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# **HOW IMMIGRANTS IMPACT THEIR HOMELANDS**

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Durham and London 2013

## Immigrant Impacts in Mexico

*A Tale of Dissimilation*

DAVID SCOTT FITZGERALD

The study of Mexican migration has never neglected the homeland altogether, as influential works by Manuel Gamio and Paul Taylor in the 1920s, the surveys of Wayne Cornelius beginning in the 1970s, and the work of Douglas Massey and Jorge Durand since the 1980s demonstrate.<sup>1</sup> Yet, most migration studies have overwhelmingly focused on immigrants' assimilation into the host country. They address how quickly different groups of immigrants lose their foreign qualities to resemble natives. Since the early 1990s, a transnational perspective has revived attention to migrant homelands, highlighting processes encompassing all poles of a migration circuit. Authors writing in this framework emphasize that those who move abroad are not definitively immigrants or emigrants, but rather human agents who lead lives that span international borders. Whether migrants physically move back and forth between their homeland and new land or participate vicariously in the lives of their places of origin through remittances and phone calls, their experiences cannot be understood from the perspective of the destination country alone. Indeed, the more postmodern inflections of transnationalism reject altogether the dichotomous categories of origin and destination, emigrant and im-

TABLE 6.1. Taxonomy of Migration Studies Perspectives

<i>Analytic Perspective</i>	<i>Assimilation</i>	<i>Dissimilation</i>	<i>Transnationalism</i>
Phenomenon	Immigration	Emigration/return migration	Real or virtual circularity
Reference Country	Destination	Origin	Origin and destination
Trajectory of change	Convergence	Divergence	Reproduction

migrant, and even the geographic spaces of here and there—arguing for a convergence of a single community, social field, or third space across international borders.<sup>2</sup>

Building on the literatures of assimilation and transnationalism, the concept of *dissimilation* offers a third perspective that too often falls out of existing accounts (see table 6.1). Dissimilation, the process of becoming different, is the forgotten twin of assimilation, the process whereby groups and individuals become similar. As Mexican immigrants and their children become similar to other Americans, they become dissimilar from the nonmigrant Mexicans they leave behind.<sup>3</sup> The differences that develop between migrants and those who stay in Mexico are often much greater than the small differences upon which scholars of assimilation focus their microscopes.<sup>4</sup>

For example, policymakers and scholars have viewed some immigrants' adoption of urban and gang-inflected youth culture in the United States as a failure of assimilation.<sup>5</sup> The same set of facts is viewed in Mexico as evidence of Americanization. When young men who left for the United States as children or U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants visit their ancestral homes in rural Mexico, they often stand apart from their peers who never left. The tattoos, body piercings, baggy pants, shaved heads, and fondness for gothic letters of *cholo* youth telegraph their transformative U.S. experience. Nonmigrants commonly claim that migrants *no son de aquí ni de allá* (are neither from here nor from there). In other words, migrants have dissimilated from the Mexican mainstream, but they do not belong in the U.S. mainstream either.<sup>6</sup>

As with assimilation, dissimilation can be parsed into different domains of social life.<sup>7</sup> Migration may dramatically open opportunities for exogamy, for example, while doing little to change some aspects of the cultural content encountered in the place of destination. Spanish-

language music is as widely available in the United States as English-language music is in Mexico. Because heterogeneous cultural influences are felt on both sides of the border, independently of migration (through cross-border flows of media, goods, and tourists), it is challenging to gauge migration's independent effect on cultural change in the homeland. Migrants become different from those who stay behind, while those who stay behind are also changing, as Mexican society undergoes myriad transformations only partly attributable to migration.

The dissimilation perspective shares the transnational perspective's attention to the country of origin and the possibility of migrants' new and ongoing ties across borders, but the dissimilation perspective differs in important ways. Against the transnationalism literature's focus on the reproduction and *similarity* in a community spread across international borders, the concept of dissimilation focuses attention on the creation of *difference* between populations divided by the border. Dissimilation questions the very concept of community by highlighting negotiations over who is a legitimate member of the community, what kinds of behavior are acceptable, and struggles over where the boundaries of the community begin and end.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to skeptics of Mexican assimilation, such as the political scientist Samuel Huntington, who mistakenly saw "deviant" social practices of Mexicans as failures of Americanization, the same practices reflect Americanization from the dissimilation perspective of the country of origin.<sup>9</sup> Vis-à-vis the scholars of transnationalism, who highlight the ongoing connections between migrants and their homeland, and the newly institutionalized possibilities for dual nationality and cultural pluralism, the dominant pattern in Mexican migration is still one of migrant dissimilation.

