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Negotiating Membership in a Mexican Transnational Community.

A study of North American Immigrants in a Mexican Border Town.

Helene Balslev Clausen¹

This article seeks to shed light on new formations of citizenship and political transnationalism in a Mexican town in the Mexican – US border region. We analyze how a North American immigrant group as a new actor forms part of the civil society and the implications that networks forged by this group have for the nature of citizenship. The article argues that we are in need of a more nuanced account of the limits and possibilities for understanding transnational citizenship. The North American immigrant group recognizes the continuing significance of the nation state (US), however they are flexible in negotiating the practices and rights of citizenship across borders. They must accommodate or resist, as they attempt to politically construct new spaces for practicing citizenship across borders. Thereby the article rejects both nationalist and post-nationalist essentialisms and focuses on the real social differences in order to capture the social space of the changing nature of transnational citizenship.

Key words: citizenship, membership, North American immigrants, transnationalism, social space

As in several parts of Latin America also in Mexico there is a renewed focus on the traditional perception of citizenship, in which political identity and membership are congruent with state territory. However, this model is increasingly unable to resolve the contradictions created by the global migration. The international migration thus manifests the function of citizenship as a mechanism of inclusion/exclusion, however the transnational perspective makes it necessary to rethink the concept of citizenship and membership. Modern politics and citizenship have been organized around the coincidence of citizenship rights and boundaries of states (Dagnino 2005; Itzigsohn 2000). However, a wide range of empirical

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trends do raise questions about the nation-state-based approach to the concept of citizenship. This article incorporates recent findings on how a North American immigrant community in a Mexican town in the Mexican – US border region negotiates its practices and rights of membership across borders in order to create a distinct social space; recreating a different vision of the society they want to be members of. It asserts how this new actor forms part of the civil society, with focus on the political space and the implications that networks forged by this group have for the nature of citizenship. It explores how this group constructs its membership in the community being only North American citizens and without any wish to become Mexicans or obtain dual citizenship.

The article focuses on the group's engagement in types of formal cross-border arrangements that sustain three non-profit organisations founded by the group of North American immigrants in order to solve some of the social problems in the Mexican community where they reside. However, we suggest that these also generate non-formalized developments in the notion of citizenship. Thus, the focus is on domains outside that formal apparatus of citizenship as an institution and in that sense akin to informal citizenship as far as the institution is concerned. The components are categorized in terms of identities, practices and locations for the enactments of citizenship.

First, we describe three organisations, all of them nonprofit organisations founded by North American immigrants. The first two are charity organisations: *Amigos de Educación* and *Las Comadres*, which are both legally registered as nonprofit organisations in the United States. The third is the *History Club*, which focuses on collecting historical material about the town. We perceive these organisations as a visible part of the intention to create a power knowledge venue for the immigrant group. However, the explicit objective for these transnational organisations is to solve social problems and to create well-being of everyone. We suggest though that how they operate and how they solve those local problems do not pave the way for lessening inequality but empowers the North American immigrants as a group and provides them with a type of membership of the community.

The article takes its theoretical point of departure in the notion of citizenship, however, we do not understand citizenship in the traditional way as only based on the nation state as the only governing power, nor do we perceive it in its post-national meaning rejecting the nation state as essential. We seek to capture the complexity of citizenship through the proposition that citizenship is partly produced by the practices of the excluded; this opens up for the terrain for rights to non-formalized actors which in multiple ways performs changes in the formal and informal relationship between the national state and the citizen and through which we can understand the strains² and contradictions in national state membership.

Methodological Steps

In order to grasp the social and political dynamics at play and the different forces impinging on the migratory phenomenon, we believe that this case study shows how the involvement of organisations in the local communities has gained “structural” importance for unfolding the informal part the relation between migrants in the community and the receiving nation state.

We interviewed leaders of organisations and government officials and did extended fieldwork in el Pueblo. Given that the qualitative method is based on a hermeneutic scientific ideal that emphasizes the understanding of phenomena through in-depth research involving only a few individuals (Kruuse 1989: 28-29), we conducted fifty-eight qualitative, semi-structured interviews (the general idea and a series of questions were prepared in advance, leaving time to go into certain questions and topics more deeply). We used this design both with the immigrants and with the Mexicans, with organisation leaders and with government officials. Additionally, an anthropological participant fieldwork was carried out in 2004 and 2005. This method is based on active participation, that is, whenever possible, we actively participated in daily life and in events, in order to be able to observe the things that people might not normally talk to us about, such as, for example, family structures, relationships between friends, and social distinctions. We concentrated on collecting materials, including historical documentation, official statistics, and cultural programs at the municipal, state, and federal levels. As a basis for “information saturation,” we triangulated our data; that is, we combined distinct sources of information and methodologies in order to carry out research on the same phenomenon (Spradley 1980).

