

Transnationalism From Below

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I

Theorizing Transnationalism

The Locations of Transnationalism¹

Luis Eduardo Guarnizo

Michael Peter Smith

Transnationalism is clearly in the air. Expansion of transnational capital and mass media to even the remotest of hinterlands has provoked a spate of discourses on “globalization,” “transnationalism,” and the “crisis of the nation state.” A core theme in these discourses is the penetration of national cultures and political systems by global and local driving forces. The nation-state is seen as weakened “from above” by transnational capital, global media, and emergent supra-national political institutions. “From below” it faces the decentering “local” resistances of the informal economy, ethnic nationalism, and grassroots activism. These developments are sometimes viewed in celebratory terms. For some they bring market rationality and liberalism to a disorderly world “from above.” For others they generate conditions conducive to the creation of new liberatory practices and spaces “from below” like transnational migration and its attendant cultural hybridity. In more pessimistic readings, these developments are seen as preludes to a new form of capitalist modernization that is bound to convert the entire planet to “global consumerism.” This volume of *Comparative Urban and Community Research* brings together a rich combination of theoretical reflections and grounded studies of transnational processes and practices that offer a more nuanced reading of “transnationalism from below” that is neither celebratory nor dystopian.

Meanings and Metaphors of Transnationalism

In the past decade the concept of transnationalism has swiftly migrated across disciplinary boundaries. It has been rapidly “assimilated,” indeed appropriated and consumed by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, geographers and other scholars. The concept’s sudden prominence has been accompanied by its increasing ambiguity. Transnationalism thus runs the risk of

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becoming an empty conceptual vessel. The articles in this volume should temper such skepticism. They show that transnationalism is a useful concept that represents phenomena which, although not entirely new, have reached particular intensity at a global scale at the end of the 20th century. This volume centers on the development and consequences of transnational practices linked to the processes of mass migration, economic expansion, and political organization across national spaces. Moving deftly between micro- and macro-analyses, the studies in this volume expand the boundaries of the current scholarship on transnationalism, locate new forms of transnational agency, and pose provocative questions that challenge prevailing interpretations of globalization.

The convergence of several historically specific factors all help explain the complexity of transnationalism. This is a new complexity not only in terms of scale, but also because of the scope of effects that contemporary transnational flows have upon the societies involved. These include:

- the globalization of capitalism with its destabilizing effects on less industrialized countries;
- the technological revolution in the means of transportation and communication;
- global political transformations such as decolonization and the universalization of human rights; and
- the expansion of social networks that facilitate the reproduction of transnational migration, economic organization, and politics.

Cultural studies scholars have been at the forefront in the analysis of transnational practices and processes (Appadurai 1990, 1996; Buell 1994; Clifford 1992; Bhabha 1990; Hannerz 1996). Their leadership has imprinted the field with a peculiar cultural bent and a distinctive normative, postmodern discursive flavor. A variety of alternative visions of transnationalism, often specifically linked to transmigration, have also emerged in the social sciences (Glick Schiller and associates 1994, 1995; Kearney 1991; Rouse 1992; Portes 1996; M.P. Smith 1994; and authors in this volume). However different in their theoretical starting points, a sense of convergence between approaches in cultural studies and

the social sciences is arising. One sign of this convergence is the tendency to conceive of transnationalism as something to celebrate, as an expression of a subversive popular resistance “from below.” Cultural hybridity, multi-positional identities, border-crossing by marginal “others,” and transnational business practices by migrant entrepreneurs are depicted as conscious and successful efforts by ordinary people to escape control and domination “from above” by capital and the state.

Authors celebrating the liberatory character of transnational practices often represent transnationals as engaged in a dialectic of opposition and resistance to the hegemonic logic of multinational capital. Given the declining political influence of working-class movements in the face of the global reorganization of capitalism, all sorts of new social actors on the transnational stage are now being invested with oppositional possibilities, despite the fact that their practices are neither self-consciously resistant nor even loosely political in character. For example, recent work inscribes the activities of transnational immigrant entrepreneurs with a series of attributes which socially construct small capitalists as common people whose entrepreneurial practices amount to an expression of popular resistance (Portes 1996). In a similar vein, Bhabha (1990: 300) characterizes the practices and identities of transmigrants as “counter-narratives of the nation” which continually evoke and erase their totalizing boundaries and “disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (see also Anderson 1983). An example of this use of transnationalism as a counter-hegemonic political space is found in the work of Michael Kearney (1991) who represents Mixtec migrant farm workers, despite their poverty, as having created autonomous spaces in southern California and Oregon in which, he claims, neither the United States nor the Mexican state have access or control.

The totalizing emancipatory character of transnationalism in these discourses is questionable. While transnational practices and hybrid identities are indeed potentially counter-hegemonic, they are by no means always resistant. As Katharyne Mitchell (1993, 1996) and Aihwa Ong (1996) have demonstrated in their studies of

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the Chinese diaspora in Canada and the United States, respectively, the liminal sites of transnational practices and discourses can be used for the purposes of capital accumulation quite as effectively as for the purpose of contesting hegemonic narratives of race, ethnicity, class, and nation. The dialectic of domination and resistance needs a more nuanced analysis than the celebratory vision allows. At the risk of disrupting these hopeful, albeit utopian, visions, this volume attempts to bring back into focus the enduring asymmetries of domination, inequality, racism, sexism, class conflict, and uneven development in which transnational practices are embedded and which they sometimes even perpetuate.

Transnationalism is a multifaceted, multi-local process. A main concern guiding *Transnationalism from Below* is to discern how this process affects power relations, cultural constructions, economic interactions, and, more generally, social organization at the level of the locality. We try to unpack the deceptive local-global binary that dominates a significant segment of current academic discourse. This task requires us to construct an analytical optic for viewing transnationalism and for exploring the most useful methods for investigating transnational practices and processes from below. Five main analytical themes weave together the nine essays that form this volume: the political organization of transnational space; the centrality of “locality” in a historicized sense; the constitution and reproduction of transnational networks through material and symbolic exchange; transnationalism and identity politics; and the development of viable approaches for studying transnationalism.

