

The Spatially Ruptured Practices of Transnational Migrant Families:
Lessons from the Case of El Salvador and the People's Republic of China

Patricia Landolt & Wei Wei Da

Submitted to *Current Sociology*, August 12, 2004

Keywords: Family, Transnational Migration, Social Networks, Immigrants, Salvadorans, Chinese

Abstract

Our study draws insights from scholarship on immigrant families and transnational migration to examine the multi-local transnational family practices of Salvadoran refugee-migrants in the United States and middle class emigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Australia. We examine the contexts of exit and reception and state-migrant relations that characterize the two migration flows; explore the elite and popular narratives in which family migration experiences are embedded; and, provide a range of family biographies that capture some of the more emblematic long distance practices and livelihood strategies of transnational families. The paper examines three types of border-crossing family practices including long distance conjugal relations, spatial ruptures in mother-child relationships, and care giving arrangements that involve shuttling non-working age members of the family across locations. PRC and Salvadoran migrant families navigate dramatically different institutional and discursive landscapes, which impacts the character and quality of the resources they bring to bear on their long distance family arrangements. The findings challenge existing conceptualizations of the immigrant family, gender role performances and gender ideologies, and highlight the gendered aspects of the institutional landscapes and discursive narratives in which the livelihood and mobility strategies and long distance practices of immigrant families are embedded.

Introduction¹

A complex set of economic, political, and socio-cultural factors associated with globalization are contributing to the growing displacement and scattering of families across space. Increased global integration of industrial and agricultural production systems organized around flexible strategies of capital accumulation deranges established local work patterns. Workers – both men and women – are pressured to migrate across borders and into new labour markets in their search for livelihood. Transnational business elites also navigate relatively comfortably through the spaces-of-flows, profiting from their new found border-crossing mobility and multi-national experiences of inclusion. However, narrowing eligibility criteria in the immigration policies of receiving countries delays or disables plans for family reunification. These transformations suggest that the spatially unilocal family may increasingly become a rare form of family life.

Time-space compressing technologies offer families with varying degrees of resources new possibilities for organizing family practices of reproduction and production around multi-local border-crossing arrangements. Research has documented the ways in which migrants negotiate and undertake significant aspects of their lives across borders and the cumulative consequences of these practices (Basch et al. 1994; Levitt et al. 2003b; Portes et al. 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). In particular, migrant families keep in touch and care give over long distances, send children to learn English abroad or back to the home country to be educated by grandparents, manage multiple residences, and send or receive remittances. Immigrants also engage in transnational collective action, forming grassroots institutions that facilitate their ongoing economic and political participation in places of origin and allow them to parley home

and host country social issues into a transnational platform of concerns. In turn, migrant transnationalism is associated with the construction of strategies by state and non-state national and international organizations and institutions (e.g. state ministries, transnational capital, religious institutions, etc.) that seek to engage with and control the activities of migrants and shape the agendas of their border-crossing institutions.

The existing literature offers suggestive, albeit partial, lines of inquiry and analysis for capturing the relationship between transnational migration and family practices. Pioneer studies of transnational migration recognized the distinct importance of the family for immigrants many border-crossing practices. The family was posed as the matrix from which a completely layered transnational social life is constructed and elaborated (Basch et al. 1994; Pe-Pua et al. 1996). Family networks have been conceived as a key micro-level building block on which other forms of transnational practices and institutions are built (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo 2001). In spite of this insight, little effort has been made to research or theorize the interface between transnational family practices and the public life of family members in entrepreneurship and political pursuits.

Research explicitly focused on transnational family practices has addressed the relationship between spatial ruptures and the negotiation of changes in the gender division of labour, gender relations and ideologies, and intergenerational relations within the family. The literature captures the internal dynamics of transnational families through detailed case studies, but offers few overarching conceptual propositions. Indeed, as Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2003) point out there has been only limited consideration of the ways in which the broader institutional landscapes in which migrant families are embedded shapes their propensity to experience spatial

ruptures, the character of these long distance relationships, and family members' ability and willingness to negotiate and manage their personal lives across borders.

Our paper seeks to contribute to the conceptual spadework of bridges scholarship on transnational migration with studies of transnational family practices, drawing on propositions and insights from the two fields to examine the multi-local transnational family practices of dramatically different migrant populations. We explore the family practices of Salvadoran refugee-migrants in the United States and of middle class emigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Australia. We consider two overarching issues: first, how do contexts of exit and reception contour the transnational migration patterns and resulting spatial arrangements of immigrant family practices; second, how do the actions of sending states impact the material and discursive dynamics of transnational family practices.

The paper is organized into four sections. The first section reviews literature on the immigrant family, transnational family practices, and transnational migration. It identifies key arguments and concepts that serve to organize the analysis of the case studies. The second section provides an overview of the contexts of exit and reception, and the state-migrant relations that characterize PRC migration to Australia and Salvadoran migration to the United States. The third section presents a selection of family biographies in order to explore the types of transnational family practices found across the two cases. The final section is organized around a loosely comparative analysis of the empirical findings and a discussion of the conceptual challenges posed by our effort to bridge regions and literatures.

Bridging Literatures: Transnational Migration and Family Practices

The family is a primary social institution that plays a central role in securing livelihood for individuals throughout the lifecycle, meeting individuals' affective needs, and serving as a primary arena of socialization, identity formation, and value transmission. The family is best conceptualized not only as a structural unit, but also as a series of relationships or a network of individuals bound by an ideology of shared kindred that engages in social production and reproduction, care giving, and feeding work (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Orellana et al. 2001; Parrenas 2001). The family interacts with and reflects the broader social order in which it is embedded. If the family is a set of social relationships, then it follows that both the family network and its individual members are implanted in a set of complex economic, social, cultural and political arrangements that contour the organization and character of the family (Li 1998; Li 2001). The social order's race, class, gender, and generational structures also determine the character of family relations and practices (Bottomley 1983; Bottomley et al. 1991). In this light, the family emerges as a set of hierarchical social relationships that exhibit tensions, conflicts, and disagreements about the definition of priorities, the management and allocation of resources, and the ideal strategies and division of labour for undertaking care giving, feeding work, and value transmission.

In the migration process, the family undergoes changes because it must continue to meet the same set of needs within a dramatically changed context. Migration does not dissolve, but redefines and challenges the established codes that organize and give meaning to the commitments and demands of the family. Displacement and physical relocation disrupts the material and discursive arrangements of the family as members find themselves spread out across different cities and countries, and consequently embedded within different economic, social, political and cultural contexts. Migration produces changing options, modes of

negotiation, sources of tension, and sources of power and autonomy for its different members. Gender and generational differences remain especially salient dividing lines, defining the particular interests and sources of power of individuals within the group. As new situations and conflicts arise, so too emerge novel instruments and strategies for resolving tensions (Boyd 1996; Da 2003a; Parrenas 2001).

Our exploration into the spatially fragmented practices undertaken by migrant families establishes a dialogue and draws propositions from three overlapping sets of literatures including research on the immigrant family, transnational families, and transnational migration. First, research on the immigrant family has focused on unilocal families, often conflating families and households. Spatial ruptures in family geographies have been treated as a temporary aberration and family reunification in the host society as a forthcoming and desirable end goal. New scholarship suggests that spatial ruptures need not signal family disintegration and may reflect a social reconfiguration that enables family members to maintain a sense of multiple and multi-localized belonging (Herrera-Lima 2001). Without collapsing into economic imperatives as the driving logic of family spatial ruptures, it is undeniable that the migration of economically active members of the family unit remains an effective strategy for diversifying income sources by placing family members in different labour markets (Gonzalez de la Rocha 2001; Lam et al. 2002; Massey et al. 1998). Indeed, these transnational and mobile livelihood arrangements may be emerging as the only viable, albeit precarious option for a growing number of working families inserted in the global economy (Nyberg Sorensen and Fog Olwig 2002). While often tied to the necessities of livelihood, multi-local transnational family arrangements can also be part of a strategy for social mobility (Fog Olwig 2002; Ong 1999)). Spatial ruptures can even serve to assert wealth and status distinctions. In effect, multi-local transnational families cannot

simply be branded as an irregularity destined to result in family collapse or as a temporary setback in the ideal family arrangement, and thus require further investigation.

