

Article

Circulating Practices: Migration and Translocal Development in Washington D.C. and Cochabamba, Bolivia

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*Received: 5 August 2013; in revised form: 7 September 2013 / Accepted: 10 September 2013/
Published: 25 September 2013*

Abstract: Migrant remittances are increasingly seen as a potential form of development in the global South, but the impact of international migration on sending regions is far from straightforward. In this article, I analyze migrant communities of origin in rural Bolivia as dynamic places that are constantly reproduced through connections with other places. I document the movement of migrant practices between Washington D.C. and Cochabamba and the influence of monetary and non-monetary flows on Bolivian cultural practices, politics, and development. I demonstrate how hometown associations and returning migrants have transferred organizational practices and political ideas about development from the United States to rural Bolivia. In addition, I explore migration's role in struggles over belonging in Cochabamba, focusing on the efforts by migrants in Washington D.C. to stake their claim through transnational houses and collective remittance projects and on recent internal migration from other regions in Bolivia. Finally, I assess the sustainability of migrant-led development in Cochabamba. Although collaboration with migrants can strengthen the local state by providing more resources, it conditions the type of development that can take place and has yet to provide adequate opportunities for returning migrants or young people in rural Bolivia.

Keywords: development; social remittances; migrant transnationalism; citizenship; Bolivia

1. Introduction

The expansion of international migration in recent decades has led a growing number of policymakers and scholars to view remittances as a potential form of development in migrant sending

communities [1]. Remittance flows have increased dramatically since the 1970s and, by 2010, people living outside of their country of origin sent home more than \$440 billion worldwide. Almost three-fourths (\$325 billion) of these remittances were directed towards countries in the global South [2]. As a result, research on the impact of migration has generally focused on the efforts of international institutions, national governments, or migrant households to channel remittances towards development.

Although investments in infrastructure projects and entrepreneurial activities are often privileged by states and development practitioners, scholars have shown that most remittances are actually directed towards individual household consumption [3] and have important multiplier effects on the broader economy [4]. There is also increasing recognition that local governments and migrant organizations are crucial to development outcomes [5,6]. In particular, hometown associations are viewed as an important source of remittances and knowledge of local conditions [7,8]. However, while efforts to link migration with a development agenda have a long history, there are still significant debates over the impact of migration on communities of origin [9]. Notably, scholars have shown that migrant-led development projects are highly variable and are always shaped by local economic, social, and political contexts [6,10].

Furthermore, although most studies on migration and development focus on the impact of economic remittances in the global South, less work has explored what Peggy Levitt [11,12] has called “social remittances”, or the movement of ideas, value systems, behaviors and less tangible technologies between migrants and their countries of origin [13]. Migration scholars have also largely overlooked the phenomenon of return migration, a potentially important process where migrants can physically transfer ideas, practices, and skills to sending communities [14,15]. Initial research presented social remittances as unidirectional, from North to South, but more recent scholarship has highlighted the multi-directional nature of these flows and of transnational migration social networks more generally [7,16]. In this article, I analyze the impact of migration on sending regions by examining the movement of migrant practices, which I define as organized actions and everyday activities undertaken by active and returned migrants, between multiple places.

Using a case study of Bolivian migrant hometown associations in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, I explore the translocal character of migration and development in the rural Valle Alto region of Cochabamba, Bolivia. For more than 30 years, the Valle Alto has been transformed by flows of money, culture, and organizational practices from migrants living in Argentina, the United States, and Spain, and from migrants who have returned to Bolivia. While national states (both sending and receiving) continue to play a crucial role in regulating flows of transnational migration and remittances, I also employ the concept of translocalism to emphasize that Bolivian migrants participate largely within particular localities in Cochabamba, Buenos Aires, and Washington D.C. Hometown associations focus primarily on building ties among migrants from the same municipality and contributing to local development in the Valle Alto. As a result, HTAs interact with the local state in Bolivia (municipal governments and rural governance structures) and work at the margins of international and national development institutions located in La Paz and Washington D.C. [17]. Thus, while the literature on transnationalism has demonstrated that migrants are able to participate in two or more countries simultaneously, it tends to obscure that migrants are more embedded in localities than national territories [18,19].

Following Doreen Massey [20], I argue that places are constructed as flows of people, money and ideas move through and touch down. When migrants move between the Valle Alto, the city of Cochabamba, Buenos Aires, and Washington D.C. (although not necessarily in that order), they bring certain cultural, political, and labor practices with them. These practices are transformed as they move and are deployed in new places by migrants, while migrant practices also transform both sending and receiving areas. Collective remittance projects and individual investment from migrants have created new economic opportunities in the Valle Alto, but international migration has simultaneously transformed the fabric of local societies and begun to alter the relationships between rural Bolivians and local governance structures. Return migration has also had an important impact on the Valle Alto [14], but it is often not the last movement for migrants. A number of migrants have returned to Bolivia before making a new trip to another destination [21], while others maintain strong ties with communities abroad. Thus, long-term and non-linear Bolivian routes of migration continue to reshape communities in the Valle Alto and Washington D.C.