The North –South Migration Flow

Opposed to traditional migrant studies that have their focus on the migration flow South-North, Latinos immigrating to the US, this article analyses a dimension within the flow from North to South, North Americans immigrating to Mexico. Even though, this type of migrants is not studied very thoroughly, we do believe the presence of this type of immigrants and its influence is important to acknowledge and access due to this type of migrants to Mexico is increasing², even though it is much smaller than the size of the flows of Latin Americans who immigrate into the United States (Clausen 2008).

² Although no statistics about the exact number of North Americans immigrating to Mexico and other Latin American countries are available, this flow has increased considerably, as evidenced by the growing number of U.S. real estate companies offering North Americans financial support to buy real estate in Mexico.

In contrast to the few realized studies about this flow that identifies the people as in their retirement age migrating due to economic reasons (King 1998; O'Reilly 2000; O'Reilly 2002) this research surprisingly identifies a dimension that consists of a group of middle-class individuals in their mid-thirties and forties. Furthermore, the members of this group must work in Mexico in order to survive. Because they have economic resources to establish themselves in the host country (including contracting domestic servants), these migrants differ from other immigrant groups that are usually the object of study. Their active involvement in the Mexican society through transnational organisations makes them active agents in the social, cultural, and political processes that are contesting and reformulating structures of power and membership.

The Mexican Town, el Pueblo

Our case study is a town located in the state of Sonora in northern Mexico, 350 kilometers from Hermosillo, the state capital, and 50 kilometers from the largest population center in the region. El Pueblo is notable for having a historic city center with colonial houses, cobblestone streets, and beautiful gardens. Another attraction is its cultural festival, which has gained regional and national recognition as the most important cultural event in northern Mexico. Surrounded by verdant mountains, the town is also famous for its picturesque landscapes. The houses in the historic center are painstakingly maintained, and the streets are paved with cobbles and entirely clean. In that historic city center are a mission-period church and a small central plaza. The houses in this area have impressive wooden or iron doors, framed by bougainvilleas and other decorative plants. Many of the doors stand ajar or their upper half is kept open, so that it is possible to see the lush gardens sheltered inside.

El Pueblo is an important cultural center, not only for the aforementioned festival but also for several events held annually, including film screenings and painting and photography exhibits. Having this set of artistic events, which surpasses what other similar-sized towns in the region offer, is extremely important for el Pueblo. The North American immigrants live in the area described above. Nevertheless, not all of el Pueblo looks like that section.

Walking from the city center toward the Alameda, we come to an old riverbed that is dry throughout most of the year. On the weekends, there is a *tianguis* (an open-air market) here. In this area, the difference between the houses that we left behind and those that are located along the river is quite stark. The buildings are much more modest than are those in the center. They do not have a uniform style, but most can be described as cubes or rectangles superposed one on the other. For the most part, the doors are made of metal, as are the windows. Rather than being a matter of taste, the use of this material is driven by the need for security. Assorted materials have been used in building these homes; some even seem to be only half-

finished. The streets are not cobbled nor are they paved. In short, this part of el Pueblo looks a lot like many other neighborhoods throughout Mexico.

Citizenship

While citizenship making arose out of the conditions of the cities of the Late Middle Ages, today it is generally understood to be inextricably articulated with the national state. Citizenship is the foundational institution for membership in the modern national state as it defines belonging to a socio-political community. Membership of a nation state indicates two parallel senses and belonging. The membership of a nation given due to being born in the specific nation state denote the place in an affective community based on mutual recognition, while the membership of a state secures a series of rights and obligations (Marshall 1970). The rights articulated through the subject of the citizen are of particular type and cannot be easily generalized to other types of subjects.

Both citizenship and the national state have been constructed in elaborate and formal ways, and each has evolved historically as a tightly packaged national bundle of what were often rather diverse elements. The national state is one of the strategic institutional locations for both the larger contextual changes and the more specific changes pertaining to citizenship (Holston 1999).

