"TRANSNATIONALISM AND CITIZENSHIP"

Michael Peter Smith
Professor of Community Studies and Development
University of California, Davis
Davis, California, 95616
mpsmith@ucdavis.edu

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Discourses on the rights, entitlements, and obligations of citizenship have changed dramatically in the past two decades as a result of the increasingly transnational character of global migration flows, cultural networks, and socio-political practices. The once taken for granted correspondence between citizenship, nation, and state has been questioned as new forms of "grassroots citizenship" have taken on an increasingly trans-territorial character. Resident non-citizens now routinely live and work in transnational cities throughout the world while maintaining social and political networks linking them to people and places located in their countries of origin. At the same time, the rise of supranational institutional networks and the spread of the discourse on human rights also challenge received notions of state sovereignty. Some scholars (e.g., Soysal, 1994; Held, 1991) now depict the activities of international human rights agencies and the development of supranational authority structures like the European Union as signs of a new international order premised on the creation of plural authority and "transnational citizenship." What sense can we make of these developments? What do they mean for the future of the nation-state? What prospects do they hold for the future of localities that become interconnected across borders by political practices and networks that I have elsewhere called "transnational urbanism"? (Smith, 1999,2001)

Scholarly writing on transnational political practices has tended to answer such questions in fairly black and white terms. Benedict Anderson (1994, 1998), author of the classic work on "imagined communities," (Anderson, 1983) warns of the dangers he sees in the practices of transnational political diasporas who practice a kind of unaccountable "long distance nationalism." Anderson's pessimistic reading is supported by his selection of evidence, such as the case of Croatians living in Bosnia and the United States, who, in his view, were responsible for the rise to power of Franjo Tudjman. At the same time,
Anderson studiously avoids any discussion of diasporic social networks and movements whose practices have helped to open up previously one party dominant states, as for instance, in the role played by "Mexican communities abroad" in changing the political culture of contemporary Mexico.

Anderson's reading of the relationship between transnationalism and citizenship can be contrasted with the celebratory reading of transnational citizenship offered by Yasemin Soysal. In *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*, Soysal (1994) also selectively appropriates evidence that depicts the emergence of a common European citizenship and the extension of economic and political rights to guest workers in Europe, while ignoring or overlooking the exclusions and racializations around which a common European identity is being constructed.

These two discourses differ sharply in emphasis. Yet they tend to frame their stories similarly, in a way which creates the impression that an entirely new structural dynamic -- e.g., for Anderson, new communication and transportation technologies facilitating long distance nationalism; or for Soysal, emergent international human rights norms ushering in a post-national political order-- is inexorably changing the world in which we live.

My own approach to these questions underlines our need to carefully historicize the relationship between transnationalism and citizenship -- i.e., to map the contingency and agency underlying the changing practices of states, migrants, and transnational institutional networks vis a vis questions of citizenship. In my view this is best done by paying close attention to the formation and reproduction of social networks that become linked to historically specific political projects which extend the practices of citizenship across borders.

In my view, despite the claims of some globalization theorists, the state has not withered away as a disappearing relic of the end of modernity. Instead, contemporary national and local states have differentially but ubiquitously mediated the flows of transnational migration, cultural production, and political practice flowing across their boundaries. Politically constructed state policies, legitimating discourses, and institutional practices are key elements through which transnational social formations are being constituted as migrant networks
interact with state-centered actors. In this keynote address I will offer numerous examples of the politics of cross-border citizenship, drawn largely, though not exclusively, from the U.S. experience with transnational diasporas. These will be used to flesh out my argument for the contingent character of transnational urbanism and the uneven politics to which it gives rise.

**Conceptualizing Transnationalism**

At the outset it is necessary to draw a clear conceptual distinction between "globalization" and "transnationalism." There are good reasons to insist on maintaining this conceptual distinction beyond the obvious one that these two social processes differ in scope, scale, or "reach." Anthropologist Michael Kearney (1995:548) argues convincingly that discourses on globalization and transnationalism differ significantly in the key assumptions they make about the role of the state in the production of meaning, identity, and social outcomes. While the globalization discourse draws attention to social processes that are "largely decentered from specific national territories," as in the case of Manuel Castells’ (1997) discussion of globalization(s) as taking place in a "space of flows," research on transnational processes depict transnational social relations as "anchored in" while also transcending one or more nation-states. For this reason globalization discourses often explicitly assume the growing insignificance of national borders, boundaries, and identities. In contrast, the transnationalist perspective from which I speak insists on the continuing significance of borders, state policies, and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices.

