

8-20-2002

Conclusion: New Projects and Old Reminders

Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez

Anna Sampaio

Santa Clara University, asampaio@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/ethnic>



Part of the [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), and the [Latina/o Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vélez-Ibáñez, C. & Sampaio, A. (2002) Conclusion: New Projects and Old Reminders In C. Vélez-Ibáñez and A. Sampaio (Eds.) *Transnational Latina/o Communities: Politics, Processes, Cultures* (pp. 293- 295) Rowman and Littlefield.

Copyright © 2002 Rowman & Littlefield. Reproduced by permission of [Rowman & Littlefield](#). All rights reserved. Please contact the publisher for permission to copy, distribute or reprint.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethnic Studies by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

Conclusion

New Projects and Old Reminders

Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez and Anna Sampaio

Globalization and the transnational networks established by economic integration have produced a context in which the gathering of knowledge about Latina/o and Latin American communities is largely devoid of any processual perspective. This means that we must construct an alternative methodology to capture the international and transnational social fields and arenas of this multinational population. Nowhere does this type of dialogue appear more necessary than in studies of immigration from Latin America to the United States. In particular, we maintain that the integration of Latin American and Latina/o studies requires viewing these new waves of migrants as part of a synchronic flow of capital, goods, and resources back and forth between the United States and their countries of origin. We have shown in our discussion of remittances that multiple levels of economic dependency result.

In particular, with the shift toward regional economic integration it is no longer sufficient to depict migrant communities simply as either temporary sojourners or permanent settlers. Rather, these communities, like their U.S.-born counterparts, must be seen in terms of a larger economic framework in which traditional identities wedded to a single nation-state or the traditional patterns of national economic development have been replaced by a more heterogeneous construction of identity that is drawn from specific social locations and speaks to global/regional economic changes.

While imagining a Latina/o political subjectivity that operates in a multinational context is not entirely new (important contributions exist in the growing literature on Puerto Rican and Dominican politics and the migration between mainland and island communities and on Cuban American political groups seeking to direct U.S. foreign policy and alter the political environment of Cuba), this construction of political citizenship has begun to engage

more publicly with the dominant paradigms in Latin American studies, in particular with regard to the way in which globalization has aggravated inequalities and facilitated a discussion on linking populations of Latina/os across state boundaries. It is this framework of creativity, resistance to hegemonic economic consolidation, and insistence on national "coherences," coupled with the specificity of our own day-to-day struggles, that promises the most fruitful analyses.

At the same time, we must caution against an overemphasis on transnational identities and global cultural references. We are very much aware of the importance of the effects of migratory and circulating population movements and the increasing spatial diffusion of cultural scripts not necessarily tied to a single physical space and place. However, we must continue to conduct careful local-level fieldwork with an emphasis on the relational aspects of daily living and the manner in which the basic funds of knowledge that are crucial to daily survival develop, emerge, and change over generations and in multiple sites. We must engage in more longitudinal research involving not only multiple sites and locations but also multiple generations.

To emphasize identity within a single cohort in Latina/o studies would reduce our research on the basis of material and social existence to a snapshot of what we think others think about the way they think. We simply cannot afford the luxury of failing to examine a representative series of time slices of the same population or cross-sections of populations. This approach should concentrate on the changing material relations of power, economy, and the provisioning process in which Latina/os participate on a daily basis.

Ultimately, to appreciate the value of this type of research we need only return to the communities described in the introduction to this collection. The forty-some households mentioned there are totally engaged in simple survival—where to get money for a quart of milk, how the recurrent fevers of a two-year-old can be resolved, how to keep out the horseflies from the local dairy that infest any leftover crumb, how to balance the need for children's books against the need for sufficient food for the week, how to send remittances to an aging aunt in Guanajuato, and how to prevent a son from joining the local smugglers to bring over even more relatives. At the same time, there are actions and behaviors reflecting passion and relationships gone awry, physical and emotional abuse, borrowing from the local money lender at exorbitant interest, or finally buying a small truck to try truck-farming in order to escape from the fields only to have it break down under too much weight. Yet they seek an alternative to urban rents and dangers, to the crossing of dangerous borders, to lack of medical care and decent housing, and, above all to the helplessness of working three jobs and still not making enough for two days' food, much less amenities. So they build from nothing, scratching for a few extra dollars for paint and mortar, scavenging for used concrete blocks, and jury-rigging electric conduits, water mains, and cesspool

drains from neighbors whom they trust. In a few short years they have built extensive networks of persons from the same *colonia* in Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Chihuahua, or Ciudad Juárez. They return to visit, to bring more relatives, to pay off loans, to buy land, or to help in the local rituals. They may also participate in community action groups designed to create pressure, for example, for the construction of a small park for children to play in. Finally, they relocate and build and create scripts that mostly contradict the ongoing megascripts of institutions, government, economy, and surrounding communities. They test the physical and ideological frontiers of existence and make borderless the basis of social life and cultural expectations. These are realities and the way in which these dynamics change from one generation to another is a crucial problem that we simply cannot overlook.

Our research, then, needs to be grounded in the actual physical sites where much of the transnational negotiation of relationships and relations occurs, whether in the United States, in the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico, or between these states. Such grounding provides the basis for processual analysis and, more important, constitutes a constant check on grand theorizing that may be unrelated to the life needs of the populations about which we write.