Introduction: the debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism

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Abstract This introduction explores reasons for the continuing debate on the subject of transnationalism and persistent scepticism about the significance of the topic. The basis for such disagreements has to do less with the actual existence of the phenomenon than with methodological shortcomings that led to its overestimation in the early literature and the conceptual failure to distinguish between cross-border activities conducted by major institutions and by private actors in civil society. I explore these various problems seeking to clarify the actual scope of the phenomenon of transnationalism and its novel character. Despite recent findings that point to limited numerical involvement of immigrant groups in transnational activities, the latter remain significant because of their prospective growth and their impact on both immigrant adaptation in receiving countries and the development prospects of sending nations and communities. The evidence presented in the following articles document in detail these various aspects and indicates the multiple forms adopted by this phenomenon among immigrant groups in Europe and the United States.

This issue of Global Networks presents five studies focused on the topic of immigrant transnationalism. The collection can be read as a conceptual and empirical continuation of a similar issue published under the title ‘Transnational Communities’ in Ethnic and Racial Studies (ERS, March 1999). In relation to that volume, the present one extends the study of transnationalism in three ways: first, by deliberately including studies by European and North American authors focused on the experiences of immigrant minorities in the two continents; second, by presenting some of the first quantitative estimates of the incidence of economic and political transnationalism among specific groups; and third, by making use of the methodological guidelines advanced in the Introduction to the earlier ERS collection (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999).

Without repeating them in detail here, these guidelines sought to give conceptual rigor to the concept of transnationalism by avoiding its application to a multitude of disparate phenomena, many of which are already known and studied under more familiar names. In brief, that introductory essay argued that the coining of a new concept and the opening of a new field of inquiry can only be justified if certain conditions are met. These include establishing that the phenomenon in question actually exists; delimiting its scope and distinguishing it from related phenomena; describing its principal types; and identifying the necessary conditions for its emergence and growth. While not all the authors in the present collection agree with
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the definition of transnationalism advanced in that essay, they all take seriously these
injunctions and, in particular, the point that a concept that seeks to cover an excessive
range of empirical phenomena ends up by applying to none in particular, thereby
losing its heuristic value. Thus if ‘transnationalism’ encompasses all that immigrant
groups do, it defines nothing in particular and mostly ends up re-labelling what was
already known under other terms.

The authors of the following studies seek, each in their own way, to extend and
refine the accumulating knowledge about this phenomenon based on a clear
delineation of its scope of predication, that is what transnationalism is and is not. I
aim in this introduction to complement their efforts by examining the reasons why the
concept continues to be so contested, proposing conceptual distinctions that may help
clarify the reasons for these debates, and advancing some ideas about the practical
significance of transnationalism, even when exceptional and restricted to a minority
of the relevant populations.

The debate on transnationalism, part I: the problem of numbers

The discovery of transnational practices among immigrants by an enterprising group
of anthropologists led by Nina Glick Schiller, Cristina Blanc-Szanton, and Linda
Basch led to an enthusiastic flurry of activity seeking to document the most varied
manifestations of this phenomenon. Transnationalism was defined by these authors as
‘the process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain
multi-stranded social, economic, and political relations that link together their
societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social
fields that cross national borders’ (Basch et al. 1994: 6).

The empirical work conducted by this pioneering group of researchers led to a full
appreciation of the significance of the processes that they had uncovered but,
simultaneously, to an exaggeration of their scope. From these earlier writings, it
appeared that ‘everyone was going transnational’, a trend captured by the re-labelling
of immigrants as ‘transmigrants’. Critics lost no time in puncturing these exaggerated
claims by pointing to the easily proven fact that many immigrants were not involved
in these activities or took part only on an occasional basis (Guarnizo and Portes 2001;
Waldinger 1998). One reason for the overextended claims of the earlier writings had
to do with an understandable enthusiasm about the novelty of the phenomenon and, in
particular, the ways in which it challenged models of immigrant assimilation (Glick
Schiller and Fouron 1999). The concept of transnationalism did provide a new
perspective on contemporary migratory movements and generated a novel set of
hypotheses about their patterns of settlement and adaptation at variance with
established models.