Unlike the globalization discourse, which maintains a kind of zero-sum assumption, in which globalization and the nation-state are treated as mutually exclusive and antagonistically related conceptual categories, I regard the nation-state and transnational practices as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive social formations (for support for this position see Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Smith, 1994; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Schein, 1998a, 1998b). I concur with the anthropologist of transnational cultural formations Louisa Schein, who has effectively taken to task those who conceptualize transnational practices by marking them and the nation-state as mutually exclusive entities or even as antagonistically locked in a competition for paradigmatic primacy. "Why instead," argues Schein (1998b: 169-170), "can
these debates not work toward imagining nation-state and transnational as interlocked, enmeshed, mutually constituting? In the process nation and state would need to be vigilantly delinked, making room for the notion of deterritorialized nationalism, loosed from their moorings in the bounded unit of the territorial state, and coalescing at both local and translocal levels."

This stance on the interplay of nationalism and transnationalism questions those theorists of transnationalism like Appadurai (1996) who have suggested that we are now moving into a "post-national" phase of the global cultural economy. Nationalism is very much alive as a political project not only of state formations but of transnational political diasporas and ethnic formations within existing states. Nationalism can be seen as well in the current efforts by many nation-states that have experienced substantial out-migration in recent decades to go to great lengths to develop discourses and institutional mechanisms designed to actively promote the reincorporation of transnational migrants into their state centered projects -- to "recapture," so to speak, migrant remittances, investments, and loyalties, as state agencies themselves transnationalize the meaning of nationhood. (For discourses and practices developed in this respect by India, Mexico, Columbia, El Salvador, and Haiti see Lessinger, 1992; Goldring, 1998; Guarnizo; 1998; Smith, 1994; Mahler, 1998; and Glick Schiller and Fouron, 1998) At the same time, agents of receiving states remain quite capable of reconstituting the symbolic meanings of the transnational flows of people, cultural practices, ideas, and even money entering their political jurisdictions as undesirable "boundary penetrations," and threats to nationhood that must be controlled. Paradoxically, then, the expansion of transnational connections has contributed to the igniting of essentialist nationalism in both sending and receiving localities and states.

Despite a very long history of transnational practices by trade, religious, political, and socio-cultural networks, four contemporary processes have contributed to the proliferation of transnational networks of social action at the dawn of the 21st Century. These appear to be something new. They include: (1)The discursive repositioning of localities in relation to nation-states in the ongoing debate on the meaning of globalization; (2) the emergence of cross-national political and institutional networks that deploy the discourses of
decolonization, human rights, and other universalistic tropes to advance the interests of heretofore marginalized groups; (3) the facilitation of transnational social ties by new technological developments that have widened access to the means of transnational travel, communication, and ways of being in the world; and, following from these, (4) the spatial reconfiguration of social networks that facilitate the reproduction of migration, business practices, cultural beliefs, and political agency "from in-between" and “from below.”

**Exemplifying Transnational Urbanism**

As the 21st Century has dawned, the range and complexity of transnational connections constituting the terrain of what I am calling transnational urbanism have come into sharper focus. These transnational connections, once largely economic and socio-cultural, have become more explicitly political, transforming the boundaries of citizenship, political campaigning, social movement politics, and event the once largely localist politics of community economic development. Consider the following instances In May, 1998, a Filipino police officer volunteered to provide advice with security and crowd logistics at political rallies in Manila, Philippines, held by his preferred presidential candidate Joseph Estrada. When Estrada eventually won, the police officer returned to his normal beat as a Filipino-American police officer in San Francisco, California. ([San Francisco Chronicle](http://www.sanfranciscochronicle.com), May 9, 1998: A-13) In February, 1999, an opposition member of the Guatemalan Congress got an early start on the November elections in Guatemala by actively campaigning in four major Guatemalan population centers -- Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The Congressperson reasoned that, because Guatemala had allowed dual citizenship since 1996 and over one million of Guatemala's 11 million citizens now live in the U.S., largely concentrated in these four cities, her transnational political campaigning was a reasonable expenditure of her scarce resources and time. (Dolinsky, 1999: A-12)

Lest it be thought that such transnational electoral connections are an exclusive preserve of major U.S. "immigrant" cities, it is important to realize that they are increasingly common elsewhere. For example, in Jakarta, and elsewhere in Indonesia, the first free elections in 44 years were held in June, 1999. The Indonesian election was closely monitored by a transnational coalition
of grassroots organizations drawn largely from other newly democratized nation-states. Organizations participating in the monitoring process included representatives from the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) from the Philippines, the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance from Bangladesh, a transnational pro-democracy activist leader from Guyana, and scores of local monitoring groups from Indonesia itself, all coalescing around this localized transnational project. In the last years of the twentieth century similar transnational alliances helped monitor elections in many far-flung places across the globe including Sri Lanka, the West Bank, Cambodia, Yemen, Panama, Taiwan, Bulgaria, Chile, Kenya, and South Africa. (Mydans, 1999: 5)