However, global migration and transnationalism are among the dynamics that in multiple ways bring about changes in the formal and informal relationships between the national state and the citizen, and in the relationship between the formalized apparatus for politics and both old and new informal types of politics. Transnational migrants challenge then nation-state models of citizenship in both sending and receiving countries and their destabilizing effects are producing operational and rhetorical openings for the emergence of new types of political subjects and new spatialities for politics. More broadly, the destabilizing of national state-centered hierarchies of legitimate power has enabled a multiplication of non-formalized or only partly formalized political dynamics and actors. Then we are seeing the possibilities of various types of rights bearing subjects beyond the citizen. These trends signal not only a de-territorializing of citizenship practices and identities, as is usually argued, but also their partial denationalizing (Sassen 2006: 147).

Migrants are usually seen in narrow terms as consumers of receiving state social programs, but as migration studies have shown migrants are also producers of social projects in their sending communities by carrying out development project like sponsoring the construction and supply of public health facilities and schools. However, our research proposes to rethink this focus and redirect it to projects realised in the receiving country such as we perceive the non profit organisations founded by the North American immigrants that has as its purpose to solve social problems in the receiving community.

As various studies have shown both citizenship and the nation state are under pressure in both formalized and non-formalized ways for example the granting of dual nationality and granting undocumented immigrants in the United States the “right to own homes and access mortgages. In multiple ways they perform changes in the formal and informal relationship between the nation- state and the citizen (Sassen 2006: 278-279). Then, the nation state should no longer be seen as the sole governing power, it is now one class of several types of powers and political agencies in a complex system of power from the global to the local level.

As Smith and Guarnizo (1998) emphasise transnational forms of political organisation can be a lens to analyze citizenship and membership emerging in a context of rapid globalization and proliferation of cross-border activities of all sorts of “actors”, notably immigrants, NGOs the environment and rights of national minorities. For Falk (1992) these forms of transnationalized citizenship identity establish and maintain affective connections with one another in the context of a growing transnational civil society. Then citizenship resides in identities and commitments that arise out of cross-border relations. These begin to function as bases for a new form of citizenship identity to the extent that members maintain identification and solidarities with one another across state territorial divides (Levitt 2001, Smith 1998). Jonathan Fox (2005) suggests in his model that there are two domains for citizenship. The first is rights as enforceable claims on public authorities being national or international. The second domain is understood in terms of membership in society-based political communities, e.g. those defined by ethno-national identities or transformative ideologies which in turn could be civic or religious. This model paves the way to talk about on the one hand, citizenship in relationship to nation states (in our case United States and Mexico) and on the other hand, in relation to cultural citizenship understood as everyday activities through which marginalized social groups can claim recognition, public space and eventually specific rights.

An essential point elaborated by Luin Goldring (1998) describes migrant participation in public projects in their places of origin as migrants’ claims of membership. Membership is then claimed by a public affirmation of identity. An affirmation by itself is not sufficient to achieve membership; however, in a community it is only achieved when other members of the community recognize an identity claim as legitimate. It is then subject to challenge and negotiation, especially in the context of transnational migration, where potential community members are often physically absent from the site of origin. Membership is also uneven. The outcome of (re)affirmations and recognitions of membership is expressed in different levels of membership. The level ranges from full enjoyment of civil, political and social rights (Marshall 1970) to symbolic membership with none of the Marshallian rights. By symbolic membership, I mean a recognized affirmation of collective identity that makes no claims on other members of the community.

Citizen can move among the multiple meanings of citizenship. So can undocumented immigrants, albeit among a far narrower range of these meanings. Undocumented immigrants' daily practices in their community can give strong community ties e.g. through participation in civic activities as in charity organisations to the benefit of the community. There are dimensions of citizenship, such as participation in civic activities, which are enacted informally through these practices. They produce an at least partial recognition of immigrants as full social beings. One way of interpreting this dynamic is to emphasize that the multiple dimensions of citizenship engender strategies for legitimizing informal forms of membership (Soysal 1994). The practices of undocumented immigrants are a form of citizenship practices, and their identities as members of a community of residence assume some of the features of citizenship identities (Sassen 2006: 295).