A second and more decisive reason for the overextension of the concept was the
methodology used by the earlier studies. These were, without exception conducted
mostly by social anthropologists and focused on specific immigrant groups. Research
of this kind has the advantage of providing rich descriptions of the phenomenon in
question, but the disadvantage of obscuring its scope. In particular, this methodology
has a strong tendency to ‘sample on the dependent variable’, focusing on instances
where the phenomenon of interest is present, but not on those where it is absent. In
this particular instance, qualitative studies were able to document the existence of
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immigrant transnationalism, but not its numerical incidence. Yet the very impetus generated by the early empirical findings led to their generalization to the entire immigrant population.

More recent research based on a different methodology has been able to confirm the empirical existence of transnational activities, but has also demonstrated their limited scope. A comparative study based on probability surveys of Colombian, Dominican, and Salvadoran immigrants in their respective areas of urban concentration in the United States found that participation in transnational economic and political activities is exceptional. Even after deliberately oversampling entrepreneurs through a supplementary multiple referral design, the study found that transnational entrepreneurs represented a small minority of their respective immigrant communities (Portes, Haller, and Guarnizo 2001).

Immigrants regularly involved in transnational political activities do not represent more than 18 per cent of all the groups studied and, in most cases, this proportion is much less. Even when singling out the most popular form of political transnationalism – participation in hometown civic associations – and the national group most involved in these activities – Salvadorans – regular participants represent only 16.3 per cent of the sample (Guarnizo and Portes 2001). Based on data from the same study, Landolt (this issue) is able to document the similarly limited involvement of Salvadoran immigrants in transnational economic activities.

Clearly then not all immigrants are ‘transmigrants’ and claims to the contrary needlessly weaken the validity of empirical findings on the topic. It is more useful to conceptualize transnationalism as one form of economic, political, and cultural adaptation that co-exists with other, more traditional forms. Relative to them, transnational practices are still quite limited in absolute and relative numbers. As we will see in the final section, however, their relative exceptionality does not detract from their theoretical and practical significance.

The debate on transnationalism, part II: the problem of adumbration

Shortly after the original pronouncements by Glick Schiller and her collaborators on the novelty and importance of transnationalism, a second set of critics rejected these claims by pointing to the presence of similar practices among immigrant groups in the past. At the turn of the twentieth century, Polish, Italian, and Russian immigrants also forged ‘multi-stranded relations’ linking together their societies of origin and settlement. They invested in land and businesses back home, crossed the Atlantic to visit families, and sponsored political causes favouring independence or a change of regime (Foner 1997). The independence of Poland and Czechoslovakia was actively supported by their large immigrant communities in America; the struggle against Czarism found ardent partisans among the Russian émigrés (Glazer 1954). On the other side of the world, the overseas Chinese had been creating for decades complex trading communities spanning nations across the Pacific Rim (Granovetter 1995).

The point that there was really nothing new in the cross-border activities of contemporary immigrants was even embraced by some of the first proponents of the concept of transnationalism who failed to realize that, if these practices had always existed, then there was no novelty or justification for the introduction of a new term. Reasons why the concept does refer to an emergent empirical phenomena were
examined in detail in the introduction to the *ERS* special issue (Portes et al. 1999) and are discussed in detail in the articles by Landolt and Levitt in this issue. There is no reason to belabour them further. The point worth noting here is that the debate surrounding transnationalism represents an exemplary instance of what Robert K. Merton referred to as the fallacy of adumbration.

Merton dedicated the first chapter of his classic *Social theory and social structure* to this problem, introducing it with a citation by Alfred North Whitehead:

> But to come very near to a true theory and to grasp its precise application are two very different things … Everything of importance has been said before by someone who did not discover it.

(Merton 1968:1)

The thrust of the argument is that, in science, it is a common occurrence for a significant finding to be preceded by a number of observations that pointed to the phenomenon in question, but failed to note its significance. Once a scientist or group of scientists have brought the nature and importance of the phenomenon to full public attention, it is a common occurrence to point to the trail of earlier ‘findings’ that had identified it as well. The fallacy of adumbration consists in negating the novelty of a scientific discovery by pointing to these earlier instances. In Merton’s words (1968: 22), the adumbrator believes that, if something is new, it is not really true, and if something is true, it is not actually new. Precedents can always be found:

> What is more common is that an idea is formulated definitely enough and emphatically enough that it cannot be overlooked by contemporaries, and it then becomes easy to find anticipations of it.

(Merton 1968:16.)

