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**Motion Observed:
Towards an Ethnography of Migration**

ABSTRACT

Ethnographers' long-standing interest in migration has taken on new significance as researchers grapple with 'globalization' on the ground. Drawing on the insights of the transnationalism literature while rejecting its ahistorical tendencies, I explore how recent appeals to use local archival work and revisits to achieve historical depth can be applied fruitfully to ethnographies of migration. I argue for multi-sited fieldwork in countries of origin and destination and the removal of national blinders so that both domestic and international migrations are brought into the same frame for comparison. Finally, I amend the extended case method by arguing for the engagement of case studies with research programs in several ways that attend to the representativeness of the case. The utility of these strategies is demonstrated with examples from the migration literature and five years of ethnographic fieldwork among Mexican migrants.

Motion Observed: Towards an Ethnography of Migration

Since the Chicago School's sociological studies of foreigners arriving in its back yard (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927; Wirth 1956 [1928]) and British anthropology's studies of mobile workers in southern Africa (Richards 1939; van Velsen 1960), migration has been a central concern of ethnographers. Today's era of 'globalization' presents methodological challenges that may seem novel, though the extent to which globalization is new, a continuation of a secular trend, or a return to an earlier era is the subject of usually abstruse debate (e.g. Held and McGrew 2000; Urry 2000). For ethnographers, a research agenda has developed around the analysis of how the global intersects with the local in the experiences of individual agents (Appadurai 1991; Marcus 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Burawoy 2000; Gille and Riain 2002; Amselle 2002). International migrants are critical research subjects in that endeavor in both cultural anthropology and sociology (Schiller et al. 1992; Kearney 1995; Brettell 2000; Foner 2000; Levitt 2001; R. Smith forthcoming). Drawing on five years of ethnographic fieldwork among Mexican migrants in Mexico and the United States, this paper argues that four methodological strategies can usefully guide ethnographic explorations of the relationships between migrants, places, and culture, without slipping into the mire of 'globaloney' (Favell 2001). I propose a way of defining the field of study as multi-sited and bi/multi-national; executing a study in a historically-sensitive way through archival work and revisits; and supporting claims about the broader significance of the ethnographic case or small set of cases through a revised application of the extended case method.

Ethnography is a 'family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents' (Willis and Trondman 2000:1). Here I use it in the broadest sense to include

methods of intensive interviewing and close engagement with texts and cultural objects produced by migrants (Nyíri 2002), as well as participant-observation. The first strategy draws on Marcus (1995) and Hannerz (1998, 2003) to show how four different types of multi-sited ethnographies reveal the full scope of the migration experience and its impacts. Exploring sites that are linked to each other is a way to rejuvenate the ailing field of comparative ethnography (see de Munck 2002). Despite the practical difficulties of conducting multi-sited fieldwork, it offers advantages for gaining access to members of multi-sited networks. The most serious hazard of stretching research resources too thin can be managed through a strong theoretical orientation and models of collaborative work established generations ago (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927).

A second strategy is stripping off the national blinders that restrict the construction of the field, and integrating both sending and receiving country sites. This has been the welcome position of the transnationalism literature. Yet even that literature, which rightly warns of the dangers of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), has fallen into the trap of unconsciously defining its subjects in national terms. I illustrate the benefit of bringing domestic and international migration into the same analytic frame by discussing a comparison of hometown associations in major U.S. and Mexican cities formed by migrants from the same provincial Mexican town. This strategy isolates and reveals the political quality of international migration and suggests commonalities and differences with domestic urbanization.

The third of these strategies is to historicize the field. Rejecting as ahistorical the concept of ‘deterritorialization’ driving many transnationalist ethnographies (Appadurai 1991; Basch et al. 1994; Kearney 1995; Laguerre 1998; Tsuda 2003), I show how

historicizing a Mexican sending community and its satellites through local archival work, oral histories, (see Douglass 1984; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992) and a revisit of an earlier study (see Burawoy 2003) avoids the synchronic trap of the ‘ethnographic present’. This strategy provides further evidence that the claims of novel forms of community in the current migration era have been exaggerated.

A fourth strategy advocated here is the development of research programs in which ethnographic case studies contribute to the elaboration of migration theories (see Kuhn 1962; Lakatos 1978; Burawoy 1991, 1998). Ironically, the transnationalist approach to migration ethnographies that gained currency by positioning itself against the assimilation literature can be used to refine assimilation research. Ethnographic studies have advanced the ‘segmented assimilation’ and social networks programs as well. Against dominant perspectives on the extended case method (Burawoy 1991, 1998), however, I argue that establishing the representativeness of a case is necessary to refine a research program. Several approaches for selecting cases based on their typicality or atypicality and concrete ways of making claims about the empirical representativeness of ethnographic case studies are evaluated. Finally, I conclude with suggestions about the way multi-sited work, removing national blinders, historicizing the field, and elaborating a research program are useful to ethnography more generally.

