

A Transnational Gaze

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ABSTRACT

In the decade since this journal was founded, major demographic shifts caused shifts in migration studies. Against this backdrop, the questions migration scholars ask and the analytical and methodological tools we use to answer them have changed dramatically. In this essay, I take an idiosyncratic look at these developments and propose directions for the future. I focus on the analytical rewards of using a transnational perspective to study migration, on the importance of considering space and scale in our work, and on bringing culture more centrally back into our conversations. I highlight opportunities at interdisciplinary intersections that, can move our field forward in new productive directions if we take advantage of them.

Keywords: 1. transnational, 2. scale, 3. migration, 4. simultaneity, 5. immigration.

Una mirada transnacional

RESUMEN

En los 10 años que tiene de haberse fundado esta revista, importantes cambios demográficos han dado lugar a transformaciones en los estudios sobre migración. Desde esta perspectiva, las preguntas que se hacen los estudiosos de la migración y las herramientas de análisis y metodología que utilizan para responderlas se han modificado drásticamente. En este ensayo se echa un vistazo idiosincrásico a estos cambios y se propone un rumbo a seguir en el futuro. El estudio se concentra en las ventajas analíticas de utilizar una perspectiva transnacional para el estudio de la migración, en la importancia de tomar en cuenta el espacio y la magnitud de nuestro trabajo, y en situar de nuevo la cultura en el centro de nuestros debates. Así mismo se destacan las oportunidades que las intersecciones interdisciplinarias nos brindan para que nuestro campo avance en una nueva y más productiva dirección.

Palabras clave: 1. transnacional, 2. escala, 3. migración, 4. simultaneidad, 5. inmigración.

Introduction

In the decade since this journal was founded, major demographic shifts have brought about major shifts in migration studies. In the United States, more and more newcomers are moving to non-traditional urban and rural destinations, the “new” second generation is coming of age, and the nation’s political and economic power is waning. In Europe, countries—unaccustomed or unwilling to recognize their diversity—are grappling with the permanent settlement and integration of newcomers. There, the second generation is also growing up, and the religious other (primarily Muslims) directly challenges a continent that stubbornly insists upon its secularity. South-to-South migration is also increasingly common, particularly in places like southern Africa, the southern cone of Latin American, and Southeast Asia.

Against this backdrop, the questions migration scholars ask, and the analytical and methodological tools we use to answer them, have changed dramatically. In this essay, I take an idiosyncratic look at these developments and propose directions for the future. My take is quite personal and does not represent a systematic state-of-the-art of the field. Rather, I focus on the analytical rewards of using a transnational perspective to study migration, on the importance of considering space and scale in our work, and on bringing culture more centrally back into our conversations. I highlight opportunities at interdisciplinary intersections that, once filled, could move our field forward in new and productive directions.

A Transnational Gaze

Most scholars now recognize that contemporary migrants and their predecessors often maintain ties to their home countries while they become part of the countries where they settle. In fact, migration has never been a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multi-cultural salad bowl but one in which migrants, to varying degrees, are simultaneously embedded in

multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields in which they live. More and more, social life takes place across borders, even as the political and cultural power of the nation-state remains strong.

These developments in migration scholarship parallel debates in other fields. History has moved away from simplistic national comparisons to reconceptualize itself as the study of regional interactions in places such as the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993) or the Indian Ocean Rim (Bose, 2006). Keohane and Nye (1971) argued decades ago that international relations had to rethink its basic conceptual categories to include cross-border relations between different non-state and sub-national actors.

As a result, in today's world, studying social dynamics by comparing experiences within or across presumably bounded or closed social units comes up short. Transnational Studies (TS) advances the claim that the global, regional, national and the local can be analyzed through transnational methodological, theoretical, and epistemological lenses (Khagram and Levitt, 2007). In contrast to traditional perspectives, which see the transnational as happening somewhere between the national and the global, TS proposes another option. What were assumed to be bounded and bordered social groups are instead understood as transnationally constituted, embedded, and influenced social arenas that interact with one another. The world consists of multiple sets of dynamically overlapping and interacting social fields that create and shape seemingly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes. Assemblages, or contingent ensembles of material and social elements including knowledge, technology, and ontological categories as well as objects and practices, come together within and are made up of elements circulating within these transnational spaces.

Therefore, terms like "transnational", "transnationalism", and "transnationality" are partly misnomers in that they imply only a concern with dynamics across or beyond nations and states or within the nation-state system. The terms mean much more. A transnational optic or gaze begins with a world without borders and empirically examines the boundaries and borders that emerge

at particular historical moments, the relations of power that create them, and their relationship to unbounded arenas and processes. It does not take the appropriate spatial unit of analysis for granted; in fact, a key component of this approach is to examine the territorial breadth and scope of any social phenomenon without prior assumptions. Nor does it privilege the global or the local but tries to hold these layers of social experience, and all others in between, in dialogue with each other by paying close attention to how their multiple sites and layers interact with and inform one another.

Transnational migration studies begin by identifying the parameters and layers of the relevant social fields within which migration takes place. Social fields are sets of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). They are multi-dimensional, encompassing structured interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth. National social fields are those that stay within national boundaries, while transnational social fields connect actors through direct and indirect relations across borders.

Any study, whether it be about migrating people or migrating cultures, must begin by ascertaining the level and intensity of connection to actors and institutions located at other sites and levels of the relevant social field. It must treat individuals and groups not as closed containers nested in local sites but as potential sites of clustering and convergence, which, once constituted, circulate and re-circulate, constantly changing as they travel. The resulting configuration is not purely local or global but nested within multiple, intersecting scales of regional, national, and global governance, each with its own logic and repertoires of institutional and discursive resources.

Changing Assumptions and Expectations

What does using a transnational optic to study migration reveal?