Let us now turn our gaze from the electoral arena to the once largely localist field of community economic development. In 1999 a small sewing machine factory opened in the village of Timbinal, Mexico thanks to a "transnational public-private partnership" forged between planners for the Mexican state of Guanajuato and a group of 23 Mexican transmigrants who came to Napa, California, from Timbinal in the 1980's to work in the wine industry. This joint venture was initiated by the state planners who, aware that Mexicans living in the U.S. send "home" between $5 billion and $6 billion annually, actively sought out investment from the migrants under the auspices of a state-sponsored program. The program, "Mi Comunidad," was created in 1997 to tap into the trans-local loyalties of the state's transnational migrant communities. The joint venture provided for a resource matching arrangement which combined migrant investment capital and state-financed training for workers and managers. The 23 transmigrant investors put $4,000 each into the plant, which now employs 35 people in a transnational community economic development scheme that one commentator has described as creating "perhaps the first full time jobs...in Timbinal" in the twentieth century. (Quinones, 1999: A1, A6)

The collaboration I have just described is one of nine such transnational "public private partnerships" that have established sewing factories in other translocalities in Guanajuato state. "Mi Comunidad" now links these localities to such places as Atlanta, Georgia, Elgin, Illinois, and La Habra, Orange County, California, among others. The state planners point out that similar transnational development of micro-industries is occurring in other regions of Mexico as well as in Spain. For their part, the Mexican transmigrant investors from Napa have not limited their trans-local connections to the economic sphere. They have also contributed $50,000 to renovate Timbinal's church and town plaza and to build a
kindergarten. Timbinal now also has a water supply financed by a combination of transmigrant contributions and a small grant from a Napa Valley winery where 12 of the transmigrants have worked for the past two decades (Quinones, 1999: A6)

Such reconfigured loyalties, identities, and place-making practices are increasingly common in the world in which we are now living. Just as Mexican state planners have tapped into residual home-town loyalties by pursuing their local economic development projects on a transnational scale of social practice, so too have other social actors, tapped into a complex array of cross-cutting networks, loyalties, and identities that the neo-liberal discourse on globalization has sought to erase but that the transnational scale of social practice has vividly inscribed. This practical political and geographic jumping of scale, that I have termed transnational urbanism is perhaps nowhere more materially "real" than in contemporary Los Angeles.

Transnational urbanism in Los Angeles

Transnational urbanism in L.A. is complex and multidimensional, encompassing myriad translocal and transnational circuits in a sometimes dizzying array of criss-crossing articulations on the ground. The flows of people, resources, and cultural practices that now link Los Angeles to diverse localities in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, South Korea, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, have fundamentally reconstituted the city's political and cultural landscape. What is happening on the ground as a result of these criss-crossing articulations of transnational networks of people "from between" and "from below"?

Peter Olney, a key organizer of the highly successful "Justice for Janitors" labor organizing campaign in Southern California, has shown that quite a bit is indeed happening to reshape urban political life in contemporary Los Angeles as a direct result of its transnational connections. According to Olney (1993:13), "some of the most dramatic union victories through prolonged struggle have been won by majority undocumented workforces." Many of the transnational workers engaged in these struggles have brought with them a legacy of past political and trade union experience, social capital, and of course the vast numbers that have made Los Angeles the second largest city in the world for Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans. Undocumented transnational migrant workers, particularly from Mexico and Central America, have proven to be the backbone of grassroots labor organizing campaigns in Los Angeles in the past
decade. In the "Justice for Janitors" campaign it was these undocumented workers that provided the militancy and political skills that enabled the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to gain better pay and working conditions in the janitorial sector by targeting large real estate developers and a the large Danish-based transnational contracting company, International Service Systems, that held the contract to clean the entertainment, financial, and legal office complex of L.A.'s Century City. In another labor organizing campaign in the 1990's, a group of 1200, largely Mexican-origin workers at an auto parts factory in greater Los Angeles were successfully organized thanks to the self-organizing abilities of "a cadre of Mexican workers from the Federal District with experience in the trade union movement in Mexico's capital city." (Olney, 1993: 14)

Numerous transnational socio-political connections beyond labor organizing have emerged in contemporary Los Angeles as elements of its transnational urbanism. The interplay of transnationalism from above (by sending states) and below (by migrant groups) is evident in the practices of numerous Mexican and Central American "home-state" and "home-town" associations in Los Angeles now forging dual identities and promoting community development projects in various "communities of origin" south of the U.S. border. (see, e.g., Goldring 1998). Other agendas and projects inform the transnational practices "from the middle" of a wide variety of social, political, religious, and charitable organizations from Central American localities that have established affiliates in Los Angeles. (Chinchilla and Hamilton, 19:86)

Still other transnational connections between "the middle" and the grassroots are being sought by the numerous politicians from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador who now regularly include Los Angeles among their campaign stops. Similar transnational electoral connections are now being forged on the streets of Los Angeles under various discourses and practices of "dual citizenship," which link political practices in Los Angeles to national politics in South Korea. For example, during a week-long "state visit" to Los Angeles, in 1998 South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, reached out to the hundreds of thousands of Koreans and Korean-Americans living in the Los Angeles region. He announced that he was preparing legislation to empower Korean transnational migrants to enjoy the full rights and privileges of dual-citizenship, including work, property ownership, travel, and inheritance rights. Kim urged "Koreans who live in America" to learn English well so that they become fully bilingual and
bicultural, and thus "become valuable bridges in the future of the two nations," while conveying to their children "their ancestral history, culture, and language." (Kong, 1998)