Political Organization of Transnational Spaces

Transnational political organization and mobilization take place at multiple levels (M.P. Smith 1994). Constructing transnational political spaces should be treated as the resultant of separate, sometimes parallel, sometimes competing projects at all levels of the global system—from the “global governance” agenda of international organizations and multinational corporations to the most local “survival strategies,” by which transnational migrant networks are socially constructed. At the most global level, spe-

cific multilateral collectivities—such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the global capitalist class—seek to construct a global neoliberal contextual space, a “new world order,” to regulate transnational flows of capital, trade, people, and culture. In the process, they supplant the disintegrating nationally-managed regimes of Keynesianism and Fordism (Drainville, this volume). Again, at the most local level, it is specific collectivities—local households, kin networks, elite fractions, and other emergent local formations—which actively pursue transnational migration to create and reproduce another kind of transnational social space, the “trans-locality,” to sustain material and cultural resources in the face of the neo-liberal storm.

Does this mean, as some (e.g., Appadurai 1996: Part III) have claimed, that transnationalism “from above” and “from below” are ushering in a new period of weakened nationalism, a “postnational” global cultural economy? There are several reasons to doubt this claim. First, historically, states and nations seeking statehood have often kept the transnational connections of their overseas diasporas alive, as in the classical examples of the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian social formations (Tölölyan 1996). Second, and relatedly, contributors to this volume underline the continuing significance of nationalist projects and identities and their articulation with competing identities and projects, such as feminism, environmentalism and globalism in the formation of “transnational grassroots movements” (M.P. Smith 1994). These issues are thoughtfully explored in Sarah Mahler’s analysis of alternative modes of political mobilization of “deterritorialized” migrants as well as in André Drainville’s discussion of the implications of enduring national and local political identities in the new transnational political coalitions that have sprung up to resist the hegemonic ideology and austerity policies imposed “from above” by the global neo-liberal regime.

Third, in the present period of mass migration many nation-states that have experienced substantial out-migration are entering into a process of actively promoting “transnational reincorpora-

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tion” of migrants into their state-centered projects. Why is this so? As suggested above, global economic restructuring and the repositioning of states, especially less industrialized ones, in the world economy, have increased the economic dependency of these countries on foreign investment. Political elites and managerial strata in these societies have found that as emigration to advanced capitalist countries has increased, the monetary transfers provided by transmigrant investors have made crucial contributions to their national economies (Lessinger 1992), and family remittances have promoted social stability (Mahler 1996; M.P. Smith 1994). Thus, their growing dependence on transmigrants’ stable remittances has prompted sending states to try to incorporate their “nationals” abroad into both their national market and their national polity by a variety of measures including: naming “honorary ambassadors” from among transmigrant entrepreneurs in the hope that they will promote “national” interests vis-à-vis receiving countries; subsidizing transnational migrant “home-town” and “home-state” associations (Goldring, R. Smith, and Mahler, this volume); creating formal channels for communicating with these “constituencies” across national borders (Glick Schiller and Fouron, this volume; Guarnizo 1996); passing dual citizenship laws; and even, in the bizarre case of the state apparatus in El Salvador, providing free legal assistance to political refugees so that they may obtain asylum in the United States on the grounds that they have been persecuted by the state that is now paying their legal expenses (Mahler, this volume).

In short, far from withering away in the epoch of transnationalism, sending states once presumed to be “peripheral,” are promoting the reproduction of transnational subjects; and, in the process reinventing their own role in the “new world order” (see Glick Schiller and Fouron, this volume). They are officially incorporating their “nationals” residing abroad into their newly configured trans-territorial nation-state. This political process has been called “deterritorialized” nation-state formation by Nina Glick Schiller and her associates (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994). The role of the sending state and state-centered social movements in the production of transnational social formations is thoughtfully

explored below in Glick Schiller and Fouron's study of the political organization of the Haitian diaspora in New York and other U.S. cities since the restoration of the Aristide regime in Haiti.

This process of trans-territorialization raises intriguing questions concerning human agency. The sending states are insuring their own survival by contributing to the constitution of new bifocal subjects with dual citizenships and multiple political identities. Inadvertently, this very process opens up interstitial social spaces which create multiple possibilities for novel forms of human agency. These spaces provide possibilities for resistance as well as accommodation to power "from above." For example, by accommodating to their newly-legitimated dual status, bi-national subjects are able to enjoy the benefits of citizenship, the opportunities for household reproduction, as well as the costs these entail in two nation-states. They may be doubly empowered or doubly subordinated, depending on historically-specific local circumstances (compare, for instance the multiple empowerment of Ticuanenses in New York City and Ticuani, Puebla with the multiple subordination of Garifuna in Los Angeles and Belize City in the studies by R. Smith and L. Matthei and D. Smith, this volume).

Fourth, in light of these new interstitial possibilities, it is important to recall that the agents of "receiving states" remain relevant actors. States still monopolize the legitimate means of coercive power within their borders. Thus, it is problematic to conceptualize as a "deterritorialization of the state" the expansion of the reach of "states of origin" beyond their own national territorial jurisdiction into other state formations. Rather, the "foreign" territory in which transmigrants reside and their "state of origin" comes to "visit" has a material force that cannot be ignored. When politicians come to proselitize, officials to promote their programs and plans, or business people to open or maintain markets, their influence is exercised in a particular territorial domain, formally controlled by the "receiving" state. This juridical construction of transnational social formations is one which denies their "globality" and re-territorializes their meaning as a "boundary penetration," as a "transgression" of its own jurisdic-

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tion. The recent political controversy in the United States concerning the “penetration of Asian money” into U.S. national political campaigns suggests that the political elites ruling nation-states do not merely react to, but actually act to constitute the scope and meaning of “transnationalism” within their territories. In terms of racialization, this example could be taken as a gross overgeneralization of the notion of illegitimate border-crossing from the level of the individual to that of entire states and regions of the globe. It does illustrate, however, the key role of state-initiated discourses in the reinscription of nationalist ideologies and national subjects.