I explore the transformation of migrant and non-migrant spaces in Bolivia through a lens of citizenship. Although citizenship is often understood as a set of rights and duties attached to membership in a nation-state, it is also a dynamic and contested social formation [22]. In this formulation, individuals and groups can claim new rights and expand understandings of belonging through mobilization, legal action, and everyday practices [23]. In this article, I highlight the ways in which Bolivian migrants seek to belong to the Valle Alto through the construction of “transnational houses” [24] and collective remittance projects. I also assess the sustainability of migrant-led development. Although collaboration with migrants can strengthen the local state, it conditions the type of development that can take place and has yet to provide adequate opportunities for returning migrants or young people, who continue to leave rural areas. Ultimately, I argue that the Valle Alto is a dynamic and contested place that is constantly reproduced through connections with other places in Bolivia and with cities and suburbs abroad.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a period of 14 months in 2010–2011 with Bolivian migrants in Washington D.C. and Cochabamba. Outside of Argentina, one of the most established Bolivian migrant communities is located in the suburbs around Washington D.C. At least 40,000 Bolivians live in the region, a significant percentage of the more than 100,000 Bolivians in the United States [25]. Bolivian migration to Washington D.C. began in the 1950s and expanded significantly during the 1980s and 1990s, with many migrants coming from the city of Cochabamba and surrounding rural areas in the Valle Alto. Although migration has slowed considerably in recent years, Bolivians occupy an important position within the region.

During my fieldwork, I gathered information on a wide range of Bolivian and other Latin American immigrant organizations but focused primarily on two migrant hometown associations (HTAs) that raise money and organize collective remittance projects through men’s soccer leagues in Northern Virginia and Maryland. I conducted more than 50 interviews with HTA leaders and organizational members about their migration history, connections with Bolivia, and sense of belonging in the Washington D.C. metro area. I supplemented this with a shorter research trip to the small Valle Alto municipality of Arbieta, the home of many migrants in Washington D.C. This fieldwork was designed to overlap with Carnival, when a number of migrants from Argentina, the United States, Brazil, and Europe return to Bolivia for vacation. As a result, I was able to observe the interactions between

migrants and community residents during the extended period of community celebrations and meetings. In addition, I conducted interviews with visiting and returned migrants about their experiences in the United States and their decisions to return to rural Bolivia, however temporary their stay.

2. Bolivian Routes of Migration

Bolivians have a long history of international migration, but in recent decades migration has moved to the center of political debates around national identity. Structural adjustment reforms in the 1980s and 1990s led to dramatic increases in both rural-to-urban and international migration [26,27]. Although Argentina has long been the primary destination for Bolivians [28], migrants also settled in the United States [29]. Sustained political and economic upheaval caused the pace of migration to pick up further during the early 2000s, when tens of thousands of Bolivians left annually for Spain and other European countries in the context of Argentina's economic crisis and stricter immigration controls in the United States [30].

Emigration rates have slowed in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, but a significant percentage of Bolivia's population continues to reside abroad. Bolivian scholars and government officials estimate that approximately two million people, 20 percent of the country's 10 million citizens, live outside of Bolivia [31]. (Estimates of out-migration vary widely in Bolivia. While official estimates show approximately 700,000 emigrants, scholars argue that many more Bolivians live outside of the country.) In 2011, migrants remitted almost \$1 billion, a small percentage of all remittances but over 10 percent of Bolivia's GDP. The rapid pace of out-migration and the increasing role of women migrants have generated concerns about the changing nature of families and the well-being of the children left behind [32,33]. Others have been more optimistic about the potential for migrant-led development, particularly in the prominent sending region of the Valle Alto where migration has been credited with greater agricultural productivity and improved standards of living [34,35].

A number of Bolivian and foreign scholars have documented migration from the Valle Alto to other places in Bolivia and Argentina [34,36], Spain [21,30] and the United States [35,37,38]. Although access to irrigation, fertile soils, and close ties to the Cochabamba market have led *campesinos* (peasants) in the Valle Alto to be, on average, more prosperous than most other rural Bolivians [39], most small-scale farmers in the region do not own enough land to make a living solely from agriculture.

