Theoretical and Empirical Contributions
Toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism[1]

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In recent years, social scientists have contemplated the nature of the growing[2] interconnectedness of the world as a consequence of global capitalism, the flows of money, labor, images, and ideas. Will this emergent world order be an increasingly homogeneous "global village" or will the forces of conformity be counter-weighted by local interpretations—by creolizations into a "global ecumene" (Foster 1991; Hannerz 1987, 1989)? The debate promises to be protracted though there is a groundswell of support for an ecumenical future. This paradigm shift has been promoted by observers of cultural hybridity (Appadurai 1990, 1991; Foster 1991; Hannerz 1987) and also by critics of meta-narratives (e.g., modernization, dependency and world systems theories). They argue that such theories privilege the West and capitalism as Prime Movers of social change and as monopolies of exploitation and repression, while localities are stereotyped as static (Appadurai 1990; Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Featherstone 1990; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Kearney 1995a; M.P. Smith 1994). Some promote an alternative image to the meta-narrative, one in which power, domination and control do not radiate from one central source toward peripheries, but radiate from myriad loci and permeate multiple levels of social organization—familial, local, regional, national, transnational and so on. Transnational feminist analysis utilizes the operative term "scattered hegemonies" to elicit an image of multiple, overlapping and discrete oppressions in opposition to oppression as hegemonic (Grewal and Kaplan 1994: 17).

Parallel to the shift in depicting sources of power and control as multifaceted, there has been a like transformation in the portrayal of peoples' identities (e.g., Basch et al. 1994; Nagengast and Kearney 1990), and their roles in the production and reproduction of power. More traditional Marxist analysis largely characterizes people as the pawns of capitalist forces, a characterization reflexive and postmodern theorists have criticized as overly structural and

deterministic. Some have pushed for the adoption of a more dialectical approach, one that "brings together the study of structure, cultural process, and human agency" (Basch et al. 1994: 10). From a dialectical optic, people play a variety of roles simultaneously; they are both agents and subjects and, as such, they are affected by, challenge, and contribute to the perpetuation of different systems of power. For example, in my own research amidst Salvadorans who fled civil warfare in their country and sought refuge in the United States, I now find quite common the following scenario: A peasant was threatened with death by the United States-financed Salvadoran army and anti-government guerrillas if he refused to be conscripted. Fearing retribution from either group if he joined the other, he fled El Salvador for the United States, leaving the rest of his family behind. In the United States he became an undocumented landscape laborer, working for low wages and sometimes not being paid at all. When this happened he would seek assistance from a local immigrants' rights agency where he joined others and formed an advocacy group. Over several years, he squeezed out of his earnings enough money to build a new house in his home town in El Salvador and to buy several acres of land. He now pays two day workers, known as *mozos*, the minimum daily wage to work this land and relieve his wife and children of that burden. The migrant's remittances finance the education of his children who aspire to become professionals. Meanwhile, the mozos can barely feed, let alone educate, their children who, in turn, aspire to emigrate to the land of dollars.

This scenario illustrates the multiple, simultaneous roles people can play. Is the former peasant exploited, exploiter, both? Can the meta-narrative of United States hegemony over Latin America explain every level of oppression here? If not, and a multiplicity of powerful agents and oppressions is acknowledged, shouldn't they then be distinguished by magnitude of influence and by relationship to other agents? In short, the dualist vision—colonizer and colonized, core and periphery, First and Third Worlds—is becoming unacceptable, replaced by a more textured and problematized portrait, but this portrait is nowhere near completion.

Transnational studies are playing a key role in illustrating this multiplicity. Transnational studies research "social, economic, cultural and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them," i.e. globalization. They are different from globalization, however, in that they are "anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states" instead of transpiring in "global space" (Kearney 1995a: 548). This basic definition introduces one fundamental problem besetting "transnationalism"—it is a very slippery concept. One reason for its slipperiness is the outcome of having been used historically in similar yet distinct ways. As early as 1916, authors employed the term (Bourne 1916 cited in Levitt 1996); it became fashionable in the 1970s, as evidenced by the existence of the "Transnational Institute" in Amsterdam and the publication of numerous books and articles bearing "transnational" in their titles, such as *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Keohane and Nye 1971). The more perplexing problem of the term transnationalism as it is utilized contemporaneously, derives from the fact that it is used to describe a wide array of activities—from social movements to economic relations to mass media to migrants' ties to their homelands. Such breadth is difficult to research and comprehend descriptively, let alone analytically. Consequently, the field has sometimes been delimited into a more manageable size or framework in a number of ways, two of which I will discuss in this paper, drawing on empirical and theoretical research to date, including my own.

Distinguishing Transnationalism "From Above" and "From Below"

This approach is rarely expressed explicitly (Guarnizo 1996b; M.P. Smith 1994) but recurs in numerous texts by transnationalists and focusses on "transnationalism from below," even to the point of leaving readers wondering what exactly is meant by the implied, but not necessarily stated, existence óf "transnationalism from above." The basic concept of "transnationalism from above," as I understand it, is that multinational corporations, media, commoditization ("mediascapes," "technoscapes," and "finanscapes" in

Appadurai's terms [1990: 296-99]) and other macro-level structures and processes that transcend two or more states are not produced and projected equally in all areas, but are controlled by powerful elites who seek, although do not necessarily find, political, economic and social dominance in the world. "In other words, the resources, range and specialized flexibility of transnational corporations' activities enable them to present imagery and information on an almost global scale, threatening to swamp the cultural networks of more local units, including nations and ethnic communities" (A.D. Smith 1990: 174-5).

In contradistinction to the homogenizing and elitist forces of "transnationalism from above," "transnationalism from below" generates multiple and counter-hegemonic powers among non-elites. It is the creation of a new social space—one spanning at least two nations—that is fundamentally "grounded in the *daily* lives, activities, and social relationships" of quotidian actors" (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1992: 5, emphasis added). Moreover, transnationalism from below describes "the ways that the *everyday practices of ordinary people*, their feelings and understandings of their conditions of existence, often modify those very conditions and thereby shape rather than merely reflect new modes of urban culture" (M.P. Smith 1992: 493-4; emphasis added). M.P. Smith's vision of transnationalism from below is one of a "transnational grassroots politics" (1994), wherein coalitions constituted by a range of social classes exercise power that transcends national boundaries. As such, everyday people can create change, though this is much less frequently recognized than the powers enjoyed by macrostructural forces such as capitalist expansion, mass media and patriarchy (what Appadurai [1990] describes as the "global cultural economy"). For example, people who think and live transnationally may thwart the forces of assimilation (Rouse 1992; R. Smith 1995), build ethnic identities that were problematic if not impossible to sustain within one nation-state (Nagengast and Kearney 1990), challenge the power of states to control their movements and interests (Basch et al. 1994; Guarnizo 1994; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; R. Smith 1995; M.P. Smith 1994), and even escape the grasp of global capital accumulation

(Portes 1995). In short, through transnational processes everyday people can generate creole identities and agencies that challenge multiple levels of structural control: local, regional, national, and global. "Transnationalism from below" thus supports and explains, at least partially, the "global ecumene."