One thing is that the world is increasingly characterized by mobility and flux rather than by stability and rootedness (although

this does *not* mean that all people can or do move equally). This goes against the grain of many scholarly and popular accounts that not only suffer from methodological nationalism, or the expectation that people and organizations obediently respect national boundaries, but also from the mistaken assumption that stasis and boundedness are the norm when, in fact, people and culture circulate widely.

We need more fine-tuned methods for studying migrating people and culture and the relationship between them. We also need to ask how assumptions about democracy, identity, and participation change if we take mobility as central to contemporary life. How would our understanding of the social contract between state and citizen change if we acknowledged that health, income-generation, family life, and education often occur outside the nation-state box?

Taking mobility seriously also expands the conversation to include different kinds of movement and different intensities and frequencies of contact.¹ Tourists, missionaries, pilgrims, guest workers, and gang members also move. How does migration's impact differ from other forms of movement involving different levels and strength of contact between residents and newcomers? How does the "effect of the encounter" change when someone is a tourist or traveler rather than a permanent settler? How do different national philosophies of integration and diversity management regimes (or national assumptions about ethnic and religious differences and how they should be managed) influence the nature and effect of these interactions?

The second thing a transnational optic brings to light is that migration can be as much about non-migrants as it is about people who move. In some cases, migrants and non-migrants, although separated by physical distance, continue to occupy the same socio-political space. Because goods, people, money, and

¹Urban and Tourism Studies scholars are good potential discussion partners. In fact, there are two relatively new journals called *Mobilities* and *Tourism Studies* that highlight work in this field.

social remittances circulate regularly, even individuals who never move are influenced by values and practices from near and far.

Seeing migrants and non-migrants as occupying the same social space challenges the meaning of incorporation. The immigrant experience is not a linear, irreversible journey from one membership to another. Rather, migrants pivot back and forth between sending, receiving and other orientations at different stages of their lives. The more their lives are grounded in legal, health care and pension systems on both sides of the border, the more likely it is that they will continue to live transnational lives. Increasing numbers of newcomers will not fully assimilate or remain entirely focused on their homelands but continue to craft some combination of the two in ways that ebb and flow over the lifecycle. Their lives will be enabled and constrained by multiple cultural repertoires and institutions. Social mobility and inclusion in a new place, therefore, is strongly connected to social status and inclusion in the old one.

There is, however, a difference between ways of being and ways of belonging in a transnational social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). *Ways of being* refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with those actions. Individuals can be embedded in a social field but not identify with any label or cultural politics associated with that field. They may be unaware of or reject the “diaspora” label offered to them by their peers, the academy, or sending states, or they may actively embrace it. On the other hand, there are people with few social ties to people in a country of origin but who nevertheless identify with it. Because these individuals have some connection to a *way of belonging*, through memory, nostalgia, cultural competency, or imagination, they also belong to this social field and express their membership in it. If individuals engage in social relations and practices that cross borders as a regular feature of everyday life, they exhibit a transnational way of being. When people explicitly identify with a group that crosses borders, they also express a transnational way of belonging. These two experiences do not always go together.

Differentiating between ways of being and belonging brings into sharper focus the myriad identity choices that migrants and non-migrants face. We cannot assume that people automatically embrace ethnic or national labels (what Glick Schiller and Caglar (2008) called “methodological ethnicity”). Rather, they chose how to be and belong, and have that choice made for them, based not only on options in their home or host countries but also on their connections to co-ethnics, co-professionals, and co-religionists around the world. They can traverse multiple pathways toward simultaneous incorporation into various salient sites around the world.

Ethnic, national, religious, and professional groups can be characterized by high levels of in-group variation (Werbner, 2000). Both the highly skilled and barely literate, the dark and light-skinned embrace the label “Indian”. Subsumed within it are other sub-identities, including what region or state a person is from, their caste and sub-caste, their religious community, or the city or district where they live. The same person who cares little about her region or state may feel deeply committed to her homeland because she is a devoted member of a religious community. That individuals manage such internally diverse identities drives home the analytical risks of taking ethnic communities as the overarching, automatic master “choice” or of taking any group as a monolithic given (Levitt, 2007).

By calling into question the parameters and breadth of the social fields within which migration takes place, a transnational optic generates a different set of questions about incorporation and identity and comes up with a different set of answers.

Locality and Scale

Another promising direction in migration studies is its sharper focus on questions of space and place. While the relationship between global capital accumulation, economic restructuring, and the movements of people are widely recognized, the questions of how and why those processes converge differently in different places are often overlooked (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009).

In the United States, researchers generally take space into consideration when they discuss contexts of reception. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) emphasized the influence of receiving governments, the characteristics of the host-country labor market, and the characteristics of ethnic communities in shaping contexts of reception. Jeffrey Reitz (2002) stressed ethnic and race relations among the host population, differences in labor markets and related institutions, the impact of government policies and programs, and the changing nature of international boundaries. He argued that the characteristics of host societies influence immigrant integration as much, if not more, than individual immigrant characteristics.

More recent work sees successful immigrant integration as a function of the opportunities and barriers immigrants encounter in the receiving community. Integration is a fluid process based on individual and community level factors. In addition to context, these researchers also note how institutional cultures and national and local policies influence mobility trajectories (Fix and Zimmerman, 2000; Waldinger, 2001). Perceptions about newcomers and an openness (or resistance) to immigration (Padín, 2005; Bloemraad, 2006), media depictions of immigrants (Chavez, 2001; Padín, 2005), and local political mobilization (Bloemraad, 2006) also matter.

Scholars are also hard at work unearthing the characteristics of new non-traditional immigrant geographies (Massey, 2008; Singer *et al.*, 2008). They examine the conditions under which immigrants revitalize the regional economy or harm it (Singer *et al.*, 2008; Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2005; Godzniak and Martin, 2005; Smith and Furseth, 2006). Much of this research, however, does not pay sufficient attention to how new contexts of reception are nested in larger geopolitical hierarchies. Contexts of reception are generally assumed to be national, although immigrant incorporation, as well as the promulgation of policies and community responses to immigrants, vary considerably across physical and political spaces *within* nations and *between* them.