Multiple historical instances of grassroots cross-border activities exist and have been extensively documented. Yet, until the concept of immigrant transnationalism was coined and refined, the common character and significance of these phenomena remained obscure. The parallels between Russian and Polish émigré political activism and the trading activities of the Chinese diaspora, for example, could not have been established because there was no theoretical idea that linked them and pointed to their similarities. In its absence, the respective literatures remained disparate and isolated from each other, as well as from present events.

Once the concept of transnationalism made its appearance, it was a relatively straightforward task to point to these precedents and uncover commonalities among them. By itself, there is nothing wrong with this exercise and it can indeed provide useful results by exploring parallel threads linking contemporary events with similar ones in the past. The fallacy of adumbration consists in negating the value of the new concept by pointing to this evidence. Like major works of literature, scientific discoveries create their own predecessors. Connections between the latter could not have been made in the absence of the novel insight. Thus, the innovators in this field of study can rest assured of the significance of their finding. Today, we rediscover and reappraise the transnational activities of Polish peasants, Chinese traders, and Russian émigrés not because such instances had been ignored in the past, but because...
their common relevance as builders of ‘multi-stranded’ social fields across national borders has now been placed firmly before the eyes of the scientific community.

The debate on transnationalism, part III: the problem of multiple meanings

The term ‘transnational’ was not coined recently. As early as 1916, we find it in the title of a classic article by Randolph S. Bourne. In that piece, ‘Transnational America’, Bourne argued that the country was doing a disservice to itself and its immigrants by pressuring them to conform to a homogenous world, losing in the process their distinct cultural heritage. In his words,

> Just so surely as we tend to disintegrate these nuclei of nationalistic culture do we tend to create hordes of men and women without a spiritual country, cultural outlaws without taste, without standards but those of the mob … Those who came to find liberty achieve only license. They become the flotsam of American life.

(Bourne 1916: 90–1)

The concept has subsequently been used in multiple ways, referring in particular to the activities of global corporations. Partially in response to this earlier meaning, Guarnizo and Smith (1998) coined the terms ‘transnationalism from above’ and ‘from below’ to refer respectively to the cross-border initiatives of governments and corporations, on the one hand, and those of immigrants and grassroots entrepreneurs, on the other. Although we accepted this terminology in the ERS essay cited previously, subsequent usage suggests that it proves confusing because it forces together under the same label very disparate sets of activities. Clearly, a different typology is needed. The term ‘transnational’ has an appealing ring to it that leads to its usage in many diverse contexts. If confusion is to be avoided among these multiple meanings, some form of consensus needs to be reached about the appropriate usage of the term.

The following typology is self-consciously nominalist, in that it accepts that concepts are words that can be given multiple definitions rather than possessing any essential meaning. Their value is not given by their intrinsic truth but by their utility in guiding research and facilitating scientific interaction. In that spirit, it is clear that the validity of any typology depends on the degree to which it is acceptable to the relevant public, in this case the community of scholars conducting research in this field. Actions conducted across national borders fall under four broad categories: those conducted by national states; those conducted by formal institutions that are based in a single country; those conducted by formal institutions that exist and operate in multiple countries; those conducted by non-institutional actors from civil society.

Examples of the first are the embassies, consulates, and diplomatic activities of national governments. Examples of the second are the exchange activities conducted with other countries by certain universities; the export drives of agricultural producers from a particular country; and the multi-country tours organized by performing groups (orchestras, dance troupes, etc.) based on a specific city or nation. Examples of the third kind of cross-border actors are global corporations with production and office facilities in multiple countries; the Catholic Church and other global religions; and the various specialized agencies of the United Nations. Examples of the fourth are
It is useful to distinguish among these very different types of actors rather than lumping them all under the same label. For this purpose, we may reserve the term *international* to refer to the activities and programmes of the first and second types—that is, those conducted by states and other nationally-based institutions in other countries. The distinct characteristic of these activities is that they are carried out across borders in pursuit of the goals of large organizations that possess a clear national affiliation. The term *multinational* may be assigned to the third type of activity, those conducted by institutions whose purposes and interests transcend the borders of a single nation-state. While these institutions may be headquartered in a specific national or urban space, say New York or the Vatican, the very character of their goals renders them simultaneously committed and active in the social, political, and economic life of a number of countries.

Lastly, *transnational* activities would be those initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, be they organized groups or networks of individuals across national borders. Many of these activities are informal, that is they take place outside the pale of state regulation and control. Even when supervised by state agencies, the key aspect of transnational activities is that they represent goal-oriented initiatives that require coordination across national borders by members of civil society. These activities are undertaken on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the state or other corporate bodies.

