

**Between God, Ethnicity, And Country:
An Approach To The Study Of Transnational Religion**

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The purpose of this paper is to make sense of what have until now been disparate yet related fields of research on religious activities across borders. Research on globalization and transnational migration has only recently begun to take religion into account. Yet little work has been done to differentiate between the vocabularies of global religion, diasporic religion, and transnational religious practices and to specify their relationship to one another. This paper begins with a brief outline of these first two bodies of work and suggests an approach to the study of transnational religion. I then summarize selectively what we have learned about the nature of transnational religious practices to date, drawing on research on the United States experience.¹ I conclude with directions for future research.

A Matter of Definition

From their inception, most religious institutions, and the religious movements that grew out of them, knew few boundaries. The Catholic Church, with its hierarchical structure, ideology of universality, and centralized leadership apparatus provides the primary example of purposeful transnational religious development. Its interconnected network of national churches and religious and lay orders of Jesuits and Franciscans systematically transported Catholicism throughout the world (Casanova 1994). But several world religions were disseminated without the aid of a federated administrative hierarchy. Islam for example, spread through unsupervised networks of entrepreneurs, sufi orders, and individual sufis who propagated their faith in accordance with their unique inner vision (Rudolph and Piscatori 1997).

The study of world or global religions has deep roots. It grew largely out of the West's attempt to make sense of non-Christian or eastern religions. With the exception of work on the Catholic Church, much of this research examined specific religious traditions in a single setting as opposed to cross-border connections that like communities shared with one another. More

¹ I focus on the U.S. because, to the best of my knowledge, no systematic attempt has been made to summarize the scholarship on the transnational religious practices of U.S.-bound migrants. In addition, much of the literature on the religious lives of North American and European migrants focuses primarily on receiving-country life (i.e. Metcalf 1996, Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec 1990, Vertovec and Peach 1997, Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, Warner and Wittner 1998, and Schiffauer 1988. Selective notable exceptions include Gardner 1995, Huwelmeier 2001, Eickelman and Piscatori 1990, Vertovec 1995, and Sahin 2001). I do not mean to suggest that European and U.S. scholarship should be treated as separate. In fact, one of the goals of this conference is to explore the continuities and discontinuities between these two experiences.

recent work on global religions highlights religion's role in creating the international connections that engender universal identities. Religion, and particularly , religious movements operating in broad geographic contexts, engage in increasingly homogenized forms of worship and organization that give rise to global communities that locals can join. These imbue members with membership possibilities stretching far beyond their communities and cultures and challenge local religious forms and appropriations of global religious manifestations such as mission Christianity (Van Dijk 1997).

Studies of diasporic religion or religion in the diaspora grew out of a heightened interest in the diasporic experience in general. Such research arose in response to the widespread recognition that social, economic, and political life increasingly transcend national borders and the constraints of national culture. Individuals sustain multiple identities and loyalties and create culture using elements from a variety of settings. According to Vertovec (2001) diaspora studies have gone beyond their traditional focus on the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian experiences to cover other migrant experiences because these earlier groups provide a model for contemporary groups seeking to survive displacement and preserve strong group ties. The term, "diaspora" is also used as a tool in cultural politics. "Diaspora has arisen as part of the postmodern project of resisting the nation-state, which is perceived as hegemonic, discriminatory, and culturally homogenizing. The alternative agenda – now associated with the notion of diaspora – advocates the recognition of hybridity, multiple identities, and affiliations with people, causes, and traditions outside the nation-state of residence" (Vertovec 2000:5). Implicit in much of this work is the question of whether life across borders involves resistance to the nation state and allows previously marginalized groups to challenge the social hierarchy.

According to Cohen (1997), diasporas are characterized by the following qualities: (1) voluntary or forced migration from a homeland to two or more regions, (2) a collective memory of or imagined relation to an idealized homeland, (3) a commitment to reclaim or maintain strong ties to that homeland, (4) a range of incorporation experiences in the host society (from marginality to advancement) and (5) a sense of connection to co-ethnics in other places of settlement. Vertovec (1997) makes a distinction between diasporas as social forms involving individuals living throughout the world but collectively identifying with one another, their host societies, and the lands that they and their ancestors come from; diasporas as a type of consciousness that locates the individual in multiple cultural and social spaces; and diasporas as

a mode of cultural production involving the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomenon. Cultural diasporas, which incorporate religious experiences, are groups that reject the identity categories and social structures that nation states impose on them, opting instead to express identities based on a blurring of origin and destination and associated with loose, multiple connections to various groups, settings, and practices. Unlike prior work on diasporas, this new approach does not confine itself to relations between co-ethnics and a single homeland but “rather it emphasizes the feelings of alienation and new identities and subjectivities generated as individuals and groups cross borders of culture, nation, ideology, gender, and imagined community” (Gold 2001:??).

What does this all mean for the study of religion? How do diasporas influence home and host-country religious life? How do religious influences create and perpetuate diasporic communities?

First, the study of religious or cultural life across borders raises particular challenges not posed by the study of economics or politics. Religion is not a fixed set of elements but a dynamic web of shared meanings used in different ways in different contexts (Gardner 1995). It is as much, if not more, about individualized, interior, informal practices and beliefs as it is about formal, collective manifestations of faith carried out in institutional settings. Many features of religious life are implicit. It is hard to hold them constant or to determine their boundaries. They are deeply felt but often difficult to express.

Second, are religions themselves diasporas? Cohen argues they are not. Membership in religious groups often involves various ethnic communities. Most religious groups do not seek to return to or to recreate a homeland for their members. Religions can, however, provide additional glue that reinforces diasporic consciousness.