### Mexican Emigration

Emigration from Mexico is exceptional for its large volume and concentration in a single major country of destination. In 2011, roughly 12 million Mexicans, making up 11 percent of Mexico's population, lived in the United States. They accounted for 98 percent of all Mexican emigrants. More Mexicans live in the United States than the total number of immigrants in any other country in the world. Another 16.8 million people of Mexican origin were born in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Mass migration from Mexico has a centenary history and con-

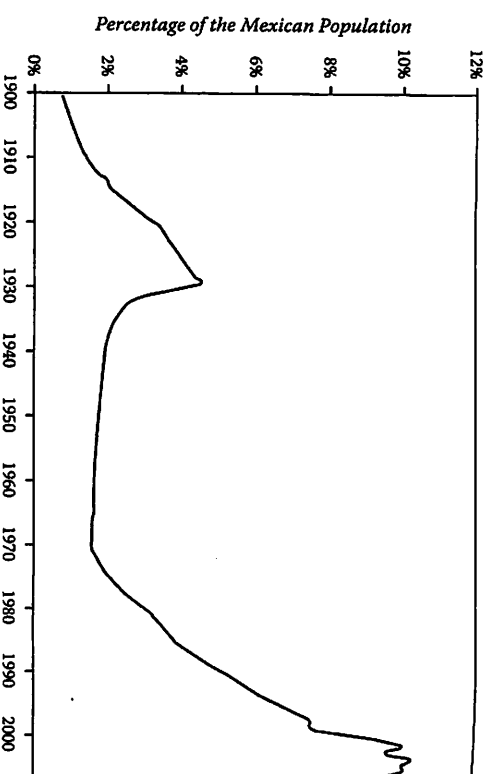


FIGURE 6.1. Mexican Emigrants to the U.S. as a Percentage of the Mexican Population, 1900–2006

Source: David Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 5.

tinues at high levels that affect those who go and those who stay behind (see figure 6.1).<sup>11</sup> A quarter of the Mexican adult population has visited or lived in the United States, and 60 percent have a relative there.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, and accelerating with the passage of the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1968, emigration from Mexico shifted from a primarily male-led, circular migration to a permanent, family migration to the United States.<sup>13</sup> Still, a considerable degree of circulation continues.

In 2008, however, migration to the United States slowed down. More than 400,000 Mexicans in the United States returned to Mexico.<sup>14</sup> In the wake of a downturn in the U.S. labor market, increased U.S. border enforcement, and increased deportations, the population of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico fell from 7 million in 2007 to 6.1 million in 2011. The authorized population grew slightly over the same period, from 5.6 to 5.8 million.<sup>15</sup>

Both return migration and permanent emigration are vehicles for social change. Even migrants' engagement with their homeland highlights to those who stay behind how migrants have been changed by their U.S. experiences.

TABLE 6.2. Mexican Communities Studied, 1999–2009

<i>Community</i>	<i>2005 Population</i>	<i>2005 County Under- development Index<sup>1</sup></i>
Arandas, Jalisco	46,099	Low
Agua Negra, Jalisco	486	Low
Tlacuitapá, Jalisco	1,264	Medium
Tunkás, Yucatán	2,812	High
San Miguel Tlacotepec, Oaxaca	1,696	High
Sahuayo, Michoacán	59,316	Very low

<sup>1</sup> Counties with a high score on the underdevelopment index have low levels of education, low levels of access to health care, poor housing infrastructure, and low levels of refrigerator ownership.

<sup>2</sup> Sahuayo is rated as a "medium" migration intensity county by CONAPO, based on the

## Methods

This chapter draws on research in six migrant-origin communities in four Mexican states. These six communities were selected to represent a broad range of migration contexts. They vary in size, level of economic development, levels of out-migration, length of community-emigration history, and ethnic composition (see table 6.2).<sup>16</sup>

## Cultural Dissimilation

As with assimilation, dissimilation may be segmented. Segmented assimilation refers to the fact that migrants associate with distinctive groups within their destination country that differentially affect the values and behaviors they adopt. Dissimilation refers to the differences in cultural and other practices between the migrants and the groups in their places of origin. Migrants are more likely to dissimilate from rural, conservative, and deeply religious populations than from urban, more socially liberal, and secular populations. Other things being equal, migration to a highly heterogeneous or culturally distinctive milieu will create greater dissimilation than migration to a more familiar context.

