BLURRING BORDERS:
CONSTRUCTING TRANSNATIONAL
COMMUNITY IN THE PROCESS OF
MEXICO-U.S. MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

The conception of community in transnational migration remains problematic because of the tendency to think of the national borders as placing an upper bound on community, membership, identity, and individual-state relations. Drawing on recent work on transnationalism, I use "transnational community" to refer to the dense social fields that may be constructed and maintained by transmigrants over time, and across space. Using data from a Mexico-U.S. transnational migrant circuit, I show how transnational community is constructed and maintained through practices which include endogamous marriage and fictive kinship, exchanges of social capital, and individual and collective spending. A discussion of key dimensions of

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transnational community highlights social and political change. Transnational migration can thus be interpreted as a process through which transmigrants may develop multiple social identities, reorient regimes of stratification, and obtain services and infrastructure, perhaps expanding their social citizenship.

INTRODUCTION: CROSSING BORDERS AND RECONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY

This paper examines the construction of transnational community in the context of Mexico-U.S. migration. It is motivated by the question of how to conceptualize community when people orient their lives around more than one site in more than one nation-state. Addressing the conceptualization of community in this context calls for a discussion of how communities are constructed, over time, across space (and national borders). This can lay the groundwork for future analyses of how membership in such communities may enhance or limit social or substantive citizenship vis-à-vis one or more nation-states.

There are several reasons for focusing on community in transnational migration. One has to do with the theoretical importance of a community level of analysis. Portes and Zhou (1992, p. 492) correctly note that “a community perspective on the topics of immigration, poverty and marginality has been given short shrift, caught in the battle between individualistic theories and structuralist arguments.” But there are also practical or policy-relevant reasons for this focus. Portes and his collaborators suggest that the social structures of different ethnic communities in the United States offer diverse sources of social capital. Social capital, together with other factors, helps to shape group-level patterns of social and economic incorporation (Portes and Zhou 1992; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Community membership, or imagining oneself to be part of the local community in the United States, is associated with migrants’ settlement intentions (Chavez 1994). The importance of community has also been noted in research on Mexico-U.S migration where the focus is often on local community of origin rather than the broader community of co-nationals, but the argument is similar. Local history, resources, and social capital can influence migration patterns and shape economic and social incorporation in the United States (Durand and Massey 1992; Goldring 1992a).

Another reason has to do with the lack of clarity in the use of community in the immigrant incorporation and cross-border migration literatures. What exactly is meant by community? Does “community” refer to the entire community of co-nationals in the United States, as many authors imply, regardless of divisions based on pre- or post-migration class and status, legal status, and so forth? Does this “community” also include the population of the country of origin? If so, does it include the entire population, or is it limited to people affected fairly directly by migration? To what extent do answers to these questions depend on the features of specific migrant or diasporic communities? These questions are raised to generate discussion; addressing them fully is beyond the scope of this paper.

In the next section I briefly introduce the case of a transnationalized Mexico-U.S. migrant community which serves as an empirical referent in the paper. This is followed by a review of available notions of community and current efforts to conceptualize the transnational social spaces of migrants. In subsequent sections I show how transnational community is constructed and maintained. Although the discussion is based on data from one such community, familiarity with other Mexican cases suggest it has broader application. Future comparative research can provide information on patterns of commonality or diversity in processes of transnationalization.

LAS ANIMAS, CALIFORNIA

Every year in January or February the town of Las Animas in southern Zacatecas, a state in west-central Mexico, celebrates its fiesta, or patron saint’s day. Several weeks beforehand, los norteños, people who have been north in the United States, begin to return. They stand out because of their clothing styles and their air of being on vacation. They return with gifts and money for their families, and money for the week or two that they will spend there before heading back north. During this time migrants are busy visiting people, and the frequency of weddings and quinceañeras rises sharply. Women’s visiting piles multiply as husbands, sons, or brothers who have returned demand clean, ironed shirts everyday. Several seasonal businesses open their doors, and prices rise in the local stores. The
population of pickup trucks with California license plates increases, creating mini-traffic jams along the main street of the village. An old flatted truck with local plates has "Las Animas, California" painted across a slat of the wooden tailgate, and several of the California pickups sport "I love Las Animas" bumper stickers.

The first day of the fiesta is taken up by a public coleadera, a rodeo-like event in which a bull is let loose to run down a long corridor while a man on horseback, who has paid for the privilege, gives chase and tries to make the bull fall by grabbing its tail. Men participate directly in the coleadera; they line up on horseback, decked out in charro attire or at least a hat, after having paid their fee. Women participate in the sidelines as members of the audience. Beer and food are sold, people watch from all sides, and musicians can be hired to play by the song or the hour. That evening there is a dance with two bands, one playing contemporary popular music, the other norteno music. These events are widely publicized. People from the surrounding region begin to arrive early in the day, spawning large temporary parking lots filled with plates from California, Washington, Oregon, Texas, Illinois, and Florida. A second coleadera is held the next day, this time primarily for Animenos, as people from Las Animas are known.

In January of 1989, while the logistics of the fiesta were being organized, planning of another sort was also taking place. A group of men were drawing up their accounts of the previous year's festivities to show how money from the coleadera and dance had been used to continue and nearly finish two community construction projects: the hall where the dance is held and the coleadera arena. Despite grumbling about the mismanagement of funds, migrants had mobilized resources for projects that would change the look and feel of their place of origin. The following year, money raised from each home, whether its members were in the United States or Mexico, was used to provide the community share of the cost of installing a potable water system. Money collected from ticket sales to the 1990 and 1991 fiestas was used to finish construction of the dance hall and coleadera arena. A separate collection of money was undertaken in the United States to finance the community's share of the cost of paving the road connecting the village to the municipal seat. Money from earlier coleaderas and dances had been used for a number of projects, including the construction of the nursery and primary schools and improvements on the church and cemetery (Goldring 1991, 1992a, 1992b).

In addition to returning to the village and contributing to community projects, people from Las Animas maintain contact across the border, and across several sites within the United States. They make regular telephone calls to relatives on both sides of the border. Since private telephone service became available in the spring of 1995, the frequency of calls has increased and many homes in the village have telephones or are in the process of obtaining them. Animenos also take short trips across the border from either direction to participate as godparents in baptisms or weddings, or to attend funerals. These trips reflect and reinforce ties of real and fictive kinship that link Animenos within the United States and Mexico, and across the border.