What about the notion of diasporic religion? Hinnells (1997a:686 in Vertovec 2000) defines this as “the religion of any people who have any sense of living away from the land of the religion, or away from ‘the old country.’” They are religious minorities in the countries where they now reside. Vertovec (1997) argues that religious and other socio-cultural dynamics evolve differently when migrants are characterized by minority status, when they form part of diasporas, or when they engage in transnational practices. He understands diaspora as the imagined connection between voluntary and involuntary migrants, a place of origin, and people with similar cultural origins elsewhere. By transnationalism, he refers to “the actual ongoing

exchanges of information, money, or resources, as well as regular travel and communication, that members of a diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalized ethnic community. Diasporas arise from some form of migration, but not all migration involves diasporic consciousness; all transnational communities comprise diasporas but not all diasporas develop transnationalism (Vertovec 2000:12). Patterns of change occurring within the context of diasporas, according to Vertovec, include identity and community, ritual practices, and the reimagining of the social and cultural spaces in which actors are embedded. Patterns of change surrounding transnationalism focus primarily on the transformation of networks.

In her work on the brotherhoods formed by Peruvian migrants in the U.S., Spain, Argentina and Japan in honor of one of their patron saints, Paerregaard (2001) makes a similar distinction between transnational and diasporic religion. She documents how migrants brought images of the saint with them to their new homes, raised funds for ritual celebrations, and conquered host-country public space by organizing annual processions. Though some of these activities involved initial communication with the mother church in Lima, these contacts seldom endured. There was little evidence of coordination between brotherhoods in the same receiving country or between different host country contexts. Instead, Paerregaard argues, members used brotherhood memberships to establish themselves in the host society and to differentiate themselves from other minorities rather than pursue enduring homeland ties.

One of the principal books that examining religion from a transnational perspective is Rudolph and Piscatori's (1997) Transnational Religion and Fading States. Here, "transnational" is used in two ways, neither to do with migrants. On the one hand, global or world religions are seen as creating a transnational civil society that challenges nation states and security interests as they have been traditionally conceived. Another set of articles documents the macro-level connections between global religious actors that cross national boundaries.

I want to take Vertovec and Rudolph and Piscatori's helpful formulations as my points of departure. I agree that not all migrants express a sense of belonging to a diaspora and that not all diasporas engage in concrete transnational activities. I agree that transnational communities are the potential building blocks of diasporas but whether they actually evolve into them is an open question. Numerous transnational communities connect the U.S. with Latin America and the Caribbean but it is unclear how many migrants would claim membership in a Mexican,

Dominican or Salvadoran diaspora. Furthermore, I take issue with the analytical distinction made between religious transformations that occur in the context of diasporas vs. transnational migration. By focusing on transnationalism as networks and exchanges of goods, we miss the fact that transnational religious practices also involve the transformation of identity, community, and ritual practices. By not using empirical studies of transnational religious practices to ground and concretize diasporic imaginations, we are often left intuitively agreeing that these exist but lacking sufficient tangible evidence to back up that claim.

Let me propose another approach to the study of transnational religion that can also contribute to diaspora studies and to the study of religious institutions as transnational civil society creators. I begin by suggesting a framework for the study of transnational migration (Levitt 2001c).

When the magnitude, duration, and impact of migration is sufficiently strong, transnational social fields or public spheres spanning the sending and receiving country emerge (Mahler 1998, Fraser 1991). Both the migrants and nonmigrants who live within transnational social fields are exposed to a set of social expectations, cultural values, and patterns of human interaction shaped by at least two, if not more, social, economic, and political systems. They have access to social and institutional resources that imbue them with the potential to remain active in two worlds.

Movement is not a prerequisite for transnational activism. There are those who travel regularly to carry out their routine affairs, whom some researchers call transmigrants (England 1999, Guarnizo 1997). There are also individuals whose lives are rooted primarily in a single sending or receiving-country setting, who move infrequently, but whose lives integrally involve resources, contacts, and people who are far away and who locate themselves within a topography that crosses borders. And there are those who do not move but who live their lives within a context that has become transnationalized. They may engage in few activities that actually span borders but they too imagine themselves and express an allegiance to a group that is constituted across space. In each case, the social field these individuals locate themselves within may be constituted by ties between a single sending and receiving-country site or by connections to co-ethnics in multiple locations, giving rise to a sense of belonging to a broader diasporic group.

Those frequent travelers, periodic movers, and individuals that stay in one place who do participate in transnational practices do so in a variety of ways. Portes et al. (1999) and

Guarnizo (2000) defines core transnationalism as those activities that form an integral part of the individual's habitual life, are undertaken on a regular basis, and are patterned and therefore somewhat predictable. Expanded transnationalism, in contrast, includes migrants who engage in occasional transnational practices, such as responses to political crises or natural disasters. Itzigsohn et al. (1999) characterize broad transnational practices as those that are not well institutionalized, involve only occasional participation, and require only sporadic movement. He and his colleagues contrast these with narrow transnational practices that are highly institutionalized, constant, and involve regular travel.

These terms help to operationalize variations in the intensity and frequency of transnational practices but cross-border engagements also vary along other dimensions, such as scope. Even those engaged in core transnational practices may confine their activities to one arena of social action. Or the same person may engage in core transnational activities with respect to one sphere of social life and only expanded transnational activities with respect to another. There are those, for example, whose livelihoods depend upon the frequent, patterned harnessing of resources across borders while their political and religious lives focus on host-country concerns. In contrast, there are those who engage in regular religious and political transnational practices but only occasionally send money back to family members or invest in homeland projects. Some individuals whose transnational practices involve many arenas of social life engage in comprehensive transnational practices while others engage in transnational practices that are more selective in scope. Table One provides concrete examples of variations on these different dimensions of transnational activism. Again, the intensity, frequency, and scope of transnational practices does not necessarily determine the strength of one's sense of belonging to a transnational or diasporic community.

Table 1: Variations in the Dimensions of Transnational Practices

	Comprehensive	Selective
Core	Transnational business owner who is also active home-country political party member, member of church with sister congregations in home and host country, and hometown association leader.	The political party official whose job it is to coordinate party activities between the sending and receiving country but who does not participate in any other kind of transnational group and maintains few cross-border social and familial ties.
Expanded	Periodically contributes to sending community projects, makes contributions to political campaigns, and provides occasional economic remittances to family members	Periodically engages in only one of these activities.