The roots of land scarcity lie in the 1953 Agrarian Reform, one of the most important reforms in Latin America during the 20th Century [36]. Although the reform ended serfdom and distributed *hacienda* land to indigenous and *mestizo* (mixed race) *campesinos*, the reform resulted in relatively small plots of land in the densely populated Cochabamba valleys. Over time, these plots became even smaller as families divided land among multiple children [34]. As full-time farming became an increasingly untenable prospect for many in the Valle Alto, families adopted diverse spatial and economic strategies that have often included internal and international migration.

3. Circulating Practices in Cochabamba and Washington D.C.

Although Arbieta is increasingly a part of the expanding urban center of Cochabamba, the municipality often feels deserted. In the weeks before Carnival, I rarely encountered people in the streets and many of the houses seemed to have no inhabitants. Even in Arbieta's central plaza, the site

of the municipal government and home to several *pensiones* (restaurants), by far the most activity occurs when buses depart for the city of Cochabamba. Recent studies have suggested that 40 percent of the Valle Alto's population lives outside of Bolivia [37], while local officials in Arbieto estimated that more than half of the municipality's residents live in the United States, Argentina, or Europe. The emptiness was apparent not only to researchers but also to local residents, who frequently remarked that most families in their village live outside of the country.

Even though migrants are physically absent for most of the year, they have greatly influenced social, political and economic life in rural Bolivia. French geographer Geneviève Cortes has used the evocative phrase "*ruralidad en ausencia*" (rurality in absence) to emphasize that absent migrants play a large role in the politics and development of the Valle Alto [34]. Robert C. Smith [40] has also described Mexican migrants in the United States as "absent but always present" (*ausentes siempre presentes*). The most visible and dramatic transformations in the Valle Alto have been in the physical landscape, particularly the emergence of new multi-story houses known as "*chalets*" [38]. Cars purchased abroad or in distant Bolivian cities drive on cobblestone streets and a mostly paved highway across the Angostura Lake. Hometown associations in Buenos Aires and Washington D.C. have used collective remittances gathered during migrant soccer matches to pave roads and construct dozens of soccer fields, churches, schools and plazas in small villages across the Arbieto municipality. Remittances have also led to the expansion of the peach industry across the Valle Alto. A growing number of households in the region now have access to irrigation canals or wells throughout the year, which allow farmers to cultivate cash crops with value in the nearby Cochabamba market [34,35].

For the most part, agricultural and other business investments by migrants have been organized individually while collective remittances are directed almost entirely towards public works projects. This differs from Mexican HTAs in the United States, many of which have shifted towards what Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker [7] call the "remittances-to-development" discourse promoted by the Mexican state and international financial institutions. The Bolivian state has also adopted this discourse in recent years, but it largely lacks the institutional capability to intervene and direct migrant remittances, even in established sending areas like the Valle Alto. Instead, migrants continue to send money to Bolivia through long-established relationships with local municipal officials and agrarian governance structures, as well as through more informal channels. In spite of the economic crisis in the United States, and in some cases because of it, migrants in Washington D.C. are continuing to invest in the Valle Alto. Challenging the conventional wisdom that Bolivia is a risky place to invest, migrants referenced the many people that lost homes during the recent housing crisis in the United States as they occasionally suggested that the U.S. economy was actually less stable than Cochabamba's.

In the rest of this article, I explore the multi-faceted impact of international migration on Arbieto. I argue that both monetary and non-monetary flows from migrants have greatly influenced cultural practices, politics, and development in the Valle Alto. I focus particular attention on how the circulation of practices between multiple sites shapes international development and understandings of belonging among active and returning migrants. While the Valle Alto is increasingly seen as a model of migrant-led development, I document a number of tensions that have emerged as a result of international migration.

While it is difficult to distinguish between migrants and non-migrants in a region with high levels of out-migration, conflicts have occasionally emerged between long-term international migrants and

community members currently residing in the Valle Alto over collective remittance projects, festivals, and other decision-making processes in rural Bolivia. International migration has also resulted in new processes of internal migration from other parts of Bolivia to the Valle Alto as well as new tensions. As a result, residents of the Valle Alto are decidedly ambivalent about the impact of international migration even as they acknowledge the visible improvements to the landscape that are the result of individual and collective remittances. This highlights the dynamic character of Arbiesto as well as the inequalities and struggles over belonging that are increasingly part of life in rural Cochabamba.

4. “A Different Mentality”: Migrants in Local Politics and Development

In the 2010 municipal elections, voters in Arbiesto elected three (out of a total of six) local officials who had spent significant time in Argentina or the United States. The mayor recently returned from West Palm Beach, Florida after more than 25 years abroad, while a number of the municipality’s 44 villages also have former migrants in leadership positions. These elections brought new attention to the influence of migration in Arbiesto, but as Leonardo de la Torre and Yolanda Aramayo [35] have demonstrated, this is far from a new process. During the first half of the 20th century, men and women traveled to Chile and the mines in Potosí. As a result of these experiences, returning migrants spoke more Spanish, brought home new food, and participated in new social activities such as soccer leagues. However, while contemporary international migrants have continued to transfer ideas about consumption and development from abroad, the impact of these trends has been much broader. According to Iver Lara, a Bolivian sociologist who has also spent time as a migrant in Spain and the United States, this phenomenon is increasingly taking place across Bolivia as migrants return from Argentina, the United States, and Spain in the wake of the economic crisis [41].