In Europe, space is a key part of discussions about “the city as context” (Glick Schiller, Caglar, and Guldbrandsen, 2006). In the 1990s, a small group of scholars had noted how size, position, and the political landscape affect how migrants settled in and became politically incorporated into particular cities. Like their American counterparts, most of this work did not address how global economic restructuring repositions particular places and directs migrants to settle where they do. Global cities scholarship was a step in this direction (Eade, 1997; Sassen, 2001). These scholars called attention to the disjuncture between geographical and social spaces that resulted from the uneven effects of globalization. Particular cities wrested themselves from the traditional local-global hierarchy to function almost independently of national context. Most of this work, however, did not connect these processes to immigrant incorporation.

The notion of ‘scale’ helps capture how urban structures, lives, and policies are embedded in a range of political economic hierarchies (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009). Global economic restructuring repositions localities in hierarchies of economic and political power. But it is not just capital that moves. When migrants move, their modes of incorporation are strongly linked to this broader re-ordering of interstate, regional, national, and global fields of power (Glick Schiller, Caglar, and Guldbrandsen, 2006; Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009). Moreover, successful incorporation is not just a function of the changing position of particular localities in the context of globalization. It is also related to the changing relationship between localities and states. State intervention and activities are institutionally and geographically differentiated. When states pursue economic development strategies or refugee resettlement policies, direct resources to particular zones (like becoming the state capital), or build highways in particular locations, they influence immigrant incorporation. Scale, then, involves not just a recalibration of the relationship between the global and the local but also between the municipal, regional, and national.

Cities also have particular cultural resources based on their geopolitical positions that they deploy in particular ways. Brettell (2005) stresses the importance of a dominant set of values or an urban ethos in shaping immigrant incorporation. Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009) highlight public discourse as a key point of connection between migration and scale theory. Cultural diversity, they argue, is an important factor in the competitive struggle between cities. Immigrants can be marketable assets in the places where they settle, even enabling some cities to reposition themselves geopolitically. In their study of Portland, Maine and Danbury, Connecticut, Cadge *et al.* (2010) found that how these cities created and deployed their cultural armatures² helped explain some of the variations in immigrant incorporation. Their tale of two cities underscored the importance of incorporating culture and scale into discussions of space and contexts of reception.

Bringing Culture Back in

Most debates about migration and development privilege the economic at the expense of the social. Officially recorded migrant remittances and philanthropic transfers amounted to 338 billion US dollars in 2008—nearly twice the amount of official development assistance (World Bank, 2009). International aid agencies and governments are hard at work designing policies to tap into and purposefully channel these resources (Wilmaladharma *et al.*, 2004). Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that many scholars and policymakers hail remittances as the next development panacea.

But economics are not the whole story. Culture permeates all aspects of the development enterprise as both a challenge and an opportunity. Ideas and practices travel in response to migration which, in turn, enables people to move and creates new forms of membership and belonging. Culture also strongly influences how development goals are established, what policies are put in

²Including their self-presentation, the ethos toward immigrants, how culture is used to promote urban renewal, and their history and political economy.

place to achieve them, and how successfully they are achieved. By privileging the economic, researchers and policymakers overlook an important potential tool and fail to recognize possible barriers to development (Rao and Woodcock, 2007).

Another important analytical move, then, is to bring culture back in more centrally to migration debates. Doing so requires not only looking at the “migration *of* culture” (or religion, or ideas, or artistic practices) but also seeing migration *as* a cultural act. Because migrants’ identities and actions are rich in cultural and social meaning, focusing solely on social networks, positions, or activities comes up short. It is not *when* or *that* these practices or identities *may* be cultural but rather that they *are* inherently cultural.

Scholars of immigrant assimilation have also largely sidestepped culture because they are primarily concerned with immigrant incorporation rather than with how cultural elements are abandoned or adopted. As research shifted “beyond the melting pot” and acknowledged that diversity would endure as a “salad bowl” or “glorious mosaic”, culture was subsumed under the “ethnicity” label. Cultural influences, though everywhere, were characterized as ethnic values, customs, and preferences. And since ethnicity was increasingly deemed optional (Waters, 1990), symbolic (Gans, 1979), or on the wane (Alba, 1990), culture, too, was relegated to a supporting role. When it was taken into consideration, culture figured in only on a macro-level. Modernization theorists and their descendants argued that development would simply follow if we just got culture right. From Edward Banfield’s 1958 (1967) book *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* to Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington’s 2000 book *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, authors have argued that the wrong kind of culture permanently relegates countries or regions to backwardness. The “dated” and “thin” concepts many of these theorists used fail to recognize the multidimensional and complex picture that emerges when heterogeneous attributes are used to understand culture (Lamont and Small, 2008).

But a sea change is underway. “It is not culture”, wrote Lourdes Arizpe (2004), “that is embedded in development. It is devel-

opment that is embedded in culture”. Amartya Sen (1999) also argued that culture is a constitutive part of development. If development is about enhancing wellbeing and freeing minds, then it has to take into account literature, fine arts and all else that makes wellbeing possible. Arjun Appadurai (2004) emphasizes the relationship between culture and poverty reduction. “In culture”, he writes, “ideas about the future as well as about the past are embedded and nurtured. The capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity. We often focus on culture as some kind of ‘past-ness’ while development is couched in terms of progress and the future”. For culture to be incorporated into the development equation successfully, that gap must be bridged.

Social scientists have struggled with defining culture for decades. Arizpe (2004:164) describes it as

a flow of meanings that human beings create, blend, and exchange. Cultures are philosophies of life that hold together all the social practices that build and maintain a capable, creative human being. Such practices also hold together well-functioning, balanced societies. In this sense, cultures function as primarily regulating systems that help to keep people’s feelings and actions within the bounds of institutionally acceptable behavior. When such systems are ignored in development, they tend to create unsocial behavior.

