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A cross-border perspective on migration: beyond the assimilation/transnationalism debate

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ABSTRACT

The transnational perspective emerged in the early 1990s as an alternative to assimilation theory, gaining instant and wide influence. But curiously, the intellectual confrontation between these two perspectives was averted, as scholars concluded that persistent homeland engagement was fully compatible with hostland integration. This paper seeks to pick up that challenge. I demonstrate how a cross-border perspective, encompassing places of origin and destination and the flows of people, ideas, and resources between them, highlights the ways in which population movements across state borders create tensions on both receiving and sending sides. In the process, I will show how looking across borders paradoxically highlights the centrality of the territorial boundary, as it simultaneously underscores the importance of dissimilation – the social and political separation of immigrants from the people they have left behind – yet also the ways in which non-citizen status and foreign origins simultaneously hamper immigrants' ability to gain acceptance in receiving states while furnishing sending states with opportunities to reconnect with nationals abroad.

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The burgeoning literature on immigrant transnationalism is one of the academic success stories of our times. In retrospect, its timing appears perfect, emerging just when walls were going down, rather than up as they are today. But its beginnings were inauspicious, as it started from the periphery of a discipline peripheral to the mainstream of migration studies, launched by three scholars, whom, as one of them later pointed out, 'were living on the margins of the academic world (Glick Schiller 2004, 448)', lacking faculty positions and based far from the precincts of New York City's chattering class. Standing on the outside, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton issued their 1990 call, urging migration scholars to adopt a new perspective, one encompassing societies of emigration *and* immigration and attending to the circulation of ideas, resources, and communal engagements that international migrations invariably trigger. Yet that now-famous manifesto (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992) appeared in a conference proceedings published by the New York Academy of Sciences, not the type of outlet that usually attracts hordes of readers. 1994 saw the publication of *Nations Unbound* (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994), currently required reading and massively

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cited, but then brought to market by a small, little-known, now extinct publishing house with a list of fewer than 600 titles, most on topics very remote from the concerns of *Nations Unbound*.

The path from obscurity has since been rapid and vertiginous, with the sources of influence various. Marginality, usually a hindrance, in this case undoubtedly helped: Glick Schiller and her colleagues could see something that other researchers committed to more conventional approaches simply could not perceive. Once pointed in the right direction, migration scholars were then quickly able to find evidence of transnationalism, since cross-border ties are both cause and consequence of population movements across borders. Novelty lent additional appeal, as transnationalism was simultaneously introduced as both a new intellectual perspective and the salient characteristic distinguishing contemporary migrations from those gone by. Sensing that the train was about to leave the station, prominent gatekeepers then hopped on for the ride. With countless others following on in due course, it has turned out to be an incredible trip.

Yet just as migration scholars flocked to this new approach, assimilation – an idea once virtually abandoned – suddenly gained new life. Whereas in 1993 Nathan Glazer thought it necessary to ask whether assimilation was dead (Glazer 1993), by 2001, Rogers Brubaker could confidently proclaim that assimilation had returned. In the mid-1980s, Portes and Bach (1985) derided the concept of assimilation for assuming that societies, if periodically disrupted by the arrival of foreigners, were invariably restored to equilibrium as immigrants learned to emulate the majority and the majority came to accept the immigrants. Yet by the early 1990s, Portes and Zhou (1993) advanced the hypothesis of 'segmented assimilation', which gained iconoclastic fame not by rejecting assimilation, but rather by insisting on its inevitability, albeit with a twist. Revitalising the very same idea that he had just harshly criticised, Portes forecast that the children of middle-class immigrants would assimilate in breakneck speed, foreseeing a similar fate for the children growing up in ethnic enclaves with merely a one generation delay, after which the immigrants' grandchildren would be as assimilated as anyone else. While the children of labour migrants were supposedly destined for 'downward assimilation', that was a fate differing only in degree, not kind, as it also entailed a fundamental dissolution of the ethnic ties and loyalties with which the parental generation arrived.

Publication of Alba and Nee's (2003) book, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, marked the culminating moment in assimilation's rehabilitation. Embarked on that very enterprise, Alba and Nee insisted that assimilation could be shorn of its normative implications and distinguished from 'assimilationism'. Reframing assimilation as a process, not end-state, they defined assimilation as 'the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences (2003, 14)', a succession of events in which the boundary between the mainstream and the ethnic outsiders evolves. Emphasising the individual pursuit of rational action, they identified immigrants' search for the good life as the mechanism that would propel assimilation, regardless of whether immigrants valued that goal or not.