Second, the literature on transnational family practices explores how spatially fragmented families negotiate changes in the gender division of labour, gender relations and ideologies, and intergenerational relations. Some of the central themes that have come out of this research include: analysis of how spatial ruptures between mothers and children lead to changing notions of motherhood (Da 2003a; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997); examinations of the stress imposed on heterosexual conjugal relations by physical separation and changes in the way male and female fidelity is defined and policed by the family and community (Binford and d'Aubeterre 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003); and the ways in which the role of elders, particularly grandmothers is transformed (Da 2003b; Plaza 1999). Findings challenge traditional theories of mother-child bonding, as well as popular gender ideologies that reify particular notions of womanhood, highlighting instead the socially constructed nature of these social locations (Orellana et al. 2001; Parrenas 2001).

Significant theoretical and empirical gaps remain to be addressed in the study of transnational family practices (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2003; Pessar and Mahler 2003). There is scant debate about the spatiality of family practices (Kivisto 2003). In particular, there is limited discussion of the relationship between mobility and changing notions of home and away or new understandings of presence and absence in family relationships. The ways in which physical distance and the ability of certain members of the family to cross-borders plays out as a source of power and autonomy for some, and as a site of risk, threat and uncertainty for other individuals within the family network has not been fully explored. Part of the difficulty is that most patterns and features associated with transnational family practices are drawn from case

studies of particular immigrant groups in particular regions. This is exemplified in the dearth of comparative analysis of the phenomenon that has unwittingly resulted in a conceptual bifurcation between analysis of Asian and Latin American family practices. While the former is narrowly associated with the practices of elite – typically Hong Kong and Taiwanese – astronaut families with “computer widows” and “parachute children”, the latter focuses on the ideology of *marianismo* (a stereotyped gender role where the ideal woman is self sacrificing and serves her children and husband) to reify the fate of the working transnational mother. The trend is problematic because what is essentially an empirical divergence that revolves around class and resource differences threatens to collapse into a new set of essentializing conclusions about the cultural imperatives of Asian and Latin American families.

To break with this conceptual bifurcation and provide a more analytical explanation for differences and similarities across the two case studies we draw on work by Pessar and Mahler (2003) particularly their notion of gendered geographies of power. The concept of gendered geographies of power is composed of three conceptual building blocks: first, the term “geographic scales” asserts that gender ideologies and relations are configured simultaneously on multiple social spatial scales; second, the concept of “social location” captures the idea that persons are positioned within interconnected power hierarchies that confer varying degrees of advantage and disadvantage; and, third, the concept of “power geometry” which brings to the foreground the types and degrees of agency people exert given their social location (Pessar and Mahler 2003). The idea of “power geometries” highlights differences in persons engagement with and experiences of time-space compression. Individuals may create, initiate, or comfortably navigate the space-of-flows produced by late capitalism, while others may be more on its receiving end (Massey 1994).

Finally, the transnational perspective on migration confirms that a growing proportion of the world's migrants maintain enduring ties to their homelands even as they are incorporated in countries of resettlement. Migrants border crossing relationships and activism has called into question conventional assumptions about the direction and impacts of international migration (Levitt et al. 2003a). A decade of research on transnational migration has generated rich discussion and debate. Recent efforts in the field focus on the articulation of a more coherent set of predictive arguments about the causes and consequences of transnational migration, the codification of transnational practices undertaken by different types of individual and institutional actors, and consideration of the relationship between transnational practices and immigrant incorporation in the host society (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2003; Portes 2003; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004).

Two overlapping propositions from this corpus guide our discussion of the border-crossing practices of transnational migrant families. First, it is argued that the character and scope of immigrant transnational activism is determined in part by the contexts of exit and reception that frame the migration process (Portes 2003). The original concept of modes of incorporation poses that contextual factors in the host country such as the responses of the host government and civil society, labour market conditions, and the human and social capital of the ethnic group determine differential settlement outcomes across immigrant groups (Portes and Borozc 1989; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). A transnational research lens stretches this argument to consider how conditions in places of origin also affect the character of migration flows and resettlement dynamics. Significant conditions include the character of the migration flow, that is whether it is a forced or voluntary migration, home country civil society responses to the

emigrants, and societal norms and expectations about migration as a social process (Landolt et al. 1999; Massey et al. 1987; Popkin 1999; Roberts et al. 1999).

Second, using the notion of contextual factors as a stepping off point, the literature suggests that differences in the propensity towards transnationalism are conditioned by the border-crossing social, political, and cultural landscape in which families and communities are embedded. This complex material and discursive border-crossing space is captured by the notion of transnational social fields defined as sets of interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are exchanged, organized, and transformed (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2003). The institutional responses and opportunity structures available within the transnational social field contour the character and scope of transnational practices (Levitt 2001). Home country state responses to emigrant populations are a particularly consequential part of this transnational institutional landscape. State action has multiple dimensions including: law, particularly changes in definitions of membership; state or elite rhetoric vis-à-vis the migrant population; and, migrant-targeted public policy initiatives (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2003). The literature identifies three types of migrant sending states including: transnational nation-states that treat emigrants as long-term, long-distance members; selective states that encourage some forms of long distance participation and strategically restrict others; and, disinterested or denouncing states that treat migrants as though they no longer belong to the homeland (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2003; Popkin 2003). State responses are never static and home country states will typically alter their relationship to migrant citizens over time.

Our paper draws insights from the literature on the immigrant family, transnational family practices, and transnational migration to make several empirical and conceptual

contributions. We wish to emphasize that our project in this paper is not to establish a direct comparison between two vastly different immigrant populations. Rather our purpose is three-fold: to reject multi-local transnational family practices as an anomalous and temporary phenomenon; to provide a theoretical justification for challenging the bifurcation between studies of Asian and Latin American family practices; and, to confirm the fruitfulness of bringing an more structuralist and institutional analysis to the study of family practices, as well as a gender analysis to the study of institutions and structures. In this light, first we examine the long distance family practices of two dramatically different migrant populations in an effort to gain perspective on the viability, meanings, and long term consequences of long distance family practices. Second, we explore the interface between the spatial arrangements of immigrant family practices and both contexts of departure and reception, and state actions, broadly defined. Third, we assume that gender organizes all social relations and that all social institutions embody, manifest, and impose gendered realities and dynamics on individuals and groups. As a result, inspired by Pessar and Mahler (2003) we attempt to bring a gendered gaze to concepts – such as contexts of exit and reception and state actions – that are central to any discussion of transnational migration. Finally, we draw on the concept of gendered geographies of power to consider the relationship between social location and transnational family practices.

The data for the paper is drawn from our respective research projects. Data for the Chinese case are drawn from an Australia-based study conducted in 1998 by Wei Wei Da on the family practices of immigrants from the People's Republic of China. In the original research, qualitative data collection techniques were employed including in-depth interviews with 40 migrants who emigrated from China to Australia after 1980. Interviews collected detailed data on a variety of items relevant to the family including issues related to marriage and attitudes

towards sexuality, child rearing practices, the division of labour within the family, and kinship tie maintenance practices.

Data for the Salvadoran case are drawn from a study undertaken between 1996 to 2000 by Patricia Landolt as part of a larger project on the causes and consequences of the emergence of transnational communities among Latin American immigrants in the United States under the direction of Alejandro Portes. The multi-sited study involved three phases of data collection over a four year period including: (1) guided interviews with key informants in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and El Salvador; (2) semi-structured interviews with confirmed transnational actors and a general household survey of Salvadoran residents of DC and Los Angeles; and (3), semi-structured interviews with confirmed transnational actors in rural and urban locations of El Salvador. The project sought to capture the scope of transnational connections between places of origin in El Salvador and Salvadoran settlements in the US, and to understand the cumulative consequences of this phenomenon for Salvadoran places of origin and of resettlement. Findings from the original project on family practices have been substantiated through additional and ongoing qualitative interviews by Landolt in El Salvador.

Contrasting Landscapes of Transnational Migration

We have organized the presentation of findings into two separate case studies, leaving the discussion of comparative trends for the final discussion. In this section, each case study includes a discussion of two processes: first, the contexts of departure and reception that frame migration and their cumulative impact on the character of migration flows and; second, the character of state-migrant relations.

