mexican community in the greater Northfield area and with people who frequently work with the Mexican community in Northfield.

Northfield is a small, rural town in Southern Minnesota about 40 miles from the Twin Cities. Its biggest employers are the Malt-O-Meal cereal plant, St. Olaf College and Carleton College, but it is surrounded by farmland on all sides where staple crops such as corn and soybeans grow. Census information indicates that Zip code 55057, the zip code of Northfield, had a population in 2000 of 22,011 with approximately 93% of

that population Caucasian and 5% Latino. Raw numbers place the Rice County Hispanic population (the county in which Northfield resides) at around 3,500 (U.S. Census, 2000). The Hispanic community in particular is new; the Northfield News reported that the county experienced a 682.5% increase in Latino population from 1990 to 2004, the second-largest increase in the state and the most dramatic increase in a Latino population for a county with more than 1,000 Hispanics. The population is also expected to grow by 50% from 2000 to 2010. The reason for the explosive growth of immigrants was initially proximity to food processing centers, but now further immigrants are arriving to be near family and friends who have already settled in the area (Johnson, August 8, 2006).

The change is also coming within the Latino community as well. Even just ten years ago the main Latino population were largely multigenerational families of migrant farmhands from Texas and Northern Mexico who came up to work during the harvest season. Employers such as Chiquita owned and operated farms and food processing plants, which relied on the annual influx of Mexican and Chicano labor during harvest season. Recently, however, the pattern has changed with more and more Mexicans, oftentimes from other parts of Mexico like Maltrata, a small city of 10,000 people in Veracruz, moving to Northfield and permanently settling there.

These new residents are not without their detractors, however. One informant told me of several anti-immigrant organizations in the area like the Still County Coalition for Immigration Reduction and the Federation for Immigration Reform, two active organizations in Southern Minnesota who stage rallies, write letters to papers, call in radio stations and operate across a wide swath of the region. Others report people expressing fears that the new influx of migrants will be a drain on the public resources.

This is not to say that the entire community is unwelcoming; the school board has just in the past year encouraged and staffed a program to help Mexican and other minorities in Northfield go off to two-year and four-year college regardless of documented status, informants have stressed that the State Senator and State Representative, both Republicans, have been very supportive. Likewise has the local Catholic Church, St. Dominic's, which has recently started giving weekly mass in Spanish.

Perhaps some of the biggest challenges come from the fear many Mexicans feel themselves. Informants who work with and try to organize the Latino community here told of the difficulty of organizing in Northfield because so many immigrants are undocumented and distrustful of, say, sending a letter to their congressperson for fear of being discovered by INS. The fear also manifests in stories that people connected to the Mexican community tell of the dangers of being undocumented; one typical story I heard was of two Mexican being arrested when they tried to cash their checks simply because they lacked I.D. With such stories it's possible that some immigrants would look back to Mexico for a sense of belonging and identity.

The newly opened Mexican Consulate in Saint Paul, just an hour away from Northfield, seems like a likely candidate as a liaison for tying the Mexican community that it serves in Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin and the Dakotas back with Mexico. Additionally, the consulate has an agency called the Institute for Mexicans Abroad with purview over four areas: education, sports, Mexican culture and multicultural diversity. As a representative of the consulate put it, the consulate is the "government center outside Mexico." As such, the consulate provides a multitude of services and acts as one of the most institutionalized links Mexicans have to their home country. It provides

continuing education programs by mail, where a Mexican can earn all the way up to a PhD. It will send human remains back to Mexico at no charge, it offers legal assistance to Mexican nationals, it synthesizes news from Mexico and sends it out as a newsletter, it provides books about Mexican culture—6,600 at the time of the interview—to schools across Minnesota, it gives presentation at schools about Mexican holidays, and it was the center of the first absentee balloting for Mexicans abroad for the area. It also aids, but gives no money toward the formation of hometown clubs. So far the consulate has helped create an Oaxacan hometown association and a Morrellan hometown association.

Being the most institutionalized link for transnationalism in the Minnesotan Mexican population does not, however, mean that it is the most common resource for Mexicans in a rural community like Northfield, an hour away from Saint Paul. The consulate, by and large, locates most of the cultural and educational programs in the Twin Cities. The consulate is too close for Northfield to be a member of its ‘traveling consulate’ program, where consulate officials drive out once a month to different areas 2.5 hours away and act as a temporary consulate office. Furthermore, the consulate has not been approached by any group wanting to start a hometown club for Veracruz. Many Northfield Mexicans that I talked to expressed distrust in the Mexican government, and as such few actually voted in the past election. Because of this Northfield Mexicans generally only use the consulate when they need paperwork processed or some other service that only the consulate can provide. However, in the future it is one potential resource to connect Northfield Mexicans back with Mexico.

