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# A comparativist manifesto for international migration studies

David FitzGerald

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## Abstract

Drawing on thirteen years of fieldwork among Mexican migrants in the United States and Mexico and comparisons of immigration policy throughout the Americas, this paper systematically elaborates the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of multi-sited studies. A reformed logic of the Millian methods of agreement and difference takes into account the causal connections among the cases. I call for a 'homeland dissimilation' perspective and comparisons of internal and international migration as a way to take off the self-imposed national blinders that pre-determine many of the conclusions of the assimilation and even transnationalism literatures.

**Keywords:** Assimilation; dissimilation; methodological nationalism; method of agreement and difference; multi-sited fieldwork; transnationalism.

In a world of more than 200 million international migrants, anthropological techniques of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) that were originally elaborated to describe remote villages are inadequate to the task of understanding contemporary human mobility. Under-theorized works simply portraying immigrant lives do not explain the causes of migration or its consequences (e.g. Markowitz 1993; Smith-Hefner 1999; Schmidt 2004). Large-scale censuses and surveys promise to yield more generalizable propositions, yet even if researchers are able to resolve the formidable challenges of the comparability and validity of data collected across different cases (Massey 1987; Bloch 1999; OECD 2003), large-N studies alone cannot explain the mechanisms of causality or provide an interpretive appreciation of how migrants engage multiple contexts of origin, transit, and destination. This paper argues for building migration theory through

fieldwork in multiple sites chosen for their theoretical variation. Studies of both assimilation and ‘transnationalism’ can be improved by case selection strategies that strip away self-imposed national blinders.

The logic of multi-sited fieldwork has been challenged for making the false assumption that the various sites are isolated units, and that variation in outcomes observed in each site are derived from different causes. In fact, the sites may be linked to each other through colonialism, trade, media, or migration, so that causal processes in each site are not independent of each other (de Munck 2002). Multi-sited fieldwork also presents a series of practical limitations as the number of sites expands (Burawoy 1991). However, comparative study of multiple sites presents considerable advantages for students of migration by revealing the interplay between factors in sites of migrant origin and destination that help to explain divergence and convergence across a wide range of outcomes. Multi-sited studies even offer some unsung practical advantages for gaining access to members of complex networks (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 1998, 2003). The most serious hazard of stretching research resources too thin can be reduced through a strong theoretical orientation and collaborative work.

A second strategy advocated here is stripping off the national blinders that restrict the construction of the field, and integrating both sending and receiving country sites. This has been the welcome position that Khagram and Levitt (2007) call ‘methodological transnationalism’. Yet even the transnationalism literature, which rightly warns of the dangers of ‘methodological nationalism’ seen in the preoccupation with immigrants’ assimilation into the nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), has often fallen into the trap of unconsciously defining its subjects in simple national terms. Comparisons of domestic and international migrants from the same community, avoiding the assumption that the experience of migrants in one city (e.g. Sydney) represents the national whole (Australia), and attending to how migrants dissimilate (become different from those whom they leave behind), are ways of avoiding the methodological nationalist trap. These strategies allow for an empirical assessment of when and how the national category is relevant. I elaborate each of these points in turn below.

### **Comparative fieldwork**

Migrants may be permanent settlers – the ‘immigrants’ of the classical imagination; temporary ‘guest workers’; circular ‘birds of passage’; return migrants to their homelands; or some combination of those categories at different points in the life course. Some migration patterns are clearly more unidirectional than others, but the

constitutive mobility of the migration experience has led authors across the social sciences to call for greater attention to contexts of both origin and destination and the extension of fieldwork to multiple sites (McHugh 2000; Sayad 2004; Brettell 2007; Falzon 2009).

