Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion[1]

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Many studies highlight the macro-level dissemination of global culture and institutions. This article focuses on social remittances – a local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion. Social remittances are the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities. The role that these resources play in promoting immigrant entrepreneurship, community and family formation, and political integration is widely acknowledged. This article specifies how these same ideas and practices are remolded in receiving countries, the mechanisms by which they are sent back to sending communities, and the role they play in transforming sending-country social and political life.

Carmen Cardenas is a 27 year old woman who lives with her mother and sister in Miraflores, a small village in the Dominican Republic. She is not married. She did not complete primary school. She does not have a steady job. She goes to Santo Domingo, the Dominican capital, about once a year but she has never traveled outside of the Dominican Republic. Like many Mirafloreños, she has two brothers and a sister living in Jamaica Plain, Boston, who support her. Though she has never been there, Carmen can vividly describe "La Center" and "La Mozart," or Center Street and Mozart Street Park, which are focal points for the Mirafloreño migrant community. She launches easily into a discussion of how life in Miraflores compares to life in the United States.

Much attention has been paid to the world-level diffusion of institutions, culture, and styles that arise from economic and political globalization. But this only partially explains Carmen's familiarity with a world she does not actually know. She can also envision a world beyond her direct experience because of social remittances – a local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion.

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Social remittances are the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities. They are the north-to-south equivalent of the social and cultural resources that migrants bring with them which ease their transitions from immigrants to ethnics. The role that these resources play in promoting immigrant entrepreneurship, community and family formation, and political integration is widely acknowledged. This article endeavors to make clear how these same ideas and practices are remolded in receiving countries, the mechanisms by which they are sent back to sending communities, and the role they play in transforming sending-country social and political life.

Social remittances merit attention for several reasons. First, they play an important, understudied role in transnational collectivity formation. Second, they bring the social impacts of migration to the fore. And third, they are a potential community development aid. Because they travel through identifiable pathways to specific audiences, policymakers and planners can channel certain kinds of information to particular groups with positive results.

This article is based on a study of a transnational community spanning Miraflores, a semiurban village located outside the city of Bani in the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica Plain, a poor neighborhood in urban Boston. Over 65 percent of the 445 households in Miraflores have relatives in the greater Boston Metropolitan area – a migration that began about 30 years ago (Levitt, 1996). In examining the transnational religious, political, legal and community organizational systems which link these two communities, the study focused on The Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD), one of the principal opposition political parties; the Catholic Church; The Miraflores Development Committee, a community organization; and Dominican legal and judicial institutions.[2]

THEORETICAL ROOTS

Scholars of migration traditionally believed that most immigrants severed ties to their countries-of-origin as they assimilated into the country that received them. Recent work, however, suggests that at least some individuals remain oriented toward the communities they come from and the communities they enter. This sustained and constant contact between communities-of-origin

[2]Field work was conducted in Boston, Massachusetts, and in the Dominican Republic between 1992–1994, including: 1) 115 interviews with institutional leaders, members, and users at the local, municipal and national levels; 2) observations of meetings, masses, rallies, and special events; 3) two sets of in-depth interviews with 20 migrant families in Boston and 20 return migrant families in Miraflores; 4) document review; and 5) a 181-household survey in Miraflores to assess socioeconomic characteristics and migration trends.

and destination prompted scholars to speak of what they have alternatively termed "transnational migration circuits" (Rouse, 1989, 1992), "transnational social fields" (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Mahler, 1997), "transnational communities" (Levitt, 1996; Smith, 1995; Goldring, 1992; Nagengast and Kearney, 1990; Portes, 1996; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Mountz and Wright, 1996; Georges, 1990; Duany, 1994) or "binational societies" (Guarnizo, 1994). Some scholars also use the term "diaspora" to describe generalized relationships between migrants from a particular country throughout the world. I reserve this term for a specific kind of transnational tie involving expulsion or involuntary exile, based on a remembrance of a lost or imagined homeland that is still to be established (Cohen, 1996).

These kinds of transnational relationships are not entirely new. Prior research indicates that earlier groups, such as the Irish and Italians in the United States, also remained involved in the affairs of their sending countries (Foner, 1997; Wyman, 1993). Several factors, however, heighten the intensity and durability of transnational ties among contemporary migrants including: 1) ease of travel and communication, 2) the increasingly important role migrants play in sending-country economies, 3) attempts by sending states to legitimize themselves by providing services to migrants and their children, 4) the increased importance of the receiving-country states in the economic and political futures of sending societies, and 5) the social and political marginalization of migrants in their host countries (Smith, 1997). These factors mean that, in some cases, migrants may be active in their countries-of-origin and destination for extended periods.