Sociologist Ann Swidler (1986) proposed the notion of culture as a toolkit. From her perspective, culture is a changing, dynamic bag of tricks that people use to solve problems and interpret their worlds. It is the cognitive, symbolic and linguistic tools that are in people’s heads and the rituals, relationships, and practices they use to express them. For Lamont and Small (2008), it is the frames, repertoires, narratives, cultural capital, and symbolic boundaries that people use and that scholars must pay more attention to in order to better understand the relationship between culture and poverty.

I cannot resolve these debates (after all, that is what anthropologists do for a living) but I will say what culture is not. It is

not a cohesive system. Its component parts do not have to make sense in relation to each other, nor do the people who belong to the same cultural group necessarily include the same tools in their toolkits. There is no such thing as a cultural core because the cultural package in place at any given time grows out of a particular history and political economy (Besserer, 2003). The “core” changes in response to changing socio-historical circumstances. A belief in “cultural holism” is not just misguided but harmful. It underlies predictions of civilization clash because writers who see culture this way assume that the packages migrants import will automatically clash with those in place.

According to García Canclini (1995), as traditions become appropriated by global culture industries, enter into international communication circuits, and move back and forth with transnational migrants, they are both “deterritorialized”, or delinked from their localities of origin, and “reterritorialized”, or relocated, mixed, and brought into juxtaposition with modern and post-modern discourse and practices. The end result is *tiempos y espacios mixtos e híbridos*, new hybrid configurations that transform culture and the public arena by allowing new individuals and collective identities and voices to emerge. What’s more, culture is not a discrete social arena but one that spills over into all aspects of social life. How it influences the economic sphere is evident in how ethics, rates of entrepreneurship, and risk aversion vary across groups. For example, viable democratic governance is only possible when a community has prior experience with participation and public debate (Sen, 1999).

In sum, culture cannot be artificially lifted out of other social spheres, nor can economics or politics be emptied of culture. Moreover, culture cannot be separated from structure. All migrations are embedded in particular structural conditions, power relations, and, in particular, socioeconomic contexts of reception (Besserer, 2003). Culture and structure are mutually constitutive. What social categories like family, household, or membership actually mean and how they are enacted develop in response to particular economic and social circumstances.

Moving Beyond Culture as Product

Once we acknowledge that immigrant poverty and community development in sending societies are two sides of the same coin and that culture is an important part of their alchemy, where should we look for culture, and what forms does it take? How can it be used effectively as a central piece of this puzzle, and what are the costs and benefits of such an approach?

Most policies treat culture as a *product*, a material and concrete object, like a dance, a piece of music, folk art, or a storytelling tradition that is being transformed, reinvented, or threatened by migration. Culture is seen as something to be revived and preserved, resuscitated and reinforced, an unconditional good to be protected at all costs. Or it is seen as impeding integration or development: particular groups have negative cultural traits that prevent them from learning to work hard, trust strangers, or govern effectively. Or it is seen as a tool of empowerment: when a group is permitted to express its culture, it is allowed to claim its place in a new society.

This view is problematic for several reasons. First, cultural products are not set in stone. They are not preserved intact nor completely transformed when people move but undergo some combination. The power relations surrounding the expression and representation of cultural artifacts also change. Who should decide what dance or song represents some allegedly homogeneous group? Even more misguided, as I have argued, is the assumption that culture is a discrete, packageable whole that can be lifted out and analyzed apart from social relations.

A more fruitful approach treats culture as a dimension of all social relations and forms that affects all aspects of immigrant incorporation and sending-community development. Patron Saint Day celebrations are one example of a cultural performance profoundly shaped by cultural influences. Many Latin American migrants return to their sending communities for their annual Patron Saint Day celebration. Even if they cannot travel, they contribute time, money, and resources to honor their commu-

nities, often organizing simultaneous celebrations wherever they are. Some Mexican communities even send a priest as a representative of their village saint to attend their festivities in New York (Rivera Sanchez, 2004). By extending the feast from Mexico to the U.S., the community extends its boundaries of belonging far beyond the physical. At the same time, it claims space and recognition for itself in New York City.

Rather than seeing culture solely as a product, it can also be understood as a *process*. When people participate in and perform cultural representations, they also create and reinvent them. Cultural events are sites of boundary work during which communities affirm who they are to insiders and outsiders around the world.

For instance, a male *mayordomo*, or benefactor, a role associated with great respect and responsibility, generally sponsors Patron Saint Day celebrations. To retain citizenship in many Mexican indigenous communities, emigrants still have to fulfill certain collective obligations even though they no longer live at home. Since so many community members live in the United States, there are too few men left to sponsor the celebration. As a result, some communities rewrite the rules, allowing people living abroad to be *mayordomos* who delegate their day-to-day responsibilities to a non-migrant relative or friend. By so doing, the community signals that its territory has expanded to include people living in the United States. It invents new ways for people to fulfill their citizenship obligations so they can still belong. Membership without residence is not only a possibility but also a necessity.

The *Fiesta Patronal* is a performance for outsiders as well as insiders, the community's representation to itself and to the outside world. New kinds of communities are created through cultural performances (Gil *et al.*, 2005). *La Hora Mixteca*, a program on *Radio Bilingüe*, a station serving indigenous people in Mexico and in the southwestern United States, helped create a pan-indigenous community. When listeners heard programming in their own language for the first time, they felt part of the Mexican nation in ways they had not before. In hearing their shared indigenous

identity broadcast back to them, they also felt a sense of belonging to a pan-ethnic community encompassing members in Mexico and the United States. Listening also reinforced generational ties because family members in Mexico or California could listen “together” (NATC Report 2004a and 2004b).