One might have expected the parallel good fortunes of these two concepts to have eventuated in a clash of ideas. As process entailing diminishing difference between outsiders and insiders, the concept of assimilation inherently implies the attenuation of home country ties, since as long as they persist, social connections and loyalties to people and places abroad would distinguish the persons of foreign origin from the nationals among

whom they lived. Moreover, the standpoints associated with assimilation and the transnational perspective offer opposing views of the questions at play: the former defines the subject as 'immigration', uniquely focusing on changes unfolding in the territory of the receiving state; by contrast, the latter expands the field of inquiry to encompass sending and receiving states as well as the continuing feedbacks going from point of origin to destination and back again.

And yet, that confrontation has somehow been averted. The course was probably set at the very beginning, when Glick Schiller and her colleagues leapt from a transnational perspective on migration to transnationalism, a claim about the nature of the phenomena extending across borders and the ties between places of origin and destination. By insisting that migrants could experience full incorporation in both countries of immigration and emigration, without, however, defining what incorporation might mean or entail, they assumed the inevitability of acceptance while putting the immigrants at the centre of inquiry which is exactly how the sociologists of assimilation frame the question. With conventional wisdom now telling us that transnationalism and assimilation are compatible, the intellectual challenge has been blunted and the difference between perspectives blurred (Portes 2003; Morawska 2003).

Building on my recent book, *The Cross-border Connection: Immigrants, Emigrants, and their Homelands* (2015), this paper seeks to pick up that challenge and demonstrate how a cross-border perspective, encompassing places of origin and destination and the flows of people, ideas, and resources between them, highlights the ways in which population movements from one state's territory to another's generates tensions at both sides of the chain. In the process, I will try to show how looking across borders paradoxically demonstrates the importance of the territorial boundary, as it simultaneously underscores the importance of dissimilation – the social and political separation of immigrants from the people they have left behind – yet also the ways in which alien status and alien origins at once impede immigrant acceptance by the people among whom they have settled and provide opportunities for sending states to reconnect with nationals abroad.

Status and states

Population movements across territorial boundaries yield an encounter between migrants discovering a strange environment and established residents meeting strange people from abroad. The migrants begin as newcomers, a source of considerable vulnerability: treated as outsiders, they do not know how to navigate the unfamiliar context, which is why they often fall back on others of their own kind. With settlement, those weaknesses fade, since as *immigrants*, the migrants' quest to get ahead encourages the adoption of the competencies and practices rewarded in the place where they live.

Yet in a world where migration is controlled and entries are restricted this emphasis on the strictly social dimension of migration leaves out the defining, political features of cross-border population movements: that the migrants' search for the better life is impeded at the territorial boundaries; that they enter as aliens, lacking citizenship and full rights; that migration control yields civic stratification, elevating citizens' rights above those of aliens and differentiating aliens by an ever-growing plethora of formal statuses, each with its own set of entitlements and constraints; and that the migrants arrive as

members of a foreign nation, living beyond their state of citizenship but simultaneously outside the political community in the state where they reside.

Those borders – between states, between citizens and aliens, among different types of aliens, between nationals and foreigners – take a different form and yield a different effect than the social boundaries between strangers and natives, or outsiders and insiders, on which assimilation theory focuses. Those latter boundaries are internal to the society on which the immigrants have converged and in which their children are raised. And yet the relative fluidity of these *internal* social boundaries stands in contrast to the growing rigidity of the *external* boundaries that effectively impede the assimilation of the society of immigration into the global society to which the continuing movement of both people and things increasingly connects. Moreover, those impediments do not only block the search for a better life that migration could make possible; they affect that search after migration has taken place. Migration control increases the costs of migration: the expenses for documents and applications required for legal passage or the fees in multiples of thousands of dollars demanded by smugglers detract from the resources available to get started after arrival, thus short-circuiting the mechanisms facilitating assimilation. Controls also foster the familial separation that the transnational literature describes, since those who can find a way through or around control systems depart first, leaving other family members with little choice but to stay behind and wait if and until the protracted and uncertain process of family reunification unfolds. Dividing families by borders in turn imposes significant psychological costs, borne both by migrants trying to adapt to a new environment in isolation from their nearest kin and by family members at home coping in the absence of a parent, spouse, or child. Not only can separation tear apart families unable to maintain the strains caused by restriction-imposed distance, it yields effect even after families gain reunification – in the form of parents who do not fully know their children, children estranged from their parents, and youngsters who arrive as adolescents for whom the travails of adaptation greatly exceed the difficulties encountered by children raised in the country of immigration from a very young age (Dreby 2010; Carling, Menjivar, and Schmalzbauer 2012).