Prominent ethnographers have raised legitimate questions about whether multi-sited fieldwork can proceed without sacrificing too much of the deep local knowledge of a locality that is the hallmark of the method. Itinerant ethnographers risk losing the intensive understanding that had traditionally distinguished them from journalists and curious tourists. The requisite intensity of fieldwork and linguistic competence may be difficult to achieve in multiple sites, with consequent variation in the quality of the fieldwork and the ability to make systematic comparisons between sites (Marcus 1995). As Michael Burawoy (2003, p. 673) puts it, 'Bouncing from site to site, anthropologists easily substitute anecdotes and vignettes for serious field work [...]'. Similarly, Gille and Riain (2002, p. 271) warn that the 'methodological imperative of being there is replaced by that of chasing things around, things that are identified more by the ethnographer's interests prior to entering the field than by the field itself'.

These authors raise sensible cautions, though the 'field' *never* simply guides research (Emerson 2001). The dialectical engagement of *a priori* theory with encountered evidence should guide the ongoing construction of field and decisions about where to focus research energies (Snow, Morrill and Anderson 2003). The boundaries of a field are not just fuzzy; they may be infinite if no theoretical guide constructs them. Deciding what the 'field' or 'fields' should constitute is inseparable from deciding what kind of 'case' the object of study presents. As Ragin and Becker (1992) have powerfully argued, making a claim about what kind of case a set of facts and interpretations constitute is a theoretical act. Similarly, the definition of the field is a theoretical act whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not. The danger of stretching time and resources too thin in multi-sited fieldwork is why it is even more dependent on a clear theoretical orientation and strategic site selection than work in a single site. Fumbling through one field site to ground theory is bad enough; in multiple sites it is disastrous (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967).

A more serious objection to multi-sited studies is that scientific comparison is no longer possible because the cultures of multiple sites cannot be considered discrete units (Gatewood 2000). Colonialism and globalization have eroded the idea that discrete cultural units exist anywhere, a notion that Wolf (1982) has shown to have been fictitious even prior to European global exploration and conquest. Without discrete units, causal processes are not independent of each other and part of the logic of the Millian methods of agreement and difference

breaks down (Ragin 1987; de Munck 2002). That is, similar outcomes across cases cannot necessarily be ascribed to similar conditions in each case (as in the method of agreement), and different outcomes among cases with different conditions cannot necessarily be ascribed to those different conditions (as in the method of difference). In a world of rapid mobility of people, ideas, and goods, the cases themselves may be influencing each other in what Goldthorpe (1997) has elaborated as ‘Galton’s problem’. For example, a comparison of immigration policies in the United States, Canada and Cuba would be deeply flawed if it simply looked for internal variation in each case to explain their development. The notion of separate US, Canadian and Cuban national models would fail to miss the critical effects of US policy on the development of Canadian and Cuban policies (Author 2010). Similarly, policies developed in Europe in the 1950s to 1970s influenced policies in Japan in the 1990s. A comparison of ‘European’ and ‘Japanese’ models that did not acknowledge the connections between them as one causal source of variation would be deeply flawed (Surak 2008).

Acknowledging the linkages between sites is an opportunity to use comparative studies strategically. Different source and destination localities can be selected precisely because they are linked by migrant networks, while still shaping migrants’ experiences differently. Fields may be constructed in multiple sites, within or without the national boundary, in accordance with the researcher’s theoretical interests and actual patterns of migration. Contrast-oriented comparisons need not be atheoretical exercises in describing specific places, *pace* John Hall (1999), but rather the basis for generating new theories or testing received understandings.

Another objection to comparative study using any method is the *caeteris paribus* problem. In non-experimental studies of social life, it is impossible to definitively isolate the effects of just one factor’s addition or removal. For instance, one should not *assume* that a given difference between two migration destinations causes variation found between migration streams sharing the same source. That connection can only be made by carefully specifying process and candidly exploring alternative accounts. It is because the Millian methods should never be applied mechanistically by simply creating a matrix of independent and dependent variables (Ragin 1987; Lieberman 1991) that multi-sited studies are best positioned to tease out the influences of different ecologies on migration processes by explaining causal mechanisms through an evidence-rich encounter with theory. Whether the effects of the locality or country of destination, locality or country of origin, or some selective characteristics of the migrant population better explain a given outcome cannot be predetermined simply by identifying the relevant variables.