Transnational religious practices represent one type of transnational activity that migrants engage in which, until now, has not been sufficiently explored. In contrast to studies of diaspora religion or of religious institutions as global actors, I propose that studies of transnational religion focus on the everyday, lived practice of migrant religion in at least two locations. They should explore migrants' grassroots transnational practices or what M.P. Smith and Guarnizo (1998) call "transnationalism from below" and take as their primary focus grounded, concrete expressions of religious beliefs, practices, and organization. They should then build up from these and document the broader social and political power hierarchies in which they are embedded. That is, they should map the horizontal ties linking individuals, leaders, institutions, and religious social movement actors in the home and host country and then situate these within the context of regional, national, and global cross-border connections. This context-specific approach is particularly important in studies of religious traditions not characterized by a unitary set of beliefs. Since there is no centralized authority and no one way to practice, these faiths vary considerably across contexts.

Studies of transnational religion should not focus solely on how religion is transformed in the host country setting. They must also examine the ways in which these changes alter sending-country religious practices, and the continuous, iterative relationship between the two. Ideally, field work should be carried out in multiple sites. If this is not possible, sending country impacts, and migrants' descriptions of these, need to be taken into account. Studies of transnational religious practices must examine all aspects of religious life, including individual and collective manifestations and formal and popular religious practices in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized settings. Finally, this work should take theology seriously. It should explore the ways in which migrants use religious ideas and symbols to construct the multiple identities and allegiances that characterize the diasporic experience. By asking respondents to describe how they use religious vocabularies and icons to situate themselves in the multiple social spaces they inhabit, processes become concrete and observable that are widely alluded to in the literature but that are infrequently clearly explained.

Transnational Religion is Not New

The fluidity of religion across political boundaries is not new. Early Christianity and Islam spread on the backs of traders, conquerors, and colonial administrators. Recent migration and heightened globalization generate new cultural contacts that have much in common with these earlier disseminations of religious life.

European churches at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, also remained strongly connected to their expatriate parishioners. Because they worried migrants might convert to other faiths in the U.S., they often contributed money, clergy, and resources toward the establishment of ethnic churches. Evangelical pastors traveled back and forth between Italy and the U.S., preaching in both settings (Simpson 1916). Italian Bishops also collaborated with one another to help migrants in the U.S. (Astori 1968).

Some sending-country churches felt responsible for their emigrant faithful, and continued to curry their long-term political and financial support. The Hungarian government, for example, provided particularly generous funding to any group that supported the Hungarian monarchy. It gave direct subsidies to loyal churches, priests, schools and newspapers, regardless of the

ethnicity of their members, as a way to control and weaken opposition among those living abroad (Bodner 1985). During the first two decades of the 1900s, Chinese Protestants played a significant role in persuading Chinese Americans to support a republican government for China. Using evangelical teachings, they criticized China as a backward, pagan land that would only achieve modernity, democracy, and republicanism when it accepted Christianity. “The immediate aim of our effort is the salvation of souls by preaching of the gospel,” one leader remarked in 1917. “The ultimate aim is the redemption of China through the earnestness of our converted young men when they return to the homeland” (Tseng in Yoo 1999:31).

Other churches saw migrants and those who returned as cause for concern. They feared that those who converted to new faiths would return to proselytize. They believed that migrants would introduce new ways of thinking that would challenge Church authority. Returnees did not treat priests with the same deference as they did before they left. Thousands of those who returned used the political organizing skills they learned to create village organizations, labor unions, and even political parties, also challenging the stronghold of the church (Wyman 1993).

Despite similarities between contemporary and earlier migration experiences, clear differences characterize contemporary migrant’s transnational religious lives.² New communication and transportation technologies permit more frequent and intimate connections between those who move and those who remain behind. The airplane and the telephone make it easier and cheaper to remain in touch. New technologies heighten the immediacy and intensity of migrants’ contact with their sending communities, allowing them to be actively involved in everyday life in fundamentally different ways than in the past. Several Brazilian Catholics in Governador Valadares, a city of approximately 270,000 that sends large numbers to the Boston Metropolitan area, said they often watched broadcasts of the Brazilian–language mass from Somerville, Massachusetts that is shown on the local television channel in Brazil so they could see their migrant relatives worshipping (Levitt 2001b). Yang and Ebaugh (2001) identified a number of immigrant congregations that kept in daily contact with their sending-country church partners via the internet.

The context of receiving-country incorporation has also changed considerably. A comparison between the experiences of earlier and more recent Irish migrants brings these differences to light. The Irish who arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

² See Levitt (2001a) for a discussion of the differences between earlier and contemporary migration in general.

helped create the U.S. Catholic church. They worshipped at national parishes, an interim strategy the church adopted to serve its new immigrant members until they learned to worship in English and to adopt more “American” ways. Irish priests, many of whom had no intention of returning home, often accompanied them. Because whole families frequently migrated together or were unified once in the U.S, attending mass and participating in parish activities were natural starting points for host-country incorporation (Dolan 1992).

“New” Irish migrants are integrated into a well-established Catholic Church in the process of reinventing itself as a multi-ethnic group. They are just one of many new Catholic constituencies who, in contrast to their predecessors, must now adapt to, rather than create, the religious landscape. It is a landscape no longer requiring migrants to abandon their home-country practices but one that recognizes that they may retain these indefinitely. In fact, they are encouraged to do so, although often within the context of pan-ethnic congregations. In Boston, Irish-born priests have been brought over to serve the new Irish but they stay only for five year contracts. They are supported by the Boston Archdiocese, the Irish Catholic Church, and the Irish government and they report to superiors on both sides of the ocean. They define their job as helping migrants who plan to settle in the U.S. and those who want to maintain ties to Ireland. Pre-marital classes, mandatory for all who wish to be married in the Catholic Church, include sessions on securing mortgages in Boston and in Ireland.

The following sections review various dimensions of transnational religious life

Variations in Transnational Religious Organization

Transnational religious life is constituted by a variety of elements. Most concrete are its institutional manifestations. My own work suggests that migrants create at least three types of transnational religious organizational patterns which are similar to those identified by other scholars.³ The first, as exemplified by the Catholic Church, is an extended transnational religious organization. From the mid 1800s to the present, the Catholic Church worked diligently to create and reinforce its role as a transnational, publicly-influential institution. By

³ I propose these types as heuristic tools. They are not static, impermeable categories. In fact, religious institutions may pass from one form to another over time. My thanks to Manuel Vásquez for pointing this out in a related paper.

dispersing religious cadres, mounting missionary campaigns, operating schools, building pilgrimage shrines, and organizing international encounters, the Church created a vast, interconnected network of activities throughout the world (Casanova 1994).