Smith and Guarnizo (1998) use "trans-territorial nation-states" to define how sending states are expanding the borders of the national community they claim to protect. They are not eliminating territoriality as a basis of nationality. The idea of a "deterritorialized nation-state" violates every constitutive element of a state in the Weberian definition of the body that has a monopoly of legitimate violence in a territory. Territoriality continues to define the state even as its citizens cross state borders. Through the proposition that insofar as citizenship is at least partly and variably shaped by the conditions within which it is embedded, conditions that have changed in specific and general ways we may well be seeing a corresponding set of changes in the institution of citizenship itself. These changes may not yet be formalized and some may never become fully formalized. The law and institutions are free-floating forms of empowerment and cultural resources whose actual value for effective citizenship depends on the social position of groups; e.g. socioeconomic conditions and specific social interactions; e.g. the relational situation of groups with respect to institutionalized patterns of authority and subordination, constitution of social prestige, and social networks (Somers 1993: 611). In other words, the laws that prescribe rights and the institutions that protect them cannot be considered independently from social practices and the relational position of social groups. The law can be turned into a form of empowerment only if people can access the resources necessary for the transformation of the law into effective rights. From the perspective of citizenship, the actual implementation of the law for social groups is dependent on functional access to the legal sphere, cultural resources, and the specific matrix of social, economic, and political relationships that determine an individual's position (as a member of a social group) in the broader socioeconomic context (Somers 1993: 609).

A short review of the Waves of the North American Immigration to El Pueblo

El Pueblo has had several waves of migration during its history. At one time, the capital of the state of Sonora was located here, and the town was home to one of Mexico's most important silver mines as well as having one of the most famous mints in all of Spanish America. However, with the closure of the mine and the mint, and the transfer of the state's seat of power to Hermosillo, to say nothing of the frequent pillaging that el Pueblo suffered during the Mexican Revolution, most of the people emigrated, leaving the previously flourishing city essentially abandoned. The houses were shuttered, and with that, the locality lost its early splendor, and it became nothing more than a footnote in Mexican history.

Two main migratory flows from the North America to el Pueblo occurred during the twentieth century. A principal difference between the two was the interest that the second wave has shown for getting involved in the socio-cultural life of the community. Individuals in the second migratory flow sought to strengthen a North American community that would fulfill certain dreams about the "authentic" Mexico, but they also showed a keen interest in supporting development in the Mexican community itself (Clausen 2008a). Most of the North Americans living in el Pueblo spend at least a part of their time working on these support activities. However, the decision by this group to create charity organisations has to be placed within the cultural context of North America, where the formation of charity and nonprofit organisations is a cultural tradition, just as is volunteerism.³ By saying this, we are only trying to point out that this is not a matter of an isolated effort by a particular group but rather it is part of an institutionalized practice (Clausen 2008).

North Americans who have arrived since the 1970s constitute the most recent migratory flow, and it seems that these inflows are not going to end. Indeed, this is not the only place in Mexico where this same category of immigrant is present⁴ (Clausen 2008).

The North American Nonprofit Organisations

Amigos de Educación

One of the organisations created by the North Americans, *Amigos de Educación* (AE), grew out of an earlier social-assistance project, "Fundación para el desarrollo de la Comunidad" (Community Development Foundation) that began in 1975, when two immigrants

³ These organisations that we analyze are equivalent to the so-called Hometown Associations (HTAs), in the sense that their purpose is to develop or help a community. The key difference is that HTAs organized by Latin Americans have the objective of developing the community of origin, whereas in our case, the purpose is to develop the destination or receiving community.

⁴ Groups of North Americans have established communities in various cities in states like Yucatán, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Sonora, and Sinaloa (Clausen 2008).

initiated a fund-raising drive to support the public library. During the next few years, the library expanded and became not only a research and lending library but also offered educational workshops for children. In 1985, when the Mexican federal government took over the management of the library, the organisation stopped funding it.

In 1990, the nonprofit organisation changed its name to the *Amigos de Educación* and altered its central objective to now focus on granting school scholarships to the poorest children in el Pueblo. So many Mexican families were interested in getting this support that the AE leadership had to try to get more funding from the United States in order to satisfy the demand for the scholarships. To increase the ways of promoting the organisation, its leaders began to include information on AE in the tourist pages of el Pueblo's newspaper (made and distributed by the North American immigrants) and on a local web site for tourists. Driven by the increasing demand for scholarships, the AE also decided to add a new requirement: only students with good grades could receive a scholarship. As part of the nonprofit organisation's operations and with the mission of helping those who were truly the neediest, the organisation developed a poverty index to measure levels of need in the population requesting scholarships.