Qualitative researchers are well positioned to make convincing claims about causal relevance when they are able to specify causal pathways and processes with detailed evidence from multiple sites. Among a growing number of studies adopting a two-site strategy, Robert Smith (2006) examined migration between a town in the Mexican state of Puebla and New York City, demonstrating migrants' integration into New York at the same time as many remain deeply engaged in the political, economic and cultural life of Puebla. Observing the ongoing connections between the two sites led Smith to reject the argument that assimilation is inherently incompatible with homeland connections. Research on both sides of the border has found that some of the most economically and socially marginalized communities in the United States are also extremely well organized in the conduct of binational politics. An unskilled labourer in California may even be the part-time mayor of his village in Mexico, a dynamic of situational power and social mobility that would be completely missed in a single-site study (Author 2000, 2004).

Studying a migrant-sending community and its satellites in multiple receiving countries, as Tilly and his associates (1998) began to do for Italians from the village of Roccasecca dispersed in Lyon, Sao Paolo, Buenos Aires, New York and Toronto, sets up a natural quasi-experiment controlling for origins which explains how receiving contexts pattern migrants' economic mobility. While more ambitious and potentially more revealing of the effects of destination given the wide variation in the characteristics of those destinations, this strategy must also face the difficult question of how to distinguish between the effect of being in a particular locality (Toronto) *vis-à-vis* the effect of being in a particular country (Canada). One way to try to tease out the effects of both locality and country is to include more than one locality in the same country, as Gold (2002) did in his comparison of Israeli immigrants in Los Angeles, New York and Detroit, as well as in London and Paris, and returned migrants in Israel.

Multi-sited fieldwork need not include the country of origin to yield analytic leverage from the multi-sited method. Bloemraad (2006) showed in her study of the political incorporation of Portuguese and Vietnamese in Boston and Toronto that Canadian multiculturalism more rapidly integrated the same ethnic groups into political participation than the more *laissez-faire* US system of integration. Yet as in the Tilly study, it may be difficult to determine whether the effect of being in Toronto is more closely related to being in that particular city, as opposed to being in Montreal, or a consequence of the fact that Toronto is in Canada. The assumption that observed patterns are a result of taking place in a specifically national rather than local context should be resolutely questioned, as Favell (2008) has

argued in his study of Europeans who have moved from their home countries to various cities within the European Union.

The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES) study is an ambitious effort to understand the effect of both national and urban contexts on the integration of second-generation youth from Turkey, Morocco and the former Yugoslavia in fifteen cities in eight countries. A strategy of distinguishing between differences in Madrid and Barcelona, Zurich and Basle, as well as between Spain and Switzerland, is yielding state-of-the-art comparisons at the level of nation-state, urban centre, and immigrant group sharing the same national origin (Crul and Schneider 2010).

Despite the logistical difficulties of conducting multi-sited fieldwork, there is at least one strong practical advantage in addition to the many theoretical advantages. Migrants' social networks span multiple sites. It is easier to gain access to those networks and establish rapport in some sites than in others. Many migrants have unauthorized legal status in the country of destination and fear detection by the authorities, making it more difficult for a stranger to gain access (Iosifides 2003; Brennan 2005). It is much easier to gain access where migrants are not in a precipitous legal situation, usually in their country of origin. For refugees, who may be in a more precipitous situation in their countries of origin, the country of destination may be a more effective entry point. For all the challenges of doing research in multiple sites, displayed knowledge of other sites and the people circulating among them can be a passport to entrée and building rapport (see also Hannerz 2003; Author 2004).