MULTI-SITED FIELDWORK

The ‘field’ of ethnographic inquiry is not simply a geographic place waiting to be entered, but rather a conceptual space whose boundaries are constantly negotiated and constructed by the ethnographer and members (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Emerson

2001). The methodological mandate ‘to follow the people’ (Marcus 1995) as they travel between localities takes seriously the movement that constitutes the migratory process. Migration inherently means both emigration from some place and immigration to another, implying that at a minimum, research should include one site each in the sending and receiving areas (Glick Schiller 2003; Sayad 2004).

Among a growing number of studies adopting a two-site strategy, Robert Smith (forthcoming) examines migration between a town in the Mexican state of Puebla and New York City, demonstrating migrants’ integration into New York at the same time as many remain deeply engaged in the political, economic, and cultural life of Puebla. A second strategy is to compare multiple destinations in the same country for migrants of a common origin, as Guarnizo, Sánchez, and Roach (1999) have done in their comparison of local factors in Los Angeles and New York that help explain varying degrees of homeland ties among Colombians. A third strategy of studying a migrant sending community and its satellites in multiple receiving countries, as Tilly and his associates (1994) began to do for Italians from the village of Roccasecca dispersed in Lyon, Sao Paolo, Buenos Aires, New York, and Toronto, sets up a natural quasi-experiment controlling for origins that explains how receiving contexts pattern migrants’ economic mobility.¹ Finally, multinational fieldwork need not include the country of origin to yield analytic leverage from the multi-sited method, as Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) shows in her comparison of Kurdish nationalists in different European countries that explains how institutional receiving contexts affect trans-state political mobilization.

Several cautions and objections about multi-sited fieldwork have been advanced. First, multi-sited work tests the limits of a method usually thought to rely on deep, local

knowledge of everyday interactions as a means to understand members' experience. The requisite intensity of fieldwork and linguistic competence may be difficult to achieve in multiple sites, with consequent variation in the quality of the fieldwork and the ability to make systematic comparisons between sites (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 2003). As Burawoy (2003:673) puts it, 'Bouncing from site to site, anthropologists easily substitute anecdotes and vignettes for serious field work...' Similarly, Gille and Riain (2002) warn that the 'methodological imperative of being there is replaced by that of chasing things around, things that are identified more by the ethnographer's interests prior to entering the field than by the field itself.' These are sensible cautions, though the 'field' *never* simply guides research (Emerson 2001). While the ethnographer's convenience and chance may intervene (Hannerz 2003), the dialectical engagement of *a priori* theory with encountered evidence should guide the on-going construction of field and decisions about where to focus research energies (Snow, Morrill, and Anderson 2003). It is precisely because of the dangers of stretching time and resources too thin that successful multi-sited fieldwork is even more dependent on a clear theoretical orientation than work in a single site.

A second caution sounded by Marcus (1995) is that multi-sited fieldwork will lose its subaltern focus, thus weakening its potential for Critique by introducing too many differently positioned voices (see Marcus and Fischer 1986). This objection is unconvincing for several reasons. Researchers committed to critiquing power and hierarchy can follow the subaltern as they migrate (e.g. Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Rouse 1995). Further, subalternity is situational and relational. Migrants who are exploited by capitalists in a receiving country are often capitalist exploiters of those who stayed behind, especially if migrants return home with new wealth. The strategic

manipulation of class position is an important motivation for engaging in cross-border practices and return migration in the first place (Goldring 1998; Mahler 1998). Finally, participant-observation is a methodological tool, not a political philosophy, and it is a tool available for disparate purposes. Regardless of one's ideological predispositions and view of the proper relationship between practicing social science and politics, following migrants as they travel across multiple sites is a productive way to understand their experiences.

A third objection to multi-sited fieldwork is that scientific comparative ethnography is no longer possible because the cultures of multiple sites cannot be considered discrete units (Gatewood 2000). Without discrete units, causal processes are not independent of each other and the logic of the Millsian methods of agreement and difference breaks down (Ragin 1987; de Munck 2002). Seen from a different view, the linkages between sites are not the end of comparative ethnography, but rather an opportunity for its rejuvenation. Different sending and satellite localities can be selected precisely because they are linked by migrant networks, while still shaping migrants' experiences differently. It is because the Millsian methods should never be applied mechanistically (Ragin 1987) that multi-sited ethnographies are best positioned to tease out the influences of different ecologies through an evidence-rich encounter with theory.