Mexicans in Northfield do engage in their own transnationalism, albeit at the least institutionalized level. It takes the form most often of a social safety net: if someone dies

in Northfield the community will band together to send the remains back to Mexico, or if someone's family is in financial trouble the community will come together spontaneously in aid. People also engaged in marches and rallies, largely before the Mexican election, to show support for a candidate or party. In particular, the social safety net ideal not only protects immigrants to America, but it also ideally covers relatives back in Mexico. One story that typifies this ideal was of a woman from Maltrata who was in danger of defaulting on a loan and losing her land. She came to Northfield and stayed with relatives there to raise enough money to win her land back, going so far as to help out in the church. One day she left, presumably with enough money to pay off the loan. While this story may not be true, it helps illustrate how connected Maltrata can be with Northfield.

Besides the consulate in St. Paul, most political and social transnationalism mentioned has been on the least institutional level—the first level of transnationalism. This, however, is not the only level of institutionalization present in Northfield. The second, middle level of transnationalism comes with the aid of St. Dominic's Church, a preexisting institution that aids the Mexican community by creating more formal ties to Maltrata. The relationship, we will see, is similar to the Los Angeles consulate's efforts to create the Comité. This Catholic church not only serves as a community center for Latinos, but it also is a social venue where, after Spanish Mass every Sunday night, people gather and eat and convene to discuss matters of import to the community. The church endeavors not to have two separate congregations—Latino and Anglo—sharing the same building, but rather a single unified one. These efforts include hosting bilingual

masses, inviting congregants from one group to the other and, most notably, organizing trips down to the Catholic Church in Maltrata.

This final effort, as it turns out, is also the most institutionalized transnational practice that I have found in the Mexican community in Northfield. The trip lasts about five days in February, from Friday to Tuesday, and sends a priest, leading a group from the Anglo congregation down to Maltrata, Veracruz. The travelers stay with family members of the Mexican congregation, sharing meals, going to service and seeing the city. While this has only happened one year so far, the first trip was considered a resounding success. According to informants, people were incredibly welcoming and friendly, and the services were packed throughout the weekend. In fact, on the final night of the group's visit, where Father Denny Dempsey from St. Dominic's led the congregation of more 700, with 400 congregants spilled out onto the plaza outside in a town with 10,000 people. And when the service was over the visiting priest from Northfield could not leave the dais for two hours, as they were asking for prayers of healing, group photos with the pastor and to carry letters back to relatives in Northfield.

One may ask: is this really political transnationalism? To some it may seem odd to claim that Northfield Mexicans are enhancing ties with their home nation by sending Anglos over to attend church and see the sights, but in reality it is transnationalism, and a shrewd one at that. Despite Anglos being sent as proxies, Mexican Northfielders at St. Dominic's still mobilized a network of friends and family to give the visitors a place to stay and eat. The reason why Anglo congregants went instead of Mexican congregants is inherently practical: a great number of Northfield Mexicans are undocumented immigrants, and so routinely crossing the border is both costly and dangerous. This

could be a limiting factor, but by sending documented Anglos as proxies and having them stay with relatives of Mexican Northfielders, the Mexican community can get around the legal hurdles to create a working relationship between the two churches. Also, this creates a rapport between the Mexican and Anglo congregations on an equal basis: by Maltratans meeting Anglo Northfielders, Maltratans feel more connected to Northfield, and Northfielders feel more connected to Maltrata, possibly expanding the idea of transnational 'community' to encompass more people than just immigrants and their families.

Mexicans in Northfield could act separately from Anglos; they could continue to utilize their informal social networks and influence Maltrata on a private and spontaneous basis, or they could bring the resources of both Mexican social networks and Anglo legal status together and make the Catholic community as a whole more invested in the success of Maltrata and the Maltratan Church San Pedro Apostol. Maltrata is also giving something back: the reception of the Northfielders was much more enthusiastic than expected and it is expected to sign a sister-parish agreement when it hosts the Northfielders again in February. One informant explained the meaning of a sister parish relationship:

The idea of having a sister parish relationship is to remind Catholics that the church is bigger than their own parish and to establish an official connectedness with people in another location. Sometimes such things become the "focus of the week" and are forgotten for another year. It is also a support for each parish to know that they are being thought of and prayed for.

A sister-parish relationship is inherently political, even if largely symbolic, because it is ultimately a choice of who one parish wishes to have a special connected relationship with another parish. The fact that St. Dominic's chose San Pedro Apostol so that so many Latino congregants attended matters because it formalizes and strengthens ties

between the parishes, and by extension, Northfield. Even if it does become the ‘focus of the week,’ such a trip requires extensive organization and coordination to successfully pull off. Plane tickets need to be bought, housing and meal arrangements need to be made, guides need to be conscripted, and San Pedro Apostol has to make special arrangements for the sheer number of congregants that will attend the service. The sheer effort involved in planning such a trip for two years lays the foundation for a deeper relationship in the future and gets people used to working in a formalized framework.