According to a common view in Mexico, the local economic benefits of emigration come at a steep cultural cost. For example, attitudes to-

<i>Percent of Adult Population with Migration Experience</i>	<i>Generations of Mass Migration</i>	<i>Ethnic Composition</i>
20%	4	Mestizo
30%	3	Mestizo
50%	4	Mestizo
25%	1	Maya (indigenous)
37%	2	Mixteco (indigenous)
NA <sup>2</sup>	4	Mestizo

2000 census. <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/intensidadmig/anexoC.pdf>. Unlike the other communities in Table 6.2, I did not conduct a survey in Sahuayo that would provide comparable data on the percentage of adults who have migrated to the United States at least once.

ward economic impacts in my survey of household heads in the county of Arandas, conducted in 2003, were generally positive. Among the Arandenses who had ever migrated, 88 percent said emigration had a positive local economic impact, while 77 percent of nonmigrants said the same. The migrants (a term I use in the Mexican context to refer to anyone who has had migration experience) and nonmigrants interviewed were equally likely to report that migration had a negative impact on the community's customs and morals. They both disapproved of migration-induced cultural changes. Just as nonmigrants feared what they saw as the corrupting influence of American culture on their hometown, migrants feared its corrupting influence on their own children, when living both in the United States and in Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

Negative views of the cultural impacts of migration in the Los Altos region of Jalisco, where all three Jaliscoan communities I discuss in this chapter are located, concur with national surveys that show that twice as many Mexicans say U.S. cultural influence is negative than say it is positive.<sup>18</sup> However, the level of nationalism directed against the United States is mitigated when Mexicans look northward for a model of modernity. The suspicions of Mexican elites are "often allied to a sneaking admiration" that has become more pronounced with the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and a generation of technocrats schooled in top U.S. universities.<sup>19</sup> Widespread am-

bivalence toward the effects of migration to the United States reflects ambivalence toward the northern neighbor in general. Cultural nationalists, who already feel beset by pervasive American cultural and economic influence, denigrate migrants. In a process of normative inversion, cultural nationalists flip the geopolitical hierarchy to assert Mexico's moral superiority over the United States. The drugs, criminality, and disease that North Americans often blame immigrants for importing to the United States are seen in Mexico as exports from the United States to their home country brought by migrants. The dissimulation of migrants is viewed as a cultural threat particularly in the areas of religion, education, public comportment, and work.

## Religion

The strongest sentiment against emigration has come from the Catholic Church, an influential voice in a country where more than 99 percent of the population identified as Catholic in 1900 and which remained 88 percent Catholic in 2000.<sup>20</sup> The Church initially opposed mass emigration, in large part because of fears that migrants would convert to Protestantism and then spread Protestantism to Mexico when they returned, but also because it saw migrants as a source of foreign cultural pollution and family disintegration.<sup>21</sup>

Fears that migrants are a Trojan horse for Protestant conversion in Mexico waned over the last century, even though Protestants increased from less than 0.4 percent of Mexico's population in 1900 to 7.6 percent in 2010. Few Mexicans converted to Protestantism in the historic heartland of Mexican emigration in central-west Mexico, which is the most Catholic part of the country. Protestantism in Mexico is strongest in the southeastern, indigenous states where foreign missionaries have been most active.<sup>22</sup> Studies have found that the few non-Catholics who live in rural, central-west Mexico often converted to other faiths while they were working in the United States.<sup>23</sup> However, according to a diocesan survey conducted in 1993 in the Los Altos region, less than 1 percent of return-migrants in the region had left Catholicism for another religion.

Nonetheless, migrant religiosity has declined. My survey of 860 adults in 2007 from the historic migrant-source community of Tlaciutapa, Jalisco, who were living either in Tlaciutapa or its major U.S. satellite destinations, in the San Francisco Bay Area and Oklahoma City, confirmed this decline. Seventeen percent of migrants reported

that they did not attend church in the previous month, compared to only 8 percent of nonmigrants. After controlling for age, sex, education, wealth, and marital status in a multinomial logit regression, each additional year spent in the United States was associated with a 1 percent decrease in church attendance.<sup>24</sup>

In the much more heterogeneous religious environment of Tunkás, Yucatán, a new community of emigration, in which 23 percent of the population is Evangelical, more than 40 percent of Catholics and Evangelicals said they attended church less frequently after migrating.<sup>25</sup> In short, migrants appear to be becoming less religious by the conventional measure of church attendance, but they are not responsible for much of the growth of Protestantism in Mexico.

Contemporary policy of the Catholic Church in Mexico makes familiar claims about the negative effects of emigration on family life and the social order. Church officials lament the U.S. street fashions introduced by returning migrants and their U.S.-born children. Clergy in the diocese of San Juan de los Lagos also argue that marital separation creates mutual suspicions of infidelity and greater opportunities for bigamy and cohabitation. They say that when men emigrate, their children often become "virtual orphans" in the absence of male role models. The head of the diocese's migrant outreach program in the Los Altos region describes emigration as changing "values typical of our towns," values such as fidelity, solidarity, honor, and sacrifice for the common good. Despite these problems, internal diocesan documents say that "in general, family customs have not suffered significant changes" due to emigration. Similarly, while warning of "the scarce social control of a plural culture" in the United States, official diocesan policy states that cosmopolitan environments should not be "a source of division or conflict, but of mutual enrichment."<sup>26</sup>

In an effort to institutionalize its pastoral plan for migrants in the late 1990s, the diocese of San Juan produced a 119-page migration policy book for local priests. The book provides a sophisticated sociological understanding of the causes and effects of Mexico-U.S. migration and templates for celebrations of the return of the *hijos ausentes* (absent children). During these celebrations, the Church has conducted purification rituals in which migrants confess the sins they committed in the North. Leslie Reese describes a processional float during a patron saint fiesta depicting the depravity of the U.S. drug culture.<sup>27</sup>

In short, the Catholic Church stopped trying to dissuade emigration

in the mid-twentieth century, as it realized that return-migrants were not conduits for mass conversion to Protestantism. Yet, clergy remain deeply concerned about the effects of emigration on family stability and conservative social values.