Transnational urbanism in Los Angeles is evident as well in the political practices of transnational social movements. Consider the following. On March 19, 1999 a contingent of supporters of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) movement traveled south from Los Angeles to the San Diego-Tijuana border zone to participate in a cross-border rally in support of a consulta, or national referendum, which the Zapatistas were sponsoring throughout Mexico on March 21. One of the participants in the rally was Jesus Corona, a representative of a Los Angeles-based organization, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation. Corona, a self-described "Mexican residing abroad," stood on the U.S. side of the border for two hours clad in peasant garb and waving a massive Zapatista banner. He and his compatriots shouted slogans of support to four Zapatista delegates and several dozen banner waving and slogan chanting U.S. and Mexican supporters of the Zapatistas who stood on the Mexican side of the fifteen foot high border fence.

This rally was part of a transnational effort by the Zapatistas to mobilize supporters from outside Mexico to bring pressure to bear on the Mexican state and society. The widest and deepest support for the Zapatista cause in the U.S. is concentrated in the Southern California region in general, and Los Angeles in particular. Numerous polling places for the consulta were set up throughout the region. The Chiapas '98 Coalition is an alliance of 65 of the over 100 "brigades" organized throughout the U.S. to support the Zapatista cause. According to the coalition's leadership these transnational voting arrangements came about as a result of the translocal connections forged between Los Angeles transnational activists and the Zapatista leadership in Chiapas. In their words: "There were some serious objections up here because only people living in Mexico could vote in the consulta... The Chicanos got all upset...so they got that restriction changed by the Zapatistas." (Schou, 1999: 4) As a result of these interactions, any Mexican citizen was allowed to vote in the consulta, regardless of where they lived or whether or not they possessed an official Mexican voting certificate. In a final transnational twist to this story, the ballots cast in the "national" referendum by "Mexicans residing abroad" were gathered by pro-Zapatista organizations in the U.S. with assistance from the Humanitarian Law Project, a U.N. registered non-governmental organization (NGO) whose regular activities include election monitoring in Mexico and elsewhere.
In sum, The Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico and its national and transnational ripple effects vividly illustrates that political voice is now relatively easily exercised by groups capable of jumping scales of social practice and transcending political borders, moving from the local to the transnational scale as new means of communication like faxes, e-mail, and the internet enable the connection of differently situated "local" actors with other "local" actors who share their objectives to constitute "transnational" communication circuits and political projects. (For other lucid examples see Keck and Sikkink, 1998)

Transnational Urbanism in New York

As in Los Angeles, transnational urbanism in New York is no less complex and multidimensional, encompassing myriad transnational ties and translocal circuits of communication. Consider the following. At the India Day Parade in New York City, in August, 1998 the State Bank of India set up a booth to advertise the selling of a bond offering a state-guaranteed 7.75 per cent interest rate to Indian transmigrants and Indian-Americans, both officially recognized in India as "non-resident Indians." The activity was part of a world-wide two week campaign by bank officers to raise at least $2 billion from members of the Indian diaspora through the bond offering. The bonds were made available at local branches of the State Bank of India and at Citibank branches that offer services to non-resident Indians. In New York the State Bank of India officials advertised the bond sale in the "local" Indian media, sponsored dinners at Indian restaurants in midtown Manhattan, and set up booths at shopping strips, all designed to promote the discourse: "Make money. Help the motherland." Their $2 billion transnational goal was reached in less than two weeks and the banking officials set their sights on $3 billion by the campaign's end. The proceeds from the bond sale were earmarked to finance major infrastructure development projects in India, including road construction and the extension of telephone lines (Sengupta, 1998: A-31). By this means the transnational scale of social practice was used to finance a nationalist developmental agenda by mobilizing world-wide diasporic loyalties. This story illustrates that nationalism and transnationalism are mutually constitutive rather than antagonistic social processes.

This is only one pointed example of the multidimensional transnational urbanism now an inseparable part of everyday urban life in New York City. Transnational peasants have been as active as transnational bankers in forging
transnational ties. Consider the following ethnographic example. In a recent study of transmigrants from rural Mexico to New York City, Robert Smith (1998) conducted research on two ends of a trans-local migrant circuit. Smith found that the male trans-migrants, who worked in New York at occupations ranging from cab-driving to flower-peddling, experienced discrimination from mainstream New Yorkers, who viewed them as a low status ethno-racial group. To cope with this stereotype, the transmigrants affirmed and recreated an essentialized group identity that accommodated to the New York City racial and ethnic hierarchy. In New York they inscribed a localized myth of ethnic origins to position themselves as racially superior to their equally impoverished Puerto Rican and African-American neighbors. In sharp contrast, in their home villages in Mexico, they resisted local power relations and widened the public sphere in these localities, to which they regularly returned, by organizing and financing “grassroots” ceremonial and community development projects. The bi-focal imaginary, by envisioning the changing power relations across this migrant “trans-locality,” reveals simultaneous patterns of accommodation and resistance to different forms of power at the different end-points of a transmigrant circuit.