As popularly described, "transnationalism from below" or "transnational grassroots politics" is the ethnoscape of migrants, social movements and coalitions. The examples M.P. Smith cites in his 1994 paper are typical: a multinational coalition of transnational refugees from Central America and college students load a caravan full of donations and drive it to El Salvador with the intention of making a political statement along the way; a group of Mixtec Indian migrants to Southern California (citing Nagengast and Kearney 1990) who finance good-will projects in their home towns in Mexico, convene a transnational conference to discuss human rights violations on both sides of the border and exercise more power *vis-à-vis* the Mexican state from California than they could from within Mexico; and a transnational conference is organized by an alliance of women's and immigrants' rights organizations to address human rights abuses suffered by transnational migrant women working in the United States (M.P. Smith 1994: 26-30). Other examples include indigenous rights movements in Latin America (Brysk 1993; Sikkink 1993), the campaign for the rights of "Untouchables" within India launched from Toronto, Canada (*New York Times* October 20, 1996), and transnational feminist alliances (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). They substantiate M.P. Smith's point that people should not be limited by a "think locally, act locally" or "think globally, act globally" politics. Rather, in the world of deterritorialized peoples and mass communications, grassroots political activities do not fit well into this binary perspective. In new, transnational spaces, Smith argues, there is more room for "thinking locally while acting globally," for "thinking transnationally while acting multilocally," and for "thinking and acting simultaneously at multiple scales" (M.P. Smith 1994: 25).

The introduction of radio and television into nearly every corner of the earth facilitates these grassroots politics. Prior to the

existence of these mediums, global information was more of an elitist enterprise, limited to those with access to newspapers, books, travel accounts and so on. Many, if not most, people lived a predominantly "local" and perhaps "regional" existence. This raises the question of how easily everyday people could employ a transnational grassroots politics even if they were moderately aware of world geography and events. There are certainly examples of this prior to the past decade or so; the examples of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s utilization of non-violent resistance as adapted from Mohandas K. Gandhi or the anti-Vietnam War movement come to mind immediately. But it seems to me that such practices have become easier in recent years, albeit not universal, with the invention of new technologies such as the facsimile, desktop computer, Internet, and camcorder. These technologies are so widespread that they are virtually impossible to eliminate, and thus control. Moreover, they constitute basic tools of capitalism; to shut them down merely to thwart dissidents, for example, would be very costly. Lastly, they can disperse information so quickly that even if they could be selectively disabled it could not be done in a useful time frame. It should not be surprising then, that these technologies have been central to the transnationalization of protests and social movements, small and large, such as Tiananmen Square, Glasnost and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Wang Dan's protest of prison conditions in China.

The "transnationalism from below" vision is profoundly democratic and empowering, a balm for those who see the world as hopelessly headed for homogeneity imposed by Western cultural and economic imperialism. Its appeal, however, should not dissuade criticism. In my reading, I see two fundamental problems it presents. First of all, I do not find any definition of "grassroots" outside the references to "every day people" conducting "daily" activities. Kearney (1995a: 559) suggests that this metaphor is somewhat "inappropriate for the organizational challenges facing deterritorialized popular groups attempting to defend themselves in a globalized world." I am more concerned about *who* is deemed grassroots: traditionally disenfranchised groups, anyone who does not represent state or corporate interests, perhaps elites

who take counter-hegemonic positions, or even coalitions that include diverse members? Sikkink (1993) raises the issue of membership when discussing the key function that institutional elites often play in social change, such as NGOs' role in defending human rights within nation-states. "The idea of a social movement...with its emphasis on bottom-up citizen protest, fails to portray accurately the range of actors involved in human rights issues, including foundations and international and regional organizations" (1993: 439).

A stickier issue than cross-class coalitions arises with state sponsorship. Can state-sponsored transnational activities be construed as grassroots? For example, as president of Haiti, Jean Bertrand Aristide appealed to Haitians living in the United States to view themselves as members of Haiti's "Tenth Department" and manifest their patriotism (Basch et al. 1994; Richman,1992). Later, as Haiti's deposed president, Aristide once again sought to marshal these migrants' support, only this time as part of a transnational campaign to oust the regime that had overthrown his government. Can either effort be deemed grassroots? This distinction is not petty for there are numerous examples of states reaching across their borders to influence the affairs of citizens who have migrated abroad (Guarnizo 1996a; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Richman 1992; R. Smith 1995). These efforts can often combine self-interest (i.e. interests of powerful elites) with a concern for migrants' welfare. A good example is when the Salvadoran government began the seemingly preposterous program of assisting its citizens, who were about to lose temporary legal status in the United States, to apply for political asylum in 1994. Nearly 200,000 Salvadorans were at risk of deportation owing to the expiration of Temporary Protected Status at that time. The government stepped in to assist its migrant citizens in the application process, a measure designed to prolong their temporary legal status and delay their return. In essence, however, consular officials aided individuals to claim that they would be persecuted by their government if they returned home! This policy only makes sense when contextualized with respect to the collective power of these migrants' pursestrings. Remittances from them, estimated at $700 million to over $1

billion annually, represent the largest source of hard currency to the country, hundreds of millions of dollars more than export earnings (Funkhouser 1991, 1992; Mahler ,1995b; Siri 1996). El Salvador has not received much international aid to rebuild following its decade-long civil war (1979-92) such that financiers and planners are beholden to transmigrants' remittances. From this angle, the ostensibly altruistic policy of assisting migrants with their applications can thus be reinterpreted. It was implemented to ensure the continued flow of remittances by minimizing the likelihood that large numbers of migrants would return home upon losing their legal status, voluntarily or involuntarily. The government feared this possibility as it would likely destabilize the Salvadoran economy and society as a whole, a society barely emerging from the civil war. The newly minted power of the migrants—only a half generation removed from nearly complete powerlessness in El Salvador as members of the peasant and urban working classes—caught the attention not only of the Salvadoran state but also of opposition leaders such as Ruben Zamora who toured the United States speaking to groups of Salvadoran migrants in an effort to fund his political campaigns. Both examples illustrate attempts by elites to coopt migrants' grassroots power primarily to serve their own interests, albeit shrouded in a veneer of benevolence.