Vatican II challenged these arrangements in somewhat contradictory ways. It reversed a century long trend toward centralization by acknowledging the plurality of national Catholicisms, and by legitimizing their expression. At the same time, it rehomogenized practice by prompting a theological renewal and instituting a series of liturgical changes throughout the entire Catholic world. In essence, it allowed for national Catholic traditions, with their different cultural and mental worlds, to flourish, though always within the context of a centrally regulated system based in Rome (Hervieu-Léger 1997). There has also been a proliferation of emotional and spiritual communities and affinity groups that cross-cut national traditions and make Catholicism even more portable than it was before.

Furthermore, a Pope who has positioned himself as a spokesperson for humanity and who issues encyclicals and takes positions on events not only of concern to Catholics but to humankind in general, stewards these activities. The Pope has become, “the high priest of a new universal civil religion of humanity and the first citizen of a global civil society” (Casanova 1994:130).⁴ By articulating a vision of community that supercedes national boundaries and within which religious transnational civil society takes center stage, the Pope also encourages members’ sense of belonging in multiple settings. Religious membership also incorporates followers into an institution that can potentially empower, protect, and give voice to their concerns.

Taken together, these changes mean that transnational migrants form part of sending and receiving-country churches that are connected and directed by a single authority but that enjoy a good deal of autonomy at the local level. When they circulate in and out of parishes or religious movement groups in the U.S., Ireland, the Dominican Republic, or Brazil, they broaden, deepen, and customize a global religious system that is already legitimate, powerful, and well organized. Religious membership enables migrants’ simultaneous belonging in their sending and receiving communities. It also integrates them into resource-rich, strongly-integrated institutional networks that are potential sites for expressing interests and making claims.

⁴ Some would disagree strongly with this characterization, arguing that the Pope can hardly claim to speak for women and homosexuals whom they see as marginalized by the Catholic Church.

These intensified connections are evident in the Brazilian and Irish communities I study but also in the work of other scholars.⁵ They grow out of relations between individual members and clergy in the home and host country and because migrants and nonmigrants participate in parallel activities and use similar worship materials within a discursive climate infused with the ideology of the universal Catholic Church. Several priests in Governador Valadares said they received frequent requests to say prayers or dedicate masses to parishioners in Massachusetts. Brazilian immigrant Apostolate churches read from the same handout of weekly prayers and hymns used in Brazil (printed in Brasilia, the national capital). They organized mission campaigns paralleling those in Brazil. When the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CBNN), for example, launched a year long campaign against homelessness, Brazilian immigrant churches initiated a campaign for better housing and stronger neighborhoods. Religious leaders chose these activities because they resonated with those undertaken in Brazil while more directly addressing the problems facing the community in Boston. Brazilian and U.S. Church leaders have also explored ways to coordinate staffing and training with one another. The CBNN has plans to expand its Pastoral for Immigrants, which is currently involved with internal migrants and Brazilians emigrants around the globe.

In the case of Dominicans from the small town of Miraflores who migrated to Massachusetts, these parish-to-parish connections mutually transformed religious life in Boston and in the Dominican Republic. New immigrants became incorporated into multi-ethnic congregations using a generic “Latino” worship style including some familiar elements and

⁵ My comments are based on findings from an ongoing research project on transnational migration among Dominican, Irish, Indian, Brazilian, Lebanese, and Israeli migrants to the greater Boston Metropolitan area. All the groups in this study were selected because large numbers of migrants left a particular sending-country village, city or state and settled near one another in Massachusetts. Findings from my work on Dominicans from the village of Miraflores who live in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, Irish from the Inishowen Peninsula who live in Dorchester, Indians from Gujarat State who have settled around the city of Lowell, and Brazilians from Governador Valadares who live in Framingham are discussed in this paper. The project research team includes myself, colleagues in each sending country, and a group of graduate and undergraduate researchers. In the United States, we collect data by interviewing first and second-generation individuals and organizational leaders, observing meetings and special events, and reviewing pertinent documents. After each interview in Boston, we ask for the names of nonmigrant family members to contact. We then conduct a parallel set of interviews with individuals and organizational leaders in sending communities at the local, regional, and national level. Two hundred and forty interviews have been conducted among first and second generation Irish, Indian, Dominican, and Brazilian migrants. In addition, seventy-six leaders of religious, political, and social organizations have been interviewed. Field work was also carried out in Ireland, Brazil, and India among migrants’ family members and with organizational leaders at the local, regional, and national levels in 1997-2001. Field work in the Dominican Republic was conducted between 1992-1994 and in 1997. Work on the Israeli and Lebanese components of this project will be carried out in 2001-2003.

excluding many that were uniquely Dominican. They communicated about changes in their religious practices and beliefs to those remaining at home. Subsequent migrants arrived already pre-socialized into many elements of U.S. Latino Catholicism. They continued to infuse fresh "Dominicanness" into the church, though it was a "Dominicanness" that was increasingly pan-Latino in tone. Continuous, cyclical transfers ensued which consolidated these pan-ethnic practices while weakening their uniquely Dominican elements. In this way, transnational ties reinforced religious pluralism at the same time that they limited its scope (Levitt 2001a).

McAlistar's (1998) work also highlights the role of Catholic and voodoo practices in creating and sustaining transnational lifestyles and in creating a unique space for the Haitian community in the U.S. Many of the Haitian migrants in New York that she studied live transnational lives. They work to support households in Haiti, send their children to school in Haiti, or return to Haiti for extended periods to rest or recuperate. Religious pilgrimages, processions, and rituals are one way that migrants express their continuing attachment to their home country. The Feast of our Lady of Miracles, which migrants celebrate at the same time that celebrations are held in Haiti manifests migrants' continued devotion to their homeland and serves to distinguish them from African Americans in the U.S.