Multi-sited fieldwork also offers practical advantages for gaining access to social networks with nodes in different sites. In a study of the politics of Mexican hometown networks at an American labor union, previous fieldwork in members' Mexican sending communities was the primary means by which I gained entrée to a union suspicious of outsiders. Union members of Mexican birth or ancestry always seemed surprised and

pleased to learn that I, an ‘Anglo’, had spent time in their remote villages of origin. Local origins meaningful to members are rarely acknowledged by ethnic outsiders lumping them together as ‘Mexicans’ or ‘Latinos’. Displaying knowledge of local distinctions is a way to reduce the social distance between the ethnographer and informants. On a number of occasions, I participated in ‘mental tours’ of the sending region in which members tested my knowledge and reminisced about their own experiences there. For all the challenges of doing multi-sited ethnography, displayed knowledge of other sites and the people circulating among them can be a passport to acceptance.²

The practical difficulties involved in multi-sited research, particularly when they involve multiple languages, can be resolved in part by abandoning the ‘lone ranger’ model of fieldwork and adopting a bi- or multi-national collaborative model. Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1927) provides an early template. The collaborative dimension combined the advantages of insiders’ intimate acquaintance with the social milieu and easier access with the advantages of outsiders’ fresh perspectives and autonomy (Merton 1972). The binational dimension enabled the researchers to examine the full range of migrants’ experiences, migration’s impacts on both countries, and the causes of migration from Polish push factors to U.S. pull factors. Contextualizing emigration within broader processes of industrialization and urbanization avoided a common problem in research on the impacts of migration on sending areas, which often overdetermines migration’s effects by failing to take into account adequately those processes occurring independently of migration (e.g. Grimes 1998).

REMOVING NATIONAL BLINDERS

A particular idea of the field ‘enables certain kinds of knowledge while blocking off others, authorizes some objects of study and methods of analysis while excluding others’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:4). While the model of constructing the field as a closed local society has been discredited in both anthropology and sociology (Amselle 2002; Gille and Riain 2002), the study of international migration has long assumed an isolation of cultural units ratcheted up to a higher scale. The dominant frame for studying contemporary international migration has been what Noiriel (1991) calls the ‘tyranny of the national’ and Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) call ‘methodological nationalism’. In this nationally restricted vision, most ethnographies outside the transnationalism literature have focused exclusively on the experience of international migrants as *immigrants* in the United States, according to the perspective of the sociology of assimilation (e.g. Whyte 1943; Gans 1962; Gibson 1989; Lamphere 1992; Kibria 1993; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Waters 1999). While perhaps especially acute in the United States, the problem of naturalizing the nation-state container society as the unit of analysis is endemic to the social sciences everywhere (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

Yet even the transnationalists who have adopted, though certainly not invented, the strategy of research in both sending and receiving countries (e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki 1927; Taylor 1928-1934; 1933), have tended to so intently focus on the transcendence of the nation-state’s borders that they have retained national blinders in another sense. Domestic migrations often evince the same decoupling of locality and culture that transnationalists are quick to proclaim as evidence of new ways of ‘being’. There is nothing inherently ‘transnational’ about ties that create an imagined community

encompassing both 'here' and 'there', as the same relationship reoccurs within almost any domestic or international migratory context (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). For example, the connections between 'here' and 'there' in the form of regular remittances, sending children 'back home' to spend the summer with grandparents, and return migration with new ideas and customs developed in the destination site, are described as 'transnationalism' in the Dominican-U.S. migration circuit (Pessar, 1997; Levitt 2001). Those connections are strikingly similar to ties among African-Americans in the South-North migration circuit inside the United States (Stack 1996) or among domestic 'snowbird' retirees circulating back and forth between northern U.S. states and the Sun Belt (McHugh 2000). The 'transnational' religious ties of international migrants (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002; Levitt 2003) are isomorphic in many ways with the ties between early African-American migrants in Chicago and their southern places of origin, who during the 1920s and 30s formed scores of migrant churches promoting a sense of collective southern identity and who sent remittances to, and sponsored pastoral visits from, home churches in the South (Best 2003).

The 'hometown associations' formed by international migrants sharing places of origin are considered the quintessential 'transnational' institution because they are a vehicle for a wide range of collective practices linking migrants to family and townspeople who stayed behind (Liu 1998; Goldring 1998). Yet the hometown associations are simply a cross-border version of what anthropologists and historians have long known as 'migrant village associations' made up of *domestic* migrants from rural areas settling in cities like Paris (Moch 2004), Lima (Jongkind 1974), and the urban centers of Nigeria (Morrill 1963) and Papua New Guinea (Skeldon 1980). In the 1920s,

Iowan migrants to the Los Angeles area created Iowan associations that picnicked, through the 1960s, in the same public parks where Salvadoran and Guatemalan associations gather today (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Mexican hometown associations in Los Angeles and Chicago also have branches in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and even the next town down the road. The original, functionalist anthropological perspective on the migrant village associations was that they were simply adaptive institutions through which peasants who had recently arrived in the city learned to navigate the strangeness of the urban milieu (Jongkind 1974). The parallel with the older view that the hometown associations of international immigrants were *simply* vehicles of assimilation is striking. However, hometown associations of both the domestic and international variety can be a vehicle for a kind of pluralist assimilation to a new context while still maintaining substantive ties to origin communities (Skeldon 1976; Hirabayashi 1986; Fitzgerald 2004).