Thus defined, immigrant transnationalism represents just one manifestation of this type of action. Peter Evans (2000) has recently highlighted the potential effectiveness of grassroots transnational coalitions in exposing the abuses of multinational corporations in Third World countries. By publicly shaming multinational giants for their labour practices in poorer nations, these grassroots alliances of Third World workers and First World activists have succeeded in producing significant changes in work conditions that otherwise would not have occurred. Evans concludes this analysis by expressing the hope that such transnational coalitions rising from civil society can provide in the future an effective counterweight to the strategies of profit-seeking multinationals.

While there is nothing sacrosanct in the labels proposed, it is important to distinguish between these different sets of activities both to avoid terminological confusion and to facilitate analysis of their interactions. Thus, the ways in which the *international* policies of national states affect the forms and scope of immigrant *transnational* initiatives has become a major analytic issue in this field of study. Similarly, the contest between corporate multinationals and transnational activists highlighted by Evans represents another significant terrain for future inquiry. Figure 1 summarizes this typology with examples from three substantive areas.

**Significance of immigrant transnationalism**

Having thus sought to delimit the meaning of transnationalism, a word must be said about its significance. After removing from its scope of predication the activities of governments and large corporations and showing that cross-border activities...
conducted on a regular basis are exceptional among immigrants and other private actors, a legitimate question can be raised about the importance of such events. As voiced by critics, the issue is whether transnationalism, even if real, addresses a phenomenon of any lasting significance.

**Figure 1: cross-border activities by different types of actors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td><strong>Economic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>Establishment of embassies and organization of diplomatic missions abroad by national governments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multinational</td>
<td>United Nations and other international agencies charged with monitoring and improving specialized areas of global life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational</td>
<td>a) Non-governmental associations established to monitor human rights globally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Hometown civic associations established by immigrants to improve their sending communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to immigrant transnationalism, there are three reasons why the phenomenon deserves careful attention. The first is that, although numerically limited at present, there is every reason to expect its growth in the future. In that respect we should note that its present exceptionality refers to the relative proportion of those involved on a regular basis, not to their absolute number. Already thousands upon thousands of immigrants and their home country counterparts have organized transnational enterprises, mobilized for political action, and transformed the character of local religious and cultural forms through their continuous back-and-forth exchanges. In the future, the number and scope of such activities can be expected to expand significantly because, unlike the grassroots activism described by Evans, immigrant transnationalism is not driven by ideological reasons but by the very logic of global capitalism.

This logic creates a continuous demand for immigrant labour in the advanced countries for reasons that have been analysed in detail elsewhere (Massey 1998; Portes 1999; Zolberg 1989). The subsequent expansion of immigrant populations in First World cities generates, in turn, the basis for the future expansion of transnational
activities. These initiatives are also fostered by the common situation encountered by Third World immigrants, namely as occupants of stigmatized low-paid occupations and subjects of widespread discrimination. These difficult conditions offer a strong incentive for newcomers, especially the more educated and better connected, to mobilize their transnational networks in search of alternatives (Guarnizo and Portes 2001; Poros, Levitt, this issue).

Global capitalism has encouraged the invention and refinement of technological marvels in transportation and communication that greatly facilitate the implementation of long-distance initiatives. As noted by several authors in this collection, the advent of cheap and efficient air transport, telephone and facsimile technology, and above all the Internet, endows contemporary immigrants with resources entirely beyond the reach of their predecessors. While, with the wisdom of hindsight, it is possible to identify and study the ‘transnational’ ventures of earlier Italian, Polish, and Russian immigrants, such activities could never have acquired the density, real-time character, and flexibility made possible by today’s technologies.

A second reason why immigrant transnationalism is significant is that it can alter, in various ways, the process of integration to the host society of both first-generation immigrants and their offspring. One possibility is that successful transnational entrepreneurs eventually return home, taking their families along. The common practice among immigrants of investing in land and ‘retirement homes’ in their communities of origin points in this direction, although no hard evidence exists at present of what proportion actually return on a permanent basis. A more intriguing possibility is that transnational activities may actually accompany and support successful adaptation to the host society.