Research on political transnationalism has argued that political identities and behaviors from sending countries shape migrant political participation in destination countries [42]. At the same time, scholars have demonstrated that norms and ideas can also flow from migrants back to countries of origin [43]. However, even though an increasing number of migrants have entered political office in their country of origin [40], most research suggests that the impact of political transnationalism has so far been limited [44].

Returning migrants in leadership positions said that they viewed rural Bolivia differently as a result of their experiences abroad, particularly as leaders of migrant hometown associations. HTAs in Washington D.C. are based in part on rural organizational practices and forms of governance practiced by *sindicatos* (agrarian unions), which require community members to participate in communal activities and serve in administrative posts through a rotating cargo system. Rural governance structures in Bolivia have undergone many changes in recent years, most notably under the 1996 Law of Popular Participation that sought to involve communities directly in local government and created *Organizaciones Territoriales de Base* (Grassroots Territorial Organizations, OTBs) to take the place of *sindicatos*. Scholars have argued that rural forms of governance have been weakened as a result of the expansion of municipal politics [45] and particularly migration, since community members living abroad are less likely to participate in communal activities [37,46]. However, even as out-migration is transforming how villages in Arbiesto are organized, aspects of these rural organizational practices continued to be transferred to and reworked in the United States.

Although some components of OTBs are not relevant in the dispersed social geography of the Washington D.C. suburbs, a number of features from rural governance structures are adapted to life in the United States. As in rural Bolivia, fines play an important role in enforcing communal norms and discouraging certain types of behavior during HTAs activities, primarily weekly soccer games between different Valle Alto villages in Washington D.C. Networks of reciprocal obligations also structure mutual aid to newcomers and decisions over whether migrants contribute to collective remittance projects in Bolivia, even though the centrality of fundraising and carrying out development projects is a new feature of migrant organizations in the United States. In interviews, migrants from Arbieta argued that they feel responsible for their communities of origin and to those that made their journey possible. HTAs are shaped by a sense of obligation and an expectation that previous forms of assistance will be reciprocated [47].

As HTA leaders develop new forms of organizational and development practices in the United States, based on rural Bolivian structures, these forms are then transferred back to Bolivia through translocal networks and physical returns to the Valle Alto. My research found that a number of HTA leaders developed new social networks, monetary resources, and perspectives about politics and development that helped them move quickly into elected office upon their return to Arbieta [48]. César (all names of individuals in the article are pseudonyms.), a returned migrant who was elected to the municipal council in 2010, insisted that he developed a “mentality” of wanting to help his village and other villages in the municipality through his participation in a Washington D.C. hometown association. The experience of directing collective remittance projects at different scales is an important skill that returning migrants can draw upon as they carry out and reconfigure development in Bolivia.

Both active and returned migrants also spoke about seeing Bolivia in a new light as a result of their experiences in the United States. In some cases, this has led to an environmental politics based on the perceived advantages of living in the United States. Standing in front of a large statue built by migrants in Buenos Aires and Washington D.C., César explained:

“What I learned (abroad) is to value my community, my land, because when a person leaves a country like the United States, which is a developed country, it’s different, right? As *residentes* (migrants), (Migrants from Bolivia, as well as other Latin American countries, generally refer to themselves as “*residentes*”, literally residents. As de la Torre [37] has suggested, this is as much a descriptive term as an aspired transnational legal status, since permanent residency allows migrants to build lives in the United States while being free to visit Bolivia, something undocumented migrants are unable to do.) we have seen the reality of our municipality, and that is of trash. We want to implement a solid waste project to separate useful and non-useful materials, and to recycle. Sometimes it is a little difficult to make local authorities and OTBs understand. They still haven’t seen reality, like us who have seen reality from the outside, how to recycle glass, disposable objects.

A number of migrants similarly contrasted the orderly and clean nature of public spaces in North American cities with rural Bolivia, which they came to see as an inefficient, dirty, and corrupt place as a result of their migration experiences. The view of clean public spaces as indicator of progress led returned migrants like César to propose using public resources to literally and figuratively clean up the

municipality through recycling programs, installing trash cans in village plazas, or constructing public bathrooms. Although César only lived in the United States for eight years, his experiences in Washington D.C. helped to form the core of his understanding of politics, development, and the environment now that he has returned to Bolivia.