PRC Immigration to Australia

Contemporary migration from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Australia echoes a series of socio-economic changes in both the sending and the receiving countries. The volume, nature and scope of the immigration flow are unprecedented, even when compared with patterns of 19th century migration from China to the West. Emigration from the PRC to advanced western capitalist nations emerges out of and reflects the dramatic economic, political, and cultural transformations that have swept across the country since the seventies. In the late 1970s, with the end of the 10-year Cultural Revolution, China introduced a new Open Door policy that initiated the country's fast track incorporation into the international capitalist system. In the 1980s, state efforts to restructure relations of production and reproduction were marked by groundbreaking economic reforms such as the creation of the Special Economic Zones, designed to attract foreign trade and investment. In the early 1990s, the state became even more permissive of private enterprise, adopting the official slogan "Let some people get rich first" (Gao and Liu 1998).

Together, economic reforms and an "open door policy" were tied to increased geographic mobility for individuals. Movement was no longer strictly controlled by the regime. The household registration system, adopted in 1955 in order to control rural to urban domestic migration, was gradually relaxed, which led to a massive internal migration from rural inland areas to the urban regions of the coast. On the international front, new immigration policy measures contributed to a radical transformation in the character and scope of Chinese migration and in the PRC's relationship with the overseas Chinese diaspora. Restrictions on selective return migration to Hong Kong were lifted. Personal contacts with overseas relatives, forcibly cut off during the Cultural Revolution, were reinstated. Leisure travel abroad, which for decades

had been tightly controlled, became more permissive as overly bureaucratic procedures were simplified (Fung and Chen 1996; Gao and Liu 1998; Tian 1999; Zhang 1995). The government also piloted programmes to send scholars and students abroad for study, with the expectation that they would bring back knowledge and technology that might contribute to China's "catch up" project (Gao and Liu 1998; Liu 1997).

A rhetorical reformulation of migration and the migrant has shadowed the sea change in China's political and economic relationship with advanced capitalist nations. In just two decades, emigration has gone from being a treacherous act, to something that was tolerated but ideologically suspect, to an activity that is openly and unreservedly encouraged and celebrated. Indeed, all migrations – regardless of whether the migrant is a man or a woman or whether the path taken is authorized and regulated, or undocumented and dangerous – are now judged by their results—ideally economic success abroad—and are recognized as a patriotic act. The elite narrative emphasizes that both new migrants and the historic diaspora are bound to China by ties of blood, and share with the PRC state the goals of modernizing the country. As Nyíri (2001) explains, the current discourse of Chinese national identity underplays and takes for granted historical memory and ancestral myths. It focuses instead on playing up essentialised character traits and patterns of behaviour—such as the myths of Chinese industriousness—to which people can relate in their everyday lives. This official discourse is echoed by the media, as well as being internalized and consumed in only slightly modified forms throughout Chinese overseas settlements (Mitchell 2001; Nyíri 2001).

The Australian state also initiated a series of policy shifts in the 1970s that together with the new policies of the PRC, paved the way for a wave of Chinese immigration. Australia's immigration system was overhauled as race-based entry requirements were replaced with a focus

on the human capital and financial liquidity of potential newcomers, and a national multiculturalism programme was developed. Australia also established diplomatic relations with China (Hon and Coughlan 1997; Massey et al. 1998). In the 1980s, Australian government programmes shifted to more targeted schemes for promoting and regulating Asian immigration. The government launched the lucrative education export program, which provided English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to overseas students in Australia, where Asians were understood to be the primary market. Since tuition fees for the ESL courses, albeit high, were lower than fees for full degree programmes and given that entry requirements for the language programmes were fairly lax when compared to similar programmes in Canada and the United States, the programme became a gateway for Chinese migration to Australia. In 1983 there were less than forty paying students in the programme, but the figure had jumped to 30,000 by 1992 (Fung and Chen 1996; Gao and Liu 1998). According to the 2001 census, there are now an estimated 142,780 Chinese-born people living in Australia, including male 66,617 and female 76,163.

Contemporary Chinese emigration has occurred in three stages, each involving distinct modes of exit and entry, as well as groups of migrants with distinct demographic and network profiles. A first wave of migrants exited China through the decade of the seventies. The majority of emigrants in this first wave were from traditional rural source regions of Southern China's Pearl River Delta, had relatively low levels of formal schooling, and had relatives overseas who were able to help them finance their departure (Da 2001). A second wave occurs in the 1980s. In this case, the population is distinctly urban, has higher rates of education, and is employed in white collar profession. Rather than draw on personal contacts to emigrate, the vast majority makes use of international scholarships and educational opportunities abroad to exit

China. An estimated 200,000 people left China as students during this period (Fung and Chen 1996; Tian 1999).

In the 1990s, a combination of factors leads to a shift in PRC migration patterns and thus the establishment of a third migration wave. First, both the PRC and receiving states such as Canada, the US and Australia had by this time consolidated complementary policy programmes. The PRC state promotes study and investment abroad, just as receiving countries instituted policies and programmes such as the Canadian investor visa programme and Australia's language programmes that facilitate entry. Second, the penetration of immigration agencies into China and the increasing density of social networks and transnational exchanges between China and its diaspora means that today's migrant is potentially able to access more complete information about his or her migration options than previous emigrants. There is increasing familiarity with the immigration policies and selection criteria of different countries, labour market conditions, and of the long term chances of economic success (George et al. 2000; Wang and Lo 2004). As a result, a three-tiered system of international migration has emerged that includes: first, individuals and families that emigrate on the metaphorical red carpet through the sending and receiving state incentive policies; a second group of urban and educated individuals that mobilize information and financial support through their personal networks to take advantage of study abroad programmes or to apply as independent class immigrants; and, third, a growing pool of workers who are willing to risk their lives to exit China through undocumented and unauthorized means.

Salvadoran Refugee Migration to the United States

The contexts of exit and reception that frame Salvadoran migration to the United States stand in sharp contrast to those identified for PRC immigration to Australia. El Salvador has a

century old tradition of largely unauthorized and unregulated regional labour migration tied to the seasonal demands of Central America's agro-export economy (Vilas 1995). In the decades before the civil war, workers migrated cyclically to work and were reabsorbed into the household during economic down times. The viability of this flexible household arrangement rested on the expectation that migrants would save their wages while away from the house and make contributions to the family economy upon their return. The cyclical labour migration system also gave rise to a malleable kinship system, high rates of free unions, and high numbers of children born-out-of wedlock both within the central conjugal couple and within other relationships established in secondary locations (Barón-Castro 1978). By the 1970s, the country's growing pool of land-poor rural wage workers were migrating by the hundreds of thousands to work in Honduras, Guatemala, Panama, and sometimes even as far as California.

In the late seventies, the violence and economic disruptions of the civil war (1975-1992) dismantled the regional labour migration system. Together indiscriminate violence in the countryside and targeted persecution in urban areas prompted a massive refugee exodus of thirty percent of the country's population, estimated at just over five million in 1980. While an estimated ten percent of the displaced sought refuge within Central America, the lion's share of the refugees eventually abandoned the region and made their way to the United States, and in smaller numbers to Europe, Australia, and Canada (Hamilton et al. 1988; Zolberg et al. 1989).

The context of reception faced by Salvadorans in the US exhibits elements of hostility and of support. Much like the war itself, Salvadoran migration and resettlement in the US played out like a political battle between a hostile US government and a globally networked movement of progressive grassroots organizations. The federal government, which was politically and financially allied with the Salvadoran state, questioned the legitimacy of Salvadoran asylum

claims and refused to recognize El Salvador as a refugee producing country. Denied refugee status, Salvadorans lived in fear of deportation and typically only applied for asylum once apprehended by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). By the mid-1990s, an estimated fifty percent of the Salvadoran population remained undocumented or had only secured some form of temporary immigration status (López et al. 1996). Currently, in spite of the passage of favourable legislation such as the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) that facilitates the regularization of undocumented Salvadorans, unauthorized entry into the country and undocumented labour market participation remain central pillars of the Salvadoran migrant experience in the United States.