Paradoxically, the expansion of transnational practices from above and from below has resulted in outbursts of entrenched, essentialist nationalism in both “sending” and “receiving” countries. In receiving nation-states, movements aimed at recuperating and reifying a mythical national identity are expanding as a way to eliminate the penetration of alien “others.” States of origin, on the other hand, are re-essentializing their national identity and extending it to their nationals abroad as a way to maintain their loyalty and flow of resources “back home.” By granting them dual citizenship, these states are encouraging transmigrants’ instrumental accommodation to “receiving” societies, while simultaneously inhibiting their cultural assimilation and thereby promoting the preservation of their own national culture.

Our effort to differentiate the local from the national and the global political organization of transnational spaces points to the growing interdependence of geographical scales. It suggests a weakness in the prevailing postmodernist metaphors of “deterritorialization” and “unboundedness.” Undoubtedly, the boundaries limiting people cut across the politically instituted boundaries of nation-states. But transnational actions are bounded in two senses—first, by the understandings of “grounded reality” socially constructed within the transnational networks that people form and move through, and second, by the policies and practices of territorially-based sending and receiving local and national states and communities. We now turn to a closer examination of this double-grounding.

Grounding Transnationalism

Transnational practices do not take place in an imaginary “third space” (Bhabha 1990; Soja 1996) abstractly located “in-between” national territories. Thus, the image of transnational migrants as deterritorialized, free-floating people represented by the now popular academic adage “neither here nor there” deserves closer scrutiny. Intermittent spatial mobility, dense social ties, and intense exchanges fostered by transmigrants across national borders have indeed reached unprecedented levels. This has fed the formulation of metaphors of transnationalism as a “boundless” and therefore liberatory process. However, transnational practices cannot be construed as if they were free from the constraints and opportunities that contextuality imposes. Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times. The “locality” thus needs to be further conceptualized.

For classical modernist theory the local, as opposed to the cosmopolitan, is conceived as a bounded “property or diacritic of social life” (Appadurai 1996: 179). In this light, the local is seen as a derogatory site that compounds backwardness, as the realm of stagnation against the dynamism of the industrial civilization of capitalism, as the realm of idiosyncratic culture at odds with scientific rationality, “as the obstacle to full realization of that political form of modernity, the nation-state” (Dirlik 1996: 23). One of the main contributions of postmodern ethnography and critical theory has been the redefinition of the local as a dynamic source of alternative cosmopolitanisms and contestation (See M.P. Smith 1992; Robbins 1993; Schein, this volume). Recently, Appadurai (1996: 185) has argued that, embedded in the contingencies of history, local subjects reproduce their locality (which he calls neighborhood) in interaction with the environment in which it is embedded. This is, in his view, “how the subjects of history become historical subjects, so that no human community, however

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apparently stable, static, bounded, or isolated, can usefully be regarded as cool or outside [of] history.”

Despite the high level of fragmentation in the literature on transnationalism, the concepts of “deterritorialization” and “unboundedness” have gone unquestioned. Here we take issue with the concept of transmigrants as unbounded social actors. We wish to examine the applicability of the concept of unboundedness to the practices of transmigrants as though implying their total disconnection from local constraints and social moorings. If we were to believe that transmigrants are socially, politically, and culturally unbound, the question then is how can we define who is and who is not a transmigrant? In other words, what are the boundaries of transnationality? This is a central issue to resolve to determine whether transnational practices are evanescent or a new structural feature of society.

We wish to underline the actual mooring and, thus, boundedness of transnationalism by the opportunities and constraints found in particular localities where transnational practices occur. For example, consider the question of the role of cities in transnational studies. Cities are not merely empty containers of transnational articulations. Is a transnational flow, such as a capital investment, migratory stream, or IMF policy, simply imposed on cities? Or does it matter whether Hong Kong capital flows go to Shenzhen or Vancouver; IMF austerity policies are implemented in San Jose, Costa Rica or Mexico City; Haitian, Mexican, Dominican, and Salvadoran migrants move to New York or Miami, Los Angeles or Madrid, Long Island or San Francisco, respectively? The studies in this volume and other studies (compare Mahler, this volume with Smith and Tarallo 1993 and Tardanico 1995, with Barkin, Ortiz, and Rosen 1997) suggest that the local sites of global processes do matter. The social construction of “place” is still a process of local meaning-making, territorial specificity, juridical control, and economic development, however complexly articulated these localities become in transnational economic, political, and cultural flows.

The complexity does not stop here, however. The research of our contributors further illustrates that the specific context in

which transnational actions take place is not just local, but also “trans-local” (i.e., local to local). Luin Goldring and Robert Smith call these contexts “translocalities.” In these social fields (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992) transnational practices are vested with particular meanings. Translocal relations are constituted within historically and geographically specific points of origin and migration established by transmigrants. Such relations are dynamic, mutable, and dialectical. They form a triadic connection that links transmigrants, the localities to which they migrate, and their locality of origin. The locality of migration provides a specific context of opportunities and constraints (e.g., labor market conditions, popular and official perceptions of the migrant group, the presence or absence of other co-nationals) into which migrants enter. The fit between specific kinds of migrants and specific local and national contexts abroad shapes not only the likelihood of generating, maintaining or forsaking transnational ties, but also the very nature of the ties that migrants can forge with their place of origin. While transnational practices extend beyond two or more national territories, they are built within the confines of specific social, economic, and political relations which are bound together by perceived shared interests and meanings. Without such social closure, without a basic sense of shared meanings and a sense of predictability of results bounding together the actors involved (i.e., social control), it would be unthinkable for any person to try to establish any kind of relations across national territories, whether a transnational migrant network, economic project, or political movement.