To summarize, "transnationalism from below" requires, at a minimum, a sensitivity to the social constellation of its actors. Should "intellectuals who are at home in the cultures of other peoples as well as their own" (Hannerz 1990: 244) or transnational capitalists such as the "Overseas Chinese" (Ong 1993, 1992) and wealthy South Indian entrepreneurs (Lessinger 1992) be viewed as participants in transnationalism from "above" or "below?" Should they be excluded just because they are elites vis-à-vis their societies, even though vis-à-vis global social and economic forces they may be inconsequential? Sikkink argues that elites should not be excluded categorically as some transform rather than reproduce "traditional" power relations. Perhaps, then, "transnationalism from below" should be distinguished from "transnationalism from above" on the basis of whether

participants' activities reaffirm existing hierarchies of power that favor elites or reconfigure existing hierarchies of power toward empowerment of the "grassroots" (i.e., traditionally excluded populations)? This might "resolve" the problem, except for the fact that actors may participate simultaneously in transnational activities that both challenge *and* contribute to hegemonic processes—such as the case of the Salvadoran landscaper cited above. These questions point to the difficulty and artificiality of distinguishing between transnationalisms for they, indeed, are interrelated.

Through careful research on decentralized loci of power and social change such as "scattered" hegemonic processes and politics "orchestrated through multiple targets, operating at a variety of institutional and geographical scales, [and] mediated by the appropriation of the global means of mass communication by transnational grassroots movements" (M.P. Smith 1994: 31), researchers can avoid reinforcing dualistic, unidirectional paradigms of power, such as "center-periphery."

I still hold a concern about casting transnationalism into a "from below" versus "from above" frame because this may privilege *organized* activities, and does not seem to acknowledge the role that other types of purposive, but not necessarily organized, action can play in transforming power. In another paper (Paul, Mahler and Schwartz, forthcoming), my co-authors and I argue that mass action defined as "purposive action undertaken by a discernibly large segment of the population and marked by resistance (overt or covert) against some prevailing feature of the status quo" (ibid.: 1) transforms social structures in unanticipated ways. We specifically use "mass action" instead of "social movement" or "collective action" to emphasize the inclusion of less organized, more diffuse forms of mass action such as undocumented immigration. And we argue that mass action becomes congealed in social policy in ways that are generally unanticipated (hence not organized in that direction) by participants and go beyond their original purview. Illegal migration is a prime example. Millions of people acting predominantly out of self-interest, and with no collective purpose, walk or fly across a border and precipitate reactive

policy making by elites. These policies are how mass actions become congealed and embedded in social structures, influencing decisions and outcomes in subtle ways long after the mass action ceases. Examples are numerous but rarely acknowledged. A case in point is the 1980 Mariel boatlift—the spontaneous mass exodus by small boats of 125,000 Cubans from Cuba and tens of thousands of Haitians fleeing the Duvalier regime whose migration preceded Mariel but peaked during the boatlift—was neither an organized social movement nor a true collective action, yet it precipitated numerous significant changes. The United States public became dismayed by then-president Jimmy Carter's inability to stem the boatlift and this helped cost him re-election. Also, the huge influx of "illegal aliens" into Miami required immediate government attention. Policies and practices were developed and implemented, such as the funding of new schools and health clinics, that old time and traditionally ignored residents such as African Americans could not help but interpret as privileging the newcomers. In the decade after the boatlift these areas erupted several times in protest (see Portes and Stepick 1993).

In conclusion, I recommend that any comprehensive roster of "transnationalism from below" should include mass actions carried out transnationally as well as organized or collective purposive activities. Moreover, since social movements are frequently led by elites, even when their expressed purpose is to subvert established hierarchies of power (Wolf 1969), mass action may provide a more universal medium through which non-elites exercise power (albeit not necessarily toward a reconfiguration of power).

Transnationalism as Transmigration

An alternative means of delimiting the field of transnational studies to a manageable size and focus is to demarcate it as the study of migrants who retain ties to their homeland; i.e., transmigration.[3] This approach has come to dominate transnational discourse, particularly among anthropologists and sociologists. It dates back into the 1980s, when numerous scholars were observing transnational activities practiced by migrant groups that they were studying primarily from the perspective of the "host" country.

They observed activities spanning both "host" and "home"[4] countries but lacked a framework to discuss and analyze them systematically. In May 1990, several researchers organized a workshop as an "effort to conceptualize and analyze transnational migration" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: ix). They invited other scholars to attend, provided them with a series of questions that they felt needed to be addressed and then published the papers in a book. The book's introductory chapter laid out their overall goal of developing transnationalism as "A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration." The workshop's organizers, quite astutely I would argue, offered a commodious definition for transnationalism but one limited to migrants' activities:

> We have defined transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated "transmigrants." Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 1-2).

This definition provides ample space for any number of individual and group activities that span borders to be construed as transnational—from visitation to sending remittances, to making telephone calls. The publication of a definition for transnationalism, and a framework for its investigation leaves the false impression, however, that transnationalism (even if limited to the study of transmigration) is an established field when, in fact, it is a highly contested approach that has yet to form a common agenda for research and analysis. This important conference could be designated the birthplace of transnational migration as a recognized field of inquiry but, I argue, it did not accomplish its goal of laying the foundation for a unified approach. A few weaknesses surface in the definition cited above. For instance, the definition offers little assistance for evaluating the content, intensity and importance of transnational ties, for examining the interests served through these ties and, perhaps most fundamentally, for establishing a typology of transnational actors—individuals, families, households, hometown associations, governments, etc. It is

my opinion that these tasks need to be addressed systematically and can be if researchers ask several basic questions that I will posit below.

My aim in this part of my paper is to further the work of the early conference planners and other scholars toward developing a useful research agenda for studying transnational migration. This would assist the comparison of myriad case studies, a task that is currently very difficult, if not impossible. It would also help identify practices unique to groups of migrants; i.e., culturally specific, from those shared by different groups, albeit in varied settings. As my intention is to supplement and not necessarily replace previous efforts in this direction, I will organize my suggestions around three areas: (1) areas that are confusing and need clarification in the existing literature, (2) basic questions that I feel need to be asked consistently in each case study, but have not been, and (3) areas that remain unidentified or insufficiently addressed in the literature to date.

Areas of Confusion in the Transmigration Literature

Absence of an Orthodox Metaphor

A basic, albeit not necessarily critical, problem plaguing researchers is the plethora of metaphors we employ in describing transnationalism. To date, I have identified "transnational social field" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; 1995), "transnational migrant circuit" (Rouse 1991, 1992; Goldring 1996), "binational society" (Guarnizo 1994), "transnational community" (Georges 1990; Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Portes 1995; R. Smith 1995), "network" (Kearney 1995b: 231), "global ethnoscape" (Appadurai 1991) and "socio-cultural system" (Sutton 1987). Although each has its merits, and no doubt best characterizes its referent group(s), the employ of so many metaphors serves to confuse the field.