A sense of community is also fostered in the United States through two annual baseball games, one held in southern California, the other in the Bay Area. The games provide an opportunity for Animenos to catch up on news, share information about jobs, see girlfriends and boyfriends, and spend time with friends and relatives (convivir) in a picnic setting which is usually followed by an evening dance. The games began during the early 1970s as an effort to bring Animenos together at a time when the majority of migrants were single men or men who had left their families in Mexico, and family "settlement" was just beginning. By now there are large established settlements of families with children, who attend school (including university), in several California cities.

Patterns of home purchases also reflect the growing importance of living and working in the United States. Many Animenos have purchased homes in the United States. Some have done so after building a home or fixing up an existing one in Las Animas, but younger generations are buying in the United States before investing in construction projects in Mexico. The U.S. homes are usually decorated with items such as embroidered tablecloths and doilies which one would also find in homes in Las Animas. In Las Animas, homes have consumer goods purchased in the United States or with money earned there.

In Las Animas the prevailing assumption is that most young men and growing numbers of women will soon travel to el norte (the north, the United States) if they have not already done so. And there is the more common example of a cross-border link: sending remittances back to family members in Mexico. In much of this Las Animas is not unique: researchers have noted many of these patterns in other

These examples are indicative of a transnational arena of activity. An arena or social space in which people from Las Animas on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border are linked through social and economic relationships, and in which they carry out a broad range of activities. Their daily lives have a dimension that is not contained within the geographic space of the locality, region, or country in which they happen to be. Spending money on projects in Las Animas suggests that Animéños who migrate feel a sense of belonging, a sense of community, in their place of origin. That many Animéños spend long periods of time in California, send their children to school, and in many cases buy homes there, suggests that they feel a sense of belonging in sites on both sides of the border. What is less clear is how we should understand transnationalized localities and social spaces, and what they imply.

CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY

Existing Approaches

Despite an overabundance of definitions of community (Hillary 1955), community is often presented as something that needs no definition. In sociology, definitions of community rest on notions of commonality, solidarity, and shared history, interests, and identity. Commonality may derive from a shared socio-structural position (i.e., class), as in Marxist and Durkheimian approaches, from common status, interests, and experiences which may or may not be limited by class, as in Weberian approaches. There is also a strong territorial dimension to most conceptions of community, with communities inscribed in specific national territories, landscapes, and settlements.

The possibility of “community without propinquity” (Webber 1963) has been recognized for several decades, but uses of community that de-couple community and spatial proximity have gained prominence recently, no doubt influenced by changes in communications technologies and other processes of globalization, including cross-border migration. Community is used to refer to “lifestyle enclaves” whose members share interests, professions, lifestyles, or market niches (cf. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton 1985). We also speak of communities based on religion, ethnicity, “race,” national origin, immigration status, and political beliefs. Anderson’s conception of the nation as an imagined political community (1983, p. 15) focused attention on the styles and mechanisms through which national communities are imagined, substantially expanding, yet reaffirming, earlier work on the social construction of communities (Suttles 1972). At the same time, Anderson’s work clearly locates the construction of the imagined community within the process of nation-building.

National boundaries continue to enclose notions of membership in most versions of community. This is also true of two competing paradigmatic approaches to immigrants in host societies. Models that posit the eventual assimilation of immigrants, and critics of such approaches who note the persistence of ethnic and linguistic practices or identify diverse patterns of immigrant incorporation based on variation in class background and contexts of departure and reception (Portes and Rumbaut 1990), both conceptualize the boundaries between host and sending societies in fairly impermeable terms (Goldring 1992a). In one model immigrants assimilate, in the other they develop a distinctive pattern of incorporation; either way, they become inscribed within their new nation.

Scholars of international migration, especially those whose work includes both “sending” and “receiving” regions, have long been aware that social networks link people across borders, that some people return to their place of origin on a regular basis, and that migrants may retain strong social and economic ties to their place of origin. However, the prevailing vision was of social networks spanning borders and linking individuals in societies that remained distinct. People moved in space from one society to another (Rouse 1991), entering and exiting communities as they moved, in some cases retaining elements of the other society.

Political scientists have addressed the issue of groups whose members orient their lives around more than one territory by referring to them as “modern diasporas” (Sheffer 1986; Esman 1986, 1992). The concept refers to entire national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups outside their homelands. While it has more often been used to characterize ethnic/religious groups, refugees, and migrant flows composed of professional or fairly educated
migrants, it has also been applied to Mexicans in the United States (González Gutierrez 1993). This literature makes an important contribution by emphasizing the politics of diasporas via a vis their states of origin and/or destination, and in so doing, expanding the frame of reference beyond that of a single nation. However, the level of analysis, the diaspora, is quite macro. The social, and political construction of diasporas and diversity within a diaspora usually escape analysis as attention is focused on relations between the diaspora as a group and its relevant state(s).

Among sociologists, national territories of origin and destination continue to provide the overall framework for the construction and definition of migrant and immigrant communities, as country of residence does for most other communities. Such conceptions of community are inadequate in the face of contemporary transnational movements because they fail to take into account the multiple and not necessarily consistent statuses and identities adopted by or imposed upon migrants who live in the context of more than one nation (Rouse 1991; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994; Chavez 1994; Hall 1990). In addition to the likelihood of occupying disparate class positions, being involved in more than one society usually means living with non-unitary conceptions of racial/ethnic hierarchy, competing gender ideologies, and more than one hegemony of nationalism.

Transnationalism

Transnational migration challenges customary equations between territory and community, and calls into question the enclosure of communities by national borders. In particular, it raises questions about the conceptualization of transnationalized communities (Goldring 1992c) and how membership is defined and negotiated in transnationalized communities (Goldring and Smith 1993). These issues have been taken up in recent work by scholars who might loosely be grouped as proponents of a "transnational approach." This perspective privileges the transnational social spaces that people create in the course of migration, and draws attention to the multiple identities of transmigrants as they act in the context of more than one country's nation-building project (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton 1994). Much of this work is based on fieldwork conducted among Caribbean-U.S. or Mexico-U.S. transmigrants.

Rouse (1987, 1991) used the concept of transnational migrant circuits to describe the communities and social spaces created through the circulation of goods, people, and information across sites on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Following his approach, Las Animas and the sites in California where people from this locality live and work can be thought of as sites in a transnational migrant circuit. People, information, and goods flow through the circuit. Rouse argues that in contemporary Mexico-U.S. migration, a social space is generated that can include elements and practices drawn from both sides of the border, but which also acquires a distinctiveness of its own. The model of the migrant circuit is particularly suited for describing Mexico-U.S. migration because of the historical, and to some extent contemporary, importance of circular migration. The metaphor can also encompass groups of people who spend most of their time in the United States yet maintain ties with their communities of origin. It has the further advantage of representing migrants as social actors because it generates an image of social structures and institutions which are created, activated, and reproduced through the practices of people (cf. Pedraza-Bailey 1990; Goldring 1992a). The metaphor also pushes researchers to broaden the scope of migration studies to include the circulation of ideas, symbols, and material culture, not only the movement of people.