Each year, the AE leadership appoints a five-person committee, including the principals from a primary school and from the town's the secondary school.⁵ This group is charged with selecting the children who will receive new scholarships and with renewing the scholarships of children already holding them. Except for the school principals, the members of the committee are all selected from among the members of the U.S. community. The committee meets each month, except at the time the scholarships are awarded, when it meets three times per week.

AE has several ways of raising funds. Some money comes from organizing house tours and also through membership dues, donations, and an annual auction. For many years, this nonprofit organisation was financed solely by donations from its members and their friends and relatives in the United States. Currently, one-third of its budget comes from dues and the money made from the house tours to residences, which for the most part have been bought and restored by North Americans who have moved to el Pueblo. In 2004, AE received 387 applications for scholarships from needy families, and in 2005, that number rose to 436. The municipal president estimates that in el Pueblo, which is the *cabecera municipal* (county seat), 509 households are impoverished.

⁵ The two principals were consulted only in order to obtain information about the needy families and about the students who already held scholarships, to ensure that those children were meeting the requirements for continuing to receive support. In Mexico, primary school goes through grade 5, and secondary school goes from grades 6 through 9.

Las Comadres

Las Comadres (The Godmothers) has been in existence for fifteen years. This charity organisation is led by five women from the United States, who each takes turns holding the posts of president, treasurer, organizer, and two secretaries. One of these women is considered to be among the most important entrepreneurs in the North American community. The committee meets each month to organize events, including a garage sale where they sell clothing. Additionally, they meet twice a year with the municipal official in charge of housing. During that meeting, a decision is made about which families will receive baskets of household staples at Christmas and Easter.

This charity organisation collects money in order to provide food, clothing, and other basic needs to the neediest women in el Pueblo. Preference is given to low-income, single women with children. The group has records showing that in 2005, it helped 120 single women in el Pueblo. *Las Comadres* seeks to coordinate its activities with those of the *AE*, so that no family receives support from both at the same time. In this way, an attempt is made to cover a larger population.

Las Comadres holds two auctions each year, during which they sell clothing, furniture, and kitchen utensils. The auction's objects are donated by members of the North American community. Like the annual *AE* auction, those organized by *Las Comadres* include a dinner-dance and stage performances. The price of the ticket in 2005 was US\$250 per person. Every Saturday and Sunday, the organisation also holds a garage sale at a place near the central plaza, where they sell secondhand goods donated by North Americans.⁶ Most of the clothing is bought by tourists or the U.S. residents of el Pueblo, making this another efficient fund-raising activity. In recent years, the women of *Las Comadres* have delivered baskets of staples to 287 families at Christmas and Easter.

These two organisations—the *AE* and *Las Comadres*—collect most of their operating funds from their networks of families, friends, and business associates in the United States.

The History Club

Another organisation in el Pueblo, but one with very distinct mission from the previous two, is *The History Club*. This group was also founded and is led by North American immigrants, whose principal objective is to conserve the history of el Pueblo, as well as its architecture and natural surroundings. This organisation has a president (who has held the position for eight years), a treasurer, and the secretary, each elected for a period of

⁶ In many Mexican cities, second-hand clothing and shoes from the United States are sold in marketplaces.

two years. All of them are from the U.S. immigrant community. As was the case with the other groups, volunteers do all the work.

The History Club was founded by a North American immigrant in 1995. The group's objective is to gather the greatest possible amount of historical materials related to el Pueblo. However, they do not collect just any sort of information. Instead, they focus on the narratives and stories about the houses, mansions, and streets that are located in the historic city center. The members also search for historical documents, such as diaries or publications by eminent people who had lived in or had passed through el Pueblo. To compile the narratives and stories, club members conduct interviews with senior citizens, either North American or Mexican. Since most of the club members only speak English, they need the help of bilingual American women who can act as interpreters.

The collection of these materials has a historical objective, but the information is also put to good use during the house tours. In recent years, the club's activities have expanded, going beyond just gathering legends and stories to also include old photographs of the houses. Additionally, the group organizes academic events, with speakers from the United States, and the North American community in el Pueblo is invited by means of an Internet newsgroup.

The material collected by *The History Club* is considered, in the words of its own members, to be part of the history of el Pueblo. However, the president keeps all the documents in her own home, that is, they are not made available to the public. Significantly, no Mexican has ever been invited to become a member.

The North American Immigrants Negotiate their Membership in the Mexican Community.