Extending an organization's catchment area across borders does not necessarily mean that migrants will sustain ties to multiple sites. Menjivar (1999) found that Catholic church membership was far less supportive of transnational activism than membership in Evangelical churches. Because the Catholic Church in Washington, D.C. was so concerned with creating a pan-ethnic identity among its new immigrant constituents, it emphasized common projects and discouraged the development of ties to specific localities. Religious leaders also discouraged using the church to mount homeland-oriented activities, fearing these would politicize and divide the Salvadoran community.

Various movements associated with the Catholic Church, such as the Charismatic, Neocatecumenal, and Cursillo movements, also expand the radius of Catholic activities across borders. These groups articulate a life view that has been disseminated globally through international conferences, fellowships, prayer links, and the media. It is not clear, however, the extent to which movement membership serves as a site from which to express multiple belonging.

Charismatic groups in Boston and Miraflores worked in conjunction with one another. Migrants visiting Miraflores were warmly welcomed at meetings as were nonmigrant visitors in Boston. This access to “a membership card that works everywhere” encouraged participants’ sense of belonging to a transnational group. It also constantly reminded nonmigrants that they too belonged to a social and religious cross-border community (Levitt 2001a).

Peterson and Vásquez’s (2001) study of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal Movement (CCR) in El Salvador and among Central American migrants in Washington revealed different effects. Many of the leaders of the immigrant community in Washington were active in the Charismatic movement in El Salvador. They brought the socialization they received in their homeland with them and when they returned to visit El Salvador they participated in CCR activities. Because of the personal transformation they experienced when they joined the CCR, some members became transnational activists. The new set of values they adopted encouraged them to send remittances to their families and to support community development projects. But Peterson and Vásquez found few organized transnational activities. Their work revealed no connections between religious groups in El Salvador and Washington and no transnational missions. Collective religious involvement, they conclude, does not orient members simultaneously to two settings.

Protestant churches with affiliates in the U.S. and in Latin America typify a second type of negotiated transnational religious organization. These also extend and deepen ties already in place but within the context of much less hierarchical, centralized institutions. Instead, flexible ties, not subject to a set of pre-established rules must be constantly worked out. Again, I focus on Brazilian immigration to Boston as a case in point.

Protestantism has grown tremendously in Latin America during the last decades. While less than five percent of the Brazilian population was Protestant in 1960, an estimated 40% of the population now claim to be “born again”. In 1998, in Governador Valadares had approximately 422 Protestant churches. In just one neighborhood of nearly 3,000 residents, there were at least 35 churches (Levitt 2001b). These congregations ranged from Mainline Protestant groups to start-up Pentecostal congregations. Some pray in private homes and storefronts while others worship in elegant, imposing structures that seat thousands. Even some of the most fledgling groups had plaques outside their doors indicating they have chapters in Massachusetts.

Both personal and institutional ties constitute this negotiated transnational religious

sphere. As in the Catholic Church, individual migrant and nonmigrant church members and religious leaders often sustained ties to one another. Institutional connections ranged from narrowly-focused ties between local, start-up home and host-country congregations to newly-mediated arrangements between sending and receiving-country branches of the same denomination with a long history of missionary activities. In the majority of cases, no clear, accepted rules governed these relations.

Pastor Murillo's experience illustrates the malleability of religious practices in these settings. Originally ordained as a Presbyterian minister, he first came to Boston to do graduate work. After he completed his course work and had returned to Brazil, he received a call from a U.S. priest he befriended who asked him to return to work with a program for Cape Verdean drug addicts (also Portuguese speaking). By the time his visa came through, however, the program had closed. Fortunately, he met a Brazilian Renewed Baptist minister who invited Pastor Murillo to join his church.

I talked with my supervisor and I told him that I was working with this group and studying (he is working toward his Masters). I am going to work, study and help this community. I send reports to the Presbyterian Church in Rio about my activities. And they say, 'keep going' because there is an agreement in the church that you can work with other groups that have the same affinities, like the Methodists or like other historic churches. Presbyterians can help other churches.

Q: But Renewed Baptists are not a historic church. They are Pentecostal.

It is Pentecostal. That is right. But I am very far from Brazil and when you are far from Brazil things are a bit more flexible. That's all. If I was in China, things would be even more flexible. In Brazil, it might be a problem.

Q: Does everyone know?

It is not very common to speak about this. One doesn't know a lot about it. I don't ask my colleagues which churches they come from.

Relations between Protestant individuals and churches also deepen and thicken what, in some cases, are already global institutions or they engender new global connections. In contrast to the Catholic Church, however, these are negotiated with respect to authority, organization, and ritual. There is no leader or administrative hierarchy to set policy and dictate how things are done. When transnational migrants extend these cross-border connections, issues like power

sharing, financing, and administrative practice must be worked out. These negotiations give rise to a more diverse, diluted set of partnerships that are unstable and shift over time. As Vasquez et al. (2001) point out, these churches function like what Manuel Castells has described as a network society – decentralized, flexible yet connected networks that provide customized services and goods. Just as decentralized, adaptive modes of production are better suited to meet the challenges of global economic competition, so flexible production and dissemination of religious goods does better at meeting the needs of contemporary religious consumers. Smaller models are more adaptable and more responsive and, therefore, more likely to endure (Stoll and Levine 1997).⁶

Several recent studies support the claim that smaller, less bureaucratized, less hierarchical churches are better suited to serve transnationally-oriented members. Wellmeier (1998) argues that because Guatemalan Mayans belonged to independent storefront ministries that were ethnically homogeneous, it was easier for them to devote their energies toward improvements in their hometowns. Because the evangelical church León (1998) studied was one of a network of over twenty-five churches in the U.S., Spain, and Mexico, members felt they were part of a broad, powerful supranational movement and that the church could therefore captivate their interest and support.