## Education

Emigration presents a multifaceted challenge to public education in Mexico. Teachers often blame migration for elevating dropout rates. In a "culture of migration," children in general, and boys in particular, grow up expecting to migrate as a rite of passage into adulthood.<sup>28</sup> Of all the state employees and policymakers I have interviewed, teachers were the most fearful of the effects of migration on cultural change, as they feared that migrants would be a transmission belt for foreign influences undermining national homogeneity.<sup>29</sup>

Studies differ in their assessment of migration's effects on schooling. The quantitative evidence for the common perception that emigration induces children to drop out of school is mixed. Gordon Hanson's 2002 census-based study found that youth from migrant households completed more schooling than those from nonmigrant households, presumably because remittances financed schooling costs and supplemented household budgets, in lieu of child labor. The positive effect of migration was found to be particularly strong among girls whose parents were poorly educated. In turn, William Kandell's and Douglas Massey's and Kandell's and Grace Kao's surveys of youth in the state of Zacatecas, with the highest per capita emigration levels in Mexico, found that respondents' intent to one day migrate negatively correlated with their educational aspirations, but students from migrant households had higher levels of schooling than students from nonmigrant households. In the Oaxacan town of San Miguel Tlacotepec, my 2007 survey found no relationship between remittance income and educational attainment, but receipt of remittances correlated positively with high school attendance. Remittances help pay for the high costs of high school studies. However, David McKenzie and Hillel Rapoport's survey found, in 2006, that living in a migrant household lowered the odds that boys would complete junior high school by 22 percent, and lowered the odds that boys and girls would complete high school by 13 to 15 percent.<sup>30</sup> The diversity of findings suggests that additional longitudinal research is needed to disaggregate the effects of levels of emigration and

remittances on educational outcomes at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels.

Return-migrant students and U.S.-born students whose parents take them to Mexico are an understudied challenge to the Mexican educational system. Based on surveys in the low-emigration state of Nuevo León and the high-emigration state of Zacatecas, Victor Zúñiga and Edmund Hamann estimated there were 200,000 students in Mexican elementary and junior high schools with experience in the United States. While these students represented only about 1 percent of the national elementary and junior high student population, they were concentrated in particular schools, due to the highly networked nature of Mexican emigration.<sup>31</sup> The teachers the authors interviewed who worked with children with U.S. experience expressed ambivalence about how to manage migrant students. Teachers wanted to be helpful, but found it difficult because of students' cultural differences.<sup>32</sup> Teachers whom I interviewed in Jalisco in 2003 and 2004 saw return-migrants as conduits for the infusion of U.S. music and the use of English and Spanglish (a mixture of English and Spanish) that they believed threatened Mexican music and "high" Spanish. Although the teachers considered proficiency in English to be an enviable accomplishment, they felt the loss of Spanish to be a moral failure and rejection of Mexican identity. Thus, the same linguistic shift from Spanish to English that is perceived as "assimilation" from a U.S. perspective is seen as national "dissimilation" and betrayal from the vantage point of Mexican educators.

## Law and Order

Migrants returning to their homeland with new practices can threaten established mechanisms of social control. Officials in Mexico often blame migrants for the introduction of illegal drugs and the increased consumption of alcohol. According to a study conducted in 1997 by the government of Jalisco in rural communities with high levels of emigration, migrants were eleven times more likely than nonmigrants to have used drugs. In a similar vein, a report in 2003 on the condition of migrants, commissioned by the government of Jalisco, warned of "the presence of mental health problems and addictions originating in the loss or alteration of their original customs and the necessity to adopt new ways of life."<sup>33</sup> This is the country of origin perspective on what some call "segmented assimilation" in the United States, in which a

large subset of immigrants assimilate into the "counterculture" of an "underclass" rather than into the national mainstream.<sup>34</sup>

The prevailing folk theory of why young male returnees are so disorderly in Mexico is that they "let loose" after being subjected to police constraints in the United States. Residents I interviewed often said that migrants behave worse in Mexico than they do in the United States. The director of the secondary school in Agua Negra, Jalisco, for example, explained that migrants suffer humiliations, privations, and discrimination in the United States. "Everything they repress there, they come here to vent." Male migrants also refer to the sense of freedom they feel in Mexico, owing largely to less state surveillance and regulation over their lives. In Mexico, they can drive without seatbelts, play their music at the volume they choose, and engage in informal commerce, all without fear of intervention from police and code enforcement. Mexicans who had lived in the United States illegally felt especially free upon their return. They complained of feeling "locked up" and fearful of the immigration authorities while in the United States.