The diverse effects of this triadic translocal relation are clearly illustrated in Ninna Sørensen’s article comparing the disparate experiences of Dominican migrants in New York and Madrid. While in both situations transmigrants have built transnational relations with their native land, the type, scale, and scope of these relations differ. The differences stem not only from the contextual differences abroad, but also from a selective social and regional composition of transmigrants in both locations. Those going to Madrid tend to be drawn from among those who could not afford to migrate to New York—because of their regional or class origin,

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because of their gender, or, most importantly, because of their lack of the appropriate social capital connecting them with the migration networks linked to the Big Apple. In this case, class, gender, and regional origin emerge as critical determinants of migrants' destination, attainment, and transnationality. The limited power of the generic "Dominican" label as a homogenizing national identifier and predictor of migrants' performance is clearly demonstrated.

This case well illustrates the generalization that migration from the same country is formed by a heterogeneous rather than unitary group of people, possessing distinct personal and social endowments (human capital and social capital), migrating under disparate circumstances, and professing significant, if subtle, regional cultural differences. Heterogeneity, in turn, results in disparate rates of access to opportunities in the receiving labor market and society, which in part explains why not all migrants are able to afford the maintenance of active transnational ties (see Mahler, this volume)—and why the transnational practices of those who do maintain them are also diverse. In general, different "receiving" localities offer migrants dissimilar contexts of reception, and thus dissimilar opportunities and constraints.²

The contribution by Alan Smart and Josephine Smart illustrates another dimension of locality and translocality, namely, that the historically particular forging of translocal relations significantly mediates the patterns of global investment as well as migration. Their study of the formation of social networks by entrepreneurial Hong Kong capitalists and Chinese workers starts from the well taken assumption that an exclusive focus on international migration in studying transnationalism is too restrictive (for an alternative argument see Mahler, this volume). In the contemporary period, national boundaries are being constantly criss-crossed by processes of communication and exchange that do not include actual bodily movement, such as capital expansion, Internet, and other telecommunications. Other modes of transnational bodily movement, such as tourism and expatriate consulting and entrepreneurship, do not entail migration. All of these relationships are mediated by trans-local understandings. Smart and

Smart's study of the constitution and mobilization of transnational social networks traversing the soon-to-be-erased Hong Kong-China border reveals a particular pattern of "situated ethnicity" as a basis for translocal network solidarity and exclusion that differs markedly from the kinds of translocal ties forged by corporate Hong Kong Chinese capitalists investing in Vancouver (Mitchell 1993, 1996). In order to successfully penetrate different localities in the world economy, the transnational capitalist fractions from Hong Kong have to justify their activities within prevailing local cultural understandings. The entrepreneurial Hong Kong capitalists studied by Smart and Smart foregrounded their Chineseness in China, while the corporate capitalists from Hong Kong in Vancouver accommodated to a different setting by downplaying their Chineseness and foregrounding their capitalist economic position within a dominant multicultural public discourse. Thus transnationalism, far from erasing the local identifications and meaning systems, actually relies on them to sustain transnational ties.

The reproduction of transnational ties is clearly sensitive to contextual conditions. However, contextual conditions are not static, and must be historicized. Over time, for example, labor market conditions can improve or deteriorate; state policies can become friendlier (see for example Schein and Smart and Smart this volume); or additional opportunities may arise from an emergent aggregate demand for goods and services generated by increasing numbers of people arriving from the same country or region. This latter process may also provoke class restructuring within the group, as well as social transformations within the receiving city and society (Sassen-Koob 1987; Sassen 1991). Given the many possibilities for social transformation generated by all of these flows, how are transnational networks currently constituted and reproduced? Just how new are these processes?

Constituting and Reproducing Transnational Networks

A critical unanswered question raised by scholars of transnational migration is whether transnational practices and relations are merely an evanescent phenomenon which will not last beyond

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first generation migrants. Or, by contrast, are transnational social practices becoming an enduring structural characteristic of global social organization? Critics of transnationalism argue that the attention devoted to transnational practices is misplaced, for such relations have always existed. In fact, the well-known “dual frame of reference” phenomenon has been a typical trait of first generation immigrants. At first glance, the historical record supports this interpretation.

Despite the relative paucity and inconsistency of existing data, there is consensus among scholars about a high incidence of transnational mobility among European immigrants, before and after the turn of the century. During the 1899-1952 period, for example, a full one-third of all immigrants to the United States, either returned or moved on. Between 1925 and 1943, almost two-fifths of all migrants remigrated (Hoerder 1985: 353-54; see also Rosenblum 1973). Moreover, some studies at the turn of the century found that return rates tended to be higher among newer immigrants. Some have attributed this to changes in the United States labor market and society which made it harder for the newcomers to adapt, and to the national composition of the newcomers, most of whom were Southern and Eastern Europeans who, apparently, returned in larger numbers than those from Northern and Western Europe (Rosenblum 1973: 125-26). Yet, according to received assimilationist wisdom, the dual frame of reference of the first generation died with it. Accordingly, the withering away of transnational ties, language, and most cultural practices and values brought by immigrants from the old country was almost completed by the third generation (Portes and Rumbaut 1990: 183).