As connections between sending and receiving countries strengthen and become more widespread, a transnational public sphere emerges (Soysal, 1997). A public sphere is a space where citizens come together to debate their common affairs, contest meanings, and negotiate claims (Habermas, 1984). What happens within the public spheres created by migration is by no means a foregone conclusion. They represent potential that may remain unused or take on a variety of forms. Public spheres may disintegrate if migrants incorporate easily into their host societies and sever their homeland ties or become arenas where nonmigrants and migrants come together periodically to articulate collective claims. Such public spheres may develop, as has Miraflores, into a transnational collectivity, where both migrants and nonmigrants enact some aspects of their lives simultaneously, though not equally, in multiple settings.

Mirafloreños formed one type of transnational collectivity. I call it a transnational community because of the strong, geographically-focused ties that almost two-thirds of the households in Miraflores share with family

members in Boston. Both migrants and nonmigrants expressed a sense of consciously belonging to a group that spanned two settings. They formed an organization attesting to this. They described numerous scenarios in which they enacted roles or participated in organizations using ideas and behaviors gleaned from both places.

Economic, political and cultural globalization lay the foundation upon which transnational communities are built (Portes, 1996; Appadurai, 1990). We understand something about the mechanisms of diffusion of global culture (Meyer and Strang, 1994; Soysal, 1994). But there is also a massive, global radiation of ideas and behaviors at the local level contributing to transnational collectivity creation which is not sufficiently understood. Numerous migrants like the Cardenas family transmit and receive culture at the microlevel. The Miraflores-Jamaica Plain connection is one type of transnational arrangement that arises from these transfers. What, then, is the nature of the social remittances that are sent? Through what mechanisms? What factors determine their acceptance and effect? What is their impact on sending-country life?

This article addresses each of these questions in turn. The following section discusses how the Dominican case compares to other population movements. Next, social remittance creation is described and different types of remittances are defined. The following sections outline the determinants of remittance impact and discuss the costs and benefits of social remittance transfers. Finally, the conceptual discussion is summarized, outlining the potential importance for community development.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE DOMINICAN CASE

The Dominican case is characterized by several unique qualities that make it particularly conducive to social remittance transfers. First, the nature of the Mirafloreños transnational community, and the social remittances that flow through it, are strongly influenced by the Dominican Republic's close proximity to the United States. It is easy and relatively inexpensive to travel back and forth. Migrant and nonmigrant family members speak regularly by phone. Social and cultural influences from the United States, already so prominent on the island, smooth the way for social remittance transfers. Migration flows involving countries that are culturally and geographically farther apart would certainly produce different kinds of transfers.

Second, the social remittance exchanges described here take place within the context of an extensive history of U.S. dominance over Dominican economic and political affairs. They are part-and-parcel of the United States' long-term, deep involvement in Dominican national affairs. Migration flows

involving more independent states or situations in which there is less of a power difference between countries of departure and reception would give rise to different transnational exchanges.

Finally, Radhames L. Trujillo, the dictator who ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930–1961, instilled a clear sense of national identity in Dominicans (Derby, 1996). Most migrants arrive strongly attached to their country of origin, which heightens the intensity of social remittance flows. In countries lacking such a highly developed sense of nationhood or in cases where migrants gladly abandon their homelands for fear of persecution or lack of economic opportunity, social remittance transfers will be weaker.[3]

SOCIAL REMITTANCE CREATION

Migrants bring a set of social and cultural tools that aid their adjustment to their new lives. Studies of evolutionary institutional change suggest useful approaches for understanding how these resources are transformed into social remittances. Evolutionary change is shaped by the structure of already existing institutional arrangements which enable and constrain subsequent choices (Campbell, 1995). These processes are often called path-dependent because once a particular choice is made, other routes are no longer possible (Scott, 1995).

A similar design process occurs in social remittance evolution. Migrants interact to varying degrees with the host society. They make sense of their experiences using the interpretive frames they bring with them. Just as institutional actors' choices are curtailed and facilitated by routines and norms already in place, so the new behaviors and views that migrants adopt are also a function of how things were done at home. A number of "blending scenarios" result. In some cases, existing ideas and practices go unchallenged. In others, new elements are grafted onto existing ones. In still others, creolization occurs, where new social relations and cultural patterns are created by the intermingling of migrant and receiving-country forms (Foner, 1994).

The degree to which migrants' interpretative frames are altered is a function of their interaction with the host society (Portes and Zhou, 1993). This depends upon their socioeconomic characteristics and the opportunity structures available to them. Mirafloreños who have enough money and education to start their own businesses have more contact with a broader community than those working alone cleaning office buildings at night. More contact with the host society means greater exposure to its different features, more reflection on existing practices, and a greater potential for incorporat-

[3]I am grateful to Sarah Mahler for bringing this point to my attention.

ing new routines. Challenges to the routines of those remaining within the ethnic community are likely to be weaker and to emanate from fewer sources.