Deported migrants create policing challenges, especially if they were associated with gangs in the United States. Criminal returnees learned new organizational models abroad. Nonetheless, while some Mexican migrant sending-communities have experienced significant problems with returned gang members, the police officers I interviewed said problems in their communities were limited to graffiti and noise, rather than violence.<sup>35</sup> In general, Mexico has not experienced the gang problems on the scale of El Salvador, described by José Miguel Cruz in his chapter in this volume. However, the rising number of deportations of gang members from the United States and the escalation of the drug wars in Mexico since 2006 may lead Mexico to replicate some of the Salvadoran experience even if the relatively stronger Mexican state is better able to restrain gangs.

### **Attitudes toward Work**

Many scholars long assumed, and policymakers hoped, that return-migrants would "modernize" their home communities because of their exposure to the United States. Scholars also believed that migrants would return to Mexico as better workers.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, in the context of work, cultural dissimilation has often been viewed as a positive source of change.

I found that perceptions of the impact of U.S. experience on returnees' work performance vary. While I know of no longitudinal studies that trace the impact of emigration on work habits, the views of Mexican employers and the rank-and-file are telling. Three quarters of household heads surveyed in Arandas and Agua Negra, Jalisco, in 2003, said that migrants returning to their hometowns from the United States did not work as hard as they did before they left. Only 14 percent said returnees worked harder. There was not a statistically significant difference between return-migrant and nonmigrant views. Clearly, returnees have higher expectations of pay and work conditions than nonmigrants. The migrants have what the labor economist Michael Piore calls a "dual frame of reference." Their assessment of their options in one labor market is based on their experience in another.<sup>37</sup> Even if most Arandenses are on the bottom of the U.S. labor market, earning dollars makes the work preferable to comparable work in Arandas.

Employers whom I interviewed said that returnees generally shun manual work, especially in agriculture. The employers described this as unprincipled laziness, rather than a rational decision by workers to avoid low-paying work in Mexico when better-paying work is available in the United States. At the same time, they also perceived workers who had labored many years in the United States as more disciplined and reliable than nonmigrants. The owner of several businesses, for example, praised the quality of his returnee employees: "They're people who come back accustomed to a schedule in which one has to earn his salary; . . . You don't have to spend half your time watching them or pressuring them. That is to say, they come back with a mentality that they will work eight hours, but they will be eight hours of real work—not simply time passed."

Other Mexican employers I interviewed believed returnees work harder to earn more money to meet consumer aspirations acquired in the United States. In Arandas, for example, the owner of a tequila distillery with 460 employees noted that not only had returnees at his factory "acquired culture" in the United States, which led them to be more responsible and to have a better understanding of the importance of punctuality and machine-work, but also that "they want to live more comfortably, and so they act more responsibly."

Most employers of agricultural workers, in contrast, saw little difference in the work ethic of nonmigrants and return-migrants they hired. However, one employer felt that the U.S. experience teaches Mexicans



how to be better workers. He noted that when his day laborers do not come to work, he tells them, "Go to the United States, you bastards, so you'll know what it's like. There, if you're ten minutes late, you come on time the next day, and if not, you're fired!" In general, though, employers found the disciplining of the U.S. labor market useful for improving the quality of factory employees, not fieldworkers.

Mexicans thus differ in their views about the cultural price of economically driven migration. The Catholic clergy has lamented the effects of migration on family separation, secularization, and youth culture, while schoolteachers have blamed migration for encouraging students to abandon their studies, and police have blamed youth violence and disobedience on the U.S. influence. Farmers, in turn, generally believe returnees to be too lazy to work in the fields, but manufacturers, who offer higher wages, believe U.S. experiences make for more disciplined workers. Whether perceiving changes positively or negatively, most agree that migrants are becoming different from nonmigrants.

## Politics

The transnational perspective has underscored how migrant activists and governments of migrant-sending countries are institutionalizing new forms of political ties that link migrants to their homelands.<sup>38</sup> These scholarly narratives emphasize laws, organizations, and discourses that enlarge a national community beyond its geographic borders. But they inadequately address how migrants become politically dissimilar from those they leave behind, and how they often distance themselves from home country politics.

As the Mexican political system became more competitive in the late 1980s, the main political parties began to perceive migrants as a potential base of support. Around the same time, the government perceived Mexicans in the United States as potential Washington lobbyists for pro-Mexico and pro-Mexican policies.