Are transnational relations exclusively a first generation practice? Did European immigrants actually sever their connections with their old country once the first generation passed on? While these questions need further examination, recent scholarship suggests otherwise. It shows that old world immigrants’ transnational orientation did not die with them. For example, Irish, Polish, and Jewish “immigrant nationalisms did not simply go to the grave with the members of the migrating generation; on the contrary, a

cultural thread links the diasporic political vision of the immigrants with the ethnic gestures of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren” (Jacobson 1995: 5). More than 100 years after the arrival of their forbearers, the enduring transnational linkages between the politics of the homeland and the culture of European diasporas still persist. Polish Americans, Jewish Americans, and Irish Americans still profess political identity and allegiance to their distant, and, for many, unknown homeland. During the struggle of the Solidarity movement in Poland, for example, thousands of Polish Americans sang the Polish national anthem in demonstrations in Chicago and other major U.S. cities. St. Patrick’s Day parades are celebrated nationwide and Irish Americans’ support of Irish independence and the IRA’s struggle remains strong. Meanwhile, the defense of Israel remains the paramount task and unifying force for many Jews in the United States. Similar patterns are also found among other Americans of Southern and Eastern European descent.

This still leaves unanswered the question of what, if anything, is different about current transnational practices? Critics of the reconstitution of immigration studies as transnational studies argue that cross-generational language retention remains problematic, that different receiving state practices (e.g., ethnic pluralism in the United States versus full assimilation in France) still tilt the balance in favor of assimilation over time, and that renewed anti-immigrant hysteria creates further pressures for “immigrants” to assimilate or “go home” rather than maintaining the double-consciousness required of transmigrants. Thus, what is the likelihood that contemporary transnational practices will be reproduced beyond first generation migrants?

In order to answer this question we will address three factors connected to the processes of migration, namely: the micro-dynamics of migration; the globalization of capitalism and economic reorganization of the economy; and the technological revolution. With regard to the micro-dynamics of migration we must differentiate the reproduction of networks and households. The social diffusion of a given social practice, like transnationalism, may be either kin- or non-kin-based. Village-based migration,

for example, has become a fact of life for many Mexican localities where thousands of migrants to the United States have originated. However historically resilient, the actual process of migration is not reproduced exclusively by kinship networks. Migrants from the same family often do emigrate North generation after generation. Yet, because of the locality-based character of circular migration from Mexico, many families, whose members had not ever emigrated before may join the process at any particular time (Massey et. al. 1987). In other words, the reproduction of migration is social, not just familial.

This is what Robert Smith and Luin Goldring (this volume) mean by the concept of “transnational communities.” Smith, for example, appropriates Alarcon’s (1994) depiction of such locality-based structures of reproduction as “rural Mexican communities that specialize in the production and reproduction of international migrant workers.” Such transnational social structures are sustained by social networks in migration and their attendant modes of social organization—home town associations, economic remittances, social clubs, celebrations and other bi-national social processes as well as by more indirect technological means of transportation and communication now available to facilitate the reproduction of transnational social fields such as jet airplanes, satellite dishes, telephones, faxes, and e-mail.

The examples provided in all of our case studies of transmigration well illustrate the interaction of global economic restructuring, the technological revolution, and the microdynamics of migrant social practices in reproducing transnational social fields. Global restructuring has created contextual conditions in the form of labor demand and labor market conditions in both rural agriculture (Zabin 1995) and in manufacturing and services in global cities like New York (Sassen-Koob 1984) favorable to transnational migration. The technological revolution in transportation and communications has facilitated the simultaneous maintenance of bi-national connections by migrating members of the new transnational working class. But it is the everyday practices of migrants that provide a structure of meaning to the acts of crossing borders, living in bi-national households, and reproducing

transnational social relations. Such meanings are not exhausted by the economistic rubric represented in the concept of “household reproduction.” Rather, they may involve the production of local or global status positions (compare Goldring with Matthei and D. Smith, this volume), the reconfiguration of local power relations (R. Smith, this volume) or the transgression of racial and gendered boundaries (Sørensen, this volume). Politically organized transnational networks and movements also weld together transnational connections by constituting structures of meaning. Historically specific examples include coalitions forged by international political and economic organizations (Drainville, this volume), cross-border labor organizing and “principled issue networks” advancing the cause of human rights, environmental justice, political democratization, and gender or racial equality (Sikkink 1993; Brysk 1993; M.P. Smith, 1994; Mahler this volume). Once established, the maintenance and reproduction of relations of power, status, gender, race, and ethnicity become inextricably enmeshed in the reproduction of transnational social fields.

Moreover, recall that transnational flows are not limited to transmigrants bodily geographic mobility. They also include multiple exchanges of monetary and non-monetary resources, material and symbolic objects, commodities and cultural values. Even in the highly unlikely event that every new immigrant became “settled” and severed all her or his connections with their country of origin, a continuous flow of new arrivals and material goods may reproduce a transnational social field. So too may the continuous flow of ideas and information provided by global media, ethnic tourism, and religious or secular festivals and rituals. All of these mechanisms have played a role in the re-emergence of transnational ties. Even in cases in which the sense of connectedness with the old country appear to have vanished, we find second and even third generation immigrants to the United States and other nation-states retaking the banner of ethnic pride and nationalism—e.g., the new nationalism vis-à-vis the Balkans and the Baltic states. Louisa Schein’s case study of the invention of Hmong transnational ties with the Miao ethnic minority in China shows that it is now even possible to completely reinvent

one's ethnic origins by the production, diffusion, and consumption of culturally oriented ethnic videos laden with geographical images and cultural icons. By these means, Hmong refugees from Laos are currently constructing a myth of cultural origins linked not to Laos but to Miao regions of China. Does this intriguing example mean, as some postmodernists would contend, that personal and social identity are completely malleable and that, in our postmodern world, anybody can become anybody else? We think not, but, as we shall see, the answer to this question is not as simple as it seems.