In short, the Big Apple’s employment opportunity structure has generated the collective resources that have enabled indigenous Mexican migrants from Ticuani to form a “home town” association in New York, send funds to their village of origin to finance community development projects, and thereby become key players in the local community power structure “back home.” Within the Big Apple these same trans-local social actors have secured their occupational niches in the New York labor market by inserting themselves into a place within the prevailing local racial hierarchy. They have done so by constructing an ethnic identity as “hard working indigenous Mexicans,” a discursive and practical move which positions them slightly above their fellow “Latinos” from Puerto Rico (see R. Smith, 1998). These male transmigrants improve their political power and social status in Ticuani while earning their livelihood by fitting into the local racial hierarchy in New York.

In the arena of transnational electoral politics, New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani makes regular trips to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic to campaign for reelection. Under the aegis of various dual citizenship and dual nationality arrangements, political candidates from Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Colombia, Mexico and elsewhere return the favor. In the arena of social movement politics, the Big Apple is a site of transnational social
mobilizations such as those linking labor activists in El Salvador with activists in New York who have organized consumer boycotts against The Gap clothing chain in order to change sweatshop conditions in the textile factories in El Salvador that supply clothing to The Gap.

The political, socio-economic, and cultural implications of the various examples of transnational labor activism, social movement politics, electoral connections, and community economic development that I have shared with you thus far are fascinating to contemplate. Yet, in my view the most dramatic transformations I have encountered in investigating the relationship between transnationalism and citizenship have occurred as a result of the criss-crossing connections that have made and remade what some have oversimplified as "ethnic enclaves" in transnational cities throughout the world. Therefore in the final part of this keynote address I offer an analysis of the origins, development, and future prospects of two such contested sites of transnational place-making -- "Chinatown" in New York and "Koreatown" in Los Angeles.

The Social Construction of "Chinatown"

The reconstruction of New York's Chinatown in the past two decades is a paradigm case of the contested politics of place-making that has become a hallmark of the Big Apple's transnational urbanism. In Chinatown, heterogeneous "Chinese" transnational networks of investment, migration, power, and cultural production from Guangdong, Fujian, Hong Kong, and Taiwan intersect with each other and interact with local institutional and organizational actors and agents of the local and national state in a variety of localized struggles for power, space, place, and identity. The complex social relations of power and meaning intersecting in Chinatown reconstruct its urban space and sense of place and confound all attempts to homogenize and essentialize this "ethnic neighborhood" and frame it within conventional discourses of urban ethnic politics.

Jan Lin's recent book length case-study, Reconstructing Chinatown (1998), tells the story of the historical transformations of New York’s Chinatown as an urban “place” very well. Lin depicts New York City’s Chinatown as a site of criss-crossing transnational social and organizational networks of meaning and power that infuse the neighborhood with its dynamism and account for its “internal” political conflicts. Community change is constantly being produced
by the intersections and social relations formed among actors representing local and transnational labor and capital, old and new community-based ethnic organizations, local power structures and their opponents, and agencies of the national and local state. Lin’s ethnographic and historical research traces the connections linking the everyday means of livelihood and social life in this localized ethnic space to the political uncertainties, capital surpluses, and economic transitions in other cities and societies in East Asia in the 1980’s and 1990’s that accelerated trans-Pacific flows of transnational migrants and capital investment to New York’s Chinatown. He also pays close attention to the public policies mediating these flows of capital, people, and culture including U.S. immigration, trade, economic, and monetary policies as well as the land use, law enforcement, banking deregulation, and other urban policies of New York City government.

Especially compelling is Lin’s portrayal of the considerable factionalism of the Chinatown local polity stemming from a conflictual politics of place where the meaning of “Chinatown” is continually contested. Some of these “internal” political struggles expose cultural and ideological fault lines stemming from still evolving geo-political relations among and between the Chinese mainland, its various regions, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—the places originating the flows of people, money, ideas, and transnational connections into and out of New York’s Chinatown. The historical, cultural, and political heterogeneity of these connections is often masked by the apparent ethnic homogeneity of the category “Chineseness” (and even “Asian-American”) in U.S. political discourse. Lin brings the connections and their political consequences to life by discussing, for example, the political struggles for local influence between a once ascendant mercantile elite from Guangdong province now being challenged by new Fujianese merchant associations. Other internal conflicts over place-making pit new immigrant based labor and community organizations against both of these capital fractions as well as against the urban redevelopment and law enforcement policies of the local state. These factional disputes are sometimes overcome by temporarily sutured political coalitions formed in opposition to discursively constructed “outside” political interventions into the neighborhood by particular urban redevelopment schemes initiated by transnational Japanese and other Asian real estate capitalists in alliance with redevelopment agencies of New York City government. Lin’s historicized political-economic and ethnographic analysis demonstrates that political identities in a neighborhood
defending its preservation are not pre-given features of an ontology of locality but rather emerge as a result of specific political struggles and collective actions.