Moreover, in crossing the territorial threshold, international migrants enter a liminal conceptual space, standing in-between the territorial boundaries of the state of reception and the formal, internal boundary of citizenship. That liminal zone is itself stratified, confronting the different categories of non-citizens with a series of inner boundaries to be traversed before legal – though not necessarily everyday – equality with citizens can be obtained. Rights and entitlements vary depending on the status under which foreigners enter the territory – whether as 'immigrants' allowed to settle permanently, 'nonimmigrants' expected to remain for longer (international student or temporary worker) or shorter (tourist) stays, undocumented immigrants lacking authorisation and therefore vulnerable to deportation, or the occupant of some 'twilight status', in a grey zone of uncertain security between unauthorised and legal immigrant (Motomura 2014). Consequently, migration control yields further differences among non-citizens as those closer to the inner boundary delineated by citizenship enjoy more rights than those at the outer bounds of this conceptual space (Waters and Gerstein 2015; Torres and Waldinger 2015).

Civic stratification (Morris 2002) is a by-product of migration control: since more immigrants would arrive were there no controls at all, restriction requires selection. Yet the immigrants are also ethnic outsiders, a status that frequently leaves them and their

descendants vulnerable to what Brubaker (2015) has labelled 'ethnocultural exclusion'. Ethnocultural insiders may deliberately discriminate, selecting some marker – whether name, accent, appearance, place of residence – to wall off outsiders from an opportunity that they seek and to which their skills and competencies make them suited. Alternatively, opportunities never emerge beyond the ranks of insiders, who circulate resources through their informal ties to others like themselves. By comparison, formal legal status is more of a nominal category: one's condition as citizen, legal permanent resident, or undocumented immigrant is hidden in everyday interaction, cutting across the more easily noticed traits of accent, name, or appearance. On the other hand, as rights get more tightly linked to status, the latter falls under growing scrutiny in a wider reach of domains. Whereas citizenship is valued in and of itself, territorial presence in some anomalous status is more likely to be stigmatised. Hence, legal status can be 'ethnicised', turning into a source of ethnocultural exclusion, as traits signalling possible membership in a population where unauthorised status is common may in turn place all the members of that population under suspicion, regardless of the specific papers that they might individually possess.

Thus, as Jasso (2011) has argued, 'migration and stratification are intimately and irrevocably linked'. Those ties are further tightened because the process of moving from one formal status to another also takes very different form than the gradual, continuous, almost unconscious acquisition of competencies and dispositions that make immigrants and their descendants increasingly like the people among whom they live. Each status transition entails deliberate, concerted effort, often entailing significant expenditure, and with results uncertain. The incentives for boundary crossing further differ by status and the corresponding mix of rewards and constraints. The gains to legal permanent residence – far greater security and eligibility for formal employment and most types of state-furnished social provision – provide ample incentive to gain this status when possible – indeed, so much so that unscrupulous entrepreneurs have found a market in undocumented immigrants willing to pay substantial sums for fraudulent services that later prove useless (Langford 2004). Relative to legal permanent residence, citizenship yields at once far fewer benefits and also entails very significant costs. Opting for receiving country citizenship is a matter of deliberate action, requiring investment and forethought, not the automatic, almost unconscious behaviour that leads to language learning or the acquisition of a skill that might put a better job in reach. Since by definition aliens are suspect, they need to demonstrate their worthiness by subjecting themselves to close scrutiny, yet another reason to forego naturalisation (Gilbertson and Singer 2003).

However, deciding to obtain receiving state citizenship is a matter of heart, not just mind. As citizenship also denotes nationality and the very same people entering the destination state are also home country nationals, the alien/citizen divide proves fundamentally different from the distinction between outsider and insider. Not only are national identity and self-identity deeply entwined; national identity is understood as relational, distinguishing 'us' from 'them'. As citizenship acquisition is called naturalisation, that is, a result linked to the very constitution of a person, the now standard definition of assimilation as a decline in an ethnic difference cannot apply. Instead, given citizenship's fundamentally symbolic quality, its acquisition involves the shift from one particularism to another, which is why it is conditioned by emotional and affective concerns as well as material costs and benefits. If changing citizenship means betrayal of one's country,

people, and family – as it clearly implies for some – then its practical benefits are unlikely to weigh much in the balance.