Transnationalism and Identity Politics

There is a tension in the literature on transnationalism between postmodern cultural studies' conception of identity construction as a free-floating, if not voluntaristic, process of individual self-formation and the many empirical studies of bi-national migrants, transnational social movements, and international organizational networks which envisage personal identity as embedded in socially structured and politically mediated processes of group formation and collective action. How can personal identity be seen as both hybrid and channeled, multipositional and network-bound, transgressive and affiliative, freely formed yet socially determined?

In a chapter of *Reading the Postmodern Polity* (1990: 70-72), entitled "American Fictions and Political Culture," social theorist Michael Shapiro offers an insightful way to reconcile this apparent contradiction. Building on the work of Foucault, but moving beyond his conceptual categories, Shapiro calls for a mapping of the "competing situations, local spaces, discourses, media, and genres...which affect the building of a person's consciousness of self and others." Among the different venues "through which people move as they form and reform their character and identity over time," Shapiro singles out such historicized and socially structured discursive fields as "educational space, military space, metropolitan space, [and] foreign ideational space." Shapiro makes a persuasive case for the post-structuralist view of subjectivity in which the "self" is envisaged as "fragmented and in contention as it is dispersed over a variety of dominant and peripheral discursive practices rather than existing as a homogeneous, centered steering

mechanism.” Yet the decentered subject is not a free-floating subjectivity. Rather, the discursive fields through which people travel as they move through life constitute alternative, socially structured bases for the inner tension and contention over selfhood and identity. In this way various “social spaces” like trans-local migrant networks, transnational working arrangements, and globalized neo-liberal ideology, can be viewed as affecting the formation of character, identity, and acting subjects at the same time that identity can be seen as fluctuating and contingent, as the contexts through which people move in time-space change and are appropriated and/or resisted by acting subjects.

The implications of the foregoing analysis for the study of transnational processes are intriguing. The discursive spaces through which transnational actors move are socially structured and shape character and identity—as do more general and enduring features of social structure, such as patriarchal gender relations, racial hierarchies, and economic inequality. Yet, as we have argued, the localized contexts of social action are important and differentiated, thus making possible a wider space for identity formation and “made character” than social structural inequalities and power/knowledge venues alone would predict. The loyalties and oppositions forged by transnational social networks, the ideological projects of transnational political actors, and the metropolitan cultures in which transnational processes are located, are more often in a state of “becoming” rather than “arrival.” They constitute opportunities as well as constraints. In short, personal identity formation in transnational social spaces can best be understood as a dialectic of embedding and disembedding which, over time, involves an unavoidable encumbering, dis-encumbering, and re-encumbering of situated selves. Identity is contextual but not radically discontinuous. People seek to be situated, to have a stable mooring, an anchor amidst the tempest. Ticuanese moving between New York and Ticuani may conceive of themselves differently than they did before migration but they do not conceive of themselves as postmodern role-players on the global stage.

The complexities of transnational-identity politics are well illustrated in several of the contributions to this volume. These

case studies lucidly capture emergent spaces of group loyalty and identity formation ushered in by transnational investment, migration, and political mobilization, both between and within various scales of state and community. One of the most obvious discourses of identity centers around the group loyalties and affiliations fostered by localities and by the state. In the case studies by Louisa Schein and Alan Smart and Josephine Smart political elites of the local state in different Chinese regions forge links and construct a cultural sense of “weness” with U.S.-based Hmong cultural brokers and Hong Kong-based entrepreneurs, respectively, that bypass national party loyalties and the ideology of the Chinese state. The Chinese state, eager to attract foreign remittances and investment, tolerates these trans-local ties within its borders, but remains watchful, worried about the risks of ethnic separatism and the erosion of the ruling party’s control of local politics. Unlike Robert Smith’s and Luin Goldring’s Mexican transmigrants who are concerned with reconfiguring power and status relations within their villages of origin and maintaining a reconfigured home-town identity, the Smarts’ Hong Kong small capitalists carefully avoid establishing economic ties in their villages of origin in China for fear of the “excess”—i.e., non-business related—expectations and demands that might be thrust upon them if they did invest there, thus minimizing the cost of negative social capital. Their basis for building transnational economic and social relations is “situated ethnicity” (i.e., a constructed “transnational Chineseness”) rather than home town loyalty. Despite their differences, each of these cases illustrates the persistent pull of “locality” as a social space of identity formation in transnational social fields.

Similarly, the experiences of Dominicans in New York City and Madrid and Haitians and Belizians in the United States discussed in this volume question the hopeful expectations of those who argue that transnational practices and identities constitute “counter-narratives of the nation” that subvert essentialist nationalist identities (Bhabha 1990: 300). If anything, these cases suggest the reinscription of group identities by transnational actors “from below” as efforts to recapture a lost sense of belonging by recreating imagined communities. These identities forged from below

are often no less essentialized than the hegemonic projects of nation states. Identities forged “from below” are not inherently subversive or counter-hegemonic. Yet they are different from hegemonic identities imposed from above. The process of subaltern identity formation is a process of constant struggle—a struggle in which discursive communities produce narratives of belonging, resistance, or escape. In these grand narratives of personal meaning, the spaces available for forming non-essentialist identities, while not entirely absent, are interstitial—i.e., they open up between such dominant discursive venues as the “nation-state,” the “local community,” and the “ethno-racial community.”

The process of marking differences within these essentialized identities is no easy task, however necessary and desirable it may be. Power, including the power to resist hegemonic projects, exists latently at all levels of the global system. But to materialize, it must be socially organized, and cannot be taken for granted as inherently embedded in phantom discourses “from below.” The literature on transnational grassroots movements reviewed by Mahler underlines this point. Resistance to the kind of hegemonic neo-liberal project discussed by Drainville is more than merely spontaneous or episodic. Despite their scattered successes, these transnational movements are nonetheless systematically organized by the intentional human agency of human rights organizations (Sikkink 1993), solidarity networks of indigenous peoples (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Smith 1994), grassroots political leaders (e.g., the Central American Solidarity and Zapatista movements), cross-border labor organizers (e.g., the tri-lateral labor struggle against NAFTA), and other issue-oriented interest groups (see, for example, Eisenstadt and Thorup 1994).