Rather, community, ethnicity, and place are all social constructions of contingent solidarities. These socially produced and "temporarily sutured" (Mouffe, 1988) solidarities, as Lin (1998:204) cogently puts it, “have the power to mobilize and reinforce networks of association and influence, confer human roles and identities, and grant an affective meaning to physical space in the way that ‘home’ and ‘turf’ imply an emotive or defensive association with territory.”

The point worth making here is not that a sense of community has been shown to emerge in defense of a neighborhood’s physical space but why it has come into existence, namely because it has been socially and politically constructed by politicized actors and networks that form temporary coalitions at particular times in response to particular efforts to redefine the meaning of “locality.”

The reconstruction of Chinatown vividly illustrates the transformative consequences of those social actors who now orchestrate their lives by creating situations of co-presence that link social networks across vast geographical distances across the globe. Such border penetrating processes go a long way toward helping explain, though they by no means exhaust, the difference-generating relations of power that constitute cultural and political identity and difference within localities defined as both political jurisdictions and as socio-cultural spaces.

**The Social Construction of “Koreatown”**

The story of the social construction of Koreatown is another grounded story of transnational business and household formation, struggles over livelihood, place-making socio-spatial practices, and grassroots social activism. The making and remaking of "Koreatown" enriches our understanding of "everyday life" in contemporary Los Angeles by highlighting the transnational dimension of "locality" and the significant degree of cross-border agency from "in-between" and "below" that constitute the process of urban place-making at this transnational moment.

Unlike many ethnic areas in U.S. cities, the historical construction of "Koreatown" in Los Angeles dates back less than three decades (Kim, 1993: 2). The initial driving forces for the spatial concentration of a Korean commercial, residential, and retail district in Los Angeles were the social networks and business associations of Korean transnational entrepreneurs who began establishing businesses in Los Angeles only the 1970's. Initially, Koreatown
transnational entrepreneurs opened up of a cluster of small businesses including ethnic restaurants, retailing, and small manufacturing. The labor force for these initial businesses was largely drawn from within the transnational Korean migrant community; the capital was supplied by self-organized rotating credit associations, known as kye, a kind of informal underground banking system, which provided credit to fellow Korean transnational entrepreneurs to set up operations in Los Angeles. These social actors relied upon ethnic media — Korean radio, newspapers, and eventually television — to give cultural identity to their place-making project.

Local political lobbying by the Koreatown Development Association secured the official identity marker “Koreatown” from Los Angeles’ city hall in 1980. (Pearlstone, 1990:88) Once this was accomplished the entrepreneurial networks used their associational resources and their continuing ties to their homeland to attract major Korean-based financial and corporate capital investment into Koreatown. Korean-owned banks, office buildings, shopping centers, and professional service firms thus sprang up there during the boom years of the 1980’s. (Lee, 1995)

Throughout the 1980’s economic connections between Korean transnational entrepreneurs and Korean based multinational capital investors were not the only transnational ties linking Koreatown to South Korea. Many of the entrepreneurs continued to live in transnational households maintaining ties with spouses and children that remained in Korea. In 1988, for example, the U.S. Embassy joined with a Korean transnational newspaper to organize a reunion between transnational entrepreneurs operating in Los Angeles on temporary visas and their spouses still in Korea (Pearlstone: 1990:90):

By 1990 this transnational social construction know as “Koreatown” had became the location of over 1/3 of all Korean owned firms in the United States (Pearlstone, 1990: 89). This, in turn led to further growth in Korean-owned and operated service firms in entertainment, finance, insurance, and real estate, communications, law, and medicine. Koreatown thence became a self-contained ethnic economy with the attendant persistence of monolingualism among Korean proprietors, workers, and residents. This enclavement also facilitated the formation of an ever wider variety of ethnic associations in business, commerce, trade, and communications.

It is important to realize that despite the key role of transnational business ties in the making of Koreatown, the Korean transnational entrepreneurial class
did not view Koreatown merely as a localized social space of commodity relations from which resources could be extracted to sustain transnationalized social relations. Transnational and local social relations are not mutually exclusive. Instead it is more fruitful to imagine the "transnational" and the "local" as interlocked and mutually constitutive in processes where power and meaning come together and are localized. In the instance at hand, as Lee (1995: 47) has pointed out in his study of business experience in Koreatown:

"The Korean shopowners' relations to Koreatown convey socio-cultural meanings beyond the material manifestation of ethnic relations. Although many tended to move out to suburban residents as they accumulated wealth, a large number often returned to Korean restaurants and bookstores with their families during weekends and holidays. This attachment to ethnic identity is embedded in the built environment of Koreatown, and it is continuously being recreated by spatial practices of social networking. It is the focus of ethnic history, collective experience, and intentions onto particular settings. Thus Koreatown achieves significance beyond commodity relations."