The immigrants' transnational practices arise in response to new problems or new needs; we argue that this involvement in the community challenges the traditional notion of citizenship. The North American non-profit organisations operate, as do all organisations, under myths about the rational way in which these groups ought to function and the myths are those that predominate in North American society. More specifically, these organisations were designed based on coordination and control mechanisms, with the assumption that their operations would be rational and efficient in terms of the organisations' objectives. To achieve that, formal institutionalized structures were developed: *The Amigos de Educación*, *Las Comadres*, and *The History Club* were run under rationalized institutional rules for their operation, that is, standardized procedures that determine who will belong to the group and the roles its president, treasurer, and secretary will play. For example, in *AE*, there are specific people responsible for arranging the house tours, and *Las Comadres* has a group that is tasked solely with organizing events, such as the auction. The North American organisations created in el Pueblo also

have mechanisms that monitor their internal operations and the fulfillment of the groups' objectives. Additionally, these institutions precisely define the recipients of their aid. Thus, only people with a family income under 1,600 pesos per month (approximately US\$150) receive aid. These rules that allow for the functioning of the groups are not necessarily put in writing, but they nonetheless exist as standardized procedures (Clausen 2008b).

The work of the North American group is perceived as responsible and rational, within the framework accepted in Western world. In the environment in which the North American nonprofit organisations operate, one of the most important organisations is, without a doubt, el Pueblo's municipal authority. On one hand, city administrations in Mexico ought to be run under the same principles of order, efficiency, and control that their North American counterparts follow. On the other, the different historical practices in Mexico and in the United States have the consequence that both the daily practices as well as the meaning that they have manifest in distinct ways in each country. Mexican municipal, state, and federal governments operate under models that, at times, are far removed from the minimal rules that are accepted as being a guarantee that the basic premises of bureaucratic rationality will be fulfilled. Because of that, Mexican governments have had many problems with legitimacy, a situation that is reproduced by the presence of corrupt practices (Clausen 2008b). The Mexican community has an image of these North Americans as industrious and organized people, and that impression is encouraged and reinforced by the establishment of these charity organisations, and above all, because of the contrast between the non-profit organisations and the inefficient local government that fails to fulfill its social responsibilities. The organisations experience an increase in the number of applications for assistance in recent years from Mexican families. Many families in el Pueblo are no longer turning first to the local government for help - the very government that ought to provide aid for the neediest families as part of established public policy - primarily because people believe it is worthless and corrupt—shows not only the lack of confidence in the government on the part of its own citizens but it is also evidence of the high level of institutionality that has been achieved by the North American organisations in this Mexican community⁷ (Clausen 2008b). The efficiency gives the organisations outward legitimacy and strengthens the myth (Powell and

⁷ The local government does not work with the organisations that are meeting social needs that have gone unmet by the state. However, this does not stop the government from positioning itself as a strong actor in other spaces. For example, officials will insist on speaking Spanish when the North American community invites them to meetings to organize cultural events. According to several interviews with the municipal president and other officials, both at the local and state level, the U.S. community has little influence over, or importance for, community development. This is said despite El Pueblo having, for one example, very low illiteracy rates compared to other towns with similar demographic characteristics.

DiMaggio 1991). In this way, the organisations pave the way for (re)affirming the group's particular collective identity within el Pueblo, based on the national traits of the immigrant group. Then, as established in studies by Sassen (2006) the nation-state is no longer to be seen as the sole governing power, but as only one class of several types of powers in the complex system of power, where the North American immigrant group emerges as a new significant actor creating an alternative parallel power structure. As established by Somers (1993), our findings shows that the North Americans' practices and non-formalized "rights" paves the way for this group of immigrants to gain influence due to the social position and the social relations of the group and its interaction (through the non-profit organisations) with the local and regional government.

As suggested by Soysal (1994) and Sassen (2006) this study perceives participation in civic activities to the benefit of the community as dimensions of citizenship practices, which are enacted informally. This because, on one hand, these practices allow the immigrants to identify themselves as members of el Pueblo, and on the other hand the Mexican community recognizes the group (e.g. looking for economic help at *Amigos de Educación* before trying the local government; and accepting the *History Club* to collect historical material that should be part of the local museum's collection) and thereby legitimises the immigrant's presence and actions. This way, the Mexican community produces an at least partial recognition of immigrants as full social beings. Even though this type of immigrants do not seek full enjoyment of civil, political and social rights as defined in the traditional notion of citizenship (Marshall 1970), our findings show that with the foundation of the non-profit organisations based on transnational practices the group engenders strategies for legitimizing informal forms of membership and their identities as members of a community of residence assume some of the features of citizenship identities. This means that these non-profit organisations have a double function. On one hand, they respond to specific problems of poverty that the government has not been able to solve; on the other hand, they give the North American immigrants significant legitimacy and provide them with membership of the community. Even if it is not the explicit purpose of these organisations to intervene in defining the local policy agenda or to win political positions—and the immigrants do not see themselves going in that direction—the organisations' impact has had repercussions of that type. Because of their resources, the North American immigrants oblige the governments to take into account the initiatives by this non-Mexican resident population.