The labour market conditions faced by Salvadorans arriving in the seventies and eighties were equally troubling. A wave of deindustrialization and restructuring led to a collapse in unionized employment, a downward push on wages, the informalization and deskilling of the labour process, and increased labour market segmentation (Cross and Moore 2002; Sassen 1991). Reflecting the global shift in the international division of labour, gender and age-based segmentation of labour market demand had a long term impact on Salvadoran employment opportunities (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Sassen-Koob 1988). Young Salvadoran women found work as industrial and private caregivers and domestics, and in labour intensive assembly work organized through sweatshops and homework arrangements (Bobo et al. 2000; Repak 1995). Young men were hired for dangerous and backbreaking work – cleaning high rise windows, removing asbestos, landscaping, etc (Andrade-Eekhoff 2003; Landolt 2000; Mahler 1995). Twenty-five years later, Salvadorans remain concentrated in industrial niches that are characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, and uncertainty (Wilson 2000).

On the other hand, the Salvadoran context of reception can be considered favourable in the sense that the refugee-migrants received support from a variety of international non-governmental organizations and transnational grassroots associations. Such organizations assisted the refugee camp populations in Central America, tracked the refugees' transit across borders, and provided refugees with material and legal assistance in places of resettlement. In particular, transnational organizations loosely allied with the political project of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement, the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN), mobilized to assist the refugees, monitor human rights abuses in El Salvador, and lobbied for non-intervention and El Salvador's right to self-determination. This globally networked grassroots social movement enabled many Salvadorans to access a variety of resources in their process of incorporation. It also cloaked Salvadoran resettlement with a distinct discourse and imagery that emphasized the refugee-migrants qualities as hard working, politically educated, and mobilized (Coutin 2000; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001).

Salvadoran refugees also drew on their own social networks of family and friends to assist them in the resettlement process. The newcomers found housing together, shared tips about job opportunities, formed church congregations, soccer teams, and social clubs, and thus sought to reconstruct the torn social fabric of their lives. Continuing obligations to friends and family left behind in El Salvador also framed resettlement. When and where it was possible, the refugees sent money and care packages home with what quickly became a small army of suitcase traders known as *encomenderos*. Obligations to kin, heightened by the uncertainties of war, consequently served as a significant point of departure for the formation of transnational family relations. Over the years, border-spanning social networks have moved beyond the family, and now link together a broad spectrum of Salvadoran society. In the process, migrants, historically

associated with displacement and marginality, have unwittingly become critical agents of social change, shaping the dynamics of El Salvador's economic, political, and cultural institutions at the local, regional, and national level (Landolt et al. 1999; Mahler 1995; Menjivar 2000).

The transformation of El Salvador by the process of migration has led to a dramatic rewriting of state-migrant relations. Over a period of thirty years the Salvadoran state has morphed from being what Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2003) categorize as a hostile and denouncing state into a selective state that encourages some, but restricts other forms of transnational participation. After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 and as part of the state's project for reconciliation, the government began to reform consular services. Consulates developed broad-based outreach initiatives that included legal services for Salvadorans attempting to regularize their status in the US, public celebrations of religious festivals and national holidays, and the organization of consultations and business meetings with Salvadoran entrepreneurs and community leaders. National and municipal level government representatives began to visit migrant settlements. After a decade of impromptu post-war projects of reconciliation, the state's extra-territorial initiative culminates in 2000 with the creation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of a new office called the *Dirección General de Atención a la Comunidad en el Exterior* (General Secretariat of Attention to the Community Abroad, DGACE). The DGACE seeks to coordinate, facilitate, promote, and support initiatives that incorporate migrants as long distance development and business partners (<http://www.rree.gob.sv/>). Yet the right to vote in national elections is not forthcoming (Landolt 2003).

The post-war shift in state-migrant relations is shadowed by a rhetorical reformulation of the migration process and its key actors. Having portrayed the refugee-migrants as subversives

and traitors throughout the war, the Salvadoran state and elite-owned national media have now recast the migrant as the *hermano lejano* or distant brother, the most industrious member of the national family whose long distance commitment to El Salvador is reflected first and foremost in the sending of remittances. In spite of the growing proportion of young women who now make the trip to the US, this national elite narrative is silent on the possible presence of an *hermana lejana* or distant sister. The *hermano lejano* narrative extends into a very problematic indeed schizophrenic portrayal of El Salvador based members of the migrant family. As the story goes, the migrant worker is often burdened by an irresponsible family that misspends his remittances and does not understand the importance of savings and productive investments. Echoing the North American neoliberal critiques of underclass welfare dependency and abuse, the receipt of remittances is associated with what are deemed socially inappropriate consumption patterns by peasant families and decay in the *campesino* family work ethic. Echoes of this multi-dimensional elite narrative are heard across a broad spectrum of El Salvador's population. Its most virulent versions are espoused by traditional village elites in pueblos with high rates of out-migration.

The ongoing structural dislocations of the Salvadoran economy and the maturity and complexity of the country's migration networks guarantees that migration to the United States will continue largely unabated well into the 21st century (Mahler 2000). The initial modalities of exit from El Salvador and reception in the global cities of the United States have cumulative consequences. Contemporary Salvadoran migration flows exhibit several basic features. Salvadoran migrants tend to sustain border-crossing social networks throughout their lives as sojourners and expatriates. Transnational social networks guide the early years of the immigrant experience, and become increasingly stable and complex over time. The promotion of a

managed form of long distance nationalism by the Salvadoran state facilitates migrants long term engagement in El Salvador.

Finally, while US-bound migration now spans the social gamut, with a growing number of middle class professionals also joining the flow, transnational migration remains largely the purview of working families who are forced to migrate to secure their livelihood. Three overlapping labour migration patterns are discerned as part of what appears to be an increasingly common strategy of assuring family livelihood through multi-local and transnational arrangements. Young men and women participate in short cycles of labour migration to regional production sites, such as export processing zones (EPZs) and modernized plantations, that are inserted in the global economy. After this first labour migration cycle, the young worker is poised for international migration to the next global worksite—a poultry farm in Alabama, stoop agriculture work in California, or janitorial work in a Los Angeles corporate office. Finally, old age is no longer associated with return and a sedentary life, but may also involve ongoing movements between El Salvador and the US (Andrade-Eekhoff 2003; Gammage and Schmitt 2004; Landolt 2001; Popkin and Andrade-Eekhoff 2002).

To summarize, four features distinguish the contexts of exit and reception that frame the PRC Chinese and Salvadoran migration processes. First, whereas PRC Chinese migration is largely voluntary, Salvadoran migration is marked by violence and is still clearly forced. The character of the emigration process has an effect on the degree of planning and resource consolidation a family can undertake prior to departure, the migrants' material and symbolic relationship to the home country, and the institutional dynamics that frames their relationship to the sending state. Second, there is a marked difference in the kinds of social networks Salvadorans and PRC Chinese draw on to exit their respective homelands. Whereas Salvadorans

depend largely on personal contacts of kinship and friendship to make the journey to the United States, the PRC Chinese access information and other resources for emigration from a variety of sources; these are not restricted to personal contacts, and also include institutional resources tied to educational and business investment opportunities.

Third, the sending and receiving state's relationship to the migration process is markedly different. The PRC state has what amounts to an explicit policy of exporting educated urban professionals in order to advance China's economic development. In turn, reflecting its own labour market demands and the interests of its multinational corporations, the Australian immigration system encourages the controlled entrance of PRC Chinese. This clear coincidence of interests creates a favourable institutional climate for authorized and planned migration from China to Australia. It also facilitates, and in many cases, encourages the construction of border-crossing relationships and institutions that complement, or are directly aligned with, state and capital interests. In contrast, Salvadoran migration brings together a tradition of unregulated labour migration with a refugee exodus whose root causes and overwhelming dimensions are denied by both the sending and receiving state. This is followed in the post-war era by the consolidation of a migration system in which undocumented labour is exported to the United States to meet demand in the secondary labour market and migrant remittances are imported to El Salvador to subsidize family livelihood and benefit Salvadoran finance capital. While denouncing the risks of undocumented movement and unauthorized entry, both the US and Salvadoran economies are structurally dependent on the continuation of this unregulated flow of precarious workers and are unlikely to address the root causes of continued migration.

Fourth, the character of transnational relations maintained between the two migrant populations and their respective homelands is also quite different. In the Salvadoran case, there

is a great diversity of non-state transnational economic, social, cultural, and political institutions that tie El Salvador to its migrant settlements. Over time, the relationship between these organizations and the state has shifted from antagonism to strategic cooperation. Alternatively, Chinese transnational practices are highly regulated and leave little room for independent undertakings by non-state actors. The PRC state and the state-friendly media have dedicated considerable resources to the penetration and incorporation of non-state transnational institutions into the government's globalizing business agenda. Independent non-state transnational institutions are few and far between.