Other returned migrants have focused on promoting economic development through tourism. These efforts generally begin in the United States and Argentina, where migrants have for decades sponsored cultural *ferías* in several Valle Alto villages that revolve around indigenous harvest traditions, religious ceremonies, and typical food dishes from the region. As Robert Albro has noted, these types of festivals became increasingly common in the Cochabamba valleys during the neoliberal era [49]. Facilitated by political and administrative decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s, municipal governments sought to use indigenous heritage to promote regional tourism.

For migrants in Washington D.C., contributing monetary remittances to cultural *ferías* and collective remittance projects can be understood as a citizenship practice and form of transnational belonging that allows migrants to improve their social status in both sending and receiving communities [50]. This is also the case for individual remittances. Scholars working in the global South have often commented on the construction of large, often ostentatious houses by migrants living abroad or those that have recently returned to their countries of origin. Described evocatively by Peri Fletcher as “*casas de sueños*” (dream houses), the construction of an American style house offers migrants a chance to return to their community of origin as wealthy and important individuals [51]. Because houses are permanent structures, they also make international migration visible for other residents, provide physical spaces where social relations between migrants and non-migrants can be maintained [52], and serve as a placeholder and a statement of intent for migrants who hope to return [53].

Houses also represent places where migrants can be comfortable and continue to live much as they do in the United States. Migrants in Washington D.C. often described Arbieta as a place to rest after so many years of working hard in the United States. As they looked forward to returning to Bolivia, migrants worked to build communal spaces like soccer fields and recreation centers or proposed retirement homes. This physical and imagined connection to the United States through houses and other structures suggests that migration can reflect and introduce new inequalities, even as migrants living abroad spend little time in the village [51]. At the same time, returning migrants from Argentina and the United States are increasingly likely to construct what Pellow has called “transnational houses” [24] in the city of Cochabamba, raising the possibility that migrants may never come back full time to the Valle Alto even if they do return to Bolivia.

This trend highlights some of the important limitations to the transfer of new ideas and practices to the Valle Alto, despite the political success of many returned migrants. This is particularly the case for migrants who left Bolivia early in their lives. By spending so much time abroad, long-term migrants were unable to serve as an OTB leader and therefore face difficulties readjusting to the political culture of Arbieta. Even those migrants that were community leaders before leaving are largely disconnected from local politics during their time abroad.

Challenging the notion that migrants can participate fully and simultaneously in multiple societies, migrants in Washington D.C. often said that distance between the U.S. and Bolivia prevented them from being involved in the decision-making processes in their OTB or irrigators association in the

Valle Alto [17]. Furthermore, since community members frequently rotate through leadership positions in local OTBs, even leaders of hometown associations in Washington D.C. are unsure about whom they should be dealing with during negotiations about development projects. Thus, even with new communication and transportation technologies, migrants and Bolivian community members have trouble communicating between different contexts.

Although many returning migrants served as HTA leaders in the United States, this did not always prepare them for the combative Bolivian political system or the ever-present tensions between migrants and current community members. These tensions were on display during a meeting of local officials and visiting migrants to organize the *Feria del Durazno*, the annual peach festival held in the town of Arbieta each fall. While one group insisted that all migrants be required to contribute \$50 to the festival, a visiting migrant named Mario suggested that the donation be voluntary since some migrants might not be able to afford \$50 after the toll of the recession. Juan, another long-time international migrant, stood and argued that all migrants had an obligation to support the town: "I always contribute (*aportar*). All *residentes* should contribute because we are from the community and because Arbieta has given us everything." Juan noted that contributions to OTBs in Bolivia are not voluntary and that Bolivians living in the United States had more than enough to pay their fair share. As migrants argued over how to define contributions to Arbieta, the town's youth organization insisted that their work should also be recognized. "The *residentes* may provide the money," the president of the local soccer team argued, "but we are the ones who actually organize the *Feria* every year."

The conflict surrounding the *Feria* is representative of the broader tensions that underlie migrant involvement in Arbieta politics. Although hometown association leaders in Washington D.C. often present collective remittances as an outcome of reciprocal obligations, the meetings demonstrated that many migrants view them as voluntary, even if still expected, donations. In contrast, community members living in Arbieta see contributions to *ferias* and public works projects as obligatory and part of belonging to the community, just like their dues to local OTBs.

Several months later, back in the United States, Mario continued to express dismay at the divisions that emerged during the meeting in Arbieta. It was useless to organize and make decisions in Bolivia, he argued, because *ad hoc* meetings there only led to conflicts and prevented migrants from making clear proposals. Instead of getting together during vacations, Mario said that migrants should primarily work through the HTA: "We need to organize ourselves here (Washington D.C.) and collaborate with the mayor (of Arbieta) from here. We should raise the money here and give it to the municipal government for public works projects."