The transnational migrant circuit offers an alternative vision of migration that challenges prior conceptions of migration as the movement of people between distinct social and economic systems. However, the social context and relations in which the circulating people, goods, and information are embedded requires further elaboration (Goldring 1992a, 1992c; Kearney 1994). Basch and her colleagues (1994) broaden the call for further analysis of the social context of transnational fields by arguing that transmigrants maintain "many different racial, national, and ethnic identities" (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1992, p. 11). Constructions of race and ethnicity, definitions of class, and national ideologies are embedded in historically specific nation-building processes. These categories must be reconceptualized in light of transnational migration, which brings people under more than one nation-building project. They also call for the further elaboration of the constituting elements of transnational social fields and how these fields are produced and reproduced.
The agenda set out by Glick Schiller and her co-authors is critical for a better understanding of transnational migration. However, it remains fairly abstract, in part because of the methodological and theoretical question of what level(s) or unit(s) of analysis to employ. There may be no single answer to this quandary: the areas and groups under study may determine the most appropriate units. Nevertheless, thought should be given to the relationship between one’s research sites, the units and definitions of community employed, and the significance attached to one’s version of community.

For example, researchers using a transnational approach in Mexico, or in Mexico and the United States, have focused on single or comparative studies of communities of origin and their members’ areas of destination, and have stressed the importance of the transnationalized community, or geographic or ethnic region of origin. Durand and Massey (1992) and Goldring (1992a) attach importance to community-level differences in the experiences of Mexico-U.S. migrants. Goldring (1992a) and Smith (1995) studied transnational migrant circuits originating in three states in Mexico, and also stress the community of origin as an organizing element in the transnational social space created by the transmigrants under study. Kearney and Nagengast (1989) were among the first to discuss the formation of Mexico-U.S. transnational communities, based on research among Mixtec migrants in California and Oaxaca. Kearney (1994) now uses the term “Oaxacalifornia” to describe the social space of Mixtec transmigrants. Here the relevant unit is expanded to include the entire ethnic group of Mixtecs.

In contrast, scholars working in the Caribbean have focused more broadly on entire countries of origin, or regions, and their relationship with the United States (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994; Guarnizo 1994). Researchers studying immigrants in the United States usually take the ethnic or national origin group in the United States as the relevant unit and community (Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Portes and Zhou 1992). The “little” community of origin does not receive the same attention in these two areas, compared to the Mexico-U.S. literature. The dynamics of Mexico-U.S. versus Caribbean-U.S. migration may account for these differences. Caribbean transnationalization may be taking place in a faster and more encompassing manner because of the small size of the countries of origin, the high concentration of their migrants in the United States, and the absence of something like the Bracero program which exposed Mexicans to a large number of dispersed sites in the United States.

Scholars conducting bi-national research on Mexico-U.S. transnationalism coincide in attaching importance to the homeland, although some focus on particular communities while others stress an ethnic group’s region of origin. Despite growing usage of the term “transnational community,” the concept needs to be refined. In the next section I offer a way of conceptualizing transnational community and show how such community is created and reproduced.

Transnational Community

I use “transnational community” to refer to the dense social fields that may be constructed and maintained by transmigrants over time, and across space, in transnational migrant circuits. The distinction between the transnational migrant circuit and the community which may develop within it emphasizes the contingent aspect of transnational community, and is intended to prompt questions about why communities form in some cases and not others, and about the longevity of particular transnational communities. The qualifier dense focuses attention on the variable quality of the movement of people, money, goods, and information in a migrant circuit, and the density of social relations that link people among sites. Transnational community should be reserved for circuits where the density of movement and social ties between sites is relatively high, so that a researcher’s construct of community bears a relationship to a migrant’s sense of belonging to such a community.

This definition is based on evidence of the ongoing importance of the place of origin for Mexican migrants, which can be seen, for example, in patterns of return migration (whether for brief visits or longer stays) and in migrant spending time in the home locality—even by migrants who appear to have settled in the United States and bought property there. It is also consistent with Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc’s (1994) transnational social fields and Kearney’s (1994) use of transnational community applied to Mixtec migrants, although I anchor it around a specific locality of origin. I would argue that this narrower version of transnational community mediates participation in regional or ethnic transnational collectivities, and in immigrant communities in the United States, and
therefore represents an important level of analysis. Community-level differences among Mexican migrants (Goldring 1992a; Durand and Massey 1992), which point to the significance of membership in specific transnational communities, are another reason for using this version of transnational community.11

There are a number of overlapping features or dimensions of transnational community, many of which contribute to its creation and maintenance. The transnational community, like the locality of origin and communities surrounding it, is a community of real and fictive kinship, social relations, and social networks. It is also a community of shared history, experiences, and memories. As Alarcón suggests, it is a northerized community, one that specializes "in producing and reproducing international migrant workers by adapting [its] economic and social structures" (1992, p. 306). It is a hierarchical community, with economic, political, social, and gender divisions and asymmetries. It is a community of consumption and exchange, where goods are embedded in a common but changing social context that gives meaning to acts of investment and consumption. It is also a political community, if we define politics as purposive action aimed at changing the conditions of social existence (Magnusson 1990, p. 52). Politics may involve relations with one or more states, or change within the community. Perhaps most fundamentally, the community is a source of social capital and an arena of shared meanings, particularly those surrounding claims to and estimations of social status.

Unlike communities contained in one geographic site, it is a multi-sited or multi-polar community, with sites located in different nations and states. Sites may differ in the predominant activities that take place in them, for example, relaxation versus wage work. Historical patterns of investment and consumption, hierarchies, gender ideologies, status claims, political power, and so on, rooted in the locality of origin are likely to be subject to reinterpretation and contestation as ideas, goods, and people circulate among sites in the transnational community.

This basic conception of transnational community leaves the borders of the circuit-level community purposely blurry because people may enter the community through social relations such as marriage, or through immigration to a particular locality. People may also leave it or have ambiguous membership, as in the case of women who marry "out," men who abandon their families, or people who do not maintain contact with fellow villagers. The exact boundary of a transnational community may be impossible to specify, but anchoring it in the locality of origin provides a conceptual boundary useful for field research. The definition of who is or is not a member of a transnational community may be fluid over time, and membership depends less on an a priori definition based on place of origin and more on an enacted definition constituted by people's activities. People's willingness to contribute money to collective projects may be a practical indicator of membership in, and the boundaries of, a transnational community. By allowing people to construct themselves and be constructed as members of the community, this version of transnational community emphasizes interaction between social practices and social structures.