As suggested by Goldring (1998) and Smith (1998) this study also proposes that financing local development projects is efficient mechanisms through which immigrants can attain political influence or "get their voice" heard as advocated by Portes. The non-profit organisations operate through transnational practices, and intervene in the development of el Pueblo through an active participation in matters that should be the responsibility

of the local government. The recognition also enables e.g. the immigrants to propose a project to build an airport on the outskirts of el Pueblo or to negotiate with the local government for street repairs in the barrios where the North Americans live -before repairs are made in the barrios where the Mexicans reside -arguing that these things are needed to attract for instance more tourists. This way, the immigrants negotiate their position and membership in the community and we are seeing the possibilities of various types of rights bearing subjects beyond the citizen.

As suggested by Levitt (2001) immigrants' adjustment is facilitated by the destination society's perception of them as part of the Western world and an embodiment of the idea of progress. As our case study shows that whatever the North American immigrants propose must be for the public good. In this way, our findings correlate with the studies by Portes et al. (1999) that transnational action has social boundaries that cross national borders, and it seems to reproduce preexisting power asymmetries. The organisations cover the social needs of el Pueblo, which also implies that the non-profit organisations create an alternative structure of power that, at various levels, constitutes a challenge for the government. This is shown by the fact that Mexicans prefer to look for support at the charity organizations than at the local government. As shown in Smith's study, localities are more exposed to distinct meanings in cases where social groups have differential power in more than one nation-state. In el Pueblo, this lets the North Americans utilize and confirm the ideas and behaviors that the receiving society holds about rational organisations, handling resources and about how they promote progress. The North American group is distinguished from other immigrant groups that have been traditionally studied not only for its economic resources but also because the North Americans are members of one of the most powerful and industrialized nations in the world. To be North American is generally synonymous with progress and modernity (Levitt 2001). In this way the North American immigrants succeed in influencing other aspects of municipal life as they attempt to develop el Pueblo, even though they do not occupy formalized membership positions or have any interest in some type of formal representation in the municipal government.

Furthermore, as advocated by Portes the discrimination of a group is an essential factor for the acknowledgement of the group in the receiving country, we also think this element plays a significant role as in post-revolutionary Mexico, the forging of citizenship took place through the rhetoric of mestizaje and a number of related state practices. The celebration of mestizaje and the idea of "the cosmic race" emerged as a challenge to North American imperial sovereignty and a reversal of the negative stereotyping of Mexicans as mongrels. Although mestizaje celebrates how racial mixing of Indians and whites has produced a new indigenous Mexican, it is still suffused by racial thinking. Its ideologues regarded the processes as one of the white blood uplifting the inferior Indian race thereby homogenizing and normalizing the national citizenry.

However, distinctions based on colour and other bodily marks remain powerful in Mexico why the North Americans as a group of white people do not suffer from the same type of discrimination on the contrary they can benefit in the Mexican society opposed to Latinos e.g. in the United States.

Final thoughts and ideas

This article explored the new space that charity organisations founded by the North American immigrant group opens for, in order to grasp the possibilities for formal and informal changes in the rights of citizens. Nation states today confront new geographies of power where transnational immigrants challenge the traditional idea of the nation state and its conditions for membership of it. As our case study shows the different elements of citizenship (rights, entitlements, etc.), once assumed to go together, are becoming disarticulated from one another. So while in theory political rights depend on membership in a nation-state, in practice, new entitlements are being realized through situated mobilizations and claims in milieus of globalized contingency. We identified the institutional context that the North American immigrants have to accommodate to or resist, as they attempt to politically construct new spaces for practicing membership across borders. The article explored the possibility of a type of informal citizen, the North American immigrant, that destabilizes formal meanings and thereby illuminate the internal tensions in that of the institution of citizenship, specifically the citizen as political subjects even though they are not quite fully recognized as such, can nonetheless function as bearers of partial rights, e.g. the right to wages when work done, and more generally as part of the political landscape. Then, the difference between having and not having citizenship is becoming blurred as the territorialization of entitlements is increasingly challenged by deterritorialized claims beyond the state.