For heuristic purposes, I identify three broad patterns of interaction with the host society. Clearly, Mirafloreños did not fit precisely within these molds. I suggest them as tools to clarify how different levels of contact affect social remittance emergence.

At one end of the spectrum were recipient observers. Most of these individuals did not work outside their homes or worked in places where the majority of their coworkers were other Latinos. They tended to shop and socialize with other Latinos and reported few social contacts with Anglos. They did not actively explore their new world because the structure of their lives did not bring them close enough to it. Instead, they took in new ideas and practices by observing the world around them, listening to how others described it, or learning about it by reading the newspaper or watching television.

Other Mirafloreños participated more fully in U.S. life. Their interactions at work, on public transportation, or with medical/educational professionals forced them to shift their reference frames. They needed new skills to be able to get along. These instrumental adapters altered and added to their routines for pragmatic reasons. They readjusted their reference frames to equip them better to meet the challenges and constraints of migrant life.

Finally, some Mirafloreños were purposeful innovators. In contrast to recipient observers, they were sponges who aggressively searched for, selected and absorbed new things. Unlike instrumental adapters, they wanted to get ahead rather than just survive. They creatively added and combined what they took in with their existing ideas and practices, thereby expanding and extending their cultural repertoire.

Several patterns of social remittance evolution resulted. Each of these was most common among, though not restricted to, these three patterns of social interaction. In some cases, migrants abandoned elements of the social and cultural tools with which they arrived. They were irrelevant in the United States or structural and social constraints mitigated against their use. For instance, Doña Gabriela stopped holding *Hora Santas*, a popular, home-based religious ceremony to honor someone's death, because they were too difficult to organize in Boston. She could never be sure that enough people would attend since everyone was so busy and lived so much farther away from one another. Beliefs weakened and behaviors became unfamiliar when they were not used frequently. *Patrones* (benefactors) could make fewer claims on their clients because they could not bestow favors on a regular basis and because they had more limited access to distributory goods.

Migration left a second set of the social and cultural resources brought by migrants unchanged. This second pattern occurred most frequently in the recipient observer group. Many of their norms and practices went unchallenged because of their limited interaction with the host society. Their same repertoire worked because they recreated lives very similar to those they led in Miraflores.

A third pattern of social remittance emergence occurred when migrants added new items to their cultural repertoire that did not alter existing elements. They expanded the range of practices they engaged in without modifying old habits or ideas. This occurred most often among instrumental adapters. One example of this was the new skills Mirafloreña women acquired at work. Since most migrant women did not work outside their homes before they came to the United States, they learned a new set of skills in the process of job seeking alone.

> When I got here, my sister tried to get me a job but there was no work at the company she was working for. I had to go down and speak to the supervisors at the places people told me about. I wasn't used to talking to people I didn't know. I had to use the telephone. In Miraflores, they had just gotten a phone at Carmen's house [her mother-in-law next door] and I wasn't used to talking to people that way. I had to find my way downtown on the subway. And I had hardly ever been to Santo Domingo by myself. (Gabriela, migrant Mirafloreña, Boston)

The new skills Gabriela learned during her job search did not call into question her old ones. She added to her repertoire of skills and understandings but did not transform it.

In a fourth scenario, which was most common among purposeful innovators, migrants' ideas and practices combined with host-country norms. In these instances, cross-pollination occurred producing hybrid social forms. Dress is a good example of this, though its impact is most apparent in Miraflores, where the remitted practices have taken effect.

Mirafloreñas generally wear tight-fitting, brightly-colored clothing. They continued to dress this way in Boston with some modification, exchanging shorts for pants and sleeveless blouses for long-sleeved shirts. They also started wearing boots in the cold weather.

Nonmigrants observed these styles when migrants came back to visit. They also received clothing as gifts. Because young women, in particular, wanted to emulate these patterns, they combined elements of their own wardrobes with items from the United States and created a new hybrid style. Women wore boots with shorts. They wore long-sleeved clothing in 80 degree weather. Patterns of dress no longer reflected climate; rather, current fashion combined U.S. and Dominican elements.

Whether expanded upon or hybridized, these social and cultural resources become the substance of social remittance flows. The following section describes the actual content of these transfers and distinguishes them from other kinds of cultural transmissions.

WHAT IS EXCHANGED?

There are at least three types of social remittances – normative structures, systems of practice, and social capital.