Furthermore, while transnational practices may reduce power asymmetries based on gender and race, and even promote solidarity based on these dimensions, such asymmetries often tend to persist not only as a steady source of struggle, but also of identity. For example, Ticuanense in New York, while marginalized by mainstream society, affirm and recreate an essentialized group identity by positioning themselves as racially superior to their equally impoverished Puerto Rican and African American

neighbors. Analogously, Mixtec immigrants remain discriminated against and marginalized by their fellow mestizo Mexicans in the United States, while women's subordination vis-à-vis men endures, although to a lesser degree than in their communities of origin (Sørensen, this volume; Guarnizo 1997; Hondangneu-Sotelo 1994; Levitt 1994; Pessar 1994).

Future Directions for Transnational Studies

It should be apparent from what we have already said that there is a need to "stretch" the study of "transnationalism from below" to encompass the scope of global processes, as well as to focus empirical research upon the "local" specificity of various socio-spatial transformations. This means that the traditional methods for studying people in local communities—ethnography, life histories, and historical case studies, must be contextualized and historicized to take into account four central dimensions of transnational socio-economic and political transformation:

1. the globalization of capitalism and the repositioning of states, nations, and class, gender and ethno-racial formations within this global restructuring;
2. the transnational dimension of global political transformations like decolonization, the universalization of human rights, and the rise of cross-national institutional networks;
3. the transnational social relations made possible by the technological revolution in the means of transportation and communication; and
4. the spatial expansion of social networks "from below" that facilitate the reproduction of migration, business practices, cultural beliefs, and political agency.

The challenge then is twofold, namely: to integrate macro- and micro-determinants into analysis, and to develop an appropriate research strategy capable of capturing the complexity of transnational processes. In undertaking this task it should be kept in mind that it is impossible to study unmediated agency; structural factors are omnipresent. The definition of an appropriate unit of analysis is thus central to the exercise of situating transnationalism. Should

the unit be the individual, the household, transnational organizations, the global system, or all of the above?

Three major shortcomings have limited the explanatory power and reliability of existing theories of transnationalism. We will discuss each of these in turn. The first is the use of disparate and not always clearly stated levels of analysis. If scholars of transnationalism were to state at the outset the level of analysis they were using, particularly whether it was macro-, meso-, or micro-structural, this would help define not only the unit of analysis, but also the most suitable research methods to use. Each level of analysis has advantages and limitations not only for what can be examined, but more importantly, for the extent to which the researcher can generalize from her or his inquiry.

Given the complexity of transnational processes, we think that a fruitful approach for future transnational research would be to start from a meso-structural vantage point, the point at which institutions interact with structural and instrumental processes. This would facilitate incorporating into one's analysis both the effects of macrostructural processes and those generated by micro-structures and practices. In contrast, starting from the macro-structural vantage point may lead to the kind of overgeneralization that produces the self-fulfilling "grand theories" that have been the postmodern object of derision. This is particularly problematic when scholars become so wrapped up in the theoretical elegance of their formulations, e.g., "late capitalism," or time-space "distantiation" or "compression," that they altogether ignore empirical analysis of the world "out there" (See for example, Jameson 1984; Giddens 1991; Harvey 1990). The contribution to this volume by André Drainville nicely avoids this pitfall by grounding the analysis of the social production of the hegemonic ideology of neo-liberalism in the political practices of historically specific macro-level actors "from above" as well as the particular forms of resistance that are emerging "from-below."

Other contributors to this volume have avoided the equally problematic pitfall of starting analysis at the micro-structural level, namely, that in privileging "personal knowledge," researchers may develop a kind of solipsistic tunnel vision that

altogether fails to connect human intentions to social structure and historical change. One of the most complicated components to investigate is that of the micro-dimension of transnationalism. To understand transnationalism from below as well as from above, it is crucial to systematically study the translocal micro-reproduction of transnational ties. Specifically, it is crucial to determine how transnational networks work, and in that sense, how principles of trust and solidarity are constructed across national territories as compared to those which are locally based and maintained. What discourses and practices hold these principles in place? How are social closure and control organized across borders to guarantee loyalty and curtail malfeasance? How do transnational relations interact with local power structures, including class, gender and racial hierarchies? More generally, how does translocality affect the sociocultural basis supporting transnational relations and ties?

This task presents serious challenges as well as new opportunities for creative scholarship. All of the contributors to this volume who have used field research have been required by the character of the transnational processes of investment, migration, and political organization to pursue a multi-locational research strategy that crisscrosses national, cultural, and institutional boundaries. For example, Louisa Schien's inventive deployment of unorthodox ethnographic methods moves back and forth between text and context, observation and participation, the United States and China, acting out her self described role as an ethnographic nomad. This flexible and reflexive approach is also apparent in the postmodern reading of Dominican migrant women's identities provided by Ninna Sørensen in the Dominican Republic, the United States and Spain. The study of rural Mexican and Salvadoran transnationals, members of the Haitian diaspora, Belizian transnational households, and Hong Kong Chinese transnational entrepreneurs all require multipositionality. As James Clifford (1992) has suggested, the study of "travelling cultures" requires travelling researchers.³

The second common conceptual pitfall in transnational studies has been a conflation that confuses transnational social relations with the effects of these relations on social organization and

regrouping in the nations involved. Often, analytical conceptualizations of *how* transnational relations take place, such as through a “transnational social network” or by means of a “transnational circuit,” are interchangeably used with other concepts that speak to the social organization emerging from transnational practices, e.g., “transnational communities” or “binational societies.” Moreover, the theorized transnational spaces in which these actions occur, i.e., “transnational social fields” (Glick Schiller et. al. 1992, 1995), are often rather carelessly thrown into the cauldron of transnationalism. Regardless of the theoretical richness and utility that researchers have given to each of these conceptualizations, it is important to keep in mind the theoretical differences among each of these types of conceptualization and to consider the implications of each.