Paradoxically, the encounter with a foreign environment and treatment as unwanted foreigners often deepens, rather than weakens, identification with the nation left behind, thereby raising the bar to acquiring citizenship of the foreign country in which the immigrants reside. As Mexican anthropologist and sociologist Manuel Gamio noted almost a century ago in the very first work of social science on Mexican immigration, the displaced Mexican peasants then arriving in the United States had 'little notion of their nationality or their country', but upon arrival in the United States 'learn immediately what their mother-country means, and they always think of it and speak of it with love (Gamio 1930, 128)'. Roughly 70 years later, studying a US union local with a large Mexican immigrant workforce, sociologist David Fitzgerald came across a myth that quelled members' interest in naturalisation: the fear 'that becoming a U.S. citizen requires a ritualistic rejection of Mexican nationality that includes stomping and spitting on the Mexican flag (2004, 236)'.

Relaxing demands for exclusive nationality weakens the pull of the emigrant's nationalised heart, facilitating the pragmatic quest for receiving country citizenship. Indeed, sending state enactment of dual citizenship laws can yield just the effects intended, increasing rates of receiving country naturalisation and boosting the earnings of the newly naturalised (Mazzolari 2009). However, sending state changes in citizenship laws only generate effects when acquisition of receiving state citizenship lies within grasp; that is often a reach too distant, as the influx of foreigners often triggers national identity concerns which repeatedly surface in the form of anxiety over the dual loyalty of *immigrant* citizens, a factor often sufficiently powerful and broad to keep *receiving state* citizenship an exclusive status (Hansen and Kohler 2005). Moreover, allergic reactions to immigration have made *citizenship status* – the obvious prerequisite of dual citizenship – increasingly hard to obtain. While toleration of immigrant dual citizenship is the general trend, naturalisation requirements in the US and Europe have followed a different path, involving more stringent residency requirements and more demanding procedures. To their misfortune, sending states can do little about these trends. Hence, the potential reach of *dual* citizenship is first and foremost limited by *host country citizenship policy*.

Thus, whereas long-distance movement produces ties between places of origin and destination, the inherently political nature of international migration precludes the type of simultaneous incorporation at both ends of the chain predicted by the scholars of transnationalism while also short-circuiting the mechanism that might otherwise propel assimilation. Unwilling to assimilate the rest of the world, receiving states pursue strategies of migration control resulting in a civic stratification that provides de facto acceptance of migration, but not of incorporation. Moreover, the emigrants arrive neither as blank slates nor as ethnics, but rather as nationals, equipped with attachments acquired prior to emigration that can keep them from exploiting the available opportunities for incorporation. Ironically, confinement to the sphere of alien status – whether externally imposed by receiving states or internally generated by migrants' own preferences – provides the opening for sending states to reconnect with nationals abroad, as migrants remain *home country citizens* no matter where they go. Since citizenship inherently ties persons to states, international migration not only knits sending and receiving societies together, but extends sending states' reach beyond their frontiers.

And yet the opportunity to engage with nationals abroad has to be managed carefully as sending state access is subject to receiving state consent and interventions that are excessively visible or too successful might foment antagonism among receiving state nationals who already see the immigrants as agents of a foreign state. The case of the *matrícula consular*, an identity card provided by the Mexican government to Mexican immigrants, demonstrates just how this process can unfold (Waldinger 2015, Chapter 7). Mexican consulates had long provided nationals abroad with an identity card, but in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, this activity took on new importance, as heightened security preoccupations confronted unauthorised immigrants with new demands for identity documents and the attack on the twin towers simultaneously dashed until-then promising plans for a US–Mexico deal on immigration. As Mexican consular officials mounted a generally successful effort aimed at persuading local banks, city officials, and police departments to accept the consular card as an official identification document, crowds of immigrants converged on consulates around the country, leading to an uptake of almost 1.2 million consular cards in 2002, with several million more issued by the end of the decade.