I propose the use of the broad metaphor "transnational social field" to skirt this confusion and the terms transnational "processes," "activities," and "ties" to itemize ways in which relations are established and developed within the greater space of

the social field. The other metaphors each have difficulties which make them less appropriate. "Transnational circuit" presupposes a degree of mobility that would preclude many if not most migrants; "binational society" precludes ties that span more than two nation-states; "transnational community" carries with it, intentionally or not, the imputed romantic notions of *communitas* when in reality transnational relations may be divisive; "network" is too closely associated with migration and is better conceived of as a constituent feature of a social field; and "global ethnoscape" and "socio-cultural system" are too broad to be of great analytical utility. Transnational "social field" is preferable but not perfect. It gives me an image of a singular, seemless, smooth terrain when, in fact, there is much evidence to suggest that transmigrants, owing at least in small part to regional differences, form multiple, overlapping and even conflictive social fields. Transnational activities change over time as do participants in them, suggesting that the topography of transnational social fields may be more bumpy and discontinuous than the "social field" image represents. Still, I find it the most useful metaphor and the most widely applicable of those proposed to date.

The Centrality of Mobility to Transnational Migration

Although Transnationalism has been defined broadly as the ways in which "transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders," (Basch et al. 1994: 7), in my reading of the transnational literature, I find that mobility constitutes a centerpiece of transnationalism. This is particularly true of the literature on Mexican transnationalism (Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Rouse 1992), but also of Caribbean transnationalism (Guarnizo 1996b; Basch et al. 1994), and even of some Chinese and other Asian transnationalism (Lessinger 1992; Ong 1992). What these authors refer to is *movement of bodies across space*, the physical translocation of migrants across boundaries dividing two or more nation-states. When people move between places with some regularity, moreover, their identities are shaped by this experience: "The migrants in the study

moved so frequently and were seemingly so at home in either New York or Trinidad as well as their societies of origin, that it at times became difficult to identify where they 'belonged'" (Basch et al. 1994: 5). Rouse (1991, 1992) labels this phenomenon "bifocality," the blurring of the distinction between the local and far away, "the capacity to see the world alternatively through quite different kinds of lenses" (1992: 41). Mobile Transmigrants organize their lives "under conditions in which their life-worlds are neither 'here' nor 'there' but at once *both* 'here' and 'there'" (M.P. Smith 1994: 17; emphasis in the original). This latter quote leaves ambiguous, however, the degree to which becoming bifocal is the outcome of frequent physical mobility.

I readily agree with Appadurai's observation that "As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic 'projects' the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality" (1991: 191). I also agree that deterritorialization stimulates migrants' memory and imagination, such that they feel betwixt and between. What I ponder is the role of bodily mobility in this conceptualization. Can transmigrants be "bifocal" if they, themselves, do not move between "home" and "host" countries? What about the impact of the flows of *things not bodies*, such as letters, videos, remittances, specialty foods and so on? Do they promote bifocality to the same degree attained by frequent travelers? Are the face-to-face contacts made possible by bodily movement more intense, more important to the development and perpetuation of transnational social fields and bifocal identities than the faceless ties of remittances—the movement of embodied not bodily ties? Also, shouldn't mobility be quantified in some way? Are transnational ties fostered most through monthly, yearly or triannual visits? Or is the number of trips far less important than the time spent with family, friends, etc. in each place? Some of the most frequent travelers are entrepreneurs; a case in point is the Salvadoran couriers I have been studying over several years. Dozens of couriers, men and women with legal status in the United States, travel back and forth between Long Island and eastern El Salvador carrying down letters, remittances, and gift packages, and returning with cheese and other products to sell as

well as a reverse flow of letters. Are the ties they manufacture similar qualitatively to ties formed by workers returning "home" in the off-season? I am not prepared to answer these questions yet, but raise them as important areas needing investigation; viz., type, intensity and mobility of ties.

The courier example also raises another, related, question regarding the degree to which bodily mobility is accessible equally to all transmigrants. Is mobility the outcome more of privilege (such as the possession of legal immigration status or sufficient funds to pay for trips), of personal/familial taste (the desire to return to one's place of origin or not), or of the proximity between the countries involved? Additionally, the degree of danger travelers incur may influence actualized mobility. There is a great deal of evidence that one or more structural factors does, indeed, play a role in transmigrants' mobility. For example, Hagan (1994) argues that Guatemalans in Houston have established greater transnational links homeward *subsequent to* obtaining legal status in the United States. Similarly, I have found in my own research that legal status is the *sinequanon* of the Long Island Salvadorans' courier industry. The price of airfare from New York to San Salvador varies between $550 and $800 round trip, a sum that discourages working-class Salvadoran migrants from returning to their homeland unless they can defray this cost in some fashion. Serving as a courier, whether on a one-time basis or as a career, provides this hedge. Most Long Island Salvadorans, however, do not go "home" for three basic and interrelated reasons: they lack legal status in the United States, returning illegally is extremely expensive (current pricetag $3,000), and overland travel is fraught with peril, particularly in transversing Mexico (Juffer 1988).

Studies of transnationalism need to address whether bodily mobility is the exception or the rule for different groups of transmigrants. Is Rouse's "transnational migrant circuit" metaphor apropos or not? If, as I suspect, it is unusual, except among groups for whom the cost of regular mobility is not too high (such as from the East Coast of the United States to the Caribbean owing to a huge tourist industry, or from Texas and Southern California to Mexico), then scholars of transmigration

need to focus on mobile information and goods flows and on other transnational ties and processes more than we have to date.

Once we have looked critically at the question of mobility and have examined all the transnational activities and ties people participate in, we will be in a position to analyze the nature of their "lived reality," to determine whether they are "bifocal," "bipolar" (i.e., settled on one side of the transnational social field with a strong local focus but also characterized by occasional transnational activities), or something else. In my case study of Salvadorans on Long Island, a population that, overwhelmingly, migrated once and stayed put, I have documented the creation and perpetuation of transnational ties linking Salvadorans on Long Island to El Salvador, but I have also documented their perception of a disjuncture between life in El Salvador and in the United States (Mahler 1995a). In their words, "people change here." Sister Maria Villatoro, a Catholic nun in El Salvador, drew upon her fond experience of growing up materially poor but rich in social bonds to contrast the egoism she finds in the United States. "Here things are not like over there," she explained. "Over there you eat even if it's only beans with bread. Here you don't. Here whoever has [money] eats and whoever doesn't, can't. You don't know about any groups who will help you or anything. You don't know anything. It's worse living here because here everyone lives for himself." Moreover, and despite this auto-criticism, time and again I encounter Salvadorans who returned to their homeland with intentions of staying and, yet, show up on Long Island less than a year later claiming they could not accustom themselves to life in El Salvador again. I have had similar experiences talking to returnees in El Salvador who wax nostaligic over their lives in the United States and express a deep desire to return. These individuals' stories do not express "bifocality," although they do exhibit a dual frame of reference. Those I have met who most closely resemble the phrase "neither 'here' nor 'there'" are the couriers, and other frequent travelers.