The practical difficulties involved in multi-sited research, particularly when they involve multiple languages, can be resolved in part through academic collaboration across borders. Such collaboration combines the advantages of insiders' intimate acquaintance with the social milieu and easier access with the advantages of outsiders' fresh perspectives and autonomy (Merton 1972; Baca Zinn 2001; Brennan 2005; Ganga and Scott 2006). Research on Mexican migration at (University of California, San Diego) provides a contemporary illustration of the merits of binational collaboration. Every year, two to three social scientists based in the United States and Mexico lead a binational team of student researchers to do fieldwork in one of three Mexican migrant-sending communities and its US satellite destinations. The three sites were purposefully chosen to achieve maximum diversity in the length of the community's history of mass migration, level of economic development, and ethnic makeup. Fieldwork rotates among three sites in the states of Jalisco, Oaxaca and Yucatán, with participation from a local social scientist and advanced university and graduate students from each of those areas (Author et al.).



Such large-scale collaborations imply methodological challenges, particularly when they involve great distances between the participants and different academic backgrounds. The principal investigators in the Mexican migration research have attempted to create a common epistemological and methodological framework through long-term collaborations and joint training of new participants. At the beginning of each annual cycle, all of the participants in their respective countries of residence read and discuss the same readings about the research topic. The participants in the study then meet in one location for a week of joint training on the fieldwork methods, including the development of the standardized survey questions, semi-structured interview guides, and the protocols for executing the research. Two months later, the entire team meets again to carry out the fieldwork together. Collaborative analysis and writing with two groups separated by thousands of kilometres presents a more difficult challenge. Internet technologies such as videoconferencing, simultaneous editing of documents online, and email help make such writing possible, but there is no substitute for periodic in-person contact to analyse a project adequately. This sort of collaboration requires substantial funding. Ideal levels of in-person preparation and analysis among the entire research group are at times sacrificed to economic constraints. Just as the homeland connections of international migrants are shaped by their access to money and technology, collaborative teams can stretch, but not break, the space-time continuum.

### **Methodological nationalism**

A particular idea of the field 'enables certain kinds of knowledge while blocking off others [and] authorizes some objects of study and methods of analysis while excluding others' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 4). 'Methodological nationalism' is a term used to describe the problem of viewing the nation-state as the natural societal container and unit of analysis. The production of statistics by every country promotes this line of thinking. Consequently, researchers may underplay variation within the nation-state because they are looking for variation among nation-states to create national models; the issue of whether the scale of comparison is appropriate is forgotten (should China be considered the same kind of unit as Belize?); and a fixed sense that a nation-state has always been there hides the variable and contingent boundaries of the entity (what does emigration from 'Poland' or 'India' mean historically?). The nation-state or national groups may be entirely appropriate units of analysis, but scholars such as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) have reminded us of the dangers of simply assuming their appropriateness and relevance for all questions.

In the nationally restricted vision of research, most studies outside the transnationalism literature have focused exclusively on the experience of international migrants as *immigrants*, according to the perspective of the sociology of assimilation or integration. Assimilation has historically been an inward-looking concept bound to processes within the nation-state (Favell 2000; Waldinger 2003; Lavenex 2005). Adopting the destination, usually the majority population of a single country, as the unquestioned frame largely predetermines the conclusions about an immigrant group's level of wellbeing. Faring well or faring poorly are relative concepts, and defining the comparison groups will determine the conclusions about immigrants' trajectories and whether the alarm bells ring warning of downward assimilation, balkanization, and ghettoization (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Thomson and Crul 2007).

Case studies have pushed the assimilation programme forward by showing that the different domains of assimilation are not always mutually reinforcing, and, in fact, can be at odds with each other. Specifically, economic assimilation, in the sense of upward mobility, can actually be increased through ethnic retention. Zhou and Bankston (1998) mix ethnographic and quantitative school testing data to argue that Vietnamese students in a poor neighbourhood of New Orleans performed well in school despite their impoverished material circumstances and low human capital when they became deeply involved in family and Vietnamese Catholic institutions that discouraged the adoption of the putatively 'oppositional culture' of African American youth in the neighbourhood. Waters's (1999) study of West Indians and African Americans in New York City further refines these arguments by studying a context in which immigrants are racially lumped together with marginalized natives. She shows that West Indians who successfully telegraph their immigrant status are rewarded by white employers and teachers who are more favourably inclined towards foreign, rather than native-born, blacks. This advantage tends to be lost in the second generation, however, as the racial lumping of native blacks and children of West Indians blurs national-origin differences.