As an instance of seemingly successful sending state connection with citizens abroad, this episode demonstrates not simply the limitations of assimilation and transnationalism, but also their blindspots. On the one hand, opposition to assimilating immigrants who crossed US borders as part of their quest for the better life created the opportunity for Mexico to do something for citizens who, in departing Mexico for the United States, had voted against Mexico with their feet. While the consular card gave Mexican immigrants a practical tool, it did so in ways that furthered their settlement in the United States, facilitating the flow of money across the border, but doing nothing to alter the immigrants' de facto captivity. On the other hand, US nationalists viewed Mexico's engagement with emigrants as an infringement on national sovereignty; perceiving the *matrícula* as an 'ID for illegals' and insisting that '*matrícula* cards sabotage national security efforts', the opponents' vociferous protest kept the consular card from evolving into a universally accepted identification document. As for the immigrants, they experienced neither assimilation in the country where they resided nor re-incorporation in the land they had left. Instead, the undocumented among them found themselves in a liminal condition, unable to return to their original homes yet barred from acceptance in the place where they had actually settled down for good.

Dissimilation

Thus, while assimilation emphasises the *immigrant* orientation towards the place of destination, and transnationalism the *emigrant* orientation towards the place of origin, both perspectives leave the inherently political nature of cross-border population movements out of view. In trying to control movement across both the external borders of the territory and the internal borders of membership receiving states paradoxically upset the mechanisms generating assimilation, while simultaneously fostering cross-border families and creating the motivations and opportunities for sending states to connect with citizens abroad.

Moreover, both approaches are hobbled by perspectives that obscure the changes transforming the migrants, aligning them with the very same receiving state nationals unwilling to fully accept foreigners and people of foreign descent, while distancing them from the

stay at homes to whom the migrants nonetheless remain connected. Notwithstanding their incessant efforts, the sociologists have yet to find a compelling answer to the question of assimilation's target group. Alba and Nee have told us that immigrants and their descendants assimilate into the mainstream, but since mainstream implies sidestream, the people of the receiving society and its mainstream cannot possibly be the same: while all citizens are members of the people, only some of them can belong to the mainstream. Although it is all well and good to say that assimilation occurs when the mainstream offers acceptance, this definition does little more than frame the issue from the standpoint of members of the dominant group itself, who deride the supposed particularism of the ethnic outsiders, but see their own in-group attachments and preferences as non-problematic. Moreover, the mainstream does not simply seek to exclude the sidestreamers; it is equally intent on maintaining receiving countries separate from the rest of the world while also those that distinguish the nationals from the unwanted foreigners resident on national soil (see Waldinger 2003).

Hence, the decline of an ethnic difference observed by the sociologists of assimilation stems from the very stance they take, placing their backs at the border and looking within. Moreover, the preoccupation with differences *internal* to the receiving society leaves unanswered the specific challenge issued by transnationalism, which extends the scope externally to the society of origin, contending that the migrants' loyalties and attachments can encompass the two different nation-states of immigration and emigration.

In taking a different standpoint and looking across borders, the proponents of transnationalism rightfully see that international migration inherently produces cross-border ties. By opting for life in another country, migrants pull one society on to the territory of another state, unintentionally and unconsciously producing a convergence between here and there. This zone of inter-societal convergence – labelled the 'transnational social field' by the scholars of transnationalism – results from the migrants' own survival strategy. The newcomers turn to one another for help in order to solve the everyday problems of migration: how to move from old home to new; how to find a job and settle down; how to pick up the skills needed to manage in their new world. In the process, the migrants extend and embed their networks, creating a new community where the density of familiar faces, tongues, and institutions reproduces the world left behind.

While practical considerations motivate the activation of cross-border networks for the purposes of leaving and settling, those same decisions tend to split family units, as individual migrants typically cross international borders while leaving many, if not most members of the core, familial network behind. 'An unwanted and unavoidable by-product of the entire process of international migration' (Reher, Requena, and Sánchez-Domínguez 2013, 27), the internationalisation of families derives from the selectivity of migration: those most likely to gain go first; others follow slowly, if at all; the elderly often stay behind. Since not everyone who could follow in due course wants to and many of those who would follow in due course can't – due to restrictive immigration policies – cross-border ties are pervasive. And it is not simply that migrants move while many of their most important social relations, as well as significant assets stay put, though that is certainly the case. Something else is involved: namely, the interdependencies between migrants 'here' and their connections 'there', the former often furnishing material resources, the latter often providing caring, whether of dependents (the young and the old) or of material assets. Even if self-interest no longer provides the motivations for

immigrants to connect with the stay-at-homes, morality remains a powerful, reinforcing factor.