Despite the power of this ethno-national social imaginary, during the final decade of the twentieth century the solidaristic "Korean community" constructed by the discursive and material practices of Korean entrepreneurs to give meaning to the particular setting of Koreatown, became unsettled by other social practices, relations, and imaginings that came together in Koreatown. These unsettling developments included the ethnic recomposition of the labor force in Korean owned businesses, the residential transformation of Koreatown itself, and the rising tide of class awareness among Koreatown's Korean-American working class.

In building up their businesses in Koreatown and elsewhere in Los Angeles the Korean small business sector had originally relied upon labor supplied by family members or other Korean-based social networks (Pearlstone 1990: 88). However, the rapid expansion of Korean owned small businesses throughout the 1980s was accompanied by an equally rapid transnational flow of migrants from Latin America. The largest components of this transnational influx of labor to Los Angeles was driven by the economic crisis in Mexico and civil wars in Central America occasioned by U.S. interventions there. Many of these transnational migrants were undocumented Mexicans or refugees from El Salvador and
Guatemala who had been driven from their homelands by IMF driven austerity policies, Cold War counterinsurgency strategies driving U.S. foreign and military policies, and growing regional and income inequality promoted by the export-oriented development strategies of the World Bank. These contextual factors set the stage for the formation of transnational Latino households capable of tapping into the income-producing capacities of labor demand in U.S. cities like Los Angeles. (Smith and Feagin, 1995)

Since a good deal of the "labor demand" in Los Angeles was being created by the Korean transmigrant entrepreneurship I have just described, many members of transnational Latino households became workers in Korean-owned businesses, whose labor recruitment strategies eventually extended out of the Korean-origin community to encompassing other groups of affordable transnational migrant workers, among the most affordable of which were undocumented Latino transnational migrants (Kwong, 1992).

In the 1980's and early 1990's criss crossing transnational connections also came together in Los Angeles in the realms of household reproduction and residential re-settlement. Not surprisingly, many low-wage undocumented Latino households chose to move into to affordable rental housing located near their workplaces. This, in turn, contributed to the gradual residential transformation of Koreatown into a multi-ethnic neighborhood which is now home to more Latinos than Koreans. The emergent inter-ethnic relations between Koreans and Latinos that came together in Koreatown and Los Angeles at the confluence of these transnational flows were also class relations -- owner-worker and landlord-tenant antagonisms-- that boiled over as a key dimension of the urban violence now condensed under the rubric "L.A. rebellion."

Many of the Korean entrepreneurs whose self-image had included an ethos of hard work, minding one's business, and taking care of one's own, were rudely awakened by the violence directed against them by blacks and Latinos as well as by the failure of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to protect Koreatown and other transnational migrant-owned business property from looting and arson as the LAPD marshaled scarce resources to protect more privileged white enclaves on the West side of L.A. In the wake of the unrest, the once politically quiescent Korean merchants in Los Angeles quickly mobilized both locally and transnationally. Locally, they organized protest demonstrations to object to an ordinance passed by the L.A. city council at the urging of black neighborhood organizations in South Central Los Angeles to limit the rebuilding of liquor stores,
an estimated 70 per cent of which were Korean owned (Mydans, 1992: 1). The
entrepreneurs stood in front of city hall for two weeks, engaging in
confrontational political rituals drawn from the experience of urban protests in
South Korea, such as beating drums to gain political attention and to obtain a
meeting with the mayor about removing the limits on business location. In this
instance the protesters got their meeting but the ordinance stood (Smith and
Feagin, 1995: ch 1)

Transnationally, the Korean entrepreneurial class mobilized to establish relief
organizations designed to tap into the networks of social and financial support
linking Koreans in Korea with Korean diaspora enclaves throughout the world.
For the most part, the organizations created by the Korean entrepreneurial class
followed the pattern of the Korean American Relief Fund (KARF), whose
organizers distributed relief checks only to fellow Korean business owners. (Lee,
1996: 51-52)

Interestingly the class-based dimensions of both of these forms of intra-ethnic
political mobilization tend to be masked by their highly visible ethno-cultural
dimension. In the case of the Korean liquor store owners, both the class
composition of the owners and the class relations between merchants and
customers in South Central were masked by the ethnic homogeneity of the
protesters and the cultural style of protest they imported from Korea to express
their interests. In the case of the transnational mobilization of the entrepreneurial
strata to obtain relief support, the worldwide appeal to help fellow Korean
brothers and sisters in Los Angeles relied upon nationalistic appeals to
"Koreaness" to promote a transnational ethnic solidarity that tended to mask the
largely class-specific benefits flowing to the Korean small business and
commercial classes.