It is important to try to sort out which of these conceptualizations carries the most promise for future research directions. A useful starting point in this exercise is to ask which captures more of the discernable consequences of transnationalism on social organization and restructuring. Given the complexity and unevenness of this emerging social organization, the concept of “transnational social formation,” seems to offer some promise of capturing what is actually happening. This is because this conceptualization signifies the transterritorialization of a complex array of socioeconomic and political asymmetries, hegemonic discourses, and contradictory cultural practices and identities, which center around the formation and reconstitution of the nation-state. It implies a process in which what has conventionally been seen as belonging within well defined territorial boundaries (i.e, political institutions and practices as well as social and cultural relations), has spilled over national borders, producing something new, namely new social formations.

The third limitation of existing knowledge about transnationalism is the lack of comparative studies. Future research centered on the comparative analysis of diverse cases of transnationalism would clearly advance the field. Comparative studies are needed at different scales and may take different forms. Several examples of particularly useful comparisons come to mind:

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- a) comparing the practices of the same group in different localities, whether it is a migrant group or a participating component of a transnational social movement, to determine the effect of localities;
- b) comparing and contrasting forms of transnational practices undertaken by different groups in similar locations, to examine the effect of group differences;
- c) comparing the practices of migrants and states vis-à-vis transmigration in different broadly geo-political regions (e.g., Latin America and the Asian-Pacific) to determine if differences within regions are greater than differences between regions;
- d) comparing the consequences of neo-liberal policies in different places where they have been “localized” to tease out new spaces of domination, accommodation, and resistance.

In all of these cases systematic comparative examination can shed light on key differences and similarities of contemporary transnationalism.

In studying transnational processes, as Mahler has suggested, a sense of scale, and thus some common indicators, are needed to determine the weight and prevalence, as well as the frequency, density, and intensity of transnational relations in the societies and communities involved. We believe, however, that this search for empirical measures of scale, scope, and impact should be undertaken with caution. Quantitative measurement cannot replace qualitative investigation of social, economic, and political processes. Quantitative and qualitative analysis are complementary. Thus, quantitative evidence of transnational processes should be qualified by interpreting it in the context of ethnographic insights which quantitative methods cannot capture.

In doing this, it must be kept in mind that positivist taxonomies can lead to the erroneous conceptualization of transnationalisms as “things” that can be readily “measured” such that a person or group may be conceived as being “more or less transnational.” Transnationalism is neither a thing nor a continuum of events that can be easily quantified. It is a complex process involving macro- and micro-dynamics. In our view, a main concern guiding

transnational research should be the study of the causes of transnationalism and the effects that transnational practices and discourses have on preexisting power structures, identities, and social organization. Put differently, the causes and consequences of transnationalism, from above and below, ought to form the center of the transnational research agenda. Both quantitative and qualitative methods ought to focus on elucidating these questions.

Whether using ethnographic, quantitative, or comparative-historical methods, transnational studies must clearly identify social and political agency—i.e., who initiates and thus who determines the direction of any transnational action under study. In investigating the “above” and the “below” of transnational action, we should guard against the common mistake of equating “above” exclusively with global structures or agents. Categorizing transnational actions as coming from “above” and from “below” aims at capturing the dynamics of power relations in the transnational arena. By definition, these categories are contextual and relational. Thus they cannot be taken as essential, immutable categories. As Schein’s study so pointedly shows, Hmong cultural brokers act “from below” vis-à-vis the United States and Chinese states by transgressing traditional borders while simultaneously they act “from above” vis-à-vis the Miao objects of their tourist gaze. Similarly, the explicit or implicit intentionality of the agent undertaking an action carries tremendous sociological weight, regardless of the final intended and unintended consequences of the action. Thus, we must avoid, at all costs, confusing intentionality with consequences, as when actors are designated “resistant” or “oppositional” because their practices produce some social change, even when it was not one they intended, fought for, or socially organized. In the last instance, as we have shown, “transnationalism from below” must be located and historicized if its is to have any meaningful referent capable of being studied now or in the future.

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Notes

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2. With respect to class structuration, the queuing of migrants into particular socioeconomic positions abroad is maintained not only by such contextual forces as labor market conditions and employers' recruitment patterns, but also by the inertia of social networks. Ethnic labor niche formation, based on social networking, has been widely documented by migration scholars (Waldinger 1994, 1996; Model 1993; Portes and Borocz 1989; Lieberman 1980). However, aggregate data tend to overlook the effects of regionalism and ethnic stratification among people coming from the same country, with all the inequalities they imply. For example, the subordination of and discrimination against indigeneous peoples in countries of origin are reproduced upon immigration, as in the case of Mexican Mixtecs in California (See Zabin 1995).
3. This approach is greatly facilitated by contemporary means of transportation and communication. However, emergent patterns of transnational mobility place significant limitations on this research approach. Transmigrants from the same country of origin are now leaving from more regions and are following a more diverse and more diasporic migratory path than in the past. For example, in addition to the United States, significant and increasing numbers of Caribbean, Latin American and Asian populations are also migrating within their own regions and to Europe and Japan. More often than not these migrants are moving to more than one location in the countries of destination making their geographical dispersion more intense and more difficult to track by lone researchers. To counter these limitations, the ethno-centric and sometimes even imperialistic approach traditionally used by scholars from core countries should be revised and transnational, collaborative projects with scholars in countries of origin should be explored.

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