Salvadorans' precarious legal status in the United States, the continued unstable and dangerous conditions of life in El Salvador, and the prohibitive cost of traveling home all contribute

to the fact that most of my informants do not live in transnational "circuits," but are settling permanently on Long Island. Noted Salvadoran sociologist Segundo Montes found evidence of settlement almost a decade ago for the wider Salvadoran population (Montes Mozo and Garcia Vasquez 1988). I have observed this process over several years. Individuals I first interviewed between 1989 and 1990 frequently changed residences and jobs, a mark of their instability. When I reinterviewed them five to six years later, I found them in more stable households, with U.S.-born children and only infrequently changing their jobs. Furthermore, few had returned to El Salvador for more than a short, often emergency, visit. Under these conditions, their lived reality is primarily local, punctuated by infrequent transnational events such as sending monthly remittances or watching a video of the local patron saint festival. Maintaining more vigorous transnational ties remains quite formidable for many if not most. This raises the question of whether they will (1) retain transnational links over the coming years and (2) use these links as tools to fashion identities resistant to the forces of acculturation in the United States,[5] a feature of transnationalism that has been suggested by several authors (Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Rouse 1992; R. Smith 1995). Salvadoran migration on Long Island is not mature enough to answer these questions with any authority. My evaluation to date is that certain groups of Salvadorans, viz., those that are most mobile and who find opportunities for socioeconomic mobility in transnational space, will maintain active transnational links while the majority of the first generation will live within a transnational social field constructed largely through remittances, letters, and interactions with recently arrived migrants. The U.S.-born children of these migrants are, for the most part, very young, too young to gauge their likely participation in second generation transnationalism.

This extended discussion of the Long Island Salvadoran case study is not meant to challenge other researchers' work, but merely to stimulate careful study of, and reflection on, the heretofore ambiguous and little-questioned area of mobility in transnational studies. It is extremely important to identify what, if

anything, is mobile and why. It is also critical to examine the relationship between mobility and identity. Questions such as these need to be raised systematically in transnational research in order to facilitate the comparison of myriad case studies. Moreover, pursuing these questions will facilitate the evaluation of the degree to which transnational space truly offers a more democratic forum for agency, whether it is terrain for the production of new power hierarchies or reproduction of established power hierarchies.

Basic Questions that Need to be Asked Systematically

Disaggregate between Activities Peformed by the Majority and by Smaller Groups

In the past section, I constructed an argument which suggests that most of my Salvadoran informants experience transnational ties through their remittances and through information from letters, couriers and newcomers. Implicit in this discussion is the recommendation that researchers collect information broadly on transnational activities and, then, disaggregate the data along certain recommended lines. Hopefully, these suggestions will encourage researchers to tailor their descriptions to best reflect their empirical findings, while still providing data comparable to other researchers'. To this end, I will suggest a series of basic research questions which help identify patterns in actors and activities. The first step is to cast a wide net and document all the ways individuals, groups, and institutions foster and maintain relations across borders. Naturally, this requires research spanning the entire transnational social field(s), not just on one side of it. Typical activities identified will include remittances, communications (letters, tapes, telephone calls, videos, e-mail), travel "home" for local festivals, business enterprises, home town association projects, cultural exchanges, government initiatives, cultural exchanges and political movements. Then I suggest grouping these activities by participants. Which are performed by most migrants? Which by select individuals or groups? Of the select activities, would non participants like to perform them, and are they precluded by certain constraints (legal, economic, etc.)? Or, do they choose not to

participate? These questions will facilitate an understanding of the existence of barriers/aids that structure transnational activities. Perhaps they will shed light on groups' unique cultural preferences and practices as well.

Much of the research to date on transnational social fields yields detailed information on a limited set of activities and practices, not a clear picture of the breadth of the social field, nor of the demography or intensity of players' participation in all the activities people engage in. A prime example is the important treatise, *Nations Unbound*, by Linda Basch, Cristina Szanton Blanc and Nina Glick Schiller (1994). This book begins with a framework for researching transnationalism in a broad sense, but the ethnographic work cited is focused on voluntary associations and political campaigns. The questions that came to my mind when reading this book, and which are not answered therein, are how representative of the entire transnational social field are these activities, and how representative of the entire migrant population are the participants in these activities? I feel that it is important to address these questions, particularly in the quest to research transnational "grassroots" practices.

Key Characteristics to Investigate: Gender, Class, Age/Generation, Mobility and Regionality

Most scholars of migration provide basic background information on the groups they study—information such as the history of the migration, its quantity, sex, age and residential distributions and economic integration. Transnational researchers should follow this precedent, I feel, but also go further, gathering data on transnational social structures, processes, and identities in particular. I recommend that several key characteristics which are culturally constructed be researched consistently as well. As of this writing I have identified gender, class, generation, mobility, race, ethnicity, and regionality, but I am sure this is not an exhaustive list. To date, only race and ethnicity have received much attention (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Popkin 1995) though mostly in the context of identity and its transformation. The other areas deserve careful scrutiny as well, both regarding studies of

transmigrants and their activities, as well as regarding broader transnational actions such as social movements. In the following discussion I will focus my comments on the less developed characteristics.

Gender has been raised as an important area of inquiry by several scholars of transnationalism (Georges 1992; Hagan 1994; Sørensen 1996; Sutton 1992), and most notably Goldring (1996); yet, it has often been side-lined (see Mahler 1996 for a discussion). In a review of the transnational literature, I detected several subtle but significant gendered processes. For example, several authors noted that only men were meeting to plan projects for their home town or regional association (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 2; Kearney 1995b), but never addressed whether men dominate these associations. Goldring (1996) confirms the latter for her research among Mexican migrants. She also found that women and men did not agree on the type of projects that should be funded by home town associations, that "if women played a significant role in deciding how to spend money on community projects, it would most likely be spent somewhat differently" (ibid: 321). There is also an expanding literature from a variety of case studies documenting how male and female migrants differ with regard to their desires to return "home" permanently. Men wish to return home where they can recoup higher status, while women try to settle the family in the "host" country (Hagan 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Goldring 1996; Guarnizo 1996b; Pessar 1986). In short, scholars should examine consistently the degree to which participation in transnational activities and in transnational social fields in general is gendered.