Menjivar's (1999) work also supports this view. In contrast to their Salvadoran Catholic counterparts, Protestant churches were not held back by extensive and demanding worldwide networks. They did not have to create new, more inclusive identities because many leaders and their followers came from the same regions of El Salvador and because they were all Christians. Activities directed at El Salvador did not create conflict. In fact, one church had sister churches in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and eastern El Salvador. They broadcast a two hour radio program in El Salvador at least three times a week, which included a call-in component so listeners could hear friends and relatives from back home. According to one member, "We are related to the church there in El Salvador spiritually and in practice. We are oriented to them and they are to us. It's like one church in two place" (Menjivar 1999:605).

The experiences of Gujarati Hindus from the Baroda district in India, suggests a third

⁶ Peterson and Vásquez make this same argument in their study of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal Movement (CCR). While parish life is characterized by a Fordist mode of production that results in a one-size-fits-all product, the CCR is post-Fordist, flexibly creating a customized product that is especially successful because it does not challenge established hierarchies.

type of recreated transnational religious organization.⁷ Migrants had to start their own religious groups when they came to the United States because there were so few established organizations to receive them. They either created their own groups (with guidance from home-country leaders) or Indian religious leaders came to areas where large numbers of Indian immigrants lived to create U.S.-based organizations with migrant support. Most of these organizations either function like franchises or chapters of their counterpart organizations in India. Franchises are run primarily by migrants who periodically receive resources and guidance from sending-country leadership, while chapters are supported and supervised regularly by sending-country leaders.

The Devotional Associates of Yogeshwar or the Swadhyaya movement is an example of a movement that has been recreated in the U.S. Swadhyaya groups in India are organized informally. According to Didiji, the group's leader, leadership emerges consensually; those who are most knowledgeable or experienced become the *motobhais* or elder brothers of each group. Swadhyaya is, at its core, a family. Followers do what they are asked because it is their duty as family members. The U.S. social and political context demands that these groups become more systematically organized. They need to look and act like formal congregations to raise funds, obtain permits, or rent halls (Warner and Wittner 1995). As a result, the Swadhyaya movement in the U.S. has been divided into nine geographic regions. Each zone has own leader, who meet bi-monthly with one another. Though they can make decisions on their own, they claim to be in touch with Swadhyaya leaders in Mumbai on an almost daily basis.

Gibb (1998) described Harari Muslims in Ethiopia and Canada whose experience of diaspora prompted them to construct an identity that was meaningful in transnational terms. To reinforce group cohesion over time and space, they had to create community values that would be relevant in the home and host country. Her work suggests, however, that though Harari ethnicity is being constructed within the context of a transnational movement, and responds to pressures from the Ethiopian and Canadian states, what it means to be Muslim has been transformed from a localized, culturally-specific version to a more homogenized globalized tradition of standardized practices observed by other Muslims in Canada. The result is that Hararis are more oriented toward other Muslims in Canada than toward other Ethiopian groups. By developing a pan-Muslim identity, they can communicate with a wider community because

⁷ Williams (1988) calls these Hindu Organizations of Indian Americans "made in the U.S.A...assembled in the U.S. from imported components by relatively unskilled labor (at least unskilled by traditional standards) and adapted to fit new designs to reach a new and growing market" (1992:230).

of their shared religious traditions.

The research I have summarized highlights the institutional expressions of transnational religious life. Let me emphasize several points before I proceed. First, transnational organization does not necessarily engender transnational identities or practices. Each of the institutions I described enacted some part of their activities across borders but, as often as not, these merely served to reinforce migrants' attachments to a single setting. The transnational practices of Harari Muslims encouraged their integration into a pan-Muslim Canada while the activities of Pentecostals and Gujarati Swadhyayees reinforced ties to their ancestral homes.

Second, transnational religious activities are part and parcel of religious globalization. As such, they cannot be viewed in isolation but must be understood within the context of these broader, global processes. At times, the boundaries between these two domains are admittedly cloudy. I purposely propose a narrow definition of transnational religious practices to encourage greater methodological and analytical clarity. But clearly, some migrants use religion to express very localized transnational attachments as well as broader diasporic or global commitments. Brazilian Assembly of God members, who expressed a sense of belonging to a religious community spanning Governador Valadares and Boston, nested these relationships within the larger context of the Assemblies of God community worldwide. The globalization of religion produces a climate that encourages transnational religious connections and creates elements needed for their enactment. Transnational religion is one, grounded strand of religious globalization that migrants further through their everyday lives.

Finally, transnational religion does not just reveal itself in institutional arenas. We need to understand its forms and consequences by examining the ways in which believers use symbols and ideas to imagine and locate themselves within a religious landscape that may be superimposed on to, run parallel to, or obviate the need for one defined by national boundaries. We need to understand how religious beliefs shape notions of rights and responsibilities and the ways in which individuals decide how and where they should be acted upon. We need to consider organized, individualized, and internalized expressions of transnational religion to understand the role of religion as a catalyst for transnational livelihoods and the ways in which transnational actors reshape religious life. The following section lays out these issues in greater detail.

Transnational religious space as an alternative landscape

Ancient pilgrims traveling from one sacred landmark to another, and their contemporary counterparts, created an imaginary religious landscape bounded by these holy sites (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990). Transnational migrants also use religion to delineate an alternative cartography of belonging. Religious icons and sacred shrines, rather than national flags, proclaim these religious spaces. The moral and physical geographies that result may fall within national boundaries, transcend but coexist with them, or create an additional place that supercedes national borders.⁸

For example, Haitian migrants in New York simply added Harlem as an additional site for carrying out their spiritual work. They extended the boundaries of their spiritual practices and superinscribed them onto the actual physical landscape of settlement (McAlister 1998). By building and conducting rituals at a shrine to their national patron saint, Cuban exiles in Miami created what Tweed (1999) calls transtemporal and translocative space. These rituals allowed migrants to recover the past when they were still in Cuba and to imagine a future when they will be there again. They also allowed migrants to assert their continued membership in their homeland. Families brought newborns to the shrine to formally transform those born in America into citizens of the imagined Cuban nation. By so doing, the community used religion to extend the boundaries of Cuba to include those living outside its borders.