The *Fiesta Patronal* is also a site where gender is redefined. Women are allowed and, in some cases, required to assume leadership roles they were previously excluded from simply because there are not enough men to fill the positions. This earns them access to power and decision-making circles that were off-limits in the past. Furthermore, when migrants return to live or visit, they bring different ways of managing gender and family with them, shaped by their experiences living abroad. Smith (2005) writes of the tensions around gender that arise between young second-generation Mexican American men and women when they visit their ancestral villages. What was considered acceptable behavior in New York is considered inappropriate in Mexico. The brother who never thought twice about his sister going out alone in Manhattan feels he is responsible for regulating her behavior back in Mexico. At least two sets of norms compete with each other, and individuals and communities have to figure out how to resolve the conflict.

Some migrants want to be the benefactor of the Patron Saint Day celebration because they want to give back to their community. Others seek the position as a platform from which to display their enhanced status. They spend so much money trying to make that point that sponsoring the festival grows beyond the means of most non-migrants. As each new *mayordomo* hosts an even more luxurious celebration than the last, villagers' inflated consumption aspirations increase even farther. What native sons and daughters must do to signal their loyalty is beyond what most residents, migrant or not, feel they can or should be able to do. Their worth is measured by their financial contributions rather than by their moral authority or leadership. Yet no one seems willing or able to stop this vicious cycle. Toning down the celebration would suggest that the community pros-

pered less than it had led itself to believe or that the benefits of migration do not always outweigh its sacrifices.

Moreover, migration forces communities to revisit their narratives about progress and success, about what the goals of development and incorporation should be. Since migrants generally make more money than non-migrants, they tend to have a louder voice in discussions about what constitutes development. Their motives for contributing to the community and what they hope to achieve through their contributions can grow increasingly distinct from those of the people who stay behind. Migrants see their community as a place to vacation, retire, and eventually die, while non-migrants see it as a place where they need jobs and health care. Migrant members want to build funeral homes, playing fields, and plazas while non-migrant members want to build schools and clinics. A parallel debate emerges vis à vis community activism in the country of settlement. While some community members argue for a shift in focus to social and political integration in the United States, others fear this will detract from their efforts to help people back home.

Culture is also a *regime* of norms, power, and status that enables and constrains behavior (Appadurai, 2004). Meanings, symbols and narratives make cultural production possible but also constrain it because the repertoires upon which that production is based only contain certain items. The terms of recognition and possibility underlying these regimes have to shift for any kind of fundamental change to occur.

A close look at ostensibly economic behaviors reveals how cultural regimes work. Some migrants send remittances to friends and family members as a form of social insurance. They keep up relationships with people back home in case things go wrong and they have to return. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) use the term “relativizing” to describe how individuals establish, maintain, or neglect ties to specific family members or fictitious kin. They choose strategically which connections to emphasize and which to let slide based on what they think their future needs will be.

How acceptable it is for someone to make these kinds of choices is strongly influenced by the normative regimes at play. In some social contexts, individuals feel and are considered by others to be incomplete if they are not part of a family or group. One woman from Gujarat State in India, for example, told me (2007) that her decisions would never be judged outside the context of her family—that her actions would reflect positively or negatively on her family until the day she died. A similar kind of transnational moral economy influences young people's marriage options, lifestyle choices, occupational possibilities, and the level of resources they have to pursue their individual and collective life plans. Because social embeddedness is so thick and dense, individuals cannot make self-interested choices without the risk of being ostracized by the group (Portes and Sessenbrenner, 1993).

Take the example of Moreno, a middle-aged man who came back from the United States to his Dominican village to open a small cement factory. His neighbors strongly criticized him when he hired the best workers rather than his relatives and friends. A Pakistani entrepreneur who started a software company in Boston faced similar criticism. His friends and family in Karachi also had lots to say when he decided not to hire every distant acquaintance that came to him looking for a job. How much each man could change his economic behavior was culturally constrained by these social consequences (Levitt, 2007).

Changes in gender relations are another arena where cultural regimes are at work. In Karachi, most women do not go to the mosque to pray; in Boston, they not only pray but actively run the mosque's cultural and educational activities. Because the mosque is also a socio-cultural center, women are needed to serve as teachers, administrators, and trustees, roles they never would have played in Pakistan. The cultural repertoire shifts but only so far. Women pray with men but not alongside them. In Karachi, changes also occur but within even more limited parameters. In my interviews with the relatives and friends of immigrant respondents in Boston, I found that while most women knew about these changes, they were not all "takers" (Levitt, 2007). Some in-

sisted it was “their special privilege” to pray at home, while others wanted to invent ways to pray and study collectively with other women.

Sommer (2005) and her colleagues conceptualize culture as *agency*. Art, she argues, has the capacity to “interrupt” or to “unblock” habits. It unsettles regimes through “defamiliarization” or the surprise inspired by new artistic techniques or encounters. Cultural engagement nudges actors outside their comfort zones and normal ways of doing and thinking and thus can lead to positive, purposeful social change. According to Sommer, we are all cultural agents in that small shifts in perspective and practice can turn artists, teachers, and religious and community leaders into catalysts of collective change. It’s not a question of whether we exercise agency but how self-consciously we do so, to what end, and with what effect.

Throughout the world, creative arenas have long been vehicles for agency. Without the “*Teatro Campesino*”, labor organizers who worked with César Chávez argue, there would have been no United Farm Workers’ Union. From the flat backs of pick-up trucks, loudspeakers called pickers to watch and join plays that poked fun at bosses and celebrated workers’ solidarity. At the Gujarati Social Forum in India, a sexuality rights NGO launched its campaign with a street play (a familiar art form in India) about the *hijras*, castrated biological males who consider themselves to be women deep inside. Many consider the places where *hijras* live to be pure, and thus sites of justice. Rights workers talked about Shikhandi, a great warrior from the epic Mahabharat who was allowed to sit next to Lord Krishna to honor his bravery. Some people believe that Shikhandi was impotent, while others claim that he was gay. Whatever one believes, he was undoubtedly a great warrior (Rajaram and Zakaria, 2009). This play revealed to audience members that acceptance of same-sex relationships is not merely a Western import but something with deep Indian roots. Facilitators presented new ideas about homosexuality using English words but then explained them using familiar elements from paintings, dances, and epics.