Mario's proposal to shift the location of decision-making to the United States would have the effect of consolidating more power in the hands of migrants, since the existing organizational infrastructure of hometown associations would allow migrants to form a united front and make stronger demands of the mayor. HTAs frequently seek guarantees from local authorities that their contributions will go to the proper recipients but continue to express frustration with how collective remittance projects were carried out in Bolivia, particularly when migrants do not receive preferential treatment at collective remittance projects financed by HTAs. In some cases, migrants have moved to transform the existing relationship between OTB leaders and community members in Bolivia in order to guarantee greater control over remittance projects. For instance, one group of migrants in Washington D.C. installed a returned migrant as their representative in Bolivia to handle funds for a community center, which

effectively bypassed the local OTB leaders accused of pocketing the money while failing to make progress on construction. Even though migrants living abroad cannot participate directly in local elections in Bolivia, migrants have sought to remove elected leaders from their positions because of similar disputes and wield considerable power over local authorities in more subtle ways.

In other cases, tensions surrounding migrant-led development projects overlay already existing conflicts between individual villages in Bolivia. While migrants from the Arbiesto municipality participate in a single hometown association in Washington D.C., funds are raised by individual villages for specific local projects. This limits the possibility of coordinating public works projects with the municipal government or implementing larger-scale development projects that might address substantial inequalities within the municipality, particularly between established and more recent migrant sending villages. Thus, while migrants contribute important resources and ideas to rural Bolivia, this transfer is not without complications and is conditioned by existing structures and inequalities.

5. The “Migrant Municipality”: Transformations in Rural Bolivia

Each February, two groups of migrants converge in Arbiesto. Alongside the dozens of international migrants from Argentina, Spain, Brazil, and the United States, visiting for Carnival, migrant laborers from other parts of Bolivia arrive in Arbiesto to work in the peach harvest. Over the summer, agricultural migrant laborers work alongside long-term residents to prepare for the harvest and then pick, sort, and transport peaches to the Cochabamba market. These internal migrants are almost exclusively from poorer regions in the Andes. In Bolivia, villagers often pointed to the mountains behind Arbiesto as they explained to me that new residents come from “*más arriba*” (higher up). Others connected this migration to well-known concerns about climate migration, suggesting that there is less access to water higher up in the mountains: “*Cuando no hay agua, no hay vida,*” [when there is no water, there is no life] remarked one former migrant in Arbiesto. Inequalities in Bolivia are sometimes expressed vertically.

Unlike the temporary visits from international migrants, however, many internal migrants have stayed in Arbiesto more permanently. A number of families now live year-round in Arbiesto, serving as caretakers in migrant-owned *chalets*, tending to peach orchards, and working as construction workers on migrant-financed development projects. Peri-urban settlements in the northern section of Arbiesto, known simply as the Zona Norte, have also become an important presence in the municipality. Since the 1990s, internal migrants from Oruro, Potosí and poorer regions of Cochabamba have built informal neighborhoods among the steep hillsides stretching south from the city of Cochabamba.

Life in the Zona Norte is similar to the struggles described by Daniel Goldstein in the neighboring Zona Sur of Cochabamba [27]. Most Zona Norte residents lack potable water and have also struggled with theft, sometimes responding with violence. While Zona Norte settlements are technically part of Arbiesto, they far have stronger ties with the city than the rest of the still largely rural municipality. Facilitated by dense transportation networks, most residents work and visit markets in Cochabamba. In contrast, the only council member from the Zona Norte has to take a taxi or two buses to reach the municipal office in the town of Arbiesto. As a result, Zona Norte residents generally make citizenship claims to Cercado, the municipality that encompasses the city of Cochabamba, and settlements

near the Arbiето-Cercado boundary line demand to be incorporated as residents of the wealthier city of Cochabamba.

However, these new Arbiето residents still embody the complex local transformations that have resulted from international and internal migration. Long-time Arbiето community members frequently described the newcomers as “immigrants.” Fully aware of the irony, Bolivian migrants in the United States also call internal migrants “Latinos” [37], a reference to the ethnic category subscribed to Latin Americans living in the United States, and in some cases expressed concerns that internal migrants would damage public works projects and soccer fields in Arbiето. This turns the marginal position of Bolivians in the United States on its head by positioning another set of migrants as low-wage workers and a threat to local communities, a common complaint about Latinos in the United States.

In other instances, however, migrants in Washington D.C. made explicit connections between the migration experiences and the marginalized position of internal and international migrants in U.S. and Bolivian society, respectively, represented in this conversation by two long-term migrants in Washington D.C.:

Eduardo: “Migration connects us, those of us that have come here (to the United States) and those that have come from somewhere else.”