As a result of these differences, the families we have studied navigate through very different migration systems. In the case of the PRC, while dependent on the opportunities and resources the individual is able to garner through social networks, immigration is undoubtedly facilitated by the policies of the sending and receiving states. The migration process is therefore planned, documented, and regulated and enveloped by a celebratory discourse of patriotism and national pride. Official rhetoric frames the maintenance of ties with people and institutions in the PRC – particularly once economic success has been established abroad – as a patriotic duty that reflects well not only on the individual and his or her family, but also on the People's Republic of China. In the Salvadoran case, immigration is borne of basic necessity – survival in a context of war and in the post-war era the need to supplement the family income to ensure livelihood. Movement across borders, the search for work, and long term settlement are unregulated, precarious, and undocumented; in short, fraught with risk for individuals and their families. Finally, while the Salvadoran state espouses a discourse of diasporic nationalism and takes strategic measures to regulate the situation of unauthorized Salvadorans living and working

in the United States, its initiatives are largely symbolic and do little to ensure migrant families' citizenship rights, either at home or abroad.

Spatial Ruptures and Transnational Family Practices

In this section we examine the spatially fragmented family relationships that are found in different modalities across the two cases. In particular, we consider spatial ruptures in relations between married partners or the conjugal relationship, the relationship between children and their parents, particularly the mother; and the relationship between elders and both economically active adults and grandchildren. In each case study we present short family biographies that we consider emblematic and particularly revealing of multi-local, transnational family practices. In every case, the names of individuals have been changed to protect their anonymity and assure a high degree of confidentiality.

Our strategy for presenting data on transnational family practices takes into account our desire to provide an overarching picture of the two situations, as well as the significant differences in the types of data we each collected as part of our primary research. Whereas research on the PRC immigrants in Australia focused on a small number of in depth interviews, the fieldwork on Salvadoran migrants centred on the application of a household-level survey to a large number of individuals, complemented with a few in depth family interviews.

PRC Family Strategies of Social Mobility

The transnational family practices of the PRC migration to Australia reveal patterns that unravel our established understanding of Asian family transnationalism. The biographies also

challenge assumptions about gender roles. The first three biographies exemplify situations in which families have been able to negotiate the opportunities and obstacles posed both by sending and receiving state policy, and by global labour markets with relative ease. In these three cases, flexible family arrangements have emerged that are characterized by a bridging and effective shrinking of geographic distances.

A first biography provides a noteworthy gender-bend on the well-known astronaut family phenomenon (Ong 1999; Pe-Pua et al. 1996; Waters 2002). In the 1990s, Li Xiao-gang immigrated to Australia with his son under his wife's application as a business immigrant. As he explains, they chose to emigrate because, like many of their peers they considered it trendy to go abroad; it not only symbolized their wealth, but also the promise of further success, particularly since Li Xiao-gang's wife had plans to expand her existing business to Australia. Shortly after their arrival, however, his wife decided business expansion was too risky and returned to China to continue running her mid-size firm. Li Xiao-gang remained in Sydney. Li Xiao-gang recognizes that, although pre-arranged and mutually agreed upon, years of separation from his wife has harmed his marriage. Nonetheless, they both accept their long distance marriage arrangement and continue to frame their emigration as a change of residence that has ensured economic success. Their lifestyle confirms this interpretation of the family migration – both spouses shuttle back and forth for regular visits, Li Xiao-gang works in a Chinese business and has not felt the need to improve his English; he shops in Chinatown, and socializes within the Chinese community. His life and that of his family is deeply transnational and embedded in the opportunities granted by the wealth and networking strategies of the contemporary Chinese Diaspora.

Two additional family biographies highlight the importance of English language ability and labour market possibilities for determining the spatially-flexible patterns of family settlement outcomes. Zhao Jian-guo and his wife and son emigrated together to Australia. Although both were professionals with good jobs in China, their English was quite poor. Unable to find work, Zhao Jian-guo's wife returned to Hong Kong to continue her job in the finance sector, while he stayed in Sydney and opened a grocery store. The entire family is now able to get together occasionally. In a contrasting case, Wang Mei-ling and her husband emigrated to Australia precisely because of their excellent English skills. Wang Mei-ling's husband soon found a well-paying job in an international company that wanted to expand into China. He was quickly offered a senior position in the company that required that he relocate to China. He now shuttles back and forth for work and to maintain his family. The case of Wang Mei-ling's family also highlights that Chinese transnationalism is not simply a strategy of particular Chinese entrepreneurs, or even simply of the PRC state, but also one that is promoted and consolidated through the activities and business interests of foreign corporations seeking a bridge into the Chinese economy (Light et al. 2002).

The next two biographies provide examples of situations in which families have not been able to bridge distances as easily, and more corrosive long distance family practices have ensued. The case of Chen Da-jiang is fairly common. In 1990, Chen Da-jiang left his wife and child in China and migrated to Australia through a language programme with the plan of eventually sponsoring his family to join him overseas. A tardy immigration procedure delayed family reunification for seven years. In this time, Chen Da-jiang never visited China. He sent remittances home regularly, while his wife sent him clothing and care packages from China. In a second case, Lu Yang migrated to Australia in the late eighties through one of the country's

language programmes, leaving behind her two year old and her husband. It took her six years to sponsor her husband during which time she traveled home twice and had her child visit her once. Even after their situation had been regularized, the couple opted to have their child remain in China where she could be well taken care of by Lu Yang's mother. Economic restrictions, the time pressures of full time employment, her desire to practice her chosen profession, and a belief that the PRC education system is superior made it easy for Lu Yang to justify her decision to leave her child with her parents.

The Precarious Livelihoods of Decentred Salvadoran Families

It is estimated that one in five households in El Salvador now has a significant family member living abroad and receives cash and in kind remittances on a regular basis (Mahler 2000; Orozco 2002). Research in El Salvador, particularly in San Salvador and in villages with high rates of out-migration and in two primary resettlement locations in the United States, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., serves as the basis for identifying three patterns that characterize contemporary Salvadoran multi-local, transnational family arrangements. Furthermore, the multi-sited character of the original fieldwork facilitates discussion of these long distance relationships from the perspective of different family members.

The first set of findings provide a glimpse into the different patterns of spousal separation and long distance conjugal arrangements that emerge when a country has become a primary exporter of labour power. The case of Maria Angelica Castro is fairly standard. She is an underemployed, thirty-two year old mother of three with a primary education. Her husband made the trip to Houston with the aid of *coyotes* or human smugglers in the mid-nineties and was now working undocumented somewhere in the US. When her husband first arrived in the US he kept in touch and sent remittances quite regularly. But three years later the couple has lost all

contact, she does not receive remittances and does not have the resources to make the trip herself. In the mid-1990s, conversations with townsfolk about the impact of migration on their communities all too often end with discussions about the abandonment of women like Maria Angelica by migrant husbands. Pueblo residents continually cite cases of women they know whose husbands send remittances infrequently or stop sending them all together. In these discussions, the irregularity of remittance receipts is not associated with husbands' economic difficulties – lay offs, injury at work, increased costs of living, etc – but rather with husband malfeasance and infidelity.

The feminization of secondary labour market demand in the US alters the way conjugal couples negotiate migration. The growth in the flow of female labour migrants is reflected in the rise of niche market coyote services that specialize in smuggling women into Mexico and the US. The migration story of Irma and Ernesto Zelaya reflects this labour market shift. Ernesto left his war torn pueblo and made his way to Washington, D.C. during the height of the civil war, leaving behind his wife Irma. He found relatively stable work in construction and landscaping. Irma, a primary school teacher in El Salvador, also made the trip undocumented and joined Ernesto in Washington, D.C. in the late 1980s. In D.C. she sometimes got work as a domestic, but dedicated most of her time to running a home daycare service for other Salvadoran families who lived in their building. Eventually, they were both able to regularize their situation in the US, acquired their green cards, and when the Peace Accords were signed they returned to retire in El Salvador. In the first few years of their return, Ernesto continued to migrate seasonally to the DC area to work in construction, but his trips never lasted more than a few months. Today, both in their late sixties, having built a good size home, and purchased some land in the outskirts of town, the Zelaya's have no plans to go anywhere.