Yet, while cross-border ties prove pervasive, they do not prove enduring. By insisting on the persistence of the connections linking migrants and stay-at-homes, the transnational literature casts a blind eye to dissimilation. 'Assimilation's forgotten twin', to cite FitzGerald (2013, 115), dissimilation entails the process whereby the territorial boundary comes to separate people with common national origins. Driven by a two-fold change dissimilation simultaneously involves the progressive reconfiguration of territorial connections, shifting from 'there' to 'here', accompanied by migrants' need to learn and adapt to the foreign environment, imperatives that steadily distance them from the people left behind.

Since migration is good for the migrants, those coming from developing societies experience those change in ways that reflect the gains made by movement to a richer society where the rules of the game differ significantly from those known before. Whereas conditions prior to emigration compel self-restraint and interdependence, conditions after immigration breed a propensity for self-expression, independence, and instrumentality. Prior to migration, artisans or agriculturalists work at a pace that they set themselves, making it easier to set time aside to help out others; after migration, by contrast, work schedules are likely to be longer, more precise, and more demanding, leaving less time for others. Prior to migration, scarcity induces scarcity consciousness: spending today proves too risky when tomorrow is uncertain; better to economise for the fallow period that is sure to come. After migration, the earnings of even the newest immigrants allow for levels of consumption well above those in the developing world. Prior to migration, long-term security is furthered through cooperation both within and across households. After migration, increased levels of consumption foster greater sensitivity to the cost of goods and services even while augmenting material obligations. Hence, norms of reciprocity falter: even among lower income migrants most inclined to share, solidarity becomes monetised; as the material rewards of arrival in a wealthy society are widely shared, migrants can buy services that were once exchanged with neighbours (Durand 1994; Arias 2009). Consumption produces further consumption and yields further individuation providing a means to satisfy the self apart from the collective unit, and often in defiance of its preferences and expectations (LeVine and White 1986; Heinze 1990).

Those inner transformations leave an imprint even on the very activities by which migrants connect with kin and communities left behind. As example, consider the houses that the migrants construct in their hometowns, and what those dwellings signal about the people who build them (or have them built) and the messages these investments send (Villanova, Leite, and Raposo 1994; Boccagni 2014). On the one hand, the remittance house, as Lopez (2014) has called it, testifies to the continuing pull of the place of origin – an attraction difficult to explain from the rational choice point of view adopted by the scholars emphasising assimilation in the reception society, as so many of these houses turn out to be wasteful palaces in which their owners never live. But on the other hand, the remittance house demonstrates how deeply the immigrant has been transformed by the experience of living in a different, much richer country, with distinctive consumption patterns and very different expectations regarding the relationship between the individual and the community, not to speak of the new, more privatised needs that the destination society breeds.

Of course, settlement yields the greatest effect on the immigrants' children, who remain integrated into international family networks even as those ties are infused with tensions that align with the territorial divide. While the obligations and attachments entailed in these internationalised family networks shape the experience of the generation born or raised in the country of destination, the bulk of their experiences take place 'here', *not* 'there'. Schools educate for citizenship, seeking to produce good citizens who are primed for the roles and behaviours that prevail in the society of destination and who have the tools that good citizenship requires. But schools also educate for national membership: as demonstrated by the social movement created by undocumented youth brought up in the United States, schools successfully create Americans even when American citizenship is lacking (Nicholls 2013). Moreover the pressures to conform to the lingua franca are overwhelming: while the sounds of the dominant tongue may be absent from the parental household, they are otherwise ubiquitous. Even when children retain the habit of speaking their parents' native tongue at home and with relatives, usage is constrained by the limited number of contexts where the foreign language prevails; hence, mastery inevitably shifts to the dominant tongue (Lopez 1996; Soehl 2016)

Consequently, while direct, in-person exposure to the parents' homeland is a common second generation experience, those very same visits to parents' homelands often demonstrate the distance between life in the place of residence and the place of origin (Wessendorf 2010). Language shift, from the parent's tongue to that of the receiving environment, produces language shock, as even self-described bilinguals discover that their mastery of the native tongue entails kitchen Spanish or Chinese or Korean, but not the vocabulary or expressiveness that native language-speakers possess (Kibria 2003). The most quotidian of interactions – as when one does not fully understand a cashier's or a waiter's comment and ask for it to be repeated – can be occasions for realising that one does not quite belong (Ramirez, Skrbis, and Emmison 2007; Itzigsohn 2009).