The on-going debate about the extent to which international migrants abroad can usefully be considered members of a ‘community’ spanning both sending and receiving localities (Portes 1997; Levitt 2001; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004) would be enriched by considering the different ways that claims to community membership are negotiated in contexts of domestic and international migration. That research project requires at least three field sites – the origin locality and an international and domestic satellite. My on-going fieldwork adopting such an approach examines hometown associations in major Mexican and U.S. cities formed by migrants from Arandas in the Mexican state of Jalisco. There is a remarkable similarity in the activities, goals, and discourses of these associations over the past 60 years. The use of new technologies allowing absent

migrants to participate in the life of their sending community has been described as a novel feature of the contemporary era that stimulates transborder connections (Portes et al. 1999). For example, Mexican migrants in U.S. destination cities gather to share their videos of hometown festivals celebrating migrants' return, thus creating a sense of community even among those migrants who could not return to the hometown (see also Fitzgerald 2000; R. Smith forthcoming). Yet movies shot on film were used for exactly the same purpose among Arandense migrants in the 1940s that formed 'colonies' in Mexico City and Guadalajara. Migrant-sponsored modernization projects in their hometown and fund-raising visits by political and religious leaders to satellites have been basic features of both domestic and international migrant associations. The discourse of the extension of Arandas and its territory to include its 'absent sons' is the same for Arandenses in Mexico City as it is for Arandenses in Chicago (field notes, 2003). As the Arandense 'colony' newspaper in Mexico City put it in a message to readers in 1950, 'In reality we are not outside Arandas; the presence of all of you establishes an extension of the red earth [of Arandas] and our beloved town.'³ As I argue in the following section, the so-called 'deterritorialization' of the 'transnational community' falsely implies that imagined and geographic communities were always coupled tightly. In fact, current residence is only one of many possible sources of identification with a locality.

International migration is only inherently different from domestic migration insofar as the former is political by virtue of crossing state boundaries of territory and citizenship (see Zolberg 1999). By bringing domestic migration into the same analytic frame as international migration, the international and political quality of international migration is made clear. For instance, in the Mexican case, U.S. border control efforts

restrict the free flow of people within the migration circuit. On the other hand, the urban receiving context characterizing much international migration may be as important in shaping migrants' experiences as the fact that the migration is international.

Ethnographies of domestic urbanization have much to offer the study of international migration, or what might be called 'international urbanization'. In both cases, the experience of being a stranger stimulates recourse to hometown ties for access to all kinds of practical and emotional resources (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). With its ability to contextualize and show fine-grained processes, ethnography is well positioned to tease out the influences of political boundaries and urban ecologies, but only if it removes its nationalist blinders to reframe the field of study to include multiple sites in sending and receiving countries.

HISTORICITY

Two of the most influential turns in recent ethnography, the postmodern and the historical, are sharply at odds with each other. Postmodern ethnographers have embraced pronouncements that the old constraints of space and time have been burst by a wave of 'global fluids' pouring across 'scapes.' Migrants are among many 'fluids' including goods and information that demonstrate 'no clear departure or arrival, just de-territorialized movement or mobility' (Urry 2000). In the words of Arjun Appadurai (1991), '[t]he task of ethnography now becomes the unraveling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world?' (1997:5). Deterritorialization signifies the uncoupling of a culture with a place and the uncoupling of residence in a territory with membership in a community. As movers

between places, polities, and cultural systems, migrants are primary agents of deterritorialization in the works of Appadurai (1991), Basch et al. (1994), Kearney (1995), Laguerre (1998), and Tsuda (2003).

The major flaw in the notion of a ‘*deterritorialized*’ world is the assumption that social life was ‘territorialized’ at an earlier point. Locality never so neatly circumscribed culture as the stereotypical Malinowskian ‘isolated village’ suggested.⁴ Rather, the putative coupling of locality and culture is an artifact of the social scientific imagining of exotic container villages and national container societies, which naturalizes efforts by states to create containers out of a world interlaced with the movement of goods, people, and ideas (Amselle 2002; Gille and Riain 2002; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Using as a foil the false image of sedentary societies in which cultural and geographic boundaries coincide is no substitute for historically sensitive research.