The example of the village *banda* in Mexico is also useful. The *banda* is not just important during the *fiesta patronal*, it is also an integral part of collective mourning when someone passes away. When listeners recognize changes in the music because non-migrants have replaced musicians now living in the U.S. and because new musical styles and instruments have been imported, they also experience their community differently. Incorporating new elements signals to them that something has shifted, that who and what the community is has expanded in some small way. Moreover, when communities ask musicians from neighboring villages to fill in for absent migrant musicians, neighbors cooperate where they may have competed in the past.

But culture is also about *profit*. Neither the underlying economic interests that shape cultural enactments nor the economic benefits that flow from them can be overlooked. The markets created by transnational migration build upon already well-developed ethnic and nostalgia markets. A successful *fiesta patronal* requires costumes, instruments, souvenirs, and food. Even places get branded and sold. One of the fastest growing religious shrines in Mexico, for example, is Santa Ana de Guadalupe in Jalisco State, believed to be the birthplace of Mexico's Patron Saint of Migrants, St. Toribio. It was not economic development that transformed this former backwater into a thriving community but the many tourists who make pilgrimages there each year (Levitt, 2007).

The potential for profit is not lost on the state. Governments produce their own versions of tradition for public consumption and worldwide dissemination, which often differ significantly from the community's account. The *Chilena*, originally considered a dance of the poor, became legitimate and profitable after the Mexican government appropriated it (Revilla López, 2000). The state pushed a commercial tourist spectacle, displaying the splendor of Mexico to its urban residents and foreigners. In contrast, *Grupos Chilenos* and *technobandas* used the form to invoke a strong sense of belonging among Mixtecos. Because *Chilenas* do not consist of a fixed set of elements, musicians could incorporate

new instruments and rhythms, producing an alternative national self-representation beyond the reach of the state.

Cultural products such as dances, music, and radio transmissions are created within the context of cultural processes and regimes that strongly influence how they develop and the impact they have. The “fiesta patronal” is reinvented such that less powerful actors, like women or poorer community members, assume positions of power and replace people who have migrated. Who is actually allowed to do so, however, is strongly influenced by cultural regimes about what is appropriate. The *Chilena* does a different kind of symbolic work now that it incorporates elements from the North and because it has been “anointed” by the Mexican State. Here again regimes of power strongly shape how cultural products are deployed and to whose advantage. Without embedding them in the social relations and power hierarchies in which they are produced and used, we fail to exploit a potential development tool and also fail to recognize potential obstacles.

The final piece of this puzzle is cultural circulation, or the relationship between migrating people and migrating cultural products. How does the movement of bodies also involve the movement of ideas, practices, images, and symbols, and how does this, in turn, enable subsequent movement? When people move, what kinds of cultural products travel with them? How are these transformed as they travel and why? How do power, interests and social networks influence global cultural production and consumption?

Such questions not only reflect recent efforts to bring culture back into migration studies but a shift in globalization studies away from its top-down understandings of global cultural production. Migration is one of the forces driving cultural globalization. Cultural globalization occurs at all levels of social experience. By bringing these two conversations together, we can begin to understand how global culture is produced, disseminated, and consumed locally and why.

Researchers across the humanities and the social sciences assert that cultural globalization is at work but rarely specify how

it actually takes place or question the geographies within which it occurs. World Systems theorists, Neo-Institutionalists, and Global Studies scholars assert global culture's increasing scope, but they generally treat these norms and values as if their intensity, breadth, and frequency were felt equally everywhere. More micro-level analyses, while paying close attention to particular socio-historical contexts, often stop short of connecting the "local" to other scales and levels of social experience. Finally, researchers like Howard Becker, David Halle, Wendy Griswold, or Diane Crane, whose work on the socioeconomic relations underlying cultural production also provides important resources for this conversation, either describe "cultural diamonds" or "art worlds" that are nationally-bounded or compare allegedly discrete national experiences. While they deserve credit for locating artistic production and consumption in their social contexts, they pay less attention to the products themselves and rarely address the transnational forces that shape them.

What we need, moving forward, is an interdisciplinary conversation that explains the relationship between migrating people and culture, one that explores what actually happens in transnational art worlds, be it the experiences of immigrant artists and writers themselves, the transformation of cultural products as they circulate in response to migration, or the role of cultural institutions and government in facilitating or blocking movement. Taken together, such a dialogue would produce a richer and more compelling account of how and why global cultural production actually gets done and how and where migration is implicated.

A Case in Point

One example of theoretical developments already underway which explore the intersection between migrating people and culture is scholarship on social remittances. In my 2001 book, *The Transnational Villagers*, I coined the term *social remittances* to call attention to the fact that migrants send home more than money. I observed at least four types of social remittances—norms, prac-

tices, identities, and social capital—circulating between Boca Canasta, a village in the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood in Boston, where many Boca Canasteros settled.

Social remittances circulate in several ways: when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin; when non-migrants visit their friends and family in a receiving country; or when the two groups exchange letters, videos, e-mails, blog posts, and phone calls. Social remittances about gender, politics, and religion, among other topics, are distinct from, but reinforce and are reinforced by, other forms of global cultural circulation such as the values and behaviors people are exposed to when they surf the web or watch TV.

While the idea of social remittances has gained some traction in the literature, it is not without critics. They argue that the “social” should also include the “cultural” and that social remittances do not just move in one direction. They also caution against seeing social remittances as always positive. I agree. To address these critiques and to move theoretical debates forward, I have continued to study social remittances and, with my colleague Deepak Lamba-Nieves (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011), have redefined them in the following ways.

Social Remittances Circulate

The ideas and experiences migrants bring with them strongly influence who and what they are exposed to and interact with in the countries where they settle. These circumstances then affect the social remittances migrants send back.