The contemporary period of cross-border political engagement began with the presidential campaign in Mexico in 1988, when the center-left candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, campaigned among Mexicans in California and Illinois. He urged the migrants to influence the vote of their families back in Mexico.<sup>39</sup> After losing the election, he formed the Party of the Democratic Revolution (designated with the Spanish acronym *PRD*), which continued to press for migrants' political rights. Eight

years later, the longstanding ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (designated with the Spanish acronym *PRI*) amended the country's constitution to allow Mexicans to vote for president from outside their districts of residence.<sup>40</sup> The amendment, in principle, allowed Mexican citizens to vote from abroad. However, the initiative proved mainly symbolic, in that it did not include enabling legislation for the Federal Electoral Institute to organize elections outside the country. In July 1999 the opposition-controlled federal Chamber of Deputies passed the enabling legislation, but the senate, controlled by the ruling *PRI*, blocked the measure.<sup>41</sup> The *PRD* had merely wanted to incorporate emigrants symbolically, so as to subvert opposition party efforts to reach out to Mexicans abroad.

The electoral reform, meanwhile, inadvertently paved the way for the formation of a Mexican emigrant lobby in Mexico City. Various emigrant groups that began with a *PRD* base, but expanded to include activists from across the political spectrum, formed the Coalition for the Political Rights of Mexicans Abroad. The coalition successfully lobbied for a bill that enabled Mexicans to vote from abroad by absentee ballot in the presidential election in 2006.

Ironically, the migrant vote in 2006 proved inconsequential in the closest official election count in modern Mexican history. Three million out of the 10 million Mexicans in the United States were eligible to vote in the election. However, only 57,000 U.S.-resident Mexicans registered to vote, and less than 33,000 cast valid ballots.<sup>42</sup> The absence of Mexican voter-registration programs in the United States, difficulties in obtaining absentee ballots, the requirement to vote by certified mail weeks in advance of the election, and a new ban on Mexican presidential campaigning in the United States all contributed to the low turnout. A Pew Hispanic Survey conducted in 2006 found that 78 percent of Mexicans in the United States knew that Mexicans could vote from abroad, but 55 percent did not know there would be elections that year.<sup>43</sup> Policymakers from the *PRI* and their ruling National Action Party (designated with the Spanish acronym *PAN*) symbolically supported migrant political participation, while limiting it in practice, because they feared voters abroad might contribute to a *PRD* victory. Against this backdrop, migrant activists reacted angrily. They sensed that the Mexican government was encouraging political apathy in Mexican partisan politics, even as it encouraged the formation of a Mexican lobby in Washington and migrant remittances to Mexico.

Migrant disaffection with Mexican politics contributed to the low voter turnout. According to the same Pew Hispanic Center survey, only 13 percent of Mexican-born adults in the United States viewed Mexican political institutions favorably. Other surveys have found that interest in Mexican politics among Mexican-born U.S. residents declined over time and across generations, indicative of political dissimulation. Nonetheless, a small core of committed migrant activists increased their cross-border political engagement over the years (see the chapter by Alejandro Portes, in this volume).<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the Mexican government began to court emigrants in the United States to lobby for legislation it coveted and against legislation it opposed, although it met with little success. Its strategy was based on emigrants' maintaining enough interest in Mexico to not entirely dissimilate from their homeland, while assimilating sufficiently into the United States to effectively make their political demands. Lobbying is much more effective when migrants become naturalized U.S. citizens, master English, and learn U.S. tactics for exerting political influence through writing letters, signing petitions, making political contributions, and meeting with politicians. Most Mexicans in the United States lacked the combination of interest, legal standing, and economic resources necessary to lobby effectively on behalf of the Mexican government. When Mexicans have pushed for immigration reform, either through conventional lobbying in Washington or through massive street protests, they have done so because they perceived it in their self-interest, not because they acted at the behest of the Mexican government.

The Mexican government first cultivated a lobby in the United States in the early 1990s, to press Congress to pass NAFTA. The measure passed, but without Mexican lobbyists' playing a significant role. Meanwhile, in 1994, Mexican consulates and Mexican American political organizations failed in their efforts to defeat Proposition 187 in California. The proposition restricted unauthorized immigrants, most of whom were Mexican, from a wide range of public services. A federal judge—not Mexican organizations, institutions, and immigrants—ultimately overturned the legislation.<sup>45</sup>

The Mexican congress, in turn, passed a dual nationality law that took effect in 1998, in large part to encourage Mexican nationals to become U.S. citizens, so that they could vote against such measures as

Proposition 187 and against politicians who supported anti-immigrant policies. The dual nationality law applies to Mexicans who take out foreign citizenship. While dual nationals may not vote or run for certain offices in Mexican elections, they may, by law, buy land in their name along Mexico's coasts and borders that foreigners may not. Yet, indicative of political dissimulation transpiring among Mexican migrants in the United States, during the first five years the law was in effect, only 67,000 Mexican-origin foreign citizens applied for dual nationality rights.<sup>46</sup>