The transnational migration literature burst onto the scene in the 1990s, incautiously proclaiming the novelty of the transnational social field, community, circuit, and other variants of the concept that migrants can retain and create substantive ties to both sending and receiving areas (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999). The most recent literature takes the work of historians more seriously and has retreated from earlier claims of novelty, arguing now that a transnational *perspective* allows researchers to see transborder ties that were invisible to the assimilationist scholars of earlier generations (Portes 2003; Glick Schiller 2003; R. Smith forthcoming). Still, the transnational migration literature would benefit from more historically oriented work within particular field sites as well as a closer reading of broader migration histories. One way to achieve historical depth is an ethnographic ‘revisit’ of an earlier

study (Burawoy 2003). Local archival work (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992) and oral histories (Bertaux and Kohli 1984) can be used to reconstruct further the period of an earlier study. The archival and oral history strategies complement the revisit, particularly when the earlier work aimed at answering different questions, is empirically thin, or is methodologically suspect.

The advantage of such a historical approach for ethnographies of international migration is illustrated by the author's on-going research project on the politics of emigration in the Mexican town of Arandas, which was the site of Berkeley agricultural economist Paul Taylor's (1933)⁵ pathbreaking study of a Mexican migrant sending community. Drawing on ethnographic and archival methods, I compare the ways that local government and the Catholic Church have tried to control emigration and manage its effects since the 1920s. By comparing the ways actors have defined and attempted to solve a similar set of problems, I explain why different solutions were chosen at different periods and in what ways contemporary solutions are constrained by earlier actions establishing a culture of emigration.

This approach draws on Haydu's (1998) observation that revisits are a way to compare historical periods as 'sequences of problem solving' for different historical actors in similar structural positions. Building on earlier studies in the same field site identifies patterns during defined periods, the sequencing of events, and the path dependence of outcomes (see Aminzade 1992). As migration presents problems *and* opportunities for different actors, the concept of 'sequences of problem solving' can be extended to examine 'sequences of utility maximization'. For example, the contemporary trips by Arandense political and religious leaders to raise money for hometown projects

among migrants in the United States is based on a model established in the late 1930s of raising funds from Arandenses who emigrated to other parts of Mexico. In short, the integration of participant-observation, intensive interviews, archival research, and previous studies turns the problem of the 'ethnographic present' into fine-grained historical depth.

THE PROBLEM OF GENERALIZING

Even if an ethnography is sensitive to local history, how can ethnographers hope to make general arguments about anything other than their field site, much less about macro processes of globalization and transnationalization floating high above? Generalizing from the particular is considered a fundamental logical fallacy.

Ethnography's capacity to show process in fine-grained detail and to open black boxes to show mechanisms is an undisputed strength of the method. That same strength limits the ability of the ethnographer to study a wide range of cases intensively.

Ethnographies are almost invariably single case studies or comparative studies of a small set of three or four cases. While even a complete census of a country can also be conceptualized as a case study (e.g. the case of the United States in 2000)⁶, the smaller scale of ethnographic case studies makes generalizing even more difficult.

According to Portes (1997), all case studies are descriptive of specific instances. They do not identify issues or problems in need of explanation, identify explanatory factors, or link with other predictive statements. Thus, case studies fulfill only one of his four elements required to construct 'theory'. Many ethnographers apparently agree with this formulation. Following Blumer's (1969 [1939]) empiricist critique of Thomas and

Znaniecki arguing that their generalizations were based on *a priori* expectations rather than evidence, many ethnographers have retreated into descriptive case studies.

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROGRAM

The extended case method first advanced by the Manchester School of anthropology and developed in sociology by Michael Burawoy offers a more ambitious alternative to the descriptive case study by showing how a single case can yield theoretical leverage. In any scientific research program or paradigm, there is a set of 'core' postulates. Surrounding the core is an 'outer belt' of secondary postulates that explain outcomes the core postulates do not predict. If multiple special qualifications are necessary to explain new outcomes, the research program is degenerative. If the secondary postulates can be revised to explain anomalous outcomes without creating a more unwieldy theoretical apparatus, the research program progresses. A single case study that successfully explains an anomaly by developing a secondary postulate protects the core of the research program from negation and provides an ethnographer with justifiable claims to generalize based on the program's enhanced explanatory capability.

Even according to Popperian (1968) logic of deterministic laws, a single case of negation is not a fatal blow to the research program if a secondary postulate consistent with the core explains the anomaly. If 'laws' are conceived in probabilistic terms (Berk 1988), particular negative cases can still be useful for advancing general theoretical claims under two conditions. Negative cases are most useful when the gap is large between the theoretical prediction and the outcome and an examination of the case is the basis of expanding a theory's range of explanation (Emigh 1997). Kuhn (1962) further

argues that research paradigms are not negated simply by the discovery of disconfirming evidence, but rather when competing research paradigms offer greater explanatory power. Thus, a single ethnographic study cannot disprove a research program, but to the extent that the case refines an existing program or contributes to a competing program, an ethnographic study can make a theoretical contribution that indirectly warrants claims applicable beyond the cases studied.