THE DIMENSIONS, CREATION, AND MAINTENANCE OF TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Kinship and Community: Social Relations Across Space and Over Time

The construction and reproduction of transnational community depends on the continued importance, in some form, of the locality of origin for members of a migrant circuit. It is the place to which people return, where family members live, where they are likely to meet a marriage partner, and where they may own a house and/or land. It is also a landscape that holds memories of childhood and adolescence, and a sense of common history and regional identity.

Kinship, both real and fictive, links people with a locale of origin and expands social ties across space. Kinship is an important dimension of transnational community, and a mechanism that contributes to its maintenance.

Kinship plays a role in the Las Animas transnational community because marriage patterns have been relatively endogamous. It is not that people do not marry out of the community, just that they are more likely to marry in. A repeating set of last names reflects this pattern. Without some degree of endogamy, ties between sites in the migrant circuit would be based more narrowly on family rather than locality of origin, limiting the creation of a sense of community in the migrant circuit. Several factors contribute to
endogamy, including the continued importance of social and economic ties to people in the village, patriarchal constraints on gender roles and women’s movement, men’s interests in marrying women whom they know to have certain qualities, and the size and location of the village of origin.

Endogamy is reinforced because of the continued importance of the village, which in turn is based on the feedback between return migration and the expansion of social ties and networks (Massey, Alarcón, Durand, and González 1987). People return because they have ties with people living in the place of origin; when they return they renew and generate new ties, so they continue to return, and so forth. Owning property, cattle, or other resources in Las Animas also draws people back.

Men and women who migrate to the United States both return to the village, but returning men are more likely to be looking for marriage partners for several reasons. Women migrate in smaller proportions compared to men (one woman for every two or three men). Women who migrate generally do so with their parents and siblings, or with husbands. If they migrate before marriage, anecdotal evidence suggests they are more likely to marry out of the community than men. This means that there is a pool of unmarried women in Las Animas interested in marrying migrant men. These men are also attractive because of the aura surrounding migrants (cf. Cárdenas 1988), and because women do not have many opportunities to meet men from outside the village due to restrictions based on the prevailing regional gender ideology.

Endogamy is also based on an interest in marrying a partner that is a “known quantity” in social terms. Since women have more limits on their opportunities to meet mates, men play a decisive role in perpetuating endogamy. They make practical choices in favor of women who have been brought up under a particular set of social institutions. These women have relatives in the village, and would therefore be interested in returning to Mexico if they should migrate north with their spouses. They have been socialized under the dominant gender ideology, meaning they are not “liberated” like women who have grown up in the United States (or other parts of Mexico)—at least not when they get married. If these women remain in the village while their spouses migrate they will be able to run the household by managing and working land (if they own land), managing remittances, dealing with in-laws, and making embroidery to sell if necessary.

The size and location of the place of origin is also related to endogamy. Small rural villages like Las Animas are more likely to have endogamous real and fictive kinship patterns, and higher kin network density, compared to urban neighborhoods (unless these too are populated by people who maintain village-based networks). The distribution of resources such as land may also mediate endogamy. Without access to land there may be less incentive for men to continue to marry in. Despite rising land prices due to migration, landlessness is not as pronounced in Las Animas as in other labor exporting communities (cf. Goldring 1992a).

Compadrazgo is pervasive in the Las Animas transnational community, as it is throughout Mexico. It establishes fictive kinship between godparents (padrinos) and godchildren (ahijados), and between godparents and parents (compadres). The relationship is not limited to baptisms, but also includes communions, quinceañeras, and several padrinos for weddings. It is not uncommon for Animenos in the United States to make brief trips to Las Animas or to other places in the United States to baptize a new ahijado, or to become padrinos in a wedding or quinceañera party. Padrinos, ahijados, and compadres often exchange assistance with housing or job hunting in the United States. People may choose padrinos from outside, but most draw on friends and relatives within the transnational community. One of the most important features of fictive, marriage, and descent-based kinship is that they can generate ties across strata, permitting people to make claims on others with different resources and social capital. In the course of transnational migration, relations based on real and fictive kinship are expanded across space and maintained over time, producing and reproducing transnational community.

Community and Social Capital

Social capital represents a key dimension of transnational community. The transnational community represents a source of social capital for migrants and nonmigrants alike. People without migration experience can reduce the economic and noneconomic costs of migration by having access to information, loans, housing, and perhaps employment, through kin, compadrazgo and friendship relations (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994). Social capital of this sort is usually most accessible.
from other members of the transnational community because of the density of these social relations. This also holds for migrants, although they may find themselves increasingly on the providing end in exchanges of social capital. The process of exchanging social capital in a migrant circuit expands social networks across space. Like kinship, social capital is an important dimension of transnational community, and it contributes to the creation and maintenance of this type of community. 

Identity and Community

Transnational migration modifies and multiplies transmigrants’ identities. Who they are is no longer based predominantly on family membership, local and regional history and gender ideology, work patterns, and personal or family wealth, power, social status, and so forth. In addition to entering different work conditions in the United States, transnational migration involves other changes that impinge upon the sense of self. And because migration also involves changes in the social landscape of the sites in the migrant circuit, it is also associated with changes in identities that are rooted in place and nation.

A sense of common identity can be thought of as a multilayered dimension of transnational community, one that includes different degrees of identification with a locality of origin, region, nation, and ethnic or racialized grouping. Identities shift in the course of transnational migration in many ways, but I want to draw particular attention to four ways in which a sense of transnational community identity is generated: exchanges of social capital, community-level celebrations like the fiesta, the migration journey itself, and confrontation with U.S. patterns of racial formation and racialization. 

As noted earlier, exchanges of social capital draw on community-level networks and expand them throughout the migrant circuit. Deploying social capital in the migrant circuit reinforces community-level identification because the community provides a special context for interpreting social status (Goldring 1992a, 1996).

The fiesta is an important celebration of village membership and identification, especially as it becomes a popular time for transmigrants to return. It provides a context for migrants and nonmigrants who have not seen each other to socialize and renew ties, as people return for a couple of weeks. Migrant men can court village women or women who have been in other sites in California, and village women have a chance to interact with men who have been absent. Because money from the fiesta is invested in community projects, people feel that participating in these events is good for the community. All of this reinforces a sense of belonging to the transnational community. Gathering for baseball games, baptisms, weddings, and burials also does this, whether the events are held in Mexico or the United States, because they generally involve fellow-Animéños.

