



**Activismos transnacionales de México:
Diálogos interdisciplinarios ante la política global**
(Transnational Activisms in Mexico:
Interdisciplinary Dialogues in a
Context of Global Politics)
Antonio Alejo, ed.
Mexico City, Instituto Mora (2018)¹

A rich —although still incipient— literature on citizen and alternative diplomacy exists in Spanish. The book *Activismos transnacionales de México: Diálogos interdisciplinarios ante la política global* (Transnational Activisms in Mexico: Interdisciplinary Dialogues in a Context of Global Politics) is an excellent sample of a collective project meant to offer new theoretical definitions and real case studies of citizen diplomacy.

This combination of different theoretical perspectives, such as decoloniality, feminism, corporate citizenship, alternative diplomacy, and Mexican migrants' activism in the United States, makes the book a rich compendium on how to approach alternative politics. Paraphrasing Rebecca Villanueva, author of the prologue, it is not only a book on politics for the people, but on the politics of the people, of the actions of citizens who make global democracy possible.

According to editor Antonio Alejo, this work centers on how transnational activism contributes to the decentralization of international relations. Alejo writes, “The relationships between citizenship and politics go beyond the nation-state and lead to, among others, the various discussions on the state of citizenship in an intensely globalized world” (p.16).

The book's 12 chapters by authors from various institutions in Mexico, Spain, the United States, and the Netherlands has intrinsic educational value, as it provides a

valuable state-of-the-art of previous studies in transnational activism. I was unable to find a similar piece of work in Mexico that combined such a wide range of interdisciplinary views on the outcomes of global activism in international politics.

The background is varied. Transnational activism in Mexico has been addressed in more than 4 000 scientific articles that focus mainly on case studies and social protest. Among international forerunners of this scholarship, I recall the article by Thomas Olesen, researcher at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, published 14 years ago in the journal *Current Sociology*.² At that time, Olesen wrote of the plurality of transnational publics as part of a transnational public sphere. For Olesen, the infrastructure of transnational publics resembled a polycephalous network, that is to say, simultaneously centralized and segmented, combining direct and indirect connections. Although at the time Olesen was writing that article, the rise of Twitter and other social networks had not yet occurred, he had a visionary perspective when he stated that communication and connections are the essence of transnational audiences (“the blood”), both for direct communication and mediation. At the same time, Olesen identified the existence of counter-publics, which responded to the need of democratizing the flow of information and political actions.

Other authors, such as Ruud Koopmans,³ also highlighted the need for alternative movements to gain visibil-

ity and resonance in the national and transnational public sphere. Visibility refers to the degree to which leaders are seen and heard in the public sphere. Resonance refers to the degree to which leaders respond to stakeholders, such as political media and social movements. The key social movements of transnational audiences constantly move between transnational audiences and one or more national public spheres.

It has not been that long since Olesen's and Koopmans's publications. Dialogue and discussion continue in a framework of complex global emergencies that force us to think and sometimes be part of global activism. Antonio Alejo offers a new approach on alternative publics and networks in the chapter called, "NGO Diplomas: Equipo Pueblo and Beyond 2015 in Mexico." In a similar way to that of previous authors, he analyzes NGO diplomacy in the context of globalization, interconnectivity, and interdependence, a required theoretical framework still valid today. To put it in Alejo's words, the actors who carry out NGO diplomacy are "agents of social appropriation of diplomacy in an environment of intense multidimensional globalization, characterized, among other components, by their weak democratic institutions and the lack of transparency in their global policy decision-making processes" (p. 303).

The present collective work is structured in three equally important parts: a) global governance and transnational activism in Mexico; b) the sociology of collective action and transnational activism in Mexico; and, c) the study of international relations and transnational activism in Mexico.

It provides novel and relevant case studies of transnational mobilization, among others, the global actions and the international caravans of the families of the Ayoztinapa students; the establishment of the Amnesty International regional office for the Americas in Mexico; and the binational mobilizations of the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations from California in support of the San Quintín day-laborers' demands.

One of this book's vital themes is migration diplomacy, understood not as the sole task of diplomats or the responsibility of diasporas, but as a combination of the two. In this regard, the work of Xochitl Bada and Shannon Gleeson is a great contribution based on ethnographic work at the Labor Rights Week in the United States. Their article is about collaboration between official, citizen, and media diplomacy to defend migrants, especially low-income

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and undocumented migrants, from labor abuse. The authors note,

A prevailing issue for Mexican immigrant workers, a third of whom are estimated to be undocumented (Passel and Cohn, 2009), is retaliation by employers and the threats of detention-deportation they receive, particularly during union organizing campaigns. (p. 244-245)

The chapter also has historical value, since it analyzes the operation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad Advisory Council, an older initiative that no longer exists. Bada and Gleeson outline consulates' central role as intermediaries between companies, unions, and migrant workers, as well as the need for their assistance in signing memoranda of understanding with local and federal bodies in the United States. While not always binding, these agreements help to at least prevent theft of wages.

On the whole, the book presents complex proof of how citizen diplomacy has to be anchored abroad in order to survive. In this sense, transnational actors that participate in global activism are vital for the democratic process worldwide, as well as for political plurality. According to editor Antonio Alejo, citizen diplomacy is "a form of social participation and advocacy in the decision-making processes of global politics that have repercussions in the life of the population" (p. 315).

The book *Activismos transnacionales de México: Diálogos interdisciplinarios ante la política global* invites the reader to reexamine the concept of new diplomacy and enrich its new meanings to respond to a complex international reality. Above all, it offers a profound perspective on how activism may help diplomats through opposition.

Antonio Alejo has spent more than a decade on his research about "organizational and narrative repertoires for influencing the decision-making processes of global policies" (p. 304). Despite the existence of inherent tensions in the interaction between official and track-two diplomacy, the editor observes a historical improvement

in the quality of the formal relationships among actors from civil society, international organizations, and governments. However, he also points to the constant deterioration and fragility of this relationship, which breaks down easily as both citizens and diplomatic institutions find collaboration difficult. In this sense, further research could address the impact of non-traditional diplomatic actors on opening up international negotiations. ■■

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Notes

1 Antonio Alejo is a researcher at the Instituto Galego de Análise e Documentación Internacional. He was a visiting scholar at CISAN in autumn 2019 and is part of the Network of Researchers on North America.

2 Olesen, Thomas, "Transnational Publics: New Spaces of Social Movement Activism and the Problem of Global Long-sightedness," *Current Sociology* vol. 53, no. 3 (2005), 419-440.

3 Rudd Koopmans, "Protest in Time and Space: The Evolution of Waves of Contention," in David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), pp. 19-46.