When the lens of class difference is added to the lens of ethnic difference and
criss-crossing transnational connections are kept in mind, our reading of the
interplay of transnationalism and citizenship in Los Angeles takes on more
complex and ironic turns. In the year following the riots, the lion's share of the
transnational relief money raised to help "fellow Koreans" in Koreatown who had
suffered losses in the unrest was pocketed by members of the Los Angeles Korean
merchants and business owners associations. (Lee, 1996) This provided the
impetus for a class-based mobilization by displaced Korean workers who felt
shortchanged by the process of relief gathering and distribution. From 1993 until
early 1995 hundreds of Korean displace workers fought strenuously to reverse
the claim on these funds made by the business associations who had argued that both the local and transnational monies raised in the relief efforts should be "invested" rather than being used to satisfy immediate needs. (Lee, 1996:47) These workers joined a political coalition led by a grassroots organization, the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), in a protracted campaign to force the Korean entrepreneurial class to share the relief funds. The workers viewed themselves as challenging an internal establishment that had constructed and ethnic economy in L.A. that benefited unduly from appeals to ethnic nationalism at the expense of working class co-nationals. (Lee, 1996:50).

KIWA eventually won this fight. Its research revealed that over one-third of the Korean workers displaced by the unrest worked for Korean owned businesses and spoke virtually no English (Lee, 1996: 54) This gave them a fairness issue on which to build political support.

Not insignificantly, KIWA's political organizing efforts also effectively mobilized transnational informational resources of their own. These proved quite useful in the struggle. For example, to call attention to the plight of immigrant workers in Los Angeles, KIWA joined in a campaign with Local 11 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) to deal with the union busting tactics of the new Korean owners of the Plaza Hotel who had fired a unionized and mostly Latino staff and began hiring cheaper non-unionized transnational migrant workers.( Kim, 1999: 6; Lee, 1996) KIWA successfully researched the history of the Korean firm by using transnational connections of its own because KIWA had "access to information sources in Korea not available to the union." (Lee, 1996:55)

Ultimately, KIWA won its fight when KARF, the principal Korean business association targeted by KIWA, decided to avoid further unfavorable publicity by transferring the balance of its relief account to KIWA. (Lee, 1996: 59) Since this victory KIWA's brand of political activism has become a highly visible force in the urban politics of Los Angeles' Koreatown. In the past two years KIWA has engaged in a bitter struggle against hundreds of Korean-owned restaurants in Koreatown to improve wages, overtime pay, and working conditions for the restaurants' nearly 2,000 workers. Significantly, while over two-thirds of these workers are Korean, the remainder are largely Latino. Thus, while KIWA has retained its name, "Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates", it has begun to advocate the interests of all workers it regards as exploited by Korean owners, not merely those of Korean origin.
This ongoing political struggle has clearly split the Korean transnational migrant community in Koreatown along class, generational, cultural, and ideological lines. KIWA's eight full-time staff activists are mostly Korean transnational migrants in their 20's and 30's, born in Korea but reared in the United States. Migration scholars refer to such migrants as the "one and a half" generation. These activists accuse the largely first generation Koreatown restaurant owners, who were born and raised in Korea, of exploiting their employees by violating U.S. minimum wage, safety, and overtime laws. The restaurant owners, in turn have responded by accusing KIWA activists of trying to destroy their parent's generation; of being too political, radical, and disrespectful; and of seeking political support "outside the community." They warn of dire consequences for Koreatown businesses already "adversely affected by the financial crisis in South Korea." (Kang, 1998:A1) Whatever the outcomes of the various organizing campaigns now being waged to reshape Koreatown's ethnic economy, the very intensity of these ongoing struggles indicates that the social construction of "Koreatown" is very much an unfinished project. At this transnational moment it is instructive to view Los Angeles' Koreatown as a social construction being reconstituted by a local politics of place making and struggles over livelihood in which diverse transnational flows and connections, such as those detailed in this narrative, are likely to continue to play important roles.

Conclusion

One obvious implication of the interplay of transnationalism and citizenship emerging from the stories I have told is that social researchers must now pay close attention to changing social relations on all sides of transgressed borders. This requires a multi-focal imagination, a historicized approach to political economy and a multi-sited approach to ethnographic research. The boundary penetrating processes now characterizing our world have facilitated the social construction of “communities in the making” as alternative imagined spaces, often occupying the same geographical locale. These imaginings of communal identity necessarily entail processes of inclusion and exclusion, i.e., processes which create not only likeness but “otherness.” Taken together, these difference-generating social practices have reconstituted the socio-cultural landscape of transnational cities while eroding, but hardly erasing, the boundary-setting capacities of nation-states. Yet, they have clearly rendered problematic representations of the interplay between the state and civil society.
premised on transparent distinctions between inside and outside, citizen and alien, self and other.

References