Jaime: “From poor places like norte de Potosi, parts of Oruro and certain parts of Cochabamba that have not come here (the United States). There is movement with us leaving there (Arbiето) and there is no one to work. They come to our place in search of work, and they are immigrants also. We call them immigrants, like we are called Latinos here, we call them Latinos.”

In this discourse, internal migrants are replacing those who have left and are contributing to the economic dynamism initiated by international migrants in Argentina and the United States. By sending home remittances and financing the construction of new homes and public works projects, therefore, migrants in the United States insist that they are helping to provide jobs for people in other areas of Bolivia. While tensions have clearly emerged from the movements in and out of the Valle Alto in recent decades, it is clear that international migration is part of, and in some ways a catalyst for, dramatic transformations in rural Bolivia.

6. “Here You Make Enough to Eat, But No More”: The Limits of Migration-Led Development in the Valle Alto

As a result of its relatively long history of out-migration and migrant investments in infrastructural and agricultural enterprises, Arbiето has increasingly been seen as a model for migration-led development in Bolivia. Research has suggested that Bolivian migrants direct a higher percentage of their remittances towards investments than migrants from other Latin American countries [35,54]. Migrants from the Valle Alto in particular are using resources gained abroad to purchase land, build new houses, finance public infrastructure projects, and expand agricultural production through new irrigation technologies. According to de la Torre, these investments have improved life, not only for migrants and their families, but also for the broader region, as well as creating the potential for more economic development in the future [35,37].

My work with Bolivian organizations in Washington D.C. suggests that migrants from the Valle Alto are more likely to be connected to sending communities through dense social and institutional networks than migrants from other regions in Bolivia. This is primarily the result of hometown associations and related soccer leagues, as well as strong family networks that tie migrants to family and community members back home. In contrast, migrant connections in Washington D.C. to other regions in Bolivia are less institutionalized and more infrequent. While migrant folkloric dance troupes or soccer leagues from a different region of Bolivia may contribute money to charity or local development projects, these projects generally take place in larger cities and depend on the personal connections of migrant leaders, which can limit the impact of migrant remittances. Thus, if development is dependent on dense translocal networks, as de la Torre and others have suggested, then other sending communities are unlikely to follow the example of Arbieta.

As a result of these dense networks, interviews with Bolivians in Washington D.C. and the Valle Alto described migration as a mostly positive force and frequently referenced the dramatic transformation of their villages over the last 30 years. Although some infrastructure and communications improvements are the result of government programs separate from remittance-led development, residents of Arbieta often pointed to specific migrant-financed projects such as new soccer fields, schools, and roads that had improved their quality of life.

However, the economic transformations in Arbieta or the broader region of Cochabamba have yet to provide adequate economic opportunities to migrants living abroad when they return to Bolivia. This has been brought into sharp relief by the recent economic recession in the United States, which has forced some migrants to return from Washington D.C. earlier than they had planned. During my fieldwork in Arbieta, returned migrants stressed that they were making ends meet, but only barely. Migrants who had worked in Buenos Aires and Washington D.C. often uttered a version of the phrase, "Here you make enough to eat, but no more," as a way to signify the difficulties of relying on largely subsistence agriculture and irregular side jobs like hauling peaches to the Cochabamba market. Beyond sending their children to school or expanding their homes, many returned migrants seemed unlikely to be able to invest in new economic activities.

Many scholars of migration and development, including de la Torre, acknowledge that remittances do not automatically lead to sustained economic development and are likely to require additional resources from the state or other actors [7,35,55]. As I suggested above, adequate support from La Paz is unlikely at this point, and Bolivians in the United States and in the Valle Alto often complained about the lack of development assistance from regional and national governments. In their place, local municipal governments and OTBs across Bolivia have begun to develop close working relationships with migrant associations abroad. While these partnerships can be tense, as I demonstrated above, they also provide local officials with important resources.

Levitt [12] has argued that by financing public works projects, migrant hometown associations can absolve the state of its responsibility to improve the welfare of its citizens. In rural Bolivia, the state has long played a minor role in development, although this has changed somewhat following the decentralization reforms that transferred new resources and responsibilities to municipal governments [56]. Although Arbieta had been a municipality since 1983, local officials only gained access to central government funds through the LPP in 1996, after which the municipality was expected to propose projects and carry out development directly.

By devolving this responsibility to municipalities, decentralization created a variety of new spaces for migrants to collaborate with local officials [35]. In contrast to Levitt, therefore, I argue that migrant-led development can in some cases strengthen, rather than weaken, the local state by allowing it to have a broader reach [57]. In Arbieta, the municipal government and OTBs are able to implement a variety of projects that they could otherwise not afford because of their relationships with migrants. Thus, although tensions exist underneath (and occasionally above) the surface, migrants and local governments are bound together by relations of interdependency [44].