Normative Structures

Normative structures are ideas, values, and beliefs. They include norms for interpersonal behavior, notions of intrafamily responsibility, standards of age and gender appropriateness, principles of neighborliness and community participation, and aspirations for social mobility. They also include expectations about organizational performance such as how the church, state, or the courts should function. Norms about the role of clergy, judges, and politicians are also exchanged.

Several prior studies have described normative structure-type social remittances without defining them as such. The changing values and social ties that Polish immigrants wrote about to their nonmigrant family members allegedly fostered greater individuality at home (Thomas and Znackieki, 1927). Return migrants to the West Indies repatriated change-inducing ideologies they learned from the Black Power movement in the United States (Patterson, 1988). Mirafloreños also communicated the values and norms they observed to those at home.

> When I go home, or speak to my family on the phone, I tell them everything about my life in the United States. What the rules and law are like. What is prohibited here. I personally would like people in the Dominican Republic to behave the way people behave here. The first time I went back to the Dominican Republic after nine years away, I arrived at the airport. I saw the floor was filthy and that the smokers threw their cigarette butts everywhere. And I said wait a minute. I even said it to the police who were there. How can this be, the gateway to our country is the airport. It should be clean and neat and people should be polite. When people put out their cigarettes they should use an ashtray. Tourists will get a bad impression when they see this mess. So when I smoked, I used an ashtray. It's not just saying things but doing them to provide a good example. When I'm in Miraflores, when I see people throwing garbage on the ground, I don't go and pick it up because that would be too much, but I get up and throw my own garbage away and everyone sees me do it. And those that have a little consciousness, without me saying anything, the next time they have to throw something out, they'll probably remember that they saw this, and its the right thing to do, and they'll do it. These things and many more, the good habits I've acquired here, I want to show people at home. (Pepe, migrant, Boston)

Host societies offer both positive and negative role models and migrants are equally adept at emulating both.

> Life in the United States teaches them many good things but they also learn some bad things as well. People come back more individualistic, more materialistic. They are more committed to themselves than they are to the community. They just don't want to be active in trying to make the community better any more. Some learned to make it the easy way and they are destroying our traditional values of hard work and respect for the family. (Javier Sanchez, nonmigrant, Miraflores)

Migrants' notions of identity also shifted with the changes in their social status brought about by migration. These revised concepts exposed nonmigrants to a more ample range of possible self-concepts from which to choose.

In Miraflores, notions of gender identity were particularly in flux. Migrant women modified their ideas about womens' roles in response to their more active engagement in the workplace and with the public sector in Boston. They transmitted these new ideas about identity back to Miraflores. Nonmigrant women used these social remittances to construct new versions of womanhood. While their ideas were often somewhat romanticized, they still represented a marked change in thinking about male-female relations.

> I don't say that I won't get married to someone from here because he doesn't have a gold necklace. I want to marry someone from there because they have another mentality. They have changed the way they think. When they live there, they see that there isn't machismo. In the United States machismo doesn't exist. (Luisa, nonmigrant, Miraflores)

Systems of Practice

Systems of practice are the actions shaped by normative structures. For individuals, these include household labor, religious practices, and patterns of civil and political participation. Within organizations, they include modes of membership recruitment and socialization, strategies, leadership styles, and forms of intraorganizational contact.

In Miraflores, these types of social remittances had far-reaching effects that ranged from altering the organization of social interaction to changing patterns of political participation. Mirafloreños spent much of their time outdoors due to the heat. They built homes with many windows and front *galerias* (porches). As a result, they socialized constantly with their neighbors while at work and at leisure and conducted much of their private lives in public view.

Mirafloreños in Boston were more isolated from those around them. Several respondents mentioned that they lived in the same building for several years but never met their neighbors across the hall. While some felt this deepened their loneliness, others became accustomed to living more independently, without "everyone knowing their affairs." When they returned to Miraflores, their

desire to protect their privacy was one factor motivating the type of houses they built.[4] Some eliminated the front *galeria* and oriented their homes toward a more private patio in the back. Others built homes surrounded by high walls. As more and more people imitate these behaviors, ties between neighbors are likely to weaken.

Patterns of organizational behavior were also socially remitted. Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD) leaders claimed to transmit some of the vote-winning strategies they observed in the United States.