Long distance and ruptured relations between migrant mothers and fathers and their children receive considerable attention and are a source of continual concern in El Salvador. Two family biographies provide different takes on the phenomenon. The case of Juan Antonio Perez is particularly tragic. Unemployed and with few prospects for providing for his new born son, Juan Antonio Perez Senior (Sr.) migrated undocumented to the US in 1986, leaving behind his wife and child. Shortly thereafter, his wife was diagnosed with cancer and died in 1987, leaving her mother to raise her year old child. Juan Antonio Sr. eventually found work as an electrician in San Francisco, remarried, and started a new family. In spite of this, he continues to send monthly remittances to help cover some of his sons living expenses, talks to his son on the phone, and, when he can, sends him care packages with what in El Salvador are considered luxuries – brand name running shoes and jeans, video games, roller blades, etc.. Although he still does not have his green card, Juan Antonio Sr. has on three occasions arrived in El Salvador claiming that his son must start preparing himself to leave El Salvador and that junior's move to the US is imminent. Each of these visits propels the boys grandmother into a depression, infuriates the other family members, and encourage the boy's fantasies about the wonders and riches that await him in his new life in the United States. Juan Antonio is now seventeen years old, has seen his father briefly three times in his life, and still lives in San Salvador with his grandmother who has raised him practically since birth.

A second case captures the dynamics of mother-child separation from the point of view of a non-migrant grandmother. Mrs. Delfina Reyes lives in large traditional house in the urban core of a pueblo in the central region of El Salvador. She has been taking care of her migrant daughter's two children, ages four and seven, for the past three years since her daughter made the trip to the US undocumented. Mrs. Reyes accepts her responsibility as the children's primary

care giver and clearly assumes her duties with pride. Although there have only been occasional problems, she does worry about the timely arrival of the remittances her daughter earmarks for covering the costs of raising the children. Mrs. Reyes does not mention the children's father. They have not seen their mother since her departure, although they talk to her occasionally on the telephone.

There is a growing population of children and youth being raised in El Salvador by adults other than their biological parents. Migrants are either leaving children in the care of grandparents and other members of the extended family, or sending US-born children back to El Salvador. While some people, such as Juan Antonio Perez dream of giving their kids 'a better future' in the US, the majority of migrants make the move undocumented, work in precarious jobs, and have limited possibilities for sponsoring their children to join them in the US. On the other hand, village residents associate the northbound exodus of young workers and the separation of children from their mothers with a decay of family values; where teenage girls are portrayed as morally reproachable and young men as disengaged. The spectre of sexual promiscuity, drugs, and gang activity hangs over these representations (Zilberg and Lungo 1999). The contrast of this discourse with the celebratory narrative of the *hermano lejano* is noteworthy.

An overarching context of economic uncertainty and insecurity in El Salvador is giving way to a continual circulation of family members across locations. Undocumented labour migration begins when boys and girls reach adolescence and continues late into the individual's lifecycle. Furthermore, it is not only the economically active members of the family that migrate as children and the elderly are shuffled back and forth between places of origin and immigrant settlements to complement adult work schedules. This suggest a need to examine the long

distance arrangements of Salvadoran families in a way that extends beyond a focus on spatial ruptures in dyadic relationships, i.e. mother-child or conjugal couple separations. The Jimenez family provides an excellent urban middle-class take on these emergent family arrangements.

The Jimenez's are a large urban, middle class family that includes two elderly parents in poor health, five middle-age off spring including three professional daughters who work in San Salvador, and two working class sons with stable employment in Los Angeles, and a large number of grandchildren in the US and El Salvador. The family's migration process began during the civil war with the two young sons, and the father and one of the daughters both of whom fled the country for political reasons. Twenty years later the family continues to engage in an endless juggling act in which members with their resource contributions and demands are constantly shuttled across borders. Economic uncertainties and increased levels of violence and insecurity in San Salvador – the family has been car jacked several times – constantly prompts the Jimenez clan to discuss the possibility of a permanent and intact family move to Los Angeles. Yet they resist. In recent years, the family's migration moves have concentrated on those who are considered more at risk; first, taking into account the medical needs of their aging parents the LA-based sons put the money together to sponsor their parents for the green card; second, after high school graduation the teenage granddaughter was sent to study in Los Angeles. As a result, although she had originally resisted living in Los Angeles, the Jimenez grandmother followed her teenage granddaughter to LA and now spends extended periods of time in the US raising her teenage granddaughter. In this case, the back and forth movement of family members, first of the working age members and the politically at risk, and in the post-war years of the more vulnerable members, reflects an effort to negotiate multiple locations to the

advantage of the complete extended family unit. There is a strong shared project of economic stability and well being.

The PRC and Salvadoran family biographies offer empirical evidence for three types of family network patterns associated with transnational migration including: spatial ruptures between mothers and children, long distance conjugal relationships, and arrangements in which families circulate children, elders, and working age members of the kin network across locations. The evidence suggests interesting differences and similarities across the two cases that will be examined in the final discussion.

Discussion and conclusions

The concluding discussion identifies themes that tie together the two case studies, explores some of the conceptual insights that emerge from the research, and identifies some of the methodological challenges posed by our comparative approach.

Two themes clearly stand out as points of convergence across the case studies. First, the case studies suggest that transnational family arrangements are embedded in and have a transforming effect on established traditions that frame both the materiality and normative order of expectations that define family practices. In the Salvadoran case, for instance, flexible livelihood arrangements that revolve around the migration and long distance economic contributions of working age members of the family have a long history tied to the tradition of labour migration to the region's agro-export harvests. Migrant remittances are the contemporary pillar of this century old tradition. Today however the migrants' ability to return home regularly is sharply curtailed. Thus, while the commitment to contribute earnings to the family and 'do

right' by one's kin remains, the context in which such arrangements are realized is fundamentally transformed and increasingly uncertain. Likewise, in the case of PRC there are numerous traditions that structure today's long distance family practices. Most notably the role of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, as care givers and educators of their grandchildren is well established in the Chinese family tradition. Indeed, leaving young children in the care of grandparents when mothers migrate to urban areas for work is quite common. Such practices lay the normative groundwork for transnational mothers who opt to leave children in China under the care of kin.

Second, significant changes are taking place in the gender role performances and gender ideologies that organize women and men's social location in the two migration systems. In dramatic contrast with 19th century patterns of Chinese labour migration that were dominated by men, and challenging established portrayals of Asian family migration strategies, Da's research finds women initiating the immigration process and sponsoring their husbands, women as the heads of astronaut families, and immigrant career women opting to leave children in China with grandparents to continue their education or practice their desired profession. Woman-led family strategies for migration and mobility are facilitated by a number of factors including the gender equity policies promoted under Mao's China, the current policy initiatives of the sending and receiving states, and the discursive legitimacy granted by PRC state rhetoric.

In the Salvadoran case, the feminization of precarious work in the secondary labour markets of the United States means that young women are joining men in the trek north. As they send remittances, women migrants also contribute significant resources to the family economy and by extension to the national economy. Unlike PRC migration narratives, in this case elite representations of the *hermano lejano* and popular discourses about the decay in family values

that results from leaving children in the care of elders not only fail to acknowledge women's resource contributions, they are likely to undermine the women's interpretation of their migration process. Although beyond the scope of the present discussion, the family biographies also suggest changes in age roles for elders and children that merit further consideration. The physical absence of working age adults from the quotidian routines of home life has the potential to confer greater autonomy to remaining family members and may lead to the establishment of new types of relationships between the oldest and youngest generations of the family.

The multi-local transnational family practices of PRC and Salvadoran migrants provide a data-rich point of departure for strengthening the conceptual arsenal of the immigrant families literature and the transnational migration literature. First, together the two case studies provide ample evidence for confirming that the practices of immigrant families are being transformed by the process of globalization. Multi-local, transnational family practices are neither an anecdotal curiosity, a region-specific phenomenon, a temporary aberration on the road to family reunification in the host country, nor simply the refuge of the working poor. While Salvadoran working poor families disperse kin across different labour markets to reduce the costs of social reproduction and guarantee livelihood, PRC families shuttle children, working age adults, and the elderly across locations as they make a bid for upward mobility.