Many of the Salvadoran youth that Vásquez and his colleagues (2001) studied did not feel they belonged in the U.S. or in El Salvador. They joined transnational gangs because they provided a close, tight-knit community and helped counteract their feelings of marginality in the society at large. Gang members shared many of the characteristics of transnational migrants because they acted, made decisions, and developed identities shaped by relationships and resources that cross borders. In fact, when the Salvadoran Peace Accords were signed in 1992 they had to be approved in El Salvador and in Los Angeles.

The appeal of gang life gradually wore thin for many members. As some groups got involved in drug trafficking, they grew less effective at providing a place for adolescents who

⁸ See Vertovec (2000) for a up-to-date review of literature based on the European experience making a similar claim.

were trying to belong. Pentecostal churches stepped in to fill this gap. They functioned much like gangs, “savings souls transnationally” by using contacts in El Salvador and the U.S. to reach gang members. These efforts worked because they “combined deterritorialization (the operation of transnational webs) with reterritorialization (re-centering of self and community)” (Vásquez et al. 2001:34). Religion engendered an alternative, ultimately more satisfying space, because it successfully synthesizes self and community.

Some of the Valadarenses I interviewed in Boston also use religion to create an alternative landscape. The activities they enact there promote host-country integration but also situate migrants in a broader, global religious community that may ultimately prove more meaningful and override national or transnational political commitments. Pastora Eliana said she felt invisible when she came into contact with government agencies and schools in the U.S. or when she had to complete official Census forms. She said she only began to feel a sense of belonging in this country when her church joined the American Baptist Convention (ABC). She continues to be active in her denominational convention in Brazil at the same time that she, and the group of Renewed Brazilian Baptist congregations she belongs to, have become members of the ABC. It is her identity as a Baptist, rather than her identity as a Brazilian American that has allowed her to begin to become integrated into U.S. society.

What I see the Brazilian population searching for here in Massachusetts is that we would like to have a sense of belonging. When we go back to Brazil we are no longer Brazilian Brazilians and being here we are not considered EuroAmericans. So we are a people without identity, without a connection, and we are very family oriented. But when we leave our country, our family, our neighbors and we come here after time goes by, we search for a way to belong to this culture. We want to belong to something that we could call family because we are struggling to identify who we are. We have become bicultural, we have changed. But so far, who are we?

But this Baptist identity also inscribes her in a global religious community that is both welcoming and empowering.

Q: Why wouldn't one be a Baptist? Could you imagine a world where the salient identity would be a Baptist rather than Brazilian or American?

I think that this identity already exists. I mean being a Brazilian person and being

a Baptist is synonymous with being smart. It is synonymous with wisdom because among us we know that Baptists are capable of thinking or being in a relationship with one another, of having disagreements but at the same time finding solutions and agreement among ourselves. Calling ourselves Baptists is something that we as a community are proud of. When the denomination showed that it was open to establish this relationship with us, giving recognition to us, it was something that we celebrated because it is giving to us the recognition that we are no longer invisible. So far, we have been an invisible culture without any connection with the new system that we are in. But now, this kind of feeling is so strong because we really feel that we are becoming family in a very constructive way. We are no longer invisible. Even through the Census, if I go to fill out an application in any school or any place, I can identify myself as Hispanic or other. And usually I go other. This is what I call invisible culture. I mean we are here but nobody knows yet.

Because of the marginalization Eliana experiences in the U.S., her identity as a Baptist assumes preeminence. It helps her integrate into the host society but it also incorporates her into a global religious community that may eventually become more salient. We need to understand more about the relationship between global religious and national belonging. How does the individual's relationship to the society at large change when the social glue evolves from civic rather than religious principles? Do transnational political actors do things differently with respect to their sending and receiving communities than their transnational religious counterparts? I turn to this briefly in the section that follows.

Religion as a guide to transnational civic engagement

Just as religion furnishes elements with which to create alternative cartographies, so it guides believers about their rights and responsibilities in the communities where they belong. Religious institutions differ from other immigrant institutions in that they see themselves as the living embodiment of universal and timeless truths (Chen 2001). They provide members with moral compasses and orient them to act upon these values in particular settings. Yet few studies take theology seriously by trying to understand what ordinary people actually believe and how these beliefs guide their everyday lives. As global interconnectedness expands, to what extent do particular traditions articulate globally-oriented theologies? What lessons do transnational religious groups disseminate to members about the rights and duties of transnational, if not

global, citizens? To what extent do these teachings shape their continuing attachments to home and host-country communities?

Pentecostalism, for example, is often considered apolitical. Members are citizens of God's Kingdom, which transcends boundaries and supercedes national or transnational citizenship. The Salvadoran Pentecostal churches that Menjívar studied in Washington lend credence to this perspective. They kept in close touch with sister congregations in El Salvador. They supported community development projects, invited each other's pastors to speak, circulated the same monthly newspaper, held conventions that brought congregations together, and participated in international Evangelical church councils. Evangelization rather than community development goals motivated these efforts, however. According to one respondent, "We only keep in touch with our own countries if it's going to help them accept Christ as their savior. And then the nationality doesn't matter any more. What's important is that we bring them the good news, the Word. This is a much better gift than any amount of money or clothes you can send (1999:607). The political or civic consequences of these activities are accidental. Members' primary goal is to extend and strengthen the community of God.

Vásquez et al. (2001) take issue with this view. Though Pentecostal communities try to erect clear boundaries between the safe, sanctified world of faith and its dangerous, violent secular counterpart, their safe enclosures are not hermetically sealed. Members enact multiple roles and participate in multiple settings meaning that they continue to influence the secular world and it continues to influence them. Pentecostal churches also reproduce patterns of domination and exclusion. Their rhetoric of spiritual warfare creates a "terrain of control" that is difficult to challenge. "Since this closed social terrain is ultimately grounded in the radical deterritorialization demanded by the reign of God, it mirrors the erasure of borders and identities that is central to globalization. In other words, for all its emphasis on the self, Pentecostalism, like global capitalism, homogenizes, making particularity only a strategy or stepping stone toward the production of globality/universality" (Vásquez et al. 2001:40).