These studies are important works in the 'segmented assimilation' literature which argues that the specific *segment* of society to which persons assimilate strongly influences their life chances (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Vermeulen (2010) notes that as quantitative studies establish the risk of 'downward assimilation' among various immigrant groups in Europe, they generally fail to show that there is an existing 'oppositional culture' or 'underclass' that would be a cognate to the one putatively driving downward segmented assimilation in the United States. Mixed method studies in Europe

combining qualitative and quantitative analysis would more effectively establish both causality and mechanisms in this line of research.

Nancy Foner's (2005) research provides an example of the rewards of such a strategy in her comparison of how the presence of an established Black native population in New York caused different racial experiences for West Indians in New York than for those in London. Academic studies in New York tend to portray West Indians as a success story *vis-à-vis* African Americans, while in London, West Indians are portrayed as disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* native Britons and Asian immigrants. The established population of African Americans in New York has created possibilities for a pan-Black political alliance through which West Indians have gained real political power, yet the presence of the established African American population also encourages West Indians to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness on a daily basis in an effort to avoid being lumped into the same category as African Americans and suffering the resulting discrimination. Over the course of generations, lumping appears inevitable, at least in daily life, and West Indians are more residentially and maritally segregated from whites in New York than in London. Foner's methodology avoids the implication that immigrant trajectories are exclusively created by differences that populations bring with them from abroad and focuses attention on the context of destination and settlement.

Claire Adida's (2011) pathbreaking fieldwork in West Africa expands the study of assimilation to understudied South-South migrations. Based on surveys and interviews with two major immigrant communities, Nigerian Yorubas and Hausas, living in Ghana, Benin, Nigeria and Niger, she finds that the most culturally similar immigrants are the least likely to integrate. As she explains, immigrant leaders patrol cultural boundaries to prevent their constituents from 'passing' in the host society and defecting from the informal institutions controlled by the leaders. Members of the host society are quickest to reject culturally similar immigrants whom they fear will be a greater source of competition for scarce resources if they can pass as natives. Adida's case selection, which allows comparisons of how the same ethnic group interacts with the host in multiple national contexts, as well as showing differences between the levels of integration of two different groups in the same national context, is a powerful strategy yielding surprising new insights into the conditions under which cultural boundaries are maintained or eroded.

### **Homeland dissimulation**

The counterpart to *assimilation*, the process of groups or individuals becoming similar, is *dissimulation*, the process of becoming different. Migration from the Global South to the North is driven by wage gaps

and other differentials that make it possible for southerners to improve their life circumstances through migration. Such improvements can be measured not only over the life-spans of migrants but also in the growing differences between migrant families and those who remain in the home country. Thinking outside the national box, through comparing the growing differences between Mexican migrants and their descendants, on the one hand, and Mexicans who stay in Mexico, on the other, reveals dramatic upward mobility and a process of 'homeland dissimilation' that conventional accounts tend to miss (Author 2009b).

For example, education is one of the most important dimensions of assimilation and dissimilation because it captures the human capital necessary for full social, political and economic participation in a society. Mainstream academic work and policy perspectives from radically different points on the political spectrum decry the high dropout rates and low levels of education of Mexican immigrants *vis-à-vis* native whites and other more highly-educated immigrant groups (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Huntington 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

The homeland dissimilation perspective paints quite a different picture. Second-generation Mexican American men average 4.5 years more education than do Mexican men in Mexico. Simply by virtue of having been born in the United States, they are dramatically better situated *vis-à-vis* their Mexican peers. Even a high school dropout in the United States would count as 'highly educated' in Mexico, where only about one-fifth of adults have graduated from high school (Author 2007). The remarkable improvement in the life chances of migrants' children is no secret, certainly not to the migrants who make tremendous sacrifices to achieve that gain, but it has been strangely ignored in much of the academic literature on inter-ethnic differences in educational achievement (e.g. Lee 2002; Goldsmith 2004).<sup>1</sup>