Second, in a variety of ways, the case studies highlight the importance of considering the spatiality of family relations and family practices. To begin, the definition of the family as a network of individuals bound by an ideology of shared kindred breaks with the spatial determinism of the focus on the family as a geographically intact household. This definition has allowed us to trace the border-crossing dynamics of family practices. What we uncover is that transnational migration is promoting the formation of family networks that are dispersed and

decentred. In turn, the constant circulation of family members within this transnational network prompts a redefinition of notions of home and away, as well as of presence and absence. In this context, phone calls, internet chat, email, letters, remittances, care packages and air travel enable families to maintain relationships and make decisions together across borders, allowing migrant members of the family to remain present. Increasingly, the idea of being ‘present’ is tied not to face-to-face interactions between loved ones, but rather to remittances and other kinds of resource contributions by migrants and non-migrant care givers alike.

Geographic distance and mobility are clearly contentious sources of power and vulnerability within the transnational migrant family. Perennial concerns about the timely arrival of remittances to cover livelihood costs highlight the profound vulnerability of being a non-migrant member in a transnational family and the power conferred by, but also the tremendous responsibilities imposed on the mobile members of the family. The remittance uncertainty also sheds new light on the notion of precarious work. Traditionally reserved to refer to underpaid and structurally unstable wage work in secondary labour markets, in a multi-local transnational family care giving and feeding work also become sites of precarious unpaid labour by wives, mothers and grandmothers that like precarious wage work are also tied to the vagaries of globalization. The dependence on remittances to ensure livelihood and particularly to cover the costs of raising children also intimates a commodification of family practices.

The research reveals the many different ways migrant families attempt to navigate the space-of-flows produced by late capitalism. While some families are able to shrink and bridge distances, others experience dramatic ruptures in their family network. There is, in effect, not only one type of transnational family, but rather a continuum of border-crossing familial arrangements; families may shrink and successfully bridge long distances or their multi-local

transnational practices may be ruptured, fragmented and even interrupted for substantial periods of time. Likewise, multi-local family arrangements may be associated with upward mobility and professional career goals, but can also be tied to livelihood requirements. Of course what begins as a risky journey imposed by structural dislocations may result in long term improvements in the family's quality of life, particularly children's access to health and education.

A combination of factors determine a family's ability to navigate globalizing dynamics to their advantage including the family's personal resources, the resources they garner through different types of social networks; state policies of sending and receiving states; and the elite and popular narratives that provide tropes that family's and individual family members draw on both to make and justify their decisions. It turns evaluations of whether a family network is simply being stretched or a devastating rupture has occurred are socially constructed, in part through the multiple narratives of migration in which family practices are embedded.

To conclude, the two case studies allow us to contribute to the research agenda of transnational migration. First, our findings confirm the importance of contexts of exit and reception in contouring the practices of migrant families. More significantly, the research advocates for studies of transnational migration to pay more systematic attention to the narratives and representations that shadow institutional processes. It also highlights the importance of a gendered understanding of key institutions and policies that are the bedrock of transnational migration systems. Second, the research raises questions about the appropriate unit of analysis for studying transnational migration and about the kinds of data we need to collect to capture the complexities of transnationalism. If the family plays such a critical role in undertaking transnational endeavours such as entrepreneurship and bids for political power and status, how are we to capture the interface between these public ventures and their family underpinnings

without understanding what takes place within the family unit. To provide a more concrete example, survey questions about whether transnational migrants own a second home in their place of origin or send remittances to family and friends in their homeland provide only limited information about the resource circulation that takes place within the family network. Such questions fail to capture the tensions and power games that go into forging the transnational family networks in which other activities are embedded and on which they depend. Our work confirms the need both to bridge the study of immigrant families with broader discussions about transnationalism, and to reconsider the research agenda of transnational migration so that we can capture the relationship between the networked practices of primary social institutions such as the family and the collective endeavours of transnational migrants.

References

- Andrade-Eekhoff, K. (2003). Las dinámicas laborales y la migración en la region: Entre la inclusión y la exclusión, *La transnacionalización de la sociedad centroamericana: Nuevos retos planteados a partir de la migración internacional*. San Salvador: FLACSO.
- Barón-Castro, R. (1978). *La Población de El Salvador*. San Salvador: UCA Editores.
- Basch, L., Schiller, N. G., & Blanc, C. S. (1994). *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach.
- Binford, L., & d'Aubeterre, M. E. (2000). Conflictos migratorios transnacionales y respuestas comunitarias. Mexico City: Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades.
- Bobo, L., Oliver, M., Johnson, J., & Valenzuela, A. (2000). *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Bottomley, G. (1983). Review of historical and sociological modes of the family. In A. Burns, G. Bottomley & P. Jools (Eds.), *The family in the modern world: Australian perspectives* (pp. 3-18). Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Bottomley, G., De Lepervanche, M., & Martin, J. (1991). *Intersexions: Gender, class, culture, ethnicity*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Boyd, M. (1996). Family and personal networks in international migration: Recent developments and new agendas. In R. Cohen (Ed.), *The sociology of migration* (pp. 297-328). Cheltenham, UK: Brookfield.
- Coutin, S. (2000). *Legalizing moves: Salvadoran immigrants' struggle for U.S. residency*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Cross, M., & Moore, R. (2002). Globalization and the New City: Migrants, Minorities, and Urban Transformations in Comparative Perspective. In Z. Layton-Henry & D. Joy (Eds.), *Migration, Minorities, and Citizenship*. New York: Palgrave.
- Da, W. W. (2001). *Migrants from the People's Republic of China to Australia: A study of family practices*, University of Sydney.
- (2003a). Gender Relations in Recent Chinese Migration to Australia. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 12, 361-384.
- (2003b). Transnational Grandparenting: Child Care Arrangements among Migrant from People's Republic of China to Australia. *Journal of international Migration and Integration*, 3, 79-103.
- Ehrenreich, B., & Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *Global Women: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

- Fog Olwig, K. (2002). A 'Respectable' Livelihood: Mobility and Identity in a Caribbean Family. In N. Nyberg Sorensen & K. Fog Olwig (Eds.), *Work and Migration: Life and livelihoods in a globalizing world* (pp. 85-105). New York City: Routledge.
- Fung, E. S. K., & Chen, J. (1996). Changing perceptions: The Attitudes of the PRC Chinese towards Australia and China 1989-1996. *Australia-Asia*, 78, 1-30.
- Gammage, S., & Schmitt, J. (2004). Los inmigrantes mexicanos, salvadoreños y dominicanos en el mercado laboral estadounidense: las brechas de género en los años 1990 y 2000. Mexico, D.F.: Unidad de Desarrollo, CEPAL.
- Gao, M. C. F., & Liu, X. (1998). From Student to Citizen: A Survey of Students from the People's Republic of China in Australia. *International Migration*, 36, 27-48.
- George, U., Tsang, K. T., Man, G., & Da, W. W. (2000). Needs Assessment of Mandarin Speaking Newcomers in Toronto. Toronto: Ontario Administration of Settlement and Immigration Services.
- Gonzalez de la Rocha, M. (2001). From the Resources of Poverty to the Poverty of Resources?: The Erosion of a Survival Model. *Latin American Perspectives*, 28, 72-100.
- Hamilton, N., & Chinchilla, N. S. (2001). *Seeking community in a global city : Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hamilton, N., Frieden, J., Fuller, L., & Pastor, M. (1988). Crisis in Central America : regional dynamics and U.S. policy in the 1980s. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Herrera-Lima, F. (2001). Transnational Families: Institutions of Transnational Social Spaces. In L. Pries (Ed.), *New transnational social spaces : international migration and transnational companies in the early 21st century* (pp. 77-92). New York City: Routledge.