Some migrants, for example, come from communities with strong traditions of participation, be it in religious organizations, communal land management and farming schemes, or sports clubs. It is natural for them to reorganize themselves collectively when they move, and they do so with a great deal of skill and know-how.

When people from the Dominican village of Boca Canasta recreated their baseball league in Boston, for example, they not only

came into contact with other immigrant and native-born players and fans, they also had to learn to negotiate the municipal park system and to secure permits for hosting fundraising events. In contrast, Indian migrants from Gujarat State in the United States transplanted highly developed, hierarchically organized religious organizations that provided strong social supports but resulted in few contacts with their native-born neighbors or with city and state government.

The ideas and skills that each group sent home differed markedly. In the case of Boca Canasta, migrants encouraged their nonmigrant counterparts to adopt the same kind of organized schedule for the playing fields and facilities they had used in Boston. They wanted builders and caterers back home to sign contracts and stick to deadlines in the same way that they saw food and beverage suppliers held accountable in the United States. The Gujarati community, in contrast, emphasized the importance of formal religious education for children, which had become a priority in a Christian-majority nation. They sent back models for organizing religious education and what its content should be.

Social Remittances Are Positive and Negative

Not all of the ideas and practices migrants send back to their homelands are positive. There are costs and benefits.

Much work suggests that social remittances shake up gender and generational dynamics in ways that benefit women. Migrant men and women who work and share responsibility for housecleaning and child care talk about and model a different kind of gender relations when they visit or return to their home communities (De Haas, 2007; Osella and Osella, 2000).

Writer Amitav Ghosh (1992), for example, found that rural Egyptians who had migrated to Iraq sent back ideas and beliefs that challenged the village status hierarchy and allowed for greater social mobility. Anthropologist Gunvor Jonsson (2007) found that people who moved to the city from urban villages in rural Mali introduced new consumer patterns and desires, ranging from

clothes to music and food, and different ideas about romance, democracy, and youth culture.

Social remittances also influence health outcomes. Because Boca Canasteros earned more money and received more education in the United States, Lamba-Nieves and I found that many people became more health conscious. They were more likely to drink bottled water, keep animals out of living spaces and to recognize the importance of annual check-ups because they were entitled to one through their medical insurance in the United States (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

Knowledge about contraception also reached nonmigrants in rural Guatemala, sent both by migrants' family members and friends in the United States and people who moved to Guatemala's cities. Demographers David Lindstrom and Elena Muñoz-Franco (2005) found that knowledge of contraceptive methods was a strong predictor of contraceptive use.

Attitudes toward education can also shift. As more young people from Boca Canasta completed high school and went on to higher education in the United States, their nonmigrant peers also wanted to go onto college. In the Gujarati community, as young people ventured into a wider range of careers, it became more acceptable to study international relations and humanities instead of just finance, medicine, or pharmacology.

Social remittances can also challenge people's ideas about democracy and the rule of law. Political scientist T. F. Jiménez (2008) found that migration transformed local Mexican politics. More migrants and non-migrants participated politically, and the balance of power between political actors shifted, although with limited lasting effects due to entrenched interests. Return migrants to Governador Valadares in Brazil had much to say about Brazilian politicians and lawyers based on their experiences in the United States. "We have a democracy in Brazil", said Gilberto, age 65, told me, "but it doesn't work as it should. You have a system of checks and balances there", Every time a streetlight went out or the garbage wasn't collected, Gilberto visited city hall. "I learned this in the United States—that governments can do what they're

supposed to do and that citizens should make sure that happens. I'm trying to get people here to understand that they don't have to accept business as usual".

Finally, hi-tech professionals and entrepreneurs from Pakistan and India not only send back new technology and skills but ideas about conducting business. Working in the United States has emboldened some to take chances, think outside the box, and challenge a superior rather than deferring to him. "The first thing my boss taught me when I arrived in the United States", Amir, a 35-year-old engineer from Karachi said, "was not to stand up when he came into the room or to call everyone 'Sir'". While deference and obedience might work back home, Amir realized that U.S. companies valued individuality and innovation.

By no means, though, is everything that migrants send back positive. Both individuals and community leaders often speak about their fear that migrants import values that weaken families, deify consumerism, and encourage sexual permissiveness. Migrants and nonmigrants in the Caribbean and Central America are also concerned about residents who get deported after engaging in criminal activities in the United States. Numerous hometown residents and local officials argue that they bring bad habits, set a poor example for local youth, compromise the reputation of immigrants abroad, and import new criminal technologies and contacts with international crime syndicates. Resident and non-resident South Asians alike hold migrants responsible for the rising popularity of fundamentalist Hinduism in India and Islam in Pakistan. This is not only because of the money migrants donate but also because of the more conservative religious beliefs and styles they adopt and import once they move to the West.

Social remittances can also contribute to a "culture of migration" that makes moving almost inevitable because people are no longer satisfied by the economic and social opportunities their homelands offer. This is true in communities throughout Latin America and Asia but also in places such as Ireland where, despite a decade of a roaring "Celtic Tiger", young people still emigrate because centuries-old habits and rites of passage die hard.

Even what first appears to be a positive development can have negative spillover effects. One Dominican migrant, for example, who wanted to build a housing development back home, firmly pledged to do so according to construction rules and codes so that it would not turn into a “slum” of poorly built buildings.

The idea, he said, came from the building projects and sales contracts he observed in the United States. He imagined, however, a gated community that would only attract exclusive, well-to-do buyers. Although he promoted an ordered and planned approach to development, he also exacerbated class stratification that had already worsened because of migration.

Collective Social Remittances

Most of my examples so far involve the exchange of ideas and behaviors between individuals. Our recent research suggests that social remittances are also harnessed collectively. Here I focus on Modebo and Soprovís, two hometown associations (HTAs) based in the neighboring Dominican Republic towns of Boca Canasta and Villa Sombrero, to make my case (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

HTAs allow immigrants from the same city or region to maintain ties with and materially support their places of origin. Sometimes migrants and nonmigrants organize separate organizations, partnering with whatever group best furthers their specific project goals. In the case of Modebo and Soprovís, migrants and nonmigrants belong to the same organization and work together from their different addresses.