> Here are a series of concrete examples. With respect to publicity, we have begun to imitate North American political advertising with the slogans, posters, "bumper stick." We print up leaflets. We didn't use these things before – photographs of the president but not posters. This comes from the United States. (PRD vice-president, Santo Domingo)

Social Capital[5]

Both the values and norms on which social capital is based, and social capital itself, were socially remitted. Basch (1992) found this among Vincentian and Grenadian immigrant leaders and activists who were able to use the prestige and status they acquired in the United States to their advantage at home. This also occurred in Miraflores. When the nonmigrant sister of the Miraflores Development Committee (MDC) president in Boston became ill, her family went to the health clinic to ask the doctors to visit her at home, which they refused to do. Her relatives became angry and reminded the physicians that she was the MDC president's sister and that it was the MDC that had recently funded clinic renovations. When the doctors heard this, they suddenly became available. The president's family in Miraflores harnessed the social capital he accrued in Boston to help a family member at home.

Access to social capital also declined. When migrants did not contribute to community projects but were felt to be in a position to do so, nonmigrant family members in Miraflores suffered the consequences. For example, after

[4]Clearly, social remittances were not the only factor motivating these choices. The desire to display enhanced status or to be able to install air conditioning were also at play.

[5]Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993:1323) define social capital as "those expectations for action within a collectivity that affect the economic goals and goal-seeking behavior of its members, even if these expectations are not oriented toward the economic sphere." Value introjection, reciprocity transactions, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust are four sources of social capital through which "individual maximizing behavior is constrained" in a fairly predictable way so that these expectations can be utilized as a resource. Coleman (1988), Putnam (1993), and Bourdieu, Newman and Wacquant (1991), among others, all offer their own slightly different version of this concept. What is important here, as Portes and Landolt (1996) correctly point out, is that social capital can be used with positive and negative consequences.

Manuel became a supervisor in Boston, he started charging other Mirafloreños to place them in jobs. When word got back to Miraflores, committee members openly criticized his behavior and did not include his family in the next project.

MECHANISMS OF TRANSMISSION

Social remittance exchanges occur when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin; when nonmigrants visit their migrant family members; or through interchanges of letters, videos, cassettes and telephone calls. Social remittances are transmitted between individuals, within organizations by individuals enacting their organizational roles, or through the looser, informally-organized groups and social networks that are connected to the formal organizations. For instance, temporary political party working groups organized by PRD members for a specific campaign or informal transnational groups formed to organize popular religious ceremonies are also forums for social remittance transmission.

The mechanisms of social remittance transmission differ from other types of global culture dissemination in several ways. First, the workings of social remittance transmission are specifiable while it is often difficult to distinguish how world-level institutions and global culture emerge and diffuse. Social remittances travel through identifiable pathways; their source and destination are clear. Migrants and nonmigrants can state how they learned of a particular idea or practice.

A second feature that distinguishes how social remittances are transmitted from other kinds of global transfers are that the latter are sometimes unsystematic and unintentional. Nonmigrants may also begin to hold their politicians accountable when they happen to hear on the radio that the President of the United States is being investigated for his real estate dealings. But these messages are not aimed at specific individuals. Many Mirafloreños are not listening or learn about them by accident. A comparable transfer of information that is a social remittance occurs when migrants speak directly to their family members about a different kind of politics and encourage them to pursue change. In this case, ideas are communicated intentionally to a specific recipient or group of recipients. Villagers can specify when and why they changed their minds about something or began to act in different ways.

A third distinguishing aspect of social remittance transmission is that it usually occurs between individuals who know one another personally or who are connected to one another by mutual social ties. Social remittances are delivered by a familiar messenger who comes "with references." This personalized character of the communication stands in contrast to the faceless, mass-produced nature of global cultural diffusion.

Several prior studies highlight the interpersonal nature of idea transmission among elites. These idea carriers were able to convince others to adopt the technical expertise and skills they introduced. They either occupied social positions which allowed them to act upon these ideas themselves or they were able to influence those in a position to do so (Hughes, 1975; Hall, 1989; Dominguez, 1997).

The Miraflores case indicates social remittances are also communicated by ordinary individuals or the "provincial cousins" of these elite idea carriers. Though most Mirafloreños had little contact with urban elite, some community members enjoyed personal relationships with municipal and provincial leaders. The ideas and practices they put forth functioned as the local-level, change-from-below counterpart of elite idea carriers' influence on national politics.

A fourth characteristic differentiating social remittance transmissions from other cultural flows is the timing with which they are communicated relative to other types of transfers. In many cases, a staged process occurs whereby macrolevel global flows precede and ease the way for social remittance transmission. Since many nonmigrants wanted to emulate the consumption patterns they were already familiar with from U.S. media, they were more receptive to the new political and religious styles that migrants subsequently introduced. Calls for more political and economic participation by women met with greater acceptance because they came on the heels of globally accepted discourses about womens' equality. Social remittance flows do not arise out of the blue. They are part-and-parcel of an ongoing process of cultural diffusion. Gradual transmission sets the stage for future remittance transfers which then seem to make more sense.