There are several major programs in the study of international migration, including network theory and assimilation/ integration. The large literature on social networks explains why migration is perpetuated between sending and receiving areas and how recently arrived immigrants manage to get jobs, housing, and the information needed to live in the receiving society (Massey et al. 1987; Boyd 1989; Portes 1995). The literature emphasizes the positive outcomes of membership in networks, but immigrant women often do not share the same rewards as men. How can this anomaly be explained? In her study of Guatemalan immigrants in Houston, Jacqueline Hagan (1998) found that women were less likely than men to legalize their undocumented status through the amnesty provisions of the 1986 Immigration and Reform Control Act because of the way women's social networks were structured by their employment. Women, who worked almost exclusively as domestics, were more atomized and had fewer opportunities than men, who tended to work in maintenance or large stores, to develop the 'weak ties' best suited for exchanging information about effective legalization strategies and finding jobs. This ethnographic study of a particular group of immigrants in a particular place thus advances the social networks literature by attending to the way those networks are gendered and shaped by occupational position. Cecilia Menjívar's (2000) ethnographic

study among Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco further refines the social networks program by explaining the apparent anomaly of networks that weaken over time, rather than functioning as a survival mechanism for migrants who “may be poor in financial resources, but ... wealthy in social capital” (Massey et al. 1987:170-71). Menjívar argues that when immigrants are so impoverished that they have few resources to exchange, social networks break down despite norms of reciprocity. The work suggests an important restriction on the range of conditions under which social networks are a vehicle for upward economic mobility.

The dominant research program in the sociology of immigration analyzes ‘assimilation’ or ‘integration’ (Morawska 2003a). Ethnographies have pushed the assimilation program forward by showing that the different domains of assimilation (e.g. cultural, structural, marital, identificational) described by Gordon (1964) are not always reinforcing, and in fact, can be at odds with each other. Specifically, economic assimilation, in the usual sense of upward mobility, can actually be increased through retention of an ethnic identity and intensive participation in co-ethnic religious institutions. In Gibson’s (1988) study of Punjabi Sikh immigrants and their children’s high school experiences in a small town in central California, she found Sikh students performed well despite their parents’ low occupational status, financial resources, and levels of education. Her narrative emphasizes the ways in which Sikhs selectively acculturate to America in order to achieve educational success. For example, Sikh parents encourage their children to learn English and study hard in American schools at the same time as they construct and maintain thick ethnic boundaries with non-Sikhs in domains like marriage and religion. Similarly, Zhou and Bankston (1998) argued that Vietnamese

students in a poor neighborhood of New Orleans did well in school despite their impoverished material circumstances and low human capital when they became deeply involved in family and Vietnamese Catholic Church institutions that exerted strong social control discouraging the adoption of the putatively ‘oppositional culture’ of African American youth in the neighborhood. Water’s (1999) study of West Indians and African Americans in New York City further refines these arguments by studying a context where immigrants are racially lumped together with marginalized natives. She shows that West Indians who successfully telegraph their *immigrant* status are rewarded by white employers and teachers who are more favorably inclined towards foreign rather than native-born blacks. This advantage tends to be lost in the second generation, however, as the racial lumping of native blacks and children of West Indians blurs national-origin differences.

All three of these studies are important works in the ‘segmented assimilation’ literature that argues that the specific *segment* of society to which persons assimilate strongly influences their life chances (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). These works also refine the social stratification research program, historically built around an analysis of individualistic and socioeconomic factors like class and educational background, by demonstrating that ethnic forms of social capital must be taken into account to explain socioeconomic status in multiethnic settings. While questions inevitably persist about how generalizable the studies are, in practice they have each contributed to refining the assimilation paradigm and understandings of social stratification. Collectively, the works make an even stronger contribution given the diversity of national origin groups and settlement areas concerned.

While the transnationalism literature originally positioned itself *against* the assimilation program by emphasizing migrants' enduring ties with their places of origin (Glick Schiller et al. 1992), the literature could be used to *refine* the assimilation program by describing the ways that integration into the receiving society is fully compatible with the maintenance of transborder ties (Levitt 2001; Kivisto 2001; Morawska 2003b; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004; Fitzgerald 2004). The use of a case study to advance a research program is illustrated by the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1927), even though it preceded the canonical literature in both assimilation and transnationalism.