Identity as a member of a transnational community is also created and reproduced through the shared experience of the journey and arrival in a foreign land. These processes also generate or accentuate regional and national identities. The shared journey creates a bond between people, even those who have made the trip at different points in time and under diverse circumstances, fostering a sense of group identity. This happens among Animéños and other migrants from the same place of origin, but it also occurs more generally among migrants who find themselves traveling in similar circumstances (Anderson 1983). The shared experience of migration also entails exposure to common hazards. These include the border patrol in the case of undocumented migrants, sexual harassment or rape for women, the Mexican and U.S. police, unscrupulous employers, bogus notarios (notaries) and other quacks, high-crime neighborhoods, and racist attitudes and behavior.

Perhaps more important than the journey itself is commonality in the way Mexican labor migrants tend to be received, even at different points in time (Portes and Rumbaut 1990, Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, p. 1328). In the encounter with patterns of U.S. racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994), most Mexicans quickly confront dominant racial and ethnic stereotypes which cast them as good workers but also as members of an ethnic and racial minority with relatively low political power and social status. As minorities, they often experience discrimination and exclusionary practices. The shared journey and common reception links generations of migrants from a particular place and fosters a sense of shared history, community, and national identity.

The construction of transnational community thus involves processes of transmigrant identity formation that operate at several levels. At the community or migrant-circuit level, migrants develop a sense of themselves as members of a group from a communities
of origin. As they get to know Mexicans from other localities and other Spanish speakers during their stays in the United States, Animeños also develop a sense of their shared Mexican-ness and minority status. They are members of their migrant circuit's imagined community, which builds on historical village-level identification, and they may be becoming members of the imagined national community of Mexicanos, an identity that emerges in the process of being defined as a foreigner in the United States. They may also see themselves as Latinos or Hispanics, another product of transnational migration.

Gender and Community

Gender dynamics and ideologies represent another key dimension of transnational community. The regime of stratification in a transnational community includes status distinctions based on gender as well as wealth, land, or other markers of socioeconomic status. These distinctions are embedded in assumptions about gender relations. Migration to the United States can accentuate tensions between spouses and between parents and children over changing notions of gender relations—in families where the entire family migrates and in those where only some members migrate (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Goldring 1996).

Research indicates that Dominican and Mexican women are more likely to want to remain in the United States compared to their male partners because they like the changes in gender relations that they associate with being in that country, even though those changes may be minimal (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Goldring 1996). Men's and women's interest in creating and maintaining transnational community may thus be quite different. I would argue that among men from Las Animas, the desire to return to the village and maintain a transnational community involves the opportunity to express a version of masculinity that is not as readily available in the United States (Rouse 1990; Goldring 1996). In contrast, women may be motivated to extend social networks northward across the border because life in the United States can offer alternatives in terms of gender relations (cf. Gledhill 1995). Changing gender relations and family attachments generated by raising children in the United States appear to shift the balance of interest toward the United States among women from Las Animas, although they still enjoy returning to Mexico periodically. Women's interests in, and meanings associated with, transnational social fields may thus differ somewhat from those of men.

Spending and Community

The spending of migrant earnings in Las Animas reflects people's continued ties to relatives there, and to the place.²² It also contributes to the construction and maintenance of the transnational community because it is a way of making status claims, and, as suggested earlier, these claims are a key dimension of this kind of community. People can improve their material well-being and make claims to social status and mobility through private (individual or household) spending, but they also spend money collectively on community projects, thereby making claims about their status as members of a community with nicer homes, better services and roads, and so forth.²³ At the same time, spending reinforces social hierarchies because different people and families have variable costs, incomes, and preferences.

Private Consumption and Distinction

Most of the dollars migrants earn are spent on daily maintenance and recurrent costs: food, clothing or fabric, and medical expenses. However, anyone who walks around and visits with people in Las Animas will learn that money made in the United States is also spent on consumer goods such as radios, cassette players, televisions, and for some, washing machines and VCRs. Certain items, like radios, stoves, and televisions are found in a majority of homes. They are associated with migrants who are doing reasonably well, making a moderate living from their transnational labor. More expensive items, such as VCRs and parabolic antennae, are less evenly distributed. In order to have one of these, household members have to be doing quite well. Dollars also pay for a sizeable share of appliances, electronic equipment, vehicles, and other goods.

As these new consumer necessities are accumulated, dollars are also saved and spent on building new homes and improving existing ones. However, compared to some migrant communities, home improvement in Las Animas is relatively modest: better-off Animeños spent money on land and cattle (Goldring 1992a). Local and regional history (including the land reform, post-reform land
In part, on collectively mobilized resources. The rodeo ring where the *coleadera* is held and the community hall where the *fiesta* dance takes place have been among the most expensive, complex, and impressive projects. But paving the road to the municipal seat promised to be another such case. While federal, state, and local governments have supplemented community funds in some of these projects (schools, water, and roads), people feel that they were primarily responsible for them.

The early discussions about plans to pave the road to the municipal seat (1990-1991) demonstrated the significance of transnational community at the same time that they highlight the issue of defining membership in the community. During October of 1990 plans were underway to raise money in order to pay for the community’s share of the cost of the project. If the community came up with one-third of the total cost of $1,400,000,000.00 (old pesos), the government would pay the rest. In general, people I spoke with in California supported the idea of having the road paved, since it took nearly half an hour to travel the five kilometers to the municipal seat. However, when it came time to decide on how to collect the money, problems arose.

The initial proposal that each family pay a flat amount was objected to by people who pointed out that the proportion of U.S. wage earners per household was not constant, and that therefore a flat rate would be unfair to families with small numbers of working migrants. But then, asked others, why should a family with four unmarried sons and a father working in the United States pay nearly twice the amount that a family with two working sons would pay—if the share was calculated based on the number of workers? Others raised concerns over how to define a family: would this include married sons and daughters who had their own families? What about people with spouses who were not from Las Animas—how should they contribute? (This was most often raised with reference to women who had married outside the community.) Different versions of the definition of who was supposed to pay, and how much, competed for some time.²⁴

This example illustrates the difficulty of defining membership in a transnational community, even by its own members. Membership is somewhat fluid and is based on social relationships that must be enacted to be maintained. It also underscores the importance of practical definitions of community, that is, definitions based on actual practices such as financial participation in a collective project.
Although problems may come up in the collective mobilization of migrant earnings, it is clear that such funds can and often are channelled into community projects. The success of collective projects lies in their being framed as being for the good of “the community.” If only a few individuals stood to gain from them, there would be little reason for others to contribute funds. Some people in Las Animas pointed out that norteños with pickup trucks would benefit most from paving both the village streets and the roads to town, but paving the roads was desired by most people because it would shorten the trip into town considerably and make the road passable during the rainy season. A sewing cooperative in Las Animas had limited success because it was not considered to benefit more than its limited membership.