The importance of social class to transnational processes has been another area mentioned but rarely addressed by researchers, with the notable exception of Roger Rouse (1992). He examines how transmigrants can occupy different class positions within their transnational circuits. I feel strongly that social class also be used as an analytical tool in the identification of patterns in transnational activities. Do people of different social classes participate in similar or different transnational activities, and do different classes enjoy similar or different costs and benefits from these ties? I will

return to this theme below in the section on whose interests are served. Guarnizo (1996b) is also concerned about class, and supplements Rouse's perspective by introducing the importance of legitimacy for class analysis. Transmigrants may enjoy greater economic success but do they translate that into greater social prestige and acceptance among established elites? Do transmigrants engage in certain transnational activities to further their social acceptance, for example by sponsoring "altruisic" projects in their home towns? I will also return to this topic later with my perspective.

Generation also merits greater attention from researchers. Age is quite straight forward, of course, and some indication should be provided in transnational studies which disaggregates activities by the age of the participant. The question of generation—first, second, third and so on—is obviously related, yet more nuanced. Several questions are repeatedly tossed at transnational scholars; viz., whether transnationalism is really something new and whether or not migrants' children will pursue transnational lives. These questions are not easy to answer. Answers would require, in the first instance, a historical if not archaeological background and, in the second instance, longitudinal studies. Though there are exceptions, most research on migrants provides a snapshot of today with some history of yesterday. Longitudinal studies are rarer, owing to their cost and difficulty. However, some "snapshot" studies do find evidence that at least some children and grandchildren of migrants participate in transnational activities (Basch et al. 1994; R. Smith 1995). Robert C. Smith's (1995) description of the transnational social field constructed between Ticuani, Puebla, Mexico and New York City develops this transgenerational theme most thoroughly.

An examination of the perpetuation of transnational ties among New York Ticuani youth illustrates that the ties are preserved across generation because they articulate self-interests. Smith shows that when they return to their parents' home towns, the youth are inserted at the top of the local hierarchy. In contrast, the same Ticuani youth occupy one of the lowest social strata in New York and, unlike their parents whose identity is rooted in their

home country hierarchy, the second generation clearly perceives its position within the United States hierarchy (see also Gibson 1988; Ogbu 1990; Suárez-Orozco 1989). Through the perpetuation and even over-accentuation of their Ticuani identity, Smith argues, they create an alternative niche, one that bulwarks being associated with the negative stereotypes attributed to other poor minorities. "Ticuanense membership and identity provides them with the practices and resources to resist the negative social location, akin to Blacks and Puerto Ricans, they feel the larger society places them in through their common attendance at the same schools, their competition in the labor market, and often their geographical proximity. In this sense, second generation Ticuanense identity is a reactive formation which both defends and benefits the immigrants" (1995: 32).

Smith's study is very interesting and important; it documents transnational ethnogenesis and one that could further problematize the already murky study of ethnicity throughout the globe. Unfortunately, there is little published literature against which his case study can be compared. Is this a general pattern that Smith is identifying, or an extreme measure adopted by a much-maligned group of minority youth? It is impossible to determine at this moment owing to a dearth of comparative information. However, there is at least one comparison that can immediately be made: Deported Salvadoran gang members. Hundreds of Salvadorans have been deported from the United States, principally from Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., back to their country of origin and many have reconstituted gangs there (Jonas 1995; *Washington Post* April 4, 1996; *Los Angeles Times* June 27, 1995. These youth have become part of a transnational social field involuntarily, yet, at least among people I have spoken with in El Salvador, they have a disproportionate influence on many Salvadorans' perceptions of that social field. They also represent an ethnogenesis and a creolization but, unlike for the Ticuani, this second generation identity does not thwart the forces of assimilation; rather it exemplifies a high degree of assimilation, a classic case of "segmented assimilation" (Portes and Zhou 1993). Moreover, the gangs have sparked a new transnational twist—the reappearance of vigilante

groups, i.e., death squads, who blame the gangs disproportionately for El Salvador's current crime wave and target them for assassinations (Jonas 1995).

The last two social characteristics I shall stress as meriting close attention during research on transnationalism are mobility and regionality. I have already discussed mobility in some detail earlier, so I will only repeat my main points on this topic. Researchers should determine what is mobile—money, goods, ideas, and/or people—and then make quantitative and qualitative measurements regarding the frequency of mobility for each type and the contribution each makes to the generation and perpetuation of transnational social fields. Lastly, the special case of bodily movement through space needs to be examined *vis-à-vis* identity. What happens to the identity of migrants who are highly mobile versus those who remain quite stationary, and yet retain transnational ties? Do the latter develop a new, hybrid identity to the same degree as the frequent travelers, or will they come to differentiate more between their lived, "local" reality and the world they left behind? So many of today's migrants live under these conditions that this question must be researched.

Finally, regional differences need consistent attention and discussion in the literature. Though transnational studies have tended to focus on one particular migrant group such as Mexicans or Chinese, and this focus is likely to continue to be predominant despite efforts to do comparative research involving several groups simultaneously, regionality always plays a role. By this I mean that most migrant groups are not concentrated in only one area of the "host" country. Some communities are larger and may differ significantly from others along demographic lines; some are older and have more established institutions and so on. Consequently, the transnational linkages these different subpopulations form are also likely to vary. The case I know best is the Salvadoran migrant population, half of whom live in greater Los Angeles and only about 12 percent have made greater New York their adoptive home. There are similarities between these communities but also numerous differences, such as the fact that the Los Angeles Salvadorans are representative of most regions and social classes in

El Salvador whereas the New York Salvadorans come primarily from eastern El Salvador where they were overwhelmingly peasants (Chavez 1994; Chinchilla, Hamilton and Loucky 1993; Hamilton and Chinchilla 1995; Mahler 1995a). Not surprisingly, they vary also with regard to transnational ties and to the development of their transnational social field. Home town associations in Los Angeles are numerous and more highly developed than in the New York area (Popkin 1995); likewise gangs are much more pronounced in California than in New York. These differences suggest a phenomenon that I have not yet seen mentioned in the transnational literature; viz., that there may be multiple, even overlapping, transnational fields that link two or more nation states and that these fields may vary in constituency and topography. Introducing this comparative analysis will yield both a more textured comprehension of transnationalism (i.e., its depth as well as its breadth) and insight into the roles that demographic variables play in the building and reproduction of transnational social fields. At this moment, there may be only a few migrant groups—such as Salvadorans and Mexicans—who have been studied in different regions (in this case of the United States) and, thus, can be compared. In the future, as more transnational work is completed, this important optic is likely to become more readily available. I ask merely that, whenever possible, researchers make the comparisons.