Thomas and Znaniecki implicitly rejected the assumption that assimilation is a linear process leading to an undifferentiated American norm, a point about pluralist or 'hyphenated' identities made by Glazer and Moynihan (1964) much later. Polish American institutions simultaneously promoted ethnicization as Polish Americans, incorporation into the U.S. economy and polity, and support for the 'national liberation' movement in Poland. The conceptualization of the 'supra-territorial' organization of Poland to include Polonia – the community of American Poles – explicitly recognized a rupture of territorial residence and cultural/ political belonging. Years before the current transnationalism debate erupted, Thomas and Znaniecki showed that assimilation to a pluralist rather than melting pot vision of American society is compatible with intensive cross-border social ties and long-distance nationalism. The significance of a particular study in advancing a research paradigm is often not recognized until long after the fact (Kuhn 1962).

ESTABLISHING EMPIRICAL REPRESENTATIVENESS

How does one know if what Menjívar, Thomas and Znaniecki, or any other ethnographer found are just outliers on the great graph of social life? Is it possible to know how representative these single cases are of broader processes? Like practitioners of analytic induction and grounded theory, extended case methodologists differentiate their attempts to generalize from the logic of quantitative methods (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Katz 1997; Burawoy 1998). The case study is a way to make claims of 'societal significance' rather than 'statistical significance' (Burawoy 1991:281), where the former refers to the development of ideas of theoretical and practical import and the latter refers to the finding that an association of two variables is not the result of random variation.

Pummeled by colleagues oriented towards quantitative measurement and sampling issues, some ethnographer sociologists have tried to change the terms of the debate by arguing representativeness simply does not matter (Burawoy 1998).

The extended case method by itself does not solve the problem of generalizing from a particular, however. In a stochastic world, a single negative case is not necessarily a serious anomaly for a research program (Berk 1988). If the case is just an outlier or product of rare conjuncture, the research program is not threatened. For example, if workers only participated in their own exploitation under non-coercive regimes in the single Chicago factory Burawoy (1979) studied, that one case would hardly represent a serious challenge to classic Marxist theory emphasizing coercive production regimes. The 'societal significance' Burawoy find in a single case cannot be completely divorced from the question of 'statistical significance.' Unusual cases like a revolution need not be typical in any sense to have strong societal significance, but mundane cases like instances

of migrants' network survival strategies require some degree of typicality in order to be socially significant. The ethnographer must demonstrate the particular case has some relevance to a larger set of cases if the anomaly resolved is to be considered a significant advance for the research program. Below I discuss four grounds on which ethnographers can claim their particular case has a degree of empirical representativeness within some defined universe in order to support declarations of broader theoretical relevance.

There are at least four putative grounds for making empirical generalizations based on a single case or small set of cases (see Hammersley 1992: ch. 5). Two involve claims of the case's *typicality*; and two are based on its *atypicality*. One contention popular in the Chicago School is that a particular case contains *types representative of a broader category*. For example, in Nels Anderson's 1923 classic, *The Hobo*, informants represent 'types' like 'the Pervert' or 'the Coke Head'. Such typing frequently does not go beyond simple assertion. Typing is more credible when it is based on the ethnographer's demonstrated, intimate knowledge of a small universe or statistical data locating the object of study in a larger universe.

A second strategy, the interpretive case method, claims that *each part contains essential principles of the whole*. Clifford Geertz, who claimed to describe fundamental features of Balinese society manifested in a village cockfight (Geertz 1973:436), is the most notable practitioner of this method. Oddly, he is also a critic of its assumptions, at least in their more vulgar form. 'The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up and simplified in so-called typical small towns and villages is palpable nonsense' (1973:22).

A third strategy for making empirical generalizations is based on the logic of

atypicality when the case is said to be in the *vanguard* of likely changes. For example, Gans (1967) claimed his conclusions from Levittown could be generalized to include new suburbs all over America because Levittown was one of the first of the master-planned suburbs becoming more common. The anthropological transnationalism literature has also implied that international migrants are in the vanguard of globalizing changes that will increasingly affect those who do not move as well (Appadurai 1991). The warrant of the vanguard claim can only be established definitively after the fact.

Fourth, the atypicality of a case is grounds for generalizing if the case is an *extreme crystallization* of some theoretically significant phenomenon. If a theoretical prediction does not apply to the extreme case, it is unlikely to apply anywhere. For example, Halle (1984) defends his choice of a specific chemical plant in New Jersey to generalize about the relationship of the contemporary American working class to the middle class based on the plant workers' high wages, automated jobs, and high rates of home ownership. If workers in the most privileged ranks thought of themselves as 'working' rather than 'middle class,' it stood to reason that less privileged workers would think of themselves as working class as well.