Not only is the taken-for-granted comfort experienced at home missing, finding acceptance can be difficult, largely because second generation assimilation to the country of destination simultaneously involves dissimilation from the country of origin. Thus, visits demonstrate how little sameness is left, not simply because returning immigrant offspring cannot speak like the locals, but also as a result of the signals conveyed by the ways in which the immigrant offspring present themselves. The signal can be material, as when immigrant offspring arrive with 'designer sneakers, fashionable clothes, and gold chains' (Smith 2006, 247), the meaning of which is fully understood by the stay-at-homes who respond with disdain. But even 'dressing down' can be a meaningful indicator of cultural change, as informality is an increasingly common trait of the post-material societies in which the second generation grows up. Though the outsized 'dream houses' (Villanova, Leite, and Raposo 1994) that immigrant parents build in their hometowns express the parents' new preferences, their design and use is also affected by the new, more privatised needs of the immigrant offspring who want 'individual space … privacy and independence, including rooms, stereos and televisions of their own (Fletcher 1999, 76)'.

Thus, identity with the place of *origin* is weakened by the ways in which the expectations of the place of *residence* are internalised, altering the self and leading to a better, more satisfying fit between identity and location. Those expectations are generic to the affluent, post-material societies on which immigrants from the developing world have

converged. But sameness is also weakened because immigrant offspring grow up to think of themselves as part of an imagined, *national* community whose boundaries are delimited by the borders of the state where they live. To some extent, identification with *the people* of the state of residence takes the form of a banal, almost unconscious nationalism, as illustrated by the Mexican immigrant who told a team of Mexican sociologists that his US-raised children refused to live in Mexico because they missed '*their* country, *their* game of the Dodgers and those things, or McDonalds, which they liked, and all those little things (Alarcón, Escala, and Odgers 2016, 123)'. Moreover, since 'here' and 'there' are not only divided by space, but by wealth and status, preferences for the richer, more comfortable, often more powerful place of residence are hard to repress. As explained by a young Dominican American woman interviewed for a study of second generation New Yorkers, the situation she encountered during her home country visit was a bit like 'country mouse and city mouse'; while the experience was fun she was also glad that she could go 'back home to *civilization* (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2008, 262; emphasis added)', an expression that says it all.

Thus, settlement anchors the migrants and their descendants in the society of reception, yielding tastes, behaviours, and expectations common to the people around them. Yet it does so without in any way guaranteeing acceptance, which is why the oft-repeated assertions about the compatibility of home country ties and assimilation are far too pat. While the migrants and their children come to understand themselves as being both *in* and *of* the society of reception – just like the young immigrant activists who present themselves as embodying the American dream in order to further their quest for US residence and citizenship rights (Nicholls 2013) – receiving country nationals are not always ready to accept that point of view. Instead, they tend to see the immigrants and their descendants as still *of* them, there – some foreign people and land – and hence bearing dubious claims to belonging.

Things are not that different on the other side of the chain. Living on *foreign* ground the emigrants' claim to membership in the national community in the place where they no longer live is contested. As Nancy Green felicitously noted, the expatriate can easily slip into the *ex*-patriot (Green 2012, 7), in which case exit may be seen not as departure, but rather as desertion and hence disloyalty. Sentiments of this sort are widely shared , as evidenced by the historically negative portrayal of emigrants in Mexican popular or political culture or the terms applied to Israeli emigrants, who, unlike the immigrants to Israel, went down, not up, let alone the characterisation of the Cuban exiles as *gusanos* (worms) applied by the Castro regime. The claim to identity with the stay-at-homes may ring true to some, but definitely not all, as those with in-person contact can readily detect the ways in which the *immigrants* – variously described as 'gringoized Mexicans', 'gold-chainers' (criticising the conspicuous amount of jewelry worn by Dominicans returning to the island from the US), 'Riches Marocains de l'Europe' (instead of 'résidents Marocains à l'étranger') – have become *unlike* those who have stayed behind. Consequently, although some scholars may insist that the migrants create transnational communities suspended between 'here' and 'there', the reality is otherwise: the migrants and their descendants find that they are betwixt and between their new and old homes, *in* the country of immigration but *of* the country of emigration. Neither one nor the other, they are *foreigners* (Mexicans, Italians, Senegalese, what have you) *in* the country where

they reside, but *immigrants* (French, Germans, American, what have you) in the country which they left.