Community projects show how migrants can carve out areas of relatively autonomous community development, and create and maintain transnational community. While the state has provided funding for some of the projects, people feel that without the community contribution, the projects would never have taken place. People’s earnings, most of which come from transnational migration, are considered a vital element in the projects. Rather than ignoring development activities, migrants are taking an active role in community projects. They are involved in defining what projects are taken up, and how they are carried out. The process is not without conflict, but facilities and roads do get built.

The Annual Fiesta

The fiesta represents a context where private and community spending come together. As seen earlier, the fiesta plays an important contextual role in the display of social distinction. It provides a time and social and physical space for migrants and their families to display their consumer power and claim social distinction among fellow Animéños with whom they share a sense of community identity, and a field of meaning that includes understandings about claims associated with status and stratification. Animéños say that every year the fiesta is more elaborate and people spend more on preparations. Although transmigrants do not return every year, many, particularly younger people, try to make it back every two or three years at fiesta time. During the 1989 fiesta people agreed that attendance had risen noticeably since the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) provided a way for the formerly undocumented to regularize their status in the United States. Despite more frequent returns, migrants continued to spend quite a bit of money on their return. Some migrants reported spending from $600 to $1,500 during a one- or two-week trip back to Las Animas in 1989. (For 1995 the figures were in the $1,000 to $3,500 range). Men paid for colegaderas, music, and beer for themselves and friends, while women spent most of their money on clothes and gifts. This may impose limits on the frequency of return in the future. The fiesta also allows people to generate and spend money for community improvements. They are proud of the community hall, colegadera, schools, roads, and other improvements made with fiesta funds. Despite complaints about the rising cost of returning for the fiesta, arguments over how the money made from it will be spent, and accusations of financial mismanagement, the fiesta continues to be staged.

The Differentiation of Social Space

The social space of the transnational community is not uniform. As part of the process of creating a transnational community, the social role of the village of Las Animas has changed. Working in the United States has shifted the physical location of work to several sites in el norte, and altered the spatial equation between one’s place of work and site(s) of consumption and recreation (Rouse 1990, 1991; Goldring 1992a, 1996). The tendency to treat Las Animas as a privileged site of rest and relaxation, and sites in California as the place of work is reflected in comparative statements about feeling freer (más libre) in Mexico, versus living a highly regulated and constrained life in the United States (cf. Rouse 1991). These statements are particularly common from men, whose migration to the United States involves different kinds of discontinuities in the gendered use of social space compared to women.12

The differentiation of social space in transnational migrant circuits and communities is important because it may have a fragmenting and ambiguous effects on the possibilities people have for making social and civic claims, on either side of the border. To the degree that work and productive activities do not take place on the Mexican side of the border, opportunities for expressing work-related claims
may diminish. Because migrants work in the United States, the Mexican state can focus employment policies and activities on other sectors of the population, thereby excluding migrants from the pool of potential workers and citizens. However, to the extent that U.S. sites of migrant circuits become places of social production and reproduction as well as work, and migrants become somewhat involved in civil society in the United States, then their opportunities for making claims in the United States may broaden.

Claims made upon the Mexican state for services and infrastructure may be strengthened by the ability to leverage migrant earnings into community shares of project costs which are supplemented with government funds. But this could also be seen as a reduction of the state’s financial responsibility in the arena of rural development—a case of the state getting “off the hook.” Thus, the differentiation of social space in transnational communities points to contradictory tendencies. On one hand there is the possibility of constructing a sphere of relatively autonomous action, and on the other is the possibility that social spaces are too fragmented to achieve meaningful long-term change.

Social and Political Transformation

Transnational communities may represent important arenas of social change. As transnational wage workers, migrants are spending on global goods and outfitting themselves, their families, and their homes with the signs of material well-being. Migrants are constituting themselves as transnational wage workers, and their communities as places where such workers/consumers live. The fact that many migrants spend considerable sums of dollars in Mexico supports the conception of a transnational arena of activity in which transnational wage workers do not necessarily sever social, economic, or political ties with their community and country of origin. Rather, transnational migration leads to multiple and not always coherent class affiliations, community identities, geographic and social spaces of action, and conceptions of what is wanted and can be acquired. Migrants use their financial resources in ways that reflect these changes. They also spend their money within a social, historical, and regional context that creates preferences for particular forms of spending and investment.

People in the Las Animas transnational community conform less and less to unitary conceptions of campesinos or jornaleros dedicated to agricultural work. The village retains an important role in the social life of the migrant circuits, but not the “productive” role prescribed by most development planners. It has become a setting in which migrants and their families can translate earnings into social status among people who speak the same language of stratification. This is something they have been relatively less able to do in the United States, at least until recently.

There is a strong political dimension to the nexus of transnational migration, the social construction of community across space and time, and private consumption based on spending migrant earnings. Migration can allow people to transform their socioeconomic status, in part because of the multiple class experiences associated with being in the United States versus being in Mexico, but perhaps more importantly, by obtaining goods and services that were previously beyond their level of income and political power. This transformed assemblage of goods has reoriented local regimes of stratification; it may also expand social or substantive citizenship.

The Limits Of Transnational Community

The final dimensions of transnational community that I want to consider are longevity and generalizability. Existing transnational communities and the concept of transnational communities have limits. The construction of community in migrant circuits is based on social practices and conditions that change over time and which may not be universal across space. Over time, there may be important changes in migrants’ participation in civil society in the United States and in their level of social production and reproduction in U.S. sites. Looking at migrant circuits across space, differences in rurality, urbanity, location, and history may lead to different forms of transnational communities. In some cases they may not arise, and in others they may have variable durations and forms. This variability places limits on the continued importance of the place of origin in the transnational migrant circuit, and on possibilities for the construction and maintenance of transnational communities.

Differences between circuits may become particularly important, especially in terms of the limits to transnationality in particular cases. For example, there is a second generation of Aniñanos that is
becoming increasingly incorporated socially and economically in the United States. Their employment patterns, practices of consumption, and the meanings associated with these are increasingly carried out in U.S. terms and contexts. It is likely that, over the next decade or so, the Las Animas transnational circuit will be much different, assuming that people continue to raise families in the United States. But second-generation incorporation does not occur in a uniform pattern in Mexico-U.S. transnational communities (Goldring 1992a).