What are the concrete ways in which ethnographers actually know if any of these cases are really typical (in the senses of being representative of a broader class of phenomena or a microscopic expression of the whole) or atypical (in the senses of being in the vanguard of likely change or extreme crystallizations of theoretical significance)? Hammersley (1992) suggests three complementary strategies. The first is using existing statistics to assess the degree of representativeness of a case, as ethnographers often do using census data (e.g. Guarnizo et al. 1999). The second is collaborations of

ethnographers and survey researchers combining methods. The on-going Mexican Migration Project 'ethnosurveys' (Massey 1987) of more than 100 migrant sending communities, co-directed by demographer Douglas Massey and anthropologist Jorge Durand, are a premier example of this sort of collaboration. A third strategy is the collaboration of serial ethnographies that capture a greater range of variation than is possible in one researcher's work. For example, Levitt (2003) conducted research on the role of religion in contemporary 'transnational life' by working with colleagues in India, Ireland, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. Against the prevailing prescription of the extended case method (Burawoy 1991, 1998), the notion of 'theoretically sampling' across a range of cases (Glazer and Strauss 1967) *can* be complementary to the extended case method by showing how a *set of diverse empirical cases* represents a significant theoretical anomaly for a research program. A fourth option not mentioned by Hammersley is the combination of ethnographic and statistical methods by the same researcher, as Kyle (2000) has done in his study of four migrant sending communities in Ecuador mixing surveys and participant-observation.

While Hammersley (1992:92) argues, 'It is not clear what basis there can be for making claims about the general relevance of ethnographic studies in terms of their contribution to the development of theory,' establishing some sense of a case's representativeness and whether it is a significant negative case allows for generalization based on a research program. Ethnography is not a method of making statistical generalizations, but rather than dismiss quantitative concerns out of hand, ethnographers would do well to situate their studies in ways that strengthen claims to both empirical representativeness and theoretical significance.

CONCLUSIONS

My goal here has not been an exhaustive review of all major methodological issues facing ethnographers of migration, as such a review would closely mirror general issues in ethnography. Other critical issues recurrent in ethnographies of migration have been analyzed elsewhere, including discussions of the ethnographer's role as both researcher and activist (Coutin 2002); ethnic outsider or insider studying marginalized populations (Waters 1999; Baca Zinn 2001); and the context of inter-state power hierarchies shaping the field of migrants' experiences (Wacquant and Bourdieu 2000).

Nor are the issues discussed here the exclusive domain of ethnographies of migration. The argument that demonstrating some degree of representativeness is fundamental to the elaboration of research programs using anomalous case analysis is equally applicable to the extended case method in and out of migration studies. The imperative is the same whether elaborating programs in assimilation, social networks, or Marxist understandings of production regimes. Likewise, the problem of national blinders pervades the social sciences. The same blinders that have led migration researchers to restrict their gaze to the experience of *im* migrants, or to ignore the relationships between international and domestic migration, lead to methodologically suspect practices every day. For example, studies implicitly or explicitly taking the United States as their case often are assumed to have universal relevance, while 'foreign' studies are subject to a higher standard to demonstrate they are worthy of the attention of U.S. scholars.

The issue of multi-sited ethnography in the study of migration also extends to the most parochial studies. For example, following the same informant around throughout the

day is a multi-sited ethnography writ small.⁷ The ‘extended-place method’ (Duneier 1999) has a multi-sited component as well. What I advocate here is more specific: intensive research in several connected sites selected for their potential theoretical yield. The object of this comparative ethnography is not only to follow people as they move, but also to understand the influences of different kinds of boundary crossings and ecologies on their experiences in multiple domains.

Still, the practical difficulty of developing intensive local knowledge in multiple settings represents a serious challenge for ethnographic fieldwork. The Thomas and Znaniecki (1927) model of binational, multi-sited collaboration is a useful strategy for dealing with the problem of space, but it does not address the problem of time. The integration of participant-observation and interviews with local archival research (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992) and the ethnographic revisit (Burawoy 2003) are two ways to address historical change. Revisiting an earlier study creates a sort of bi-temporal ‘collaboration.’ Whether involving a migrant minority or the majority whose mobility is restricted, detailed historical reconstructions within particular sites are useful ways of determining the changing ways that ‘globalization’, ‘transnationalism’, and other meta-processes articulate with members’ experiences and understandings.

ENDNOTES

¹ There is an especially rich tradition of 'village outward' and comparative studies in the historiography of Italian migration (see also Gabaccia 1988; Baily 1999).

² Hannerz (2003) describes a similar process of establishing personal credentials in his study of foreign correspondents.

³ *El Arandense*, vol. 5, February 1950. Author's translation.

⁴ Even Malinowski (1984 [1922]) studied a regional exchange system in multiple sites.

⁵ Paul Taylor was another pioneer of binational, multi-sited fieldwork in international migration, producing a series of ethnographically informed studies of migrant-receiving areas throughout the United States as well as the sending area of Arandas, Jalisco, Mexico (Taylor 1928-1934).

⁶ For a thorough discussion of this point, see Ragin and Becker 1992.

⁷ I am grateful to Laura Miller for this point.

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