Finally, Indians in the U.S. sent an estimated \$350,000 to support Hindu nationalist causes in India between January 1992 and December 1993. (Prashad 1997:9). Religious and cultural groups, many which operate transnationally, strongly influence homeland politics (Van der Veer 1995, Van der Veer and Lehmann 1999). Although she does not describe sending-country dynamics, and therefore does not fit strictly within the definition of transnational religion

I have proposed, Kurien's (2001) work offers one of only a few windows onto the relationship between U.S. Hinduism and Indian politics. Because religious communities are the most effective means for certain groups to develop and maintain ethnic identities in the U.S., she argues, national heritage is redefined as the religion of a particular group. Multicultural societies privilege migrants who articulate strong, cohesive ethnic identities. In response, a process of unification, homogenization, and glorification occurs, using religious organizations and symbols. But since ethnicity is officially defined by national origin, ethnic groups must recreate their homeland and cultures into symbols of the pride that they express. This often produces ethnic nationalism that massages the past, present, and future so they resonate with religious identities. Hindu groups in the U.S. promote host-country incorporation by transforming Hinduism into an ethnic category that is accepted and familiar. At the same time, because these reformulations support a Hindu nationalist view, they contribute to the Hindutva movement in India.

Conclusion and future directions

This paper proposes an approach to the study of transnational religious practices, differentiates it from research on diasporic and global religions, and attempts to synthesize what little we know about transnational religious activities to date. I suggest that studies of transnational religion focus on the everyday, lived practice of migrant religion grounded in at least two locations. I propose that they examine the ways in which host-country incorporation changes religious practice, how these changes affect sending-country religious life, and how these changes mutually reinforce one another. Transnational religious studies are not just about the organizational manifestations of faith but about the alternative places of belonging that religious ideas and symbols make possible and about the ways in which these sacred landscapes interact with the boundaries of political and civic life. I hope that the formulation I propose will help specify religion's role in transnational identity formulation and the ways in which transnational migrants change religious life. I hope it brings to light how religious participation shapes continued home and host-country political and civic engagement and the ways in which local practices are aggregated and incorporated into regional, national or transnational activities. Finally, I expect that it will advance our understanding of the ways in which transnational

religious practices contribute to diasporic or global religious consciousness and how diasporic and global religious actors institutionalize themselves through transnational religious practices.

Clearly, there is much work to be done. What I have offered is a brief sketch of what we know about nature and impact of transnational religious practices based on selective studies of U.S. migration. I am short on conclusions and long on calls for more empirical, grounded studies of ordinary individuals' lived religious experiences and beliefs. Future work needs to flesh out how transnational religious practices are actually carried out, what their impacts are, and what they mean for home and host-country life.

These tasks pose methodological and epistemological challenges. How do we make concrete the landscapes and communities that people imagine? How can we go beyond the in-depth, grounded field work needed to make explicit what is often so implicit in order to make comparisons across groups? How would our questions change if we shifted the central organizing principle from nation to faith community – if we took seriously, as many respondents may, a world that is primarily organized around Islamic, Hindu, or Baptist identities rather than ethnic or nation affinities and that is built upon religious values rather than civic ones?

Several studies indicate parallels between the effects of transnational religious, economic, and political practices. Espinosa(1999), R. Smith (1995), and Durand (1994) outline religion's role in transnational community creation and perpetuation. Religious festivals, and particularly Patron Saint Day celebrations, have always been important sites of contact, maintenance, and renewal of relations between migrants and nonmigrants. Immigrants' churches often contribute significant sums of money to community development in their sending communities. Guatemalan immigrants in Los Angeles made special appeals to immigrants' churches in the U.S. who actively supported projects back home (Popkin 1995). The pastor of a Mayan Catholic church in Guatemala helped his former parishioners set up a formal organization based on organizational models used in Guatemala (Wellmeier 1998).

These religious practices also generate similar conflicts between migrants and nonmigrants that others have described (Goldring 1998, Levitt 2001a). When Mexican migrants began replacing traditional elites as the sponsors of religious festivals, nonmigrant leaders called for cultural purity. They put the church in charge of protecting the community from the threat to this migrants posed. The church added a *Dia Del Emigrante* (Day of the Emigrant) to its Patron Saint celebrations. Migrants participated in a special retreat and mass during which the priest

discussed migration's impact on the local society. When migrants were deemed spiritually and symbolically renewed, they were then reintegrated back into community (Espinosa 1999).

What other effects will result from transnational religious engagements? How do migrants combine these practices with other kinds of transnational activities? Under what circumstances can participation in one domain compensate for partial membership in others? What difference does it make when new migrants' principal mode of integration into their host country is through religious membership rather than political citizenship? How do religiously - defined public spheres and notions of civil society differ from political conceptualizations? To what extent do the religious ideas guiding migrants' everyday lives challenge the existing social contract? In what ways do migrants' long-term impacts on their countries of origin change when they remain connected through churches rather than political groups?

What do migrant-generated transnational practices have to do with other kinds of transnational social formations? How do the activities of Charismatic Catholic Renewal groups, for example, compare to those of indigeneous or environmental rights proponents? Should we even be talking about transnational migrant communities and cross-border epistemic or professional communities in the same breath?

Finally, to what extent will transnational practices persist among the second generation? It makes sense that the children of immigrants born in the U.S., or who spend most of their formative years in this country, would feel their strongest sense of attachment to their family's adopted, rather than ancestral, home. Several recent studies suggest that this is, in fact, the case (Kasinitz, Waters, and Mollenkopf 1998, Rumbaut 1998). It may be premature, though, to conclude that transnational practices will all but disappear among the second generation. In fact, many studies highlight the unique role of religious institutions in reinforcing ethnic identities among the children of immigrants. My own work suggests that recreated transnational groups, such as the Swadhyaya and Swaminarayan movements, may be quite effective at reinforcing transnational religious identities among the second generation as well.

The research directions I propose speak to theoretical debates in the literature on migration and to public policy debates about the role of religion in public life. The intensification of life across borders will only increase the numbers for whom social and political citizenship is decoupled from residence. It is time we put religion front and center in our

attempts to understand how identity and belonging are being redefined in this increasingly global world.

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