Efforts by Mexican political parties and the Mexican government to court emigrants for political purposes have met with little success because most of those who have settled in the United States have distanced themselves from Mexican politics. There is one major exception to migrants' distancing from the Mexican government. It is born of migrants' personal interests. Over 7 million Mexicans in the United States obtained official Mexican *matricula consular* identification cards between 2000 and mid-2008. Mexicans who entered the United States illegally could not obtain U.S. identification documents, other than driver's licenses in some states. For them, the newly offered cards are especially attractive. The cards may be used for routine transactions that ultimately have assimilatory consequences, such as for enrolling children in U.S. schools, but also for reinforcing ties to Mexico, such as in facilitating the opening of bank accounts through which remittances can be sent to nonmigrant family members.

It is noteworthy that migrant politics among Mexicans in the United States differs from that among Turks in Europe, described by Riva Kastrano in her chapter in this volume. Turkish migrants are much more engaged in homeland politics. There are at least two reasons for the difference between the two migrant groups. First, almost all Mexican emigrants live in the United States, which is much more politically welcoming of immigrants and their children than most European countries. The United States has low barriers to naturalization and an extremely strong version of *jus soli* that grants citizenship even to the children of unauthorized immigrants who are born on U.S. soil. Easy political assimilation into the destination country encourages dissimulation from the country of origin. Second, contemporary Mexican migrants come from a country with far less ethnic politicization than Turkey, which faces armed movements from Kurds demanding regional autonomy and even independence. Violent separatist politics thrive on foreign

bases of support and refuge. Notwithstanding the ethnic heterogeneity of Mexico, the only contemporary armed, quasiparastatist group is the Zapatista guerrillas, who since 1994 have been confined to a small sliver of jungle in the southern state of Chiapas, a state with little emigration.

### Remittances and Hometown Associations

The remittances that Mexicans in the United States send to family they left behind reflect the strength of ties retained across borders. Nationwide, 18 percent of adult Mexicans receive remittances, an average of \$350 monthly.<sup>47</sup> Remittances, which have become the country's second largest source of foreign exchange (after petroleum), totaled \$26 billion in 2007.<sup>48</sup> Because of the macro importance of remittances, the Mexican government has sponsored several initiatives to lower transaction costs, to channel remittances to community projects, to undertake job-creating investments, and to discourage emigrants' dissimulation.

What impact have remittances had? Scholars disagree. Most Mexican migrants are low-skilled, the type who Portes argues in his chapter in this volume fuel minimal economic development in their homeland. Some scholars also argue that remittances exacerbate income inequality and, in raising consumer expectations beyond the level obtainable with local jobs, fuel further emigration. Other researchers, in contrast, point to ways that remittances have stimulated economic development. In certain settings, remittances supplement the incomes of microentrepreneurs. Furthermore, when cash transfers are spent on household consumption, they may have multiplier effects, creating jobs for workers who produce the goods and services that remittance-receiving households consume.

Survey data from a range of settings reveal that most remittances to Mexico are used for household expenditures, land purchases, and home construction, not for investments that generate jobs and capital accumulation. Nonetheless, economists have estimated that remittances increase Mexican GDP by \$2.69 for every \$1 sent to urban households, and by \$3.17 for every \$1 sent to rural households. Remittances that are spent in Mexico also generate fiscal revenues through the value-added tax at the federal level and through property taxes at the county level.<sup>49</sup> And they provide foreign exchange that stabilizes the peso and balances the government's current accounts.<sup>50</sup>

Viewing remittances as a positive economic asset, the Mexican government has actively encouraged remittance-sending. To minimize the costs of international transfers, in the late 1990s the Mexican government began to encourage use of automatic teller machines in Mexico linked to U.S. bank accounts. Mexican consulates in the United States compile weekly lists of the most affordable wire transfer companies and complain vociferously about the high fees some companies charge. The cheaper the transfer costs, the more recipients receive of every dollar remitted from abroad. However, the Mexican government has not effectively used the banking system to capture remittances for the kind of investment projects that the Moroccan government has, described by Natasha Iskander in her chapter in this volume. Remittances are not deposited in Mexico for savings or investment on a large scale. Currently, most banks in the country are subsidiaries of U.S. and Spanish banks, committed first and foremost to their foreign stockholders, not to Mexican development, and over the years most migrants transferred funds to their families in Mexico either through postal-system money orders or private money-transfer companies, such as Western Union, if not on home visits. In the past, when Mexican banks were involved in remittance transfers, they alienated migrants. During the Bracero temporary worker program which operated between 1942 and 1964, U.S. employers withheld ten percent of workers' wages, which were channeled through Mexican banks. Although the banks were charged with returning the money to migrants when they finished their work stints in the United States, many migrants never received their earnings. Legal and political battles over their missing funds continue to the present day. Memories of the experience during the Bracero program may incline contemporary migrants from using banks to transfer funds to the extent they otherwise might.