St. Dominic’s did for the Northfield Mexican community what the consulate in Los Angeles did for the Comité de Beneficiencia Mexicana: it acted as the parent organization that helped start institutionalized transnationalism. Both organizations provided the framework and unique resources not necessarily available to the communities and helped create an ongoing institution. And now that transnationalism is institutionalized, this means that in time the Mexican community could continue this type of transnationalism with or without the behest of St. Dominic’s, like how the Comité continued for decades after it lost the consulate’s blessing. The main functional difference between the two cases lies in its membership. The Los Angeles case was a case of Mexicans by themselves banding together with the help of the Mexican consulate. But Northfield currently includes both Mexican immigrants and Anglo natives in its transnational community. This is a key difference and a product of which institution helped the Mexican community—one with strong ties to the Anglo community, or one without. While one could argue that an urban environment could have better access to primarily immigrant institutions like consulates, and that few institutions in a rural area do not have ties with the surrounding Anglo community, such institutions in a rural

setting could still exist. For the Northfield case, Centro Campesinos comes to mind as a group with ties mostly to Latinos and as a possible sponsor organization to help institutionalize transnationalism. In either case, the sponsoring institution does not affect the degree or development of institutionalization of transnationalism, but only its persuasion.

How the Northfield case develops remains to be seen, but it is interesting to note that both the Los Angeles and Northfield communities have a number of parallel factors that have been shown to affect the influence of transnationalism: they both have geographically concentrated communities, both communities faced difficulties from the broader Anglo community, and both grew institutionally from the behest of an existing organization in the area. The main differences lie in the age of the two communities and whether they are located in an urban or rural area.

Age seems to account for a good deal of the difference between the two cases: the Zacatecan community in Los Angeles has its roots in the 1930's and has had plenty of time to develop the medium and large institutions necessary for a widespread, organized transnationalism. The Northfield Veracruzian community on the other hand has been around for no more than eight years and has only really begun to grow. As a result the larger Mexican community in Northfield is still getting its bearings; any organizing would be expected to be new and experimental.

The rural-urban difference is far less clear, however. It would make sense that an urban community would have access to more social networks, as there are more social services around, but the Mexican Northfielders seem to have formed their own network, albeit possibly with a different group of people than if it were in a more urban locale.

However, a different group of people does not change the fundamental relationship that is being forged with Maltrata, which is a transnational relationship. Perhaps transnationalism is less likely to occur in rural communities by a matter of degree, instead of indicating some fundamental difference in how identity is formed. If there is a true rural-urban difference in degree of transnationalism, the fact that formal transnational institutions started to form after only eight years is rather telling of transnationalism's viability as a force in rural American communities.

This study suggests that transnationalism, not just assimilation, not only occurs but also develops lasting institutions in rural communities. The fact that the communities are rural has little bearing on the fundamental principles of development of transnationalism. If there is any real difference between rural and urban communities it may simply be one of age of the community. In fact, it should come as no surprise that small, isolated communities in rural areas should be any less connected than urban communities, when we consider that one of the very driving forces for transnationalism is improving technology that makes it easier for people in disparate parts of the world to communicate. And that is a phenomenon that spans national borders and thousands of miles should fall prey to the settlement patterns of individuals is very counter-intuitive.

Areas for Future Study

As this study indicates that transnationalism can occur in rural communities and that it has a very real potential to grow, this study encourages others looking for cases of new, burgeoning transnationalism outside of established immigrant institutions to look no further than the countryside. While this study did not quantify the number of actors engaging in transnationalism, it did describe the institutions. Future surveys of

transnational practices could go to the fringes of metropolitan areas and compare rural and urban immigrants and how much they are engaged in transnationalism. Even if perhaps urban immigrants were engaged in it more, surveyors would need to take into account the sheer age of the immigrant community and where it mainly came from.