DETERMINANTS OF IMPACT

Social remittances are just one of a number of change catalysts at work in sending-country communities. In some cases, the transformation of sending-country life is a social consequence of the economic fruits of migration. The monies nonmigrants receive or that return migrants bring back change social patterns. Changes resulting from social remittances are also distinct from the new demands migration places on the organizations serving sending communities. A variety of factors – including the remittance itself, the transnational system, the messenger, the target audience, differences between sending and receiving countries, and the transmission process – determine the nature and magnitude of social remittance impact.

The Nature of the Remittance Itself

Remittance impact partially depends on how easy a particular remittance is to transmit. Some remittances are difficult to package. They do not lend themselves to becoming neat data packets but instead are slippery, unstable, and unwieldy to send. They may be so complex that it is difficult to "theorize" or communicate them (Strang and Meyer, 1994). Or, to be transmittable, they may have to be broken down into component parts, thereby heightening the potential for misinformation and confusion. In contrast, other types of remittances are fairly straightforward. They travel cleanly through transmission channels, after which they are either adopted or ignored.

For example, in the case of Miraflores, social remittances like member recruitment techniques or vote winning strategies were clear. They were either appropriated as is, modified and adopted, or disregarded. In contrast, values and norms fluctuated more easily. Immigrants constantly redefined and renegotiated them. Their unstable nature made them more difficult to simplify and express and therefore diminished their force.

The Nature of the Transnational System

The features of transnational organizational systems and social networks through which remittances are communicated also influence their impact. Remittances flow more efficiently through tightly connected, dense systems because they tend to consist of similar parts and to involve similar technologies. Transfers within more open, informal systems are sloppier, less efficient, and more prone to interference by other cultural exchanges. They are like the child's game of "telephone" because each time a message is communicated it becomes more distorted in the translation.

The Boston-Dominican transnational religious system, for instance, arose primarily from personal relations between priests, parishioners, and seminarians. Because these transnational ties grew out of interpersonal connections, communication tended to be more circuitous, unsystematic, and leaky. In more structured settings, or in cases involving more tightly-woven social networks, the most efficient transmission channel was clear. The connections between organizational units or network members were closer and more well established, thereby heightening remittance impact.

The open nature of the religious system also meant that these types of social remittances were more vulnerable to interference by other global cultural flows. For example, Catholic religious messages competed with those from Evangelical churches which flowed outside its purview. In contrast,

since the PRD established an organization in the United States which mirrored its Dominican structure, political social remittances traveled directly, and with some degree of protection, through its organized, secure channels. Since the technology used to transfer remittances and the organizational units which they flowed between were similar, remittances could have a greater effect.

Finally, remittance impact also changed at different stages of organizational development. New organizations or organizations in flux tend to be more malleable or amenable to change. The PRD's 1986 electoral defeat left the party badly divided. To resurrect itself, the party underwent a major structural overhaul. Return migrants suggesting new tactics felt party leaders were more receptive to their ideas because so many routines were open to discussion during this organizational "window of opportunity."

The Characteristics of the Messenger

Whoever carries the message influences remittance impact. Individuals occupying higher status positions get listened to more. In Miraflores, these tended to be men, individuals with money, older community members, or longstanding leaders. Their abilities to command fellow community members' attention and to convince them to change were based on several factors.

In some cases, they could pressure others into listening. This happened when the social remittance receiver was economically or socially dependent upon the messenger. Receptivity increased because remittances were delivered with a golden glove.

High status individuals also heightened remittance impact because they were in a position to redefine standards. In some cases, remittances were readily adopted because receivers occupying similar status positions wanted to emulate their peers. Other community members adopted remittances to preserve their footing or "keep up with the Jones" (Strang and Meyer, 1994). Still others followed because they wanted to be more like remittance transmitters. Remittance acceptance signaled ascendance to a more high-status social or economic group.

The Target Audience

Remittance impact was also a function of receivers' gender, class, and lifecycle position. Those individuals who had access to more resources and therefore controlled more aspects of their lives could accept or reject remittances independently. Women who had some outside source of income, for example, had more liberty with which to respond to remittances than those

who were completely dependent upon their husbands. Families with some savings could try new income-generating strategies more easily than those on the economic margins.

Similarly, life-cycle stage also shaped responsiveness to remittances. Younger, unmarried women enjoyed more choices and more freedom with which to make them than married women with children. Even if a new idea or practice appealed to a married women, her ability to adopt it was restricted because of the choices she already made.