Conclusion

Whether in classical or updated form, assimilation theory presents a perspective appropriate to the short, albeit terrible, twentieth century, when the nation-states of what we now call the developed world largely kept the world at bay. At the time, society and state seemed to naturally converge, which is why it seemed reasonable to think that the process of assimilation could be uniquely driven by the mix of costs and benefits found within the country of destination, with the dynamics internal to that country determining the pace and direction of change.

But now that the social has burst through the societal, to borrow a phrase from (1987) Michael Mann, that perspective provides a far less accurate guide. In today's age of mass migration, the people crossing borders actively shape their own destinies, doing what neither home nor host state wants, getting ahead by making effective use of the resource that they almost all possess –one another. As the political as well as social logic of international migration produces international families, migrants' decisions to depart one country for another implants an infrastructure knitting those two countries together. Migration then generates flows going backwards, as some of the benefits gained by migration get channeled back home in order to stabilise, secure, and improve the options of the kin network remaining in place. However, the migrants are also dependent on the stay at homes, who may provide care to the elderly or to children, look after property, or furnish assistance when problems in the society of destination compel the migrants to look homeward for help. Hence, these entwined survival strategies bind together people separated in space.

Population movements across boundaries thus produce international integration, but integration of that type is precisely what many of the people of the developed world both fear and reject. Instead, nationals prefer dis-integration from the world, believing that state, society, and territory *should* be one and the same. Disturbed by the influx of foreigners many nationals respond with hostility: some insist that boundaries *around* the state be tightened; others demand that boundaries of the political community *within* the state be narrowed. Nor do the nationals show much interest in the programme of assimilation into the mainstream prescribed by the sociologists. Rather, many clamor that foreigners become nationals, replacing the particularism imported from abroad with the particularism found in their new home. To be sure, xenophobia coexists with xenophilia, popular culture has become increasingly cosmopolitan, and there is ever greater appreciation for foreign people not just foreign things. Yet precisely for these reasons, the greater international integration produced by migration yields greater national dis-integration, as conflicts over the presence of foreigners on national soil and the questions of whether they should belong and if so how, generate internal cleavages that seem to deepen with each day.

As international political events and international migrations – as well as the policies that govern those movements – are inextricably intertwined, the ricochet from events beyond receiving state borders has a further inflammatory effect. As we see at the top of the news every day, the anarchy of the world system, compounded by the instability

of the very states from which the emigrants depart, produces both international conflict and international movements of people. In turn, these disturbances redound in the countries of immigration, casting a shadow over the claims to belonging made by migrants and their descendants while also constraining their capacity to pursue homeland ties (Waldinger 2008; Waldinger and Green 2016, 17–19).

In much the same way, the initial equilibrium of exchanges between migrants and stay-at-homes dissolves, as settlement both reorients the migrants and transforms them. Migrants and stay-at-homes inevitably undergo different experiences, producing differences that accent the impact of geographical distance. Moreover, both the foreign-born, and especially their offspring, take on the traits of those around them, willy-nilly picking up the everyday habits and tools that make it easier to fit into the new environment and adapting to the greater abundance and individuation of the socioeconomic context in which they live. Hence, the ties extending back home paradoxically become vectors of conflict, with the political and social remittances generated by exposure to a different environment often proving disruptive. And just as the foreign origins of the migrants and their descendants foster rejection in the place where actually reside, their foreign residence and the tastes, habits, and preferences generated by life abroad weaken the migrants' claim to membership in the national community in the place where they no longer live.

Thus, in the end, neither transnationalism nor assimilation succeeds in capturing the conflicts produced when population movements cross national boundaries. On the one hand, assimilation retains its corrosive effect, though the impact of dissimilation can only be seen by abandoning the assimilation perspective and looking across borders. On the other hand, transnationalism shows how the ties between settlers and stay-at-homes both propel migration and make home country linkages persistent. Yet those connections also eventuate in an outcome that receiving country nationals reject – namely international integration – a rejection which in turn keeps the migrants in a liminal state and sends a signal that neither they nor their descendants are wanted. Hence, taking a cross-border perspective demonstrates not the compatibility, but rather the incompatibility of assimilation and transnationalism, highlighting instead the ways in which population movements from one state's territory to another's generates tensions at both sides of the chain.

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