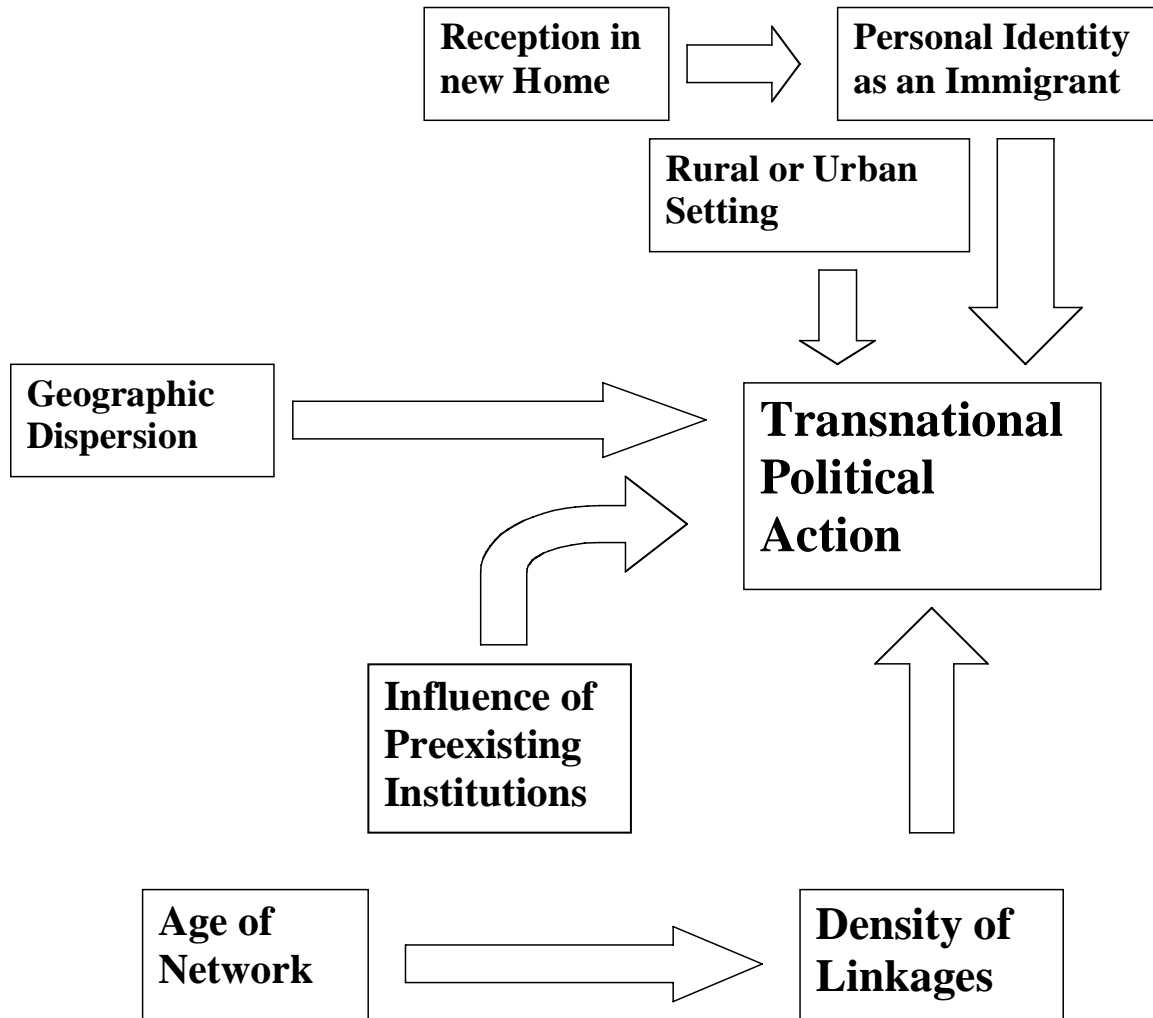
Another potential project that is logistically amenable to rural immigrant communities would be a comparison of two different migrant communities in two different rural towns in the same state. Comparing two rural communities in the same state could help control for differences in migration flows to different regions of the country, as well as the age of the communities. It would control for statewide law on immigrants. Controlling for all of these variables would help isolate and identify even further key variables like local reception by authorities, for instance: Owatonna and Northfield are both nearby in rural Minnesota, but Northfield's police department seems to have a better rapport with the Mexican community than the Owatonna police force does. Does this lead to a difference in degree of political transnationalism or political activism in general? How do the two communities differ in outlook to their respective Latino population? Studying rural transnational communities in this way could lead to a better understanding of transnationalism in general.

ⁱ Just for simplicity's sake when I refer to transnationalism I exclude NGOs such as Greenpeace, though they are indeed transnational in nature, simply because the focus of this study is on transnational linkages created by migrants.

ⁱⁱ This doesn't necessarily mean that an ethnic group would lose in its entirety its culture and buy into the Anglo-Saxon paradigm all at once. The group might even assimilate culturally, but this doesn't mean that a group is fully assimilated; a group might be culturally assimilated but segregated in terms of socioeconomic status, or fail to be structurally assimilated. In this way assimilation theory sets up a dichotomy: either you are, say, structurally assimilated or you are structurally segregated along with the rest of your ethnic community (Fernández et al, 1987: 71-72).

Appendix

Fig 1.



List of Citable Informant Sources

Beth Berry, Northfield High School, TORCH program

Jesús Torres, Centro Campesino, Youth Organizer

Silvia Toledo, Mexican Consulate in St. Paul, Office of Mexicans Abroad

Father Denny Dempsey, Priest at St. Dominic's Church of Northfield.

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