When people first left the Dominican Republic, nonmigrant members selected and administered most of the HTA's projects. As U.S. members' fundraising capacities increased, migrant members of both groups began designing projects based on their experiences in the United States. These included setting up a fire station with its own fire truck, building sports facilities, purchasing an ambulance, and organizing AIDS awareness and sexual health campaigns.

Migrant members supported projects like the sports complex because they had grown accustomed to these kinds of facilities in Boston. They saw the complex as a way to keep families together, help youth, and nurture new baseball talent. They also wanted to be able to use the facility during their vacations back home, and they were able to convince their nonmigrant counterparts of the value of such efforts. The sports complex, which cost about 200 000 US dollars, is the biggest project Soprovís has undertaken.

When speaking about his migrant colleagues, the current Dominican-based president told us, “Because they are in a developed country, they are looking at other types of constructions, edifices, other sports complexes and they want to bring those ideas to their community ... Boston has always thought big”.

The Boston leaders also proposed building a paved road to the sports facility (which is far from the town’s center) and an avenue leading to the nearby beach as part of efforts to increase tourism in the area. This “thinking big” and “different outlook” came up repeatedly in our interviews.

Nonmigrants not only became convinced that this forward-thinking mentality was good for development, they also came to believe that a more orderly and purposeful approach to infrastructure projects, like building access roads, should not be afterthoughts. Collective social remittance exchanges reinforced a respect for the rules and laws that migrants had observed in the United States and changed ideas about planning, development, and progress.

Putting Collective Social Remittances into Practice

Finally, social remittances, whether they are exchanged between individuals or groups, do not stay put. They scale out into other domains of practice and scale up to other levels of governance.

Here, I use the example of migrants in Boston who raised money to buy a fire truck for Villa Sombrero. But it was not enough to modernize the town’s approach to public safety. The residents had to establish a committee to train volunteer firefighters, identify a

locale that could serve as a fire station, and find a place to safely store the vehicle. More importantly, they had to find a way to pay for the equipment and labor. Because HTA members in Boston were not willing to fund these efforts indefinitely, they began pressuring government officials to assume some of the burden of support. The mayor eventually agreed.

Thus, a project migrants conceived became a joint citizen-state effort that redefined the responsibilities of the state and community groups. In addition, the project went beyond public safety to show how the state could partner with the community to provide a range of services. Community members are now seeking similar kinds of cost-sharing arrangements with the municipal and provincial authorities around health and education.

These kinds of values and skills also scale up. When I did my original fieldwork, many of the people I talked to did not consider the state responsible for providing basic services like health care and public safety because they saw the government as overwhelmed by so many other tasks.

Now, migrants from the Dominican Republic see these activities as an integral part of good governance. The more people adopt this stance, the more these social remittances can scale up to higher levels of governance.

Conclusion

This article is a call to incorporate space and culture more centrally and creatively into migration debates. It is a call for scholars and policymakers primarily concerned with immigrant incorporation in host countries and those working on home country development to see themselves as part of the same conversation. Finally, it is a call to all who want to use language that makes interdisciplinary research and policymaking possible.

Cultural processes, regimes, and products clearly inform the migration-development-immigrant poverty nexus. How communities perceive themselves, what they want, who is allowed to define these goals, and how they try to achieve them are all

culturally informed. Culture enables and constrains possibilities. Without factoring culture into the migration-development equation, policymakers overlook both important opportunities and potential obstacles.

Future research needs to look more carefully and systematically at how ideas and values travel and under what circumstances idea change contributes to behavioral change. When does local-level change in something like gender relations, for example, scale up to produce broader shifts in reproductive behavior and labor market participation? What is the timeframe within which this occurs? Under what circumstances can local-level democratic capacity building scale up to produce stronger provincial and national governance?

There is a clear divide between the scholars most concerned with what happens to immigrants once they arrive in a new place and those most concerned with what happens in the places where they come from. This is a false dichotomy. These processes were never disconnected, and they certainly are not today. Continuing to speak about them and organize research around them separately is counterproductive. It reifies an artificial separation that neither reflects migrants' lives nor allows us to respond creatively to the challenges they face.

Many academics and policymakers see economic remittances as the next development panacea. Migrants clearly make major contributions to community development. I am concerned, however, that despite improved living conditions and infrastructure, such projects disproportionately burden migrants and make them responsible for functions that rightfully belong to states. Although remittances significantly contribute to economic development and family survival, they also place a tremendous burden on those who send them. Family and kinship links, while a source of social support, can also be a source of never-ending obligations. Such demands can work against migrants' social mobility in the host country and also make accumulating capital for return or investing back home very difficult. Remittance-driven development policies falsely and unfairly pin the prospects of future improvement

on the backs of migrants, which raises concerns both for the short and long-term.

Development agencies need to take care that their renewed focus on diasporas and remittances does not place additional stress on already vulnerable groups. A way out of this conundrum would be to build capacity, strengthen organizations, and increase skills so that migrants can protect their interests more effectively and non-migrants would be better equipped to deal with migrants on as equal a playing field as possible. Another strategy would include fostering cooperation between grassroots groups so that communities could work cooperatively, leaving no community disproportionately burdened or excluded.

I especially hope that what I've written leads to more truly interdisciplinary conversations with economists and political scientists. There is an important lesson here. Socially and culturally oriented social scientists have to make arguments that are comprehensible and compelling to people working outside their disciplines. If future research can show, as I have intimated here, that culturally driven changes in gender relations could scale up to changes in fertility and reproductive health, then demographers may be more convinced by our arguments. If we can show how these same changes could lead to greater female integration into different sectors of the labor market, then economists might also listen. But such research agendas require partnerships across disciplines and across methodological divides. The work of translation goes both ways.

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