- Hon, H. C., & Coughlan, J. E. (1997). The Chinese in Australia: Immigrants from the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kond and Macau. In J. E. Coughlan & D. J. McNamara (Eds.), *Asians in Australia: Patterns of migration and settlement* (pp. 120-170). Melbourne, AU: Macmillan Education Australia.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., & Avila, E. (1997). "I am here but I am there": The meanings of Latina transnational motherhood. *Gender and Society*, 11, 548-571.
- Itzigsohn, J., & Giorguli Saucedo, S. (2001). Immigrant Incorporation and Sociocultural Transnationalism. *International Migration Review*, 36, 766-799.
- Kivisto, P. (2003). Social spaces, transnational immigrant communities, and the politics of incorporation. *Ethnicities*, 3, 5-28.
- Lam, T., Yeoh, B. S. A., & Law, L. (2002). Sustaining families transnationally: Chinese-Malaysians in Singapore. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 11, 117-143.
- Landolt, P. (2000). *The causes and consequences of transnational migration: Salvadorans in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.* Unpublished Ph.D., The Johns Hopkins University.
- (2001). Salvadoran Economic Transnationalism: Embedded Strategies for Household Maintenance, Immigrant Incorporation, and Entrepreneurial Expansion. *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs*, 1, 217-241.
- (2003). El transnacionalismo politico y el derecho al voto en el exterior: El Salvador y sus migrantes en Estados Unidos. In L. C. Chelius (Ed.), *Votar en la Distancia: La extension de los derechos politicos a migrantes, experiencias comparadas* (pp. 301-323). Mexico, D.F.: Contemporanea Sociologia & Instituto Mora.
- Landolt, P., Autler, L., & Baires, S. (1999). From *Hermano Lejano* to *Hermano Mayor*: The Dialectics of Salvadoran Transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22, 290-315.

- Levitt, P. (2001). Transnational migration: taking stock and future directions. *Global networks: a journal of transnational affairs*, 1, 195-216.
- Levitt, P., & de la Dehesa, R. (2003). Transnational migration and the redefinition of the state: Variations and explanations. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26, 587-611.
- Levitt, P., DeWind, J., & Vertovec, S. (2003a). International Perspectives on International Migration: An Introduction. *International Migration Review*, 37, 565-575.
- (2003b). *Special Issue of IMR on Transnational Migration*.
- Levitt, P., & Glick-Schiller, N. (2003). Transnational Perspectives on Migration: Conceptualizing Simultaneity. *Centre for Migration and Development Working Paper*, 03-09.
- Li, P. S. (1998). *The Chinese in Canada*: Oxford University Press.
- (2001). Immigrants' Propensity to Self-employment: Evidence from Canada. *IMR*, 35.
- Light, I., Zhou, M., & Kim, R. (2002). Transnationalism and American Exports in an English-Speaking World. *International Migration Review*, 36, 702-725.
- Liu, X.-f. (1997). A case study of the labour market status of recent mainland Chinese immigrants, Metropolitan Toronto. . *International Migration.*, 34, 583-605.
- López, D., Popkin, E., & Telles, E. (1996). Central Americans: At the Bottom, Struggling to Get Ahead. In R. Waldinger & M. Bozorgmehr (Eds.), *Ethnic Los Angeles* (pp. 25-56). Newbury Park: Russell Sage Foundation Press.
- Mahler, S. (1995). *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (2000). Migration and Transnational Issues: Recent trends and prospects for 2020. CA 2020:. Hamburg:: Institut für Iberoamerika-Kunde.

- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, D., Alarcón, R., Durand, J., & González, H. (1987). *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Massey, D., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1998). *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millenium*. New York City: Oxford University Press.
- Menjívar, C. (2000). *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran immigrant networks in America*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mitchell, K. (2001). Transnationalism, neo-liberalism, and the rise of the shadow state. *Economy and Society*, 30, 165-189.
- Nash, J., & Fernandez-Kelly, M. P. (1983). *Women, Men and the International Division of Labour*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nyberg Sorensen, N., & Fog Olwig, K. (2002). Mobile livelihoods: Making a living in the world. In N. Nyberg Sorensen & K. Fog Olwig (Eds.), *Work and Migration: Life and livelihoods in a globalizing world* (pp. 1-20). New York City: Routledge.
- Nyíri, P. (2001). Expatriating is patriotic? The discourse on 'new migrants' in the People's Republic of China and identity construction among recent migrants from the PRC. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27, 635-653.
- Olwig, K. F. (2002). A 'Respectable' Livelihood: Mobility and Identity in a Caribbean Family. In N. F. O. Nyberg Sorensen, Karen (Ed.), *Work and Migration: Life and Livelihoods in a Globalizing World*. New York: Routledge.

- Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship : the cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Orellana, M. F., Thorne, B., Chee, A., & Lam, W. S. E. (2001). Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration. *Social Problems*, 48, 572-592.
- Orozco, M. (2002). Attracting Remittances: Market, Money, and Reduced Costs (pp. 27). Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank.
- Parrenas, R. S. (2001). Mothering from a distance: Emotions, gender, and intergenerational relations in Filipino transnational families. *Feminist Studies*, 27, 361-390.
- Pe-Pua, R., Mitchell, C., Iredale, R., & Castles, S. (1996). *Astronaut families and parachute children: The cycle of migration between Hong Kong and Australia*. Canberra, AU: AGPS.
- Pessar, P., & Mahler, S. (2003). Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In. *International Migration Review*, 37, 812-846.
- Plaza, D. (1999). Transnational Grannies: The changing family responsibilities of elderly african Caribbean-born women living in Great Britain. *Social Indicators Research Journal*, 11, 180-201.
- Popkin, E. (1999). Guatemalan Mayan Migration to Los Angeles: constructing transnational linkages in the context of the settlement process. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22, 267-289.
- (2003). Transnational Migration and Development in Post-War Peripheral States: An Examination of Guatemalan and Salvadoran State Linkages with their Migrant Populations in Los Angeles. *Current Sociology*, 51, 347-374.

- Popkin, E., & Andrade-Eekhoff, K. (2002). The construction of household labour market strategies in Central American transnational migrant communities, *Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association*. Chicago.
- Portes, A. (2003). Conclusion: theoretical convergences and empirical evidence in the study of immigrant transnationalism. *International Migration Review*, 37, 874-892.
- Portes, A., & Borozc, J. (1989). Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on Its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation. *International Migration Review*, 23, 606-630.
- Portes, A., Guarnizo, L. E., & Landolt, P. (1999). Special Issue on Transnational Migrant Communities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22.
- Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. (1996). *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Repak, T. (1995). *Waiting on Washington: Central American Workers in the Nation's Capital*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Roberts, B., Frank, R., & Lozano-Ascencio, F. (1999). Transnational migrant communities and Mexican migration to the US. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22, 238-266.
- Sassen, S. (1991). *The Gobar City: Tokyo, London and New York*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sassen-Koob, S. (1988). *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in Investment and Labor Flow*. New York City: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, M. P., & Guarnizo, L. E. (1998). Transnational From Below, Special Issue of Comparative Urban and Community Research. In M. P. Smith (Ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

- Tian, G. (1999). *Chinese-Canadian, Canadian-Chinese Coping and Adapting in North America*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Vilas, C. (1995). *Between Earthquakes and Volcanos: Market, State, and the Revolutions in Central America*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Waldinger, R., & Fitzgerald, D. (2004). Transnationalism in Question. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 1177-95.
- Wang, S., & Lo, L. (2004). Chinese Immigrants in Canada: Their Changing Composition and Economic Performance, *Working Paper Series #30* (pp. 34). Toronto: CERIS, Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement.
- Waters, J. (2002). Flexible Families? 'Astronaut' Households and the Experiences of Lone Mothers in Vancouver, British Columbia. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 3, 117-134.
- Wilson, F. (2000). Metropolitan Labor Markets and Ethnic Niching: Introduction to a Research Project. Madison, WI: Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Zhang, R. (1995). *Anomie and Identification: Adjustment experiences of recent immigrants from mainland China in Toronto*. University of Toronto.
- Zilberg, E., & Lungo, M. (1999). *Se han vuelto araganes?: Juventud, migración e identidades laborales*. In M. Lungo & S. Kandel (Eds.), *Transformando El Salvador: Migración, Sociedad, y Cultura* (pp. 39-93). San Salvador, ES: FUNDE.
- Zolberg, A., Suhrke, A., & Aguayo, S. (1989). *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹ A first draft of our paper was presented by Wei Wei Da at the 36th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology held in Beijing, 2004. Since the congress we have received many helpful comments and suggestions

from our colleagues. In particular, we thank Ulrike Schuerkens, Judith Bernhard and Esther Rootham for their insightful critiques on earlier drafts, as well as Paola Bohórquez for her research assistance with the literature review.