The process of assimilation has been conventionally described as the gradual learning and adoption of the language, culture, and behavioural patterns of the receiving society and corresponding abandonment of those of the countries of origin. This process was traditionally regarded as a precondition for the socio-economic advancement of immigrants (Alba and Nee 1997; Warner and Srole 1945). In the contemporary world, there is reason to doubt that this progression occurs so commonly or so easily. Immigrants relegated to the bottom of the host labour market and subjected to discrimination because of their phenotypical or cultural characteristics face serious barriers to successful integration (Sassen 1988, 1995; Stepick et al. 2001; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Under these conditions, transnationalism offers a viable alternative to bypass both labour market constraints and nativist prejudice. The economic resources created by transnational enterprise can empower immigrants to resist exploitation in the labour market and propel themselves and their families into the native middle-class. Table 1 presents data from the same study cited previously, conducted among Colombian, Dominican, and Salvadoran immigrants in four US cities. The data show that transnational entrepreneurs are better educated and more economically successful than either purely domestic entrepreneurs or wage workers. In addition, and contrary to what conventional assimilation theories would lead us to expect, results indicate that transnational entrepreneurs are more likely to be US citizens and to have resided in the country for longer periods of time than the sample average. A parallel analysis of political transnationalism based on the same study indicates similar trends (Guarnizo and Portes 2001).
### Table 1: characteristics of Latin American immigrants in the United States by type of employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wage worker</th>
<th>Domestic entrepreneur</th>
<th>Transnational entrepreneur</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/executive background, %</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly income, US $</td>
<td>1251</td>
<td>2836</td>
<td>3143</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US citizen, %</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of residence in USA</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with life in USA, %</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>1202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Source: CIEP survey. See text and endnote 2 for details.
b. Owners of firms with no transnational linkages.
c. Owners of firms with regular transnational linkages: markets, sources of supplies and/or credit.

The finding that immigrant transnationalism is associated with a more secure economic and legal status in the host country contradicts the view that these activities are marginal and conducted mainly by the less acculturated and more recent arrivals. Paradoxically, the cultivation of strong networks with the country of origin and the implementation of economic and political initiatives based on these networks may help immigrants solidify their position in the receiving society and cope more effectively with its barriers. Transnationalism provides these groups with an extra ‘lift’ in terms of material and moral resources unavailable to those cut off from these activities (Landolt, Poros, this issue).

There is no evidence at present that economic or political transnationalism is transmitted inter-generationally. Indeed, existing studies of the immigrant second generation in the United States point to a very rapid process of acculturation, including the widespread loss of parental languages (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: Ch. 6). Based on these results, it is likely that the principal effect of immigrant transnationalism on the adaptation of the second generation is indirect, through its influence on the parents. To the extent that these activities support the successful economic and social integration of immigrant families, they will bear positively on second-generation youths.
Based on his detailed study of a Mexican immigrant community in New York City and its hometown in the village of Ticuani, Puebla, Smith (2001) reports that second-generation adolescents are indeed thoroughly acculturated, but that they still use their parents’ hometown both as a place of recreation and as symbolic support for their identity as Mexican-Americans. In his study of migration of a mid-size Mexican city in the state of Michoacan, Fitzgerald (2000) echoes the same finding, reporting that immigrant parents frequently send their children back home for extensive periods as a way of inculcating family values and protecting them against the dangers of drug use and gangs in American streets. By and large, regular involvement in transnational activities appears to be a one-generation phenomenon, at least in the United States. However, this involvement can have resilient effects on the second generation both through its influence on the socio-economic integration of parents and through the latter’s persistent efforts to create ‘bridges’ between their children and the culture and communities left behind.

A third reason why the study of transnationalism is significant is its bearing on the development of sending countries. Several countries of out-migration, such as Mexico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, have one-tenth or more of their populations living abroad. Commonly, the second largest city in terms of population of these countries is not within their national borders, but abroad in metropolises such as New York, Los Angeles, Miami, London, and Paris (Massey et al. 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Governments of sending countries have moved in recent years to intensify their contacts with their respective diasporas and involve them in various forms in national life. Dual citizenship and dual nationality laws for emigrants have been passed in many countries; expatriates have been granted rights to vote in national elections; and some governments have even explored ways to grant emigrant communities representation in the national legislatures. Further, several of these governments have established agencies and programmes abroad targeting their emigrants and seeking to provide various services to them (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Landolt 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen, this issue; Smith 2000).