Differences between Sending and Receiving Countries

Social remittance impact also depends, in part, on relative differences between sending and receiving countries. If the value structures and cognitive models migrants import are similar to prevailing norms, then social remittances are likely to be assimilated more quickly. If the new patterns of social relations approximate those already in place, then social remittances are also more likely to be adopted (DiMaggio, 1988; Westney, 1987). If what is remitted represents a completely new idea or behavior, then it faces greater barriers to acceptance. In this sense, remittance adoption, as well as evolution, is also path-dependent in that existing normative, cognitive and structural constraints condition future choices.

Mirafloreños, for instance, were more likely to adopt new religious practices from the United States than political ones. This was because religious remittances were often stylistic variations of the Catholic practices that Dominican and Boston parishioners already shared. In contrast, political remittances advocating more egalitarian leadership styles went against the grain of "business as usual" and contradicted vested interests. They represented a sharper departure from long-standing political ideas and behaviors and therefore were less likely to take hold.

Finally, remittance impact is also a function of size and power differences between sending and receiving countries. Remittance transfers from large, powerful countries to smaller, weaker ones will have a greater impact than those between more equal states. As when a large stone is thrown into a small pool of water, the ripples that result are large and frequent. Already-powerful global cultural flows reinforce social remittances. Some recipients will be more receptive to remittances because they want to be more like those in the "rich," "modern" receiving community. Remittance transfers between more equal states produce ripples that are smaller, less intense, and dissipate more quickly.

Features of the Transmission Process

Some remittances have a stronger effect because they travel with other remittances. When one remittance is accepted, it heightens receptivity to the other.

Remittances traveling through multiple pathways also wield a more significant effect. For example, migrants' donations toward community projects began to be more carefully managed in response to simultaneous demands from the MDC in Boston and from community members in general. MDC members pressured for stronger financial controls because they wanted to be sure the money they raised was used properly. Their concerns coincided with social remittances introduced by migrants reporting on the benefits of better management they had witnessed in the United States.

Remittances reinforced by other global transfers can heighten remittance impact. Nonmigrants, for example, may begin demanding better social programs, both because they hear about the kinds of services their relatives received in the United States and because of the stories they see on the Cable News Network (CNN). The PRD adopted a rhetoric of greater participation because return emigrants pressured the party to do so and because an international pool of ideas, which supported the utility of markets and democracy, came into favor (Dominguez, 1997).

Finally, the force of transmission affects remittance impact. If many remittances are emitted consistently during a short time, their impact is greater than transfers emerging on a more periodic basis. If there are many simultaneous calls for men to share the housework, and there are numerous examples of this, nonmigrants are more likely to do this also than if they are exposed to only infrequent, isolated examples of these behaviors.

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF SOCIAL REMITTANCES

The impacts of social remittances are both positive and negative. The ideas and practices migrants assimilated and refashioned in the United States prompted constructive change in some arenas and heightened problems in others. This comes across most clearly through a comparison of the realms of politics and the law.

About half of those interviewed saw migrants as catalysts for positive change. They argued that even though migrants were not citizens, they witnessed a fairer, more organized, and more equitable political system, about which they communicated to those in Miraflores.

> I have never been to Boston but my brothers say that the elections there are honest. Bill Clinton can't just tamper with votes because he wants to stay in power like Balaguer does here. In Santo Domingo, politics is a risk. Everything is personal. If I am from one party and you are from another, we can't share with one another. We can't discuss things. There you can say what you think. During the last elections, my brother told me how Bush and Clinton in a certain T.V. program said things to each other, and at the end they shook hands and one felt that the things that they said remained behind because it was a political thing. Here the same thing happens, but after the T.V. program is over they go outside and fight. Here, if there is a rally, the police are there and they hassle the parties on the Left. There the police have to supervise the entire rally and they can't favor one party over the other. (Freddy, non-migrant, Miraflores)

Proponents of this view argued that the social remittances migrants sent engendered demands for a different kind of politics.

> There are greater demands for more democracy within the parties, that the justice system should be separate from the executive branch which is so corrupt. . . . Emigration is a factor in the modernization of the political system in favor of a new type of establishment within the society. It is playing a role, since the people who come back come with these ideas. Even though they haven't participated in the political heart of the United States, they have lived there. They have a notion of the relationship between public and private and that these distinctions are clearer than those in the Dominican Republic. And these things, any person picks up on them because they see it when their kids go to school or when they pay taxes. If people live this in their daily lives, it produces a change in mentality. It is not that they have formed a movement in favor of the rights of citizens, but they have friends and neighbors, and they say to their cousins if you have a problem, go to a lawyer. Don't try to work it out through a friend. (PRD vice president, Santo Domingo)

As commented upon by one political leader, business as usual was no longer acceptable.