Changes associated with the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) may be another source of limits on the continuity of transnational communities. Following legalization through IRCA, undocumented family members joined recently legalized spouses and parents (Gonzalez de la Rocha and Escobar Lapat 1990; Donato, Durand, and Massey 1992). It is likely that for highly northernized villages or towns, the proportion of entire families spending long periods of time in the United States will rise while the proportion of village-based families in Mexico will decline. In relatively small communities (of up to five to seven thousand) with high proportions of multi-local transmigrant families, this will alter and perhaps reduce the importance of communities of origin. On the other hand, it may give them new significance as vacation destinations. Future research must examine transnational communities originating in larger localities, and what happens as second generations become increasingly involved in social and cultural production and reproduction in the United States.

The construction of transnational community is a contingent process. It does not take place in all migrant circuits, nor does it occur in the same manner across circuits. The generalizability of the construction of transnational communities needs to be investigated further, along with the relationship between participation in transnational communities and other forms of community in different sites of transnational communities.

CONCLUSION

I have outlined key dimensions of transnational community in the context of Mexico-U.S. migration by showing how such community is created and maintained. Over time and across space, Mexican migrants often participate in the social construction of a transnational community. This community has several important dimensions. It is a community of kinship and shared memories, a source of social capital, and an arena of identity formation. Private spending in the place of origin allow migrants and their families to claim and display status, reorienting the regime of stratification. Collective spending allows community members to make changes in their communities; it also embodies claims about the kinds of services, amenities, and infrastructure their community should have.

This suggests that social theorists and policymakers should take a more comprehensive look at migrants and immigrants who may be operating in a transnational context. Studying foreign born groups only in the context of their host-country may place unnecessary limits on analyses and interpretations. For example, Mexicans’ historically low naturalization rates may be better understood if their possible transnationality is considered. Similarly, research in Mexico should not ignore transnationalism. For example, analyses of local responses to government policies could examine the possible mediating effects of transnationalism.

The conception of transnational community highlights social and political change in transnational migration. Through migration, transmigrants may develop multiple social identities and make changes in their social statuses. They may cease to be marginal campesinos (or urban wage workers) whose only political capital is a vote to sell. Instead, they become transnational workers who can use their money to transform their individual and family levels of living, as well as many material aspects of their communities of origin. In the process, they reconstruct the physical settings and social contexts from which they migrate.

Through labor migration, migrants have been able to alter patterns of private and community spending and consumption and their relationship to outside political entities, including local, state, and national governments. Rather than depending entirely on these bodies, Animenos have mobilized significant shares of resources required for community projects, and in many ways, they have raised their level of living without assistance from these bodies. Thus, the transnational community represents a social space in which members may obtain goods and services and assume socioeconomic statuses that nation-states have not made available to them. Transmigrants may thus transform their sociopolitical position vis-à-vis regional governments and the state, possibly expanding their social citizenship.
The transnational community can be a locus of social and political affiliation and socioeconomic organization other than the nation-state. This community represents a form of organization through which political, social, and economic identities and statuses may be transformed—within contextual limits of history and social structures and institutions.

Transnational migrants contribute to the blurring of borders, and their communities change the meaning of former boundaries. However, national policies on both sides of the border continue to regulate employment, regional investment, food prices, authorized migration, and many other areas that affect migrants' lives. It is not clear under what circumstances the differentiation of social space within transnational communities may accentuate political marginalization, or, alternatively, establish contexts in which dependence on nation-states becomes less relevant (cf. Goldring 1992b, Smith 1995).

Research on ongoing changes in the use of social space in transnational communities is needed to examine U.S. "settlement," or how localities that were primarily sites of work have become places of social reproduction for transmigrants. As people become participants in various kinds of communities in the host country, what happens to participation in the transnational community? How does membership in particular transnational migrant communities mediate participation in different U.S.-based communities?

These questions reflect a concern with the implications of stressing transnationality over involvement in local U.S. communities. Chavez (1994) points out that different images of Mexicans in the United States have correspondingly diverse policy implications. People seen as sojourners, because of their transnationality, are more easily marginalized politically, economically, and socially, as indicated by current efforts to withhold rights and services from U.S.-born children of undocumented persons in California. Researchers can keep this in mind and proceed with questions about how, when, and why transmigrants participate in different communities, and explore the social, political, and economic implications of participation in different kinds of communities.

An agenda for future research on transnational migration should include an examination of the extent to which the construction of transnational communities is accompanied by the differentiation of social space, and whether and how this leads to the creation of spheres of relative autonomy and empowerment, marginalization, or combinations thereof—with respect to nation-states. Comparative research can also address the temporal limits of transnational communities, and variation in types of communities over time and during particular period in different communities. The effects of membership in particular transnational communities on intergenerational socioeconomic mobility also need to be examined on both sides of the border. Further research can also explore the relationship between transnational communities and identity formation by addressing, for example, the ways in which different kinds of transnational communities mediated the formation of ethnic (and/or minority) identities in host countries.

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NOTES

1. They use this argument to explain differential patterns of entrepreneurship among different immigrant and minority groups (Portes and Zhou 1992; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

2. This paper is based on a comparative study of two Mexico-U.S. migrant enclaves, one originating in Las Animas, Zacatecas, and the other in Gomez Farías, Michoacán (Goldring 1991, 1992a; Mines 1981; López 1986). The present discussion focuses on Las Animas. Migration from Las Animas to the United States began in the early part of this century, increased substantially during the Bracero labor contract program (1942-1964), and climbed again during the late 1960s. In 1988, the prevalence of migration to the United States was fairly high: 92 percent of households surveyed in Las Animas had at least one person with U.S. migration experience (Goldring 1992a, p. 128).
3. The celebration of a girl’s fifteenth birthday, marking her transition to adulthood.

4. Rick Mines, whose study of Las Animas is one of the first studies to talk about a community-tion of tradition of migration (my emphasis), captured the image of this truck on film (Mines 1981, p. 2). When I was in Las Animas, this truck was still making its rounds.

5. The fee was 25,000 pesos per colecta during the 1989 fiesta, which was about $10.00 at the time. The wage for day laborers in Las Animas was between 20,000 and 25,000 pesos.