The utility of the homeland dissimilation lens is illustrated in a more ethnographic mode in other domains of ethnic difference. One puzzle is that, while immigrants' adoption of urban and gang-inflected youth culture in the United States is identified by the classical assimilation literature and nativists as a failure of assimilation (Gans 1992), the same is viewed in Mexico as evidence of Americanization. When first- or second-generation young men return to their rural sending communities in Mexico to visit, they often stand apart from their peers who never left. Their tattoos, body piercings, baggy pants, and shaved heads telegraph their transformative US experience. The segmented assimilation perspective explores the notion that 'oppositional cultures' are developed in contact with a US 'underclass' as a specific form of Americanization. However, its research design cannot determine the extent to which observations of immigrant youth

behaviour are caused by forces in the destination country alone, or may be developing independently in the sending country as well. The global diffusion of youth culture through media and tourism may explain the development of particular styles in ways that are only variably related to migration, as Maira (2002) shows in her study of Indian-American youth in New York City. The homeland dissimilation perspective, with its emphasis on empirical work in both sending and receiving destinations, captures an important slice of migrant reality that is missed by adopting the perspective of the receiving country alone.

### **Comparing domestic and international migrants**

The ongoing debate in the transnationalism literature about the extent to which international migrants abroad can usefully be considered members of a 'community' spanning both sending and receiving localities is enriched by considering the different ways that claims to community membership are negotiated in contexts of domestic and international migration. The 'hometown associations' formed by international migrants sharing places of origin are considered the quintessential 'transnational' institution because they are a vehicle for a wide range of collective practices linking migrants to family and townspeople who stayed behind. Yet the hometown associations are a cross-border version of what anthropologists and historians have long known as 'migrant village associations' made up of *domestic* migrants from rural areas settling in urban areas. A full understanding of the extent to which international migration changes the practices and claims surrounding community boundaries requires at least three field sites – the origin locality and an international and domestic satellite. Many Mexican hometown associations in Los Angeles and Chicago also have branches in Mexico City and Guadalajara, enabling a systematic comparison of domestic and transborder hometown associations from the same place. A comparison of these associations in the heart of the historic Mexican migrant-sending region found that both forms of organization included a strong discourse of membership in the community despite physical absence, migrant-sponsored philanthropic and development projects in the hometown, the role of migrants as intermediaries with higher levels of government, the use of technology to reduce a sense of distance between migrants and those left behind, and fund-raising visits to satellites by political and religious leaders (Author 2008). Many of the putatively novel features of 'transnational life' had been established earlier by clubs of domestic migrants.

International and domestic migrations are not the same, of course. International migration is only inherently different from domestic

migration insofar as the former is political by virtue of crossing state boundaries of territory and citizenship (see Zolberg 1999). By bringing domestic migration into the same analytic frame as international migration, the international and political quality of international migration is made clear. For instance, in the Mexican case, US border control efforts restrict the free flow of people within the migration circuit, and make it more common for migrants with legal status to make short trips back to Mexico. On the other hand, the urban receiving context characterizing much international migration may be as important in shaping migrants' experiences as the fact that the migration is international. As I highlighted in the discussion above on comparative fieldwork, local contexts within the country of destination may matter as much as, or more than, the national context (Favell 2008).

### Conclusions

Just as migrants cross all manner of boundaries in their journeys, scholars face the challenge of crossing the mental boundaries that distort their research questions. Any research effort is forced to construct boundaries around the field of inquiry, but methodological problems arise when those boundaries are constructed out of force of habit without considering the ways that the construction of boundaries defines the kind of theoretical case that is being studied, the likely outcomes of the research, and the points of comparison that are articulated.

I argue that despite some practical disadvantages of multi-sited