Areas Not Sufficiently Addressed in the Literature to Date

In my quest to strengthen the research agenda for transnational studies of migrants, I have identified several areas that I feel are not sufficiently developed in the literature to date, areas I strongly recommend researchers to consider in the future. They are (1) assessing whose interests are served by engaging in transnational activities, (2) determining whether such activities reaffirm and/or reconfigure "traditional" relations of power and privilege, and (3) the implications of transnationalism, particularly with respect to metanarratives of power. I will now develop these themes individually.

In Whose Interest?

Scholars have long recognized that migrants invest in the construction and reconstruction of homes in their communities of origin as well as in the consumption of luxury goods and other forms of ostentation that communicate their enhanced status *vis-à-vis* non-migrant households (Georges 1990; Gmelch 1980; Mozo and Vasquez 1988; Rhoades 1978; Sider 1992). In other words, some transnational activities are unambiguously self-interested while others, such as the remittance of small sums of money to finance the basic necessities of non-migrant family members, appear more philanthropic. The latter may also represent payments of reciprocity to family members who have provided services to migrants, such as child rearing of migrants' children left in the homeland.

There is growing evidence, however, that the interests served by transnational ties may be more equivocal than they appear at first. A case in point is home town associations. The projects funded by these groups of transmigrants enjoy a veneer of altruism, while serving as a medium through which power relations can be, although not necessarily are, reconfigured. Luin Goldring (1996) and Robert C. Smith (1995) each illustrate how associations which they studied constitute "parallel power structures" (R. Smith 1995: 27) that challenge established modes of local power even though they accomplish this over transnational space. Transmigrants have garnered influence through their pursestrings. They finance local "altruistic" projects such as the construction of potable water facilities and soccer fields, projects which outcompete those sponsored by local authorities whose funds are more limited. Transmigrants can translate their projects' notoriety into real local political power via election to office or selection as honorary patrons. Do transmigrants participate equally in these pursuits? We do not know for sure because, to date, most writing has detailed only the activities, not the actors. In her analysis of home town associations involving Mexican migrants, Luin Goldring (1996), however, found them dominated by men. She argues that the projects they fund are not oriented toward those

most needed by the home town, but toward those with the most "symbolic" power. Women she talked to, had they enjoyed the power to decide where monies would be spent, would have favored more utilitarian projects. If her findings are true more generally, they would show that activities, which on one level reconfigure established power relations on another, gendered level, reproduce established power relations. They provide a good example of "scattered hegemonies"—of multiple, overlapping, and intersecting sources of power—as opposed to hegemonic power (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). Without the more nuanced information regarding participation in these transnational activities, readers can be led to believe that home town associations and other transnational activities have universal appeal, democratic structures, and highly altruistic effects when, in fact, this may well not be true.

The power now wielded by transmigrants has not escaped the notice of national governments, many of whom have launched initiatives varying from relatively benign cultural exchanges to full-fledged campaigns designed to institutionalize and control transnational ties. Once again, the overt message of many of the policies developed appears altruistic—such as the passage of laws permitting dual citizenship and protecting dual citizens' property rights in their country of origin (R. Smith 1995; Guarnizo 1996a; Sanchez 1996). Beneath the veneer of benevolence lies the interests of the state and national elites, a point I made previously using the case of the Salvadoran government's involvement in filing political asylum claims for its citizens. Savvy migrants have not consistently capitulated to these efforts to coopt their power and win their allegiance. Rather, there are numerous examples of transmigrants wielding their power *vis-à-vis* the state to demand that it attend to their interests more than it did when they were living within its boundaries (Guarnizo 1996a; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; R. Smith 1995; Richman 1992, Sanchez 1996). To what extent, however, are these groups who advocate for greater power representative of their larger constituencies? Are there select or more universal interests being pursued?

Finally, I will complicate this picture by adding one last dimension. During my most recent trip to El Salvador in the summer of

1996, I discovered a new transnational tie in the process of formation, one initiated by local communities in El Salvador and which links them to communities of migrants from these towns living on Long Island. Formally called "ADESCO" or "Association for the Development of Communities," this is a regional, if not national, attempt at collecting funds from transmigrants in the United States to finance projects in their local communities. According to informants, ADESCO explicitly skirts association with the Salvadoran State, seeking instead to form networks directly between communities. My research reveals, however, that ADESCO is constituted by local elites who cannot obtain the monies they need for major community needs by soliciting them from the centralized national government. These patron-client ties are too weak (a fact that confronted me time and again as local officials sought my assistance, convinced that I had good ties to government agencies—Salvadoran and United States). Snubbed by traditional patrons, local leaders turned to another bankroll, transmigrants, people with whom they can reactivate old patron-client ties and obligations. I gathered evidence that leaders in one town were collecting funds from Long Island Salvadorans through ADESCO to finance needed road repairs, and had even set up a special ADESCO bank account that migrants could wire remittances to. In short, ADESCO reads to me like the mirror image of home town associations; its momentum is spurred by the home town, not the home town association. Both use remittances to gain prestige but, seemingly, in opposition. Of course, transmigrant donors may press for recognition of their efforts, such as through the formation of home town associations, and shift prestige away from the local elites over time.

Reconfigure or Reaffirm?

The discussion regarding "In Whose Interest?" leads directly to a fundamental research question: Do transnational spaces, activities and processes reaffirm or reconfigure established relationships of power and privilege? This question may appear obvious if asked from a transnationalism "from above" versus "from below" perspective. Within this frame, transnationalism "from above" is the province of elites who undoubtedly are engaged in perpetuating

their power. Transnationalism "from below," as the terrain of non-elites and multi-class coalitions, could be construed as the space where people work to transform "traditional" power relations, to reconfigure and not reaffirm. Preliminary research, however, reveals that this hypothesis is not so solid. In the Ticuani case study, for instance, transmigrants inserted themselves into established hierarchies of power; they changed the players but did they transform the power structure? I would argue that there is support for both "yes" and "no" answers. The Ticuani transmigrants did not transform their home town hierarchy itself, nor its patriarchy, but they did represent the opening of a new avenue to power. In my own research, I have also documented how the transnational practices of some migrants may both reaffirm and reconfigure traditional gender roles (Mahler 1996). Salvadoran migrant women, for example, remit an equal amount of resources to their kin as men do. Thus, men and women participate equally in the most democratic form of transnationalism practiced by the Long Island Salvadorans. This is extraordinary for several reasons. First, women remit equally and support the same number of dependents in El Salvador as men, despite the fact that they earn less. This suggests that they have become partners in the role of "breadwinner" although in their homeland, at least in the countryside, women were widely excluded from that role. The research I have conducted on male and female couriers, on the other hand, does not support a thesis of reconfigured power relations. Space limitations prohibit a full discussion here, but my findings regarding this industry suggest that women have become couriers largely because this activity is constructed around "traditional" gender roles, not reconfigured ones as might be hypothesized. Quite candidly, many Salvadoran women were preadapted for courier work by following not challenging established gender roles.