The Mexican government has also promoted migrant hometown associations (HTAs) to channel remittances for collective projects, such as for the digging of wells and the paving of roads. The number of Mexican HTAs has risen rapidly from a handful in the 1970s to an estimated 2000 by 2004. And since 2002, municipal, state, and federal levels of government have contributed matching funds for infrastructural improvement projects that HTAs sponsor, through the Three for One (matching fund) program. In 2008, HTAs contributed \$33 million, which generated a total investment of \$133 million.<sup>51</sup>

Collective remittances are but one way that HTAs reinforce homeland community ties. Hometown associations often sponsor religious processions involving return-migrants during annual patron saints' day festivities. These public events are venues in which migrants, the Church, and the state together display their idea of a proper moral order. One of the main ways that HTAs raise money is through a beauty pageant in which neatly coiffed young migrant and U.S.-born women compete to display their conservative cultural traditions and ties to Mexico. The contestants embody the claim that migrants are still good moral members of the home community, despite their absence.

Hometown association projects enhance migrant stature, by demonstrating not only that they have money, but that they use it for the good of the community and that they remain committed to community values.<sup>52</sup> Concomitantly, though, HTA projects highlight how migrants have changed. They often favor different projects than nonmigrants. In this vein, Robert Smith describes in his study of the Mexican town of Ticuani, Puebla, how residents eager to develop their community argued that HTA money should be raised to pave the town's streets for the purpose of economic development, while migrants in New York sought to keep the more rustic cobblestones that made the town a charming place for a holiday visit.<sup>53</sup> The HTA-sponsored pageants and philanthropic activities contribute to the perception of timeless communities that have not changed or that have only changed in ways migrants initiated, when in fact the communities are transforming independently of migration to the United States. Internal migration within Mexico, higher levels of education, improved communications, and a better transportation infrastructure have also integrated once-remote areas into a broader economy and circulation of ideas.

As temporary return migration has become more difficult, because of the U.S. crackdown on illegal border crossings, many HTA members are re-creating patron saint fiestas where they have settled in the United States. Visiting hometown priests bring replicas of the hometown patron saints to the U.S. festivities. In such instances, even HTAs subtly reflect Mexican dissimulation, and a shift in collective homeland-linked activities to the United States.

From an economic standpoint, collective remittances are modest, and are mostly felt in very small towns and villages with high rates of emigration. In urban areas, municipalities have development budgets

much larger than funds HTAs remit. Nonetheless, collective remittances strengthen hometown ties in ways that temper dissimulation and keep massive private transfers flowing.

STUDIES OF IMMIGRANT assimilation focus on intermarriage, educational mobility, English language proficiency, ethnic identity, and involvement in mainstream American life. They point to variation in the immigrant experiences of different nationalities in the United States. Scholars of migrant transnationalism, in contrast, point to cross-border ties at the individual, community, and institutional levels. They address common practices in a single field of social action and a single imagined community that extends across national territorial boundaries.

Left largely unaddressed in transnational as well as assimilation-centered studies, however, are ways that migrants have come to differ socially, economically, culturally, and politically from the people they leave behind. The concept of dissimulation offers an analytic frame to capture these changes. It points to how migrants change even when they maintain homeland ties and even when they assimilate in their new land.

## Notes

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- 16 Mexican emigration has historically been concentrated in such central western states as Jalisco and Michoacán. Levels remain highest in that region, even as emigration has spread to such southern states as Oaxaca, and most recently to the Yucatán. I focus in this chapter mainly on the state of Jalisco, whose

long history of migration to the United States allows for a historicized understanding of how Mexican institutions have attempted to manage migration over the last century. I draw on interviews I conducted with ordinary Mexicans who never migrated and return-migrants, as well as with employers, clergy, and other community leaders.

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- 51 David Fitzgerald, "Colonies of the Little Motherland: Membership, Space, and Time in Mexican Migrant Hometown Associations," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 1 (2008): 145–69.
- 52 Hometown associations are found in international and domestic migration contexts around the world, but as the contribution by Portes in this volume shows, they are unusually strong in the Mexican case. Mexican hometown associations have been promoted "from above" by the Catholic Church and the Mexican government, and they have also grown "from below," due to the highly networked nature of Mexican migration to the United States in which streams of people from the same Mexican towns and villages live abroad, in the same neighborhoods. See Fitzgerald, "Colonies of the Little Motherland," and Fitzgerald, *Negotiating Extra-Territorial Citizenship*.
- 53 Smith, *Mexican New York*.