6. I do not want to convey the idea that communities are isolated or “contained” prior to U.S.-bound transnational migration. Extensive trade linkages and internal migration have expanded the reach of social networks and altered the boundaries of communities for some time in Mexico, as in many other places. As Wolf (1959, 1966) pointed out, peasants and other rural inhabitants are connected to a global system of production and exchange, and located within a national and international economic and political hierarchy. However, transnational migration represents a different kind of expansion of community. As U.S.-migration becomes prevalent in a particular place, growing numbers of people acquire connections that link them with a different culture, society, economy, and nation-state.

7. Blick Schiller, Basch, and Blanco-Szanton use the term *transmigrants* to describe immigrants who build social fields that link their countries of origin and settlement (1992, p. 1).


10. Caribbean migrants, from small island nations, are more geographically concentrated in their U.S. residential patterns compared to Mexicans. The majority of Cubans in the United States are in the Miami area and parts of New Jersey. Haitians are also concentrated in south Florida. Dominicans are concentrated in the New York area. In contrast, while most Mexicans go to California and Texas, significant numbers go to Illinois, Washington, and New York. And in California, Mexicans live in urban as well as rural areas, dispersed throughout most of the state. Four states in Mexico are known for their high rates of migration to the north, but other states also send rising numbers of transmigrants. In Mexico the process appears to be relatively more localized than in the Caribbean: a particular locality in Mexico will be linked to several in the United States, but it is possible that this locality will have different rates of migration compared to nearby localities. In contrast, in the Caribbean case, entire countries become linked to specific cities and regions in the United States. Place of origin differences may become less important among Caribbean migrants if most of their co-nationals live and work in the same U.S. labor market.

11. Noting intra-community similarities and inter-community differences should not preclude examining stratification and inequality within communities.

12. In some cases it may be appropriate to anchor it in a municipality or region of origin, depending on the density of social ties and transmigrants’ notions of community boundaries.

13. In 1988, 76 percent of men in households surveyed in Las Animas had migrated to the United States, whereas 21 percent of women had done so.

14. Whether or how often women will return to the village or support decisions to invest in the village once they have spent some time in the United States is not a trivial issue. It can be a source of conflict among couples who have spent a long time in the United States, and/or raised children in there. Husbands often wish to return in the village, while their wives want to remain in the United States, visiting the village periodically (Goldring 1996, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992).

15. A man’s father and/or brother often plays a key role in managing resources, but his wife is also expected to do a good job. The definition of “doing a good job” may vary, but it should reflect the man’s wishes. In some cases it may mean saving money, rather than spending it, while in others it may require spending it a certain way. Wives of migrant men often put aside money to build a home, oversee sharecropping, help sons to work as sharecroppers, and so on. They may also engage in informal embroidery work to supplement remittances.

16. I am following Guarnizo’s use of social capital as “a wealth of intangible social resources—such as information, social support, personal connections, and so forth—indispensable for achieving social, economic, and political goals” (1994, p. 74). This is a simple and useful definition of a concept that has received more abstract treatment. Coleman’s (1988) definition of social capital is reformulated by Portes and Sensenbrenner as “those expectations for action within a collectivity that affect the economic goals and goal-seeking behavior of its members, even if these expectations are not oriented toward the economic sphere” (1993, p. 1323). They identify bounded solidarity and enforceable trust as two important sources of social capital in ethnic communities. See Bourdieu (1984) on social capital, Portes and Zhou (1992) on social capital in ethnic communities in the United States, and Massey, Goldring, and Durand (1994) on the accumulation of social capital in transnational migration.

17. The importance of social capital and social networks is not constant over time, in historical or individual terms. Historically, different contexts of migration have implied different qualities of social capital and patterns of social contacts. For example, contract workers did not have to create and depend on social networks in the same way as early migrants who were not contract workers. But even formeravers describe the importance of kin and other relationships in making their way in the United States. As migration experience accumulates in a community, the quality of social capital should improve (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994). In individual terms, experienced migrants are less likely to draw on social contacts over time if they have already “learned the ropes” or have steady employment.
18. Community-level identification is also generated through endogamous marriage and fictive kin relations, the spending of migrant earnings, and other dimensions of transnational community discussed elsewhere in this paper.

19. Glazer's (1954) observation that southern Italians developed a sense of national identity only after migrating to the United States has been echoed by migration scholars studying other ethnic and national origin groups in the United States (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). This also holds for Mexicans, although regional and ethnic differences are also strengthened through migration. These sometimes appear stronger than national identity, perhaps due to the continuous arrival of new migrants and the importance of transnational communities as a source of social capital in the United States.

20. Anderson uses the concept of pilgrimages to describe the shared experiences that an interchangeable set of functionaries will undergo as they travel through a succession of educational and/or job postings (1983, chap. 4), and argues that these pilgrimages foster a sense of community among fellow pilgrims (pp. 55-56). Migrants, like functionaries, are interchangeable members of a social group that provide American employers with a particular type of worker. In the case of a specific migrant circuit the people are not from otherwise unrelated localities like Anderson's pilgrims, but they come from different families and social strata. The analogy to Anderson's bureaucratic pilgrims is useful because it points to the identity-forming dimension of transnational migration.

21. I heard comments from older migrants about how easy younger migrants had it now, compared to their experiences, but it was clear that the common experience of crossing the border, working in low-wage jobs in the United States, and confronting discrimination, generated strong bonds. See Alonso (1988) on the role of stories/histories in imagining community or forging community identity.

22. Spending patterns in the United States are also important: they indicate how people are becoming incorporated, socially and economically, in the United States (Goldring 1992a).

23. How the ends of private and family spending or community projects are arrived at is often problematic. There are gender and generational struggles over the spending of money within families. Similarly, "community" priorities are not defined without struggles that may be based on gender, generation, class, and other divisions, including old family rivalries. Here I am interested in the distinction between the more "private" (individual and family) versus "collective or public" (community) forms of spending U.S. earnings.

24. The issue had not been entirely resolved during the spring of 1991, although some of the money had been collected by the pairs of men commissioned to collect money in various sites of the Anáhuac migrant circuit. The road was completed by the 1994 fiesta.

25. Men's use of social and physical space is reduced in the United States by the disciplining forces of proletarianization. In contrast, women's use of space is more likely to expand beyond the domestic sphere (Rouse 1990; Goldring 1996; Gléthill 1995). See Grasmuck and Pessar (1991, chap. 6) for an analysis of gender relations in the context of Dominican migration.

26. In larger communities with significant proportions of members remaining in Mexico, transnationalism is likely to have a longer time horizon.

27. Following this line of thought, one would add the desire to improve social citizenship, in the form of access to services and infrastructure, as another motivation for migration.

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