However, while migration-led development offers new opportunities to local governments, it also conditions the type of development that can occur, as I suggested above. When hometown associations finance the construction of soccer fields, community centers, plazas, and new roads in rural Bolivia, they are promoting a particular kind of development based around infrastructure improvements. This is reflective of the goals of migrants to highlight their contributions in very visible manifestations, but it also aligns with the more general Bolivian development strategy of constructing *obras*, literally public works, as a way for leaders to point to their concrete achievements [58,59]. This became clear during my fieldwork in several villages on the outskirts of the Arbieta municipality and in the Zona Norte where migrants and the municipal government constructed soccer fields rather than, for instance, the expansion of irrigation to poor areas. Migrant-led development therefore may make it less likely that officials will tackle underlying social and spatial inequalities in the municipality.

Scholars have often argued that remittances result in greater inequalities over time as migrant families benefit more than non-migrants [3]. In Arbieta, the differences between families with and without migrants are seen in material terms and in new social classifications. This was illustrated by an exchange with César. As we walked through his village one day, he pointed to almost every house along the way, saying that they were owned by *residentes* or, more revealingly, “*Americans*,” how Bolivians commonly refer to white residents of the United States. Although César immediately pivoted and said, laughing, that Bolivians were also Americans, his use of the term clearly distinguished long-term and absent migrants from others in the village. Thus, even though César lived abroad for more than 10 years in Argentina and the United States, he distinguished himself from those that had decided not to return. Non-*residentes*, or those that had not spent significant time abroad, still lived in the village but generally in crumbling adobe houses and apart from, in many ways, the wealth brought by international migrants.

Migration also reproduces existing inequalities both within and between Arbieta villages. Villages without a long history of international migration tend to be poorer than more established migrant communities of origin. As migrants contribute to public works projects designated for individual villages, these inequalities can be exacerbated further [35]. While there are a variety of efforts to promote regional development in Bolivia (often through municipality groupings called *mancomunidades*), these initiatives have yet to form close ties with more locally-driven migrant hometown associations in the Valle Alto. As a result, some rural and urban communities may be passed over by local governments who are intent on collaborating on development projects with migrants.

Furthermore, despite the focus on migrant-led development at various levels of the Bolivian state and NGOs in the country, migration is sometimes seen in a negative light by local community members and is blamed for the abandonment of communities, the destruction of families, and the introduction of negative influences like gangs, graffiti, and “American” traditions of disrespecting

elders [33,43,60]. Much like Jones and de la Torre's recent study [61], I found that criticism of these changes comes from non-migrants as well as returning migrants, who were often quite critical of the phenomena of international migration in general and those that remained abroad in particular. However, even though this view of migration has become a standard narrative in Arbieta and other parts of Bolivia [33], migrants are still lauded for their contributions to public works projects that can be accessed by the entire community rather than the often narrowly focused "productive" or entrepreneurial remittance projects. Migration, therefore, always has a complex and sometimes contradictory impact in sending communities.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the movement of money, cultural practices, and ideas about development between Bolivian communities in Washington D.C. and the Valle Alto. Rather than a simple transmission from one place to another, as is often suggested in the migration literature, I argued that circulating migrant practices are reconfigured as they travel, are set down and practiced in multiple places. The case of Arbieta suggests that the literature on remittances and transnational migration could benefit from a broader and more complex understanding of spatiality. Although migrants generally plan on returning to Bolivia, this is not necessarily a pattern of return or even circular migration, but rather a long-term set of movements and settlement between established nodes in multiple countries. As Bolivian migrants cross international borders and set down roots in different locations, they are transforming the places they leave from as well as the places they go.

In Arbieta, monetary remittances from the United States have reshaped the physical landscape of the Valle Alto, led to new development initiatives, and facilitated migrant belonging through the construction of houses, collective remittance projects, and cultural festivals. As Bolivian migrants settled in the United States, they adapted rural organizational structures to suburban Washington D.C. At the same time, the practice of organizing collective remittance projects in the Valle Alto reformulates migrant ideas about development, the environment, and politics, and has shaped how development projects are being implemented in Bolivia. However, while international migration has clearly resulted in dramatic transformations of the Valle Alto, there are always conflicts associated with the movement of circulating practices, which raises questions about the impact and sustainability of migrant-led development.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft. I am grateful for the support of Bolivian hometown associations in Washington D.C., local officials in Arbieta, and Leonardo de la Torre Ávila. Fieldwork in Washington D.C. and Bolivia was funded by the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change (ICGC), the Department of Geography and a thesis grant from the Graduate School at the University of Minnesota. I am responsible for all remaining shortcomings in the article.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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