These new extra-territorial ambitions of Third World governments are easily understandable once we take into account the aggregate volume of remittances sent by migrants, their actual or potential investments in the home economy, and their political influence in terms of both contributions to parties and candidates in national elections and organized mobilizations abroad. The size of aggregate remittances often rival or exceed the value of the sending country’s traditional exports; domestic industries, such as residential construction, can become deeply dependent on migrants’ acquisitive power and demand; and a significant range of businesses has been created by returned migrants with capital and expertise accumulated abroad (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Levitt; Marques et al., this issue; Roberts et al. 1999).

National parties and political movements in sending countries have established permanent offices in cities of migrant concentration and conduct regular fundraising drives in them. Indeed the visits by party officials and political dignitaries of Third World countries to their expatriate communities in the United States or Europe have become commonplace. For sending country governments, their migrants have become increasingly important, not only as sources of remittances, investments, and political contributions, but also as potential ‘ambassadors’ or lobbyists in defence of national interests abroad (Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Levitt, this issue; Østergaard-Nielsen). The
government of Eritrea has gone as far as levying a permanent ‘war tax’ on their expatriates in Europe as a means to finance their struggle for independence from Ethiopia and subsequent national reconstruction (AI-Ali et al. 2001).

If transnationalism is important for national development, it is even more vital at the local level. As Landolt (2000, this volume) has repeatedly noted, towns and rural communities in sending countries that have civic committees of their natives abroad are definitively better off in terms of physical infrastructure – from church repairs to paved roads and health centres. The cumulative process of migration and the transnational activities of migrants can entirely transform the economic and political structure of sending areas as well as their culture. Local economies based on agricultural production become service economies fuelled by remittances and the increasingly diversified demand of migrants and their families. Traditional authoritarian politics are revolutionized by the growing economic power of migrants’ committees and their democratizing influence. Priests and pastors learn to make regular pilgrimages to their town’s ‘colonies’ abroad in order to minister to their parishioners and seek their support for various works. Indeed, church repairs are commonly the first sign of the change of fortune of a town with migrants’ civic committees abroad. Local youths no longer plan to become farmers or ranchers, but ready themselves for the time when they too will go abroad in search of fortune (Fitzgerald 2000; Levitt, this issue; Marques et al.).

An interesting dynamic develops in countries of out-migration among the various cross-border activities of actors of different levels of economic and social power. In terms of the typology described previously, the multinational activities of large corporations introduce new consumption aspirations and new sources of information about life in the First World, thereby reinforcing popular incentives for out-migration. Once migrant colonies become well established abroad, a flow of transnational economic and informational resources starts, ranging from occasional remittances to the emergence of a class of full-time transnational entrepreneurs. The cumulative effects of these dynamics come to the attention of national governments who reorient their international activities through embassies, consulates, and missions to recapture the loyalty of their expatriates and guide their investments and political mobilizations. The increased volume of demand created by migrant remittances and investments in their home countries support, in turn, the further expansion of the market for multinationals and encourage local firms to go abroad themselves, establishing branches in areas of immigrant concentration.

Reprise

The following articles explore these complex relationships in greater detail. The usual summary of contents in the introduction to an edited issue is omitted here, since the abstracts and introductory sections of the ensuing articles would make this exercise redundant. Jointly, the empirical data and theoretical analyses presented in this collection advance our knowledge of the phenomenon of transnationalism by showing its diverse geographical manifestations and the manifold ways in which the men and women involved in these activities seek to cope with the challenges of a globalized economy and the barriers encountered in home and host nations. The success of their initiatives stands as a tribute to human ingenuity and creates a partial counter to the hegemony
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of international and multinational actors in the world stage. Not only corporations, but common people can now cross borders in large numbers and with great flexibility, thus adding a novel and dynamic element to the evolution of global capitalism.

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Notes

1. The data on which this introduction to the special issue of Global Networks on New Research and Theory on Immigrant Transnationalism is partially based were collected as part of the Comparative Immigrant Entrepreneurship Project (CIEP) sponsored by the National Science Foundation of the United States, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Ford Foundation. The project’s principal investigators are Alejandro Portes and Luis E. Guarnizo of the University of California-Davis.

2. The survey was conducted as part of the Comparative Immigrant Entrepreneurship Project (CIEP), a collaborative study by four US universities in Los Angeles, New York, Providence, and Washington DC. The survey collected data on over 1200 immigrant families with a focus on their entrepreneurial activities and involvement in transnational ventures. CIEP is currently based at the Office of Population Research, Princeton University. Additional results from the project are presented below.

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