The case studies cited above should serve as an admonition to scholars of transnationalism. Much as hegemonies can be "scattered" and multidimensional, so too can be more localized forms of power. Additionally, transnationalism should not be expected to express or produce even, linear or neat patterns. Indeed, it is in the ambiguous and seemingly contradictory findings that

scholars are most likely to broaden their understanding of transnationalism. Lastly, we should keep in mind that evaluations of "reaffirm or reconfigure?" need to be made from a historically particularistic perspective. This fundamental advice will assist the comparison of myriad case studies.

What are the Implications of Transnationalism?

To this point I have suggested some of the impacts and implications of transnationalism, but now I wish to raise questions to be investigated regarding transnationalism's implications more generally. Much of what has been written about transnationalism's implications is directly related to identity—ethnic, racial and national identity constructions in particular (Appadurai 1993; Charles 1992; Fouron 1983; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Glick Schiller 1994; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Rouse 1995; R. Smith 1995). The findings are too diverse to summarize here, yet point toward the capacity of individuals to hold several different identities simultaneously, i.e., rural Mixtec agriculturalist and urban Chicano machine operator, and the ability to manipulate these identities for different purposes. These investigations are important and should continue to be pursued.

Secondly, and as stated above, I would hope that research will include questions about how transnational processes and ties reproduce or reconfigure established power hierarchies. Much of the literature to date on transnationalism from below paints it as empowering, democratic, and liberating, particularly in light of other global trends toward the concentration of wealth and power. This subaltern image needs to be tested consistently.

Lastly, I wish to discuss the implications of transnational analysis for meta-narratives of power and space. Numerous scholars have criticized much of the literature on migration as being too bipolar (Kearney 1995a; Rouse 1991 1995; R. Smith 1995). "The bipolar model assumes that migration takes place between territorially discriminable communities that retain their essential autonomy even as they grow more closely linked...Settlement is therefore seen as a process in which people inevitably reorient to their new locale, steadily transferring their home base, contextual

focus, and locus of social activity from one place to another" (Rouse 1992: 42). In other words, the bipolar model is admonished as too unilinear. I agree with this commentary, but suggest that unilinearity also rears its head in the transnational literature, particularly with respect to the implications of transnationalism. In my reading of this literature, I find a disproportionate emphasis on the effects of transmigrant activities *vis-à-vis* their communities of origin. This emphasis is most evident in the burgeoning studies of home town associations and the projects they fund (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 2; Goldring 1996; Kearney 1995b; Lungo et al. 1996; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Popkin 1995; R. Smith 1995), but it also occurs in the literature on remittances (both classic as well as more contemporary and transnational) (Georges 1990; Gmelch 1980; Mozo and Vasquez 1988; Rhoades 1978; Sider 1992). I find myself as guilty as anyone else on this score (see Mahler 1995b), but this very culpability has stimulated me to be more critical. I see much less attention paid in the literature to the role transmigrants play in transforming those communities that they occupy which are not their communities of origin. This may be a consequence of the fact that such a focus has preoccupied the myriad studies of *im*migrants' impacts on their "host" countries' economies and service provision systems (e.g, the prolonged debate between Julian Simon and George Borjas). The rise in xenophobia, nationalism, and nativism within many nation-states which have received migrant influxes during the 1980s and 1990s, suggests that these migrants are playing a broader, and perhaps deeper, role in transforming these societies than is generally acknowledged. Saskia Sassen argues that they form a "central object in and a tool for the renationalizing of political discourse" (1996: 62). That is, as globalization erodes the power of the nation state, international migration buttresses this power: "When it comes to immigrants and refugees,...the nation state claims all its old splendor in asserting its sovereign right to control its borders (Ibid: 59). At a minimum, migrants represent a major source of demographic, if not cultural, change with regard to the United States. Transmigrants should be researched not only as agents of change

vis-à-vis their communities and countries of origin but also across entire transnational social fields. To not pursue this work vigorously, serves, however inadvertently, to reproduce meta-narratives of space and power such as bipolarity and modernization theory. If, as many transnationalists argue, the global-local duality is based on the false opposition that the global is the site of change and the local is one of stasis, and that change flows from centers of capitalism to the peripheries, then we need to take care not to reaffirm this duality owing to a limited inventory of praxis. I am not fearful of this in the long run but in the short run this limited inventory can be misinterpreted. Being mindful of this will assist researchers in avoiding unidirectional models of change toward more comprehensive and much richer models marked by fundamental disjunctures between "economy, culture and politics which we have only begun to theorize" (Appadurai 1990: 29).

Conclusion

The study of transnationalism holds the promise of shedding new and brilliant light on emerging cultural processes—identity, political, and economic transformations in particular. Through a transnational optic, human agency "from below" comes into focus as well as macrostructural forces "from above." The pathways to creolization become clearer, and the vision of a one-dimensional world marked by cultural and economic homogeneity and hegemony becomes dimmer. Much as transnationalism itself is important, so too is its investigation. Such study warrants more collaborative, comparative research than social scientists, and anthropologists in particular, have traditionally engaged in—such as multi-site projects. At a minimum, we need to work hard to make our case study questions comparable. This is the task I set out for myself in this paper and, hopefully, have accomplished here.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Michael Peter Smith, Luis Guarnizo and Nia Georges for their extremely helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I also wish to acknowledge the significance of conversations I have had on this topic with Saskia Sassen.

2. I use the term "growing" to acknowledge the critique of closed corporate societies and other territorialized, isolated cultural representations as not sufficiently portraying cultures' interconnectedness prior to capitalism (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Wolf 1982).
3. Hereafter, references to transnationalism should be understood as meaning transmigration, unless explicitly stated otherwise.
4. I use such terms reservedly because they promote the bipolar model of migration (e.g., Rouse 1991, 1992; M.P Smith 1994). However, no new terms have been developed and widely disseminated that convey the intended meaning here. Until this occurs, the old terms will be recycled.
5. This process may take on the character of what Alejandro Portes and others have referred to as "segmented assimilation" (Portes and Zhou 1993). That is, the tendency for immigrant groups to assimilate to the predominate population(s) nearby. This model is applied most frequently to urban settings where immigrant children are more exposed to African American, Puerto Rican or Mexican (Chicano) cultures than to "mainstream," white, middle-class culture.

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