The article suggested that the North American immigrants implicitly bring into play the non-profit organisations as dimensions of informal membership practices that do not fit the indicators and categories of mainstream academic frameworks for understanding citizenship and political life. Immigrants that experience their membership through multiple practices have enabled the emergence of a group identity that points to dynamics that partly disaggregate the national state and weaken the grip of national politics over the particular group that constitute this group. These immigrants remain partly embedded in localized environments; however, whether it is the organisation of formal status, or membership practices, or the experiences of collective identities and solidarities, the nation-state is not the exclusive site for their enactment. It remains by far the most important site, but the transformations in its exclusivity signal a possibly important new dynamics.

The national as container of social processes and power is cracked, opening up possibilities for geography of politics that links distinct

transnational spaces and we believe that the civic participation cannot be seen only in a local context and even less between two countries that have such a long and rich tradition with each other. Along this line, we argue that, in making claims 'for a distinct social space' for imagined communities of their own and for particular membership of the Mexican community, they recreate a different vision of the society they want to be members of. This proposal emphasizes the constitution of active political subjects and the refusal of mere integration into the existing social and political ordering. These new connections among citizenship elements and mobile forms suggest that we have moved beyond the idea of citizenship as a protected status in a nation-state.

Contrary to the study by Portes (2003) that establishes that Latin American immigrants in the United States suffer discrimination and is an essential factor impeding their assimilation. Instead, the U.S. migrants are admired by many Mexicans, which facilitate many aspects of life for them in el Pueblo. In the sense that they get "their voice heard" (Portes 2003), and manage to have a greater impact than some of the government programs and are becoming a real alternative for solving some of the problems associated with poverty that the government has not been able to address. In other words, membership then is achieved through the reaffirmation of a collective identity by the surrounding Mexican community. This does not imply that the immigrants are changing their loyalties or participation from one country to another. Instead, they are trying to integrate and negotiate their particular form of membership as a group. It represents an emergent non-formalized type of political subject that does not quite correspond to the notion of the formal political subject that is the voting and jury-serving citizen. That is, the status of citizen is *only* one of several that are utilized by the immigrants to reconstruct their identities and exercise their rights.

Certainly the particular form of transnational membership exercised by the North American immigrants is far from removed from the images of post-national or global citizenship envisioned by some scholars. Nor is this form of dual engagement captured in the projected fears of long-distance nationalism and divided loyalties contained within some recent scholarships on the impact of global migration on national identity formation in the U.S as suggested by Samuel Huntington. As argued this case study shows we are in need of a more nuanced account of the limits and possibilities for understanding the continuing significance of nation-state as far more flexible factor in negotiating citizenship practices across borders. We intended to explain the necessity for rethinking the notion of citizenship, where transnational practices path the way for migrant's to create spaces of power in the community that they want to form part of, however they haven't interest in becoming Mexican formal citizens; but members with certain rights and obligations.

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Negotiating Membership in a Mexican Transnational Community. A Study of North American Immigrants in a Mexican Border Town. This article seeks to shed light on new formations of citizenship and political transnationalism in a Mexican town in the Mexican - US border region. We analyze how a North American immigrant group as a new actor forms part of the civil society and the Read preview Overview. Periodical details. Publisher: University of Aarhus. Find a periodical in our library. Questia is operated by Cengage Learning. Copyright © 2020. Second-generation Mexican youth in San Diego actively engaged with the immigrant rights movement by participating in protests they organized and orchestrated in spring 2006. The protests highlighted the encounter "and clashing" of different categories of immigrant social belonging in U.S. society. State-oriented constructions of social belonging clashed with the teens' own notions of belonging developed in relation to the lived experiences of members of their social circles. "Many observers of American migration have noticed the increasing formation of transnational communities instead of one-way transfers from old country to new. In his warm, perceptive, richly documented study of a Mexican town, its New York counterpart, and the connections between them, however, Robert Smith has lived, chronicled, and reinterpreted the human experience of transnationalism. He shows us how individual and collective transformations interact, producing surprising new varieties of social life." — Charles Tilly, author of *Durable Inequality*. "Studying local processes ov