> Return emigrants say to us that if I go to get a form in the United States, I don't have to pay a cent because it is the state's obligation to give it to me. If I pay my taxes, I have the right to this, this, and this. If I don't consume 2,000 pesos worth of electricity, I don't pay a 2,000 peso electricity bill. Although they have menial jobs, they acquire a certain discipline that they didn't acquire here because here there weren't any jobs for these people. . . . These are the things that are transmitted in the process of resocialization. This is a benefit that these people bring back to our society. (PRD leader, Santo Domingo)

Social remittances, then, prompted at least some Mirafloreños to seek change.

Other remittances counteracted these positive changes by introducing negative role models. Prior to migration, most Mirafloreños saw themselves as "Against the Law" (Ewick and Silbey, 1998). They devised adaptive strategies to circumvent a legal system they viewed as so corrupt and poorly functioning they had to avoid or manipulate it to get by. The migration experi-

ence positioned Mirafloreños both "Before" and "Against the Law." Those standing "Before the Law" believe in its appropriateness and justness though not necessarily in the fairness of its outcomes. Migrant Mirafloreños lives were structured such that they necessarily came into contact with the law. As a result, some community members sought its support while adapting and enhancing their law-bending strategies.

Their actions reflected a dual legal consciousness. They respected and sought refuge in the laws' protective capacities and absolute authority. At the same time, they creolized that absoluteness, using its predictable and certain nature as a base from which to design new ways to outwit the law. This transformed legal consciousness, and the rewards and costs it entailed were socially remitted back to Miraflores with contradictory effects. Calls for reform accompanied the introduction of new, respected ways to circumvent the system. Individuals who were able to build new homes with the disability claims they won by faking accidents at work or who made money selling drugs undercut reforms by introducing salient, rewarding examples of how to buck the system.

> There is so much money around here because of the narco-traffickers who live in the United States. They are in the United States for a year, they buy three houses, two Jeeps, they have a million dollars in the bank. I have a brother in the United States who doesn't have $100 in the bank and he has been there for 10 years. He is working and those who work don't have anything. Breaking the law is smart. (Mercedes, return migrant, Miraflores)

As a result, more crimes and a grudging respect for those who commit them went hand-and-hand with calls for a more law-abiding society. According to community leaders, there were a growing number of individuals willing to abandon *lo correcto* (what is right) to achieve material gain:

> When so many houses are built with insurance money, there seem to be more and more people who cannot resist the temptation. People who before were *serio* [serious or morally upright], just fall into this trap, and it is breaking down the moral fabric of our community. I worry about these young men who just sit around all day. Any person who comes along and says they can make money by selling marijuana or something . . . they just jump at the chance. Everyone knows this but they are afraid to speak out. (Don Pedro, nonmigrant Miraflores)

CONCLUSION

Social remittances are a conceptual tool for analyzing local-level cultural diffusion. Migrants do not absorb all aspects of their new lives unselectively and communicate these intact to those at home, who accept them as is. Instead, there is a screening process at work. Senders adopt certain new

ideas and practices while filtering out others and receivers adopt particular elements while ignoring others. Furthermore, the nature of the social remittance itself, the way in which it is transmitted, the characteristics of the transnational organizational systems and networks through which its flows, and differences between individual and nation-state senders and receivers also influence social remittance impact. These factors ultimately shape who receives what kinds of remittances, how likely they are to adopt them, and their effects on social and political life.

The Miraflores transnational community involved rural to urban migration, high concentrations of low-income migrants, a strong dependence on economic remittances among nonmigrant community members, close geographic proximity, and high levels of political and economic interdependence between the sending and receiving countries. These qualities also characterize other communities spanning the United States and Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean (*see* Smith, 1995; Goldring, 1992; Mountz and Wright, 1997). More research is needed to find out if social remittances also flow in cases involving urban-to-urban migration, lower levels of economic dependence, or countries that are geographically and culturally farther apart.

The impact of social remittances is both positive and negative. There is nothing to guarantee that what is learned in the host society is constructive or that it will have a positive effect on communities of origin. Factors increasing social remittance effect are "ethics blind."

Positive social remittances will not, in and of themselves, bring about social reform. In communities like Miraflores, however, they are a fact of life. Social remittances represent a potential tool with which practitioners and planners can promote better outcomes. Because social remittances emanate from clear sources and travel through identifiable pathways to clear destinations, certain kinds of remittance flows can be purposefully stimulated. Deliberate exchanges about health and educational practices could contribute positively to social change. The transfer of new business skills or community organizing techniques could do so as well. The intentional transmission of more accurate information about working conditions and economic prospects in the United States might also create more realistic expectations of the migration experience. These transfers should, by no means, go one way. Information from educators, business owners, priests, and healthcare professionals serving the community in Miraflores could also help their counterparts in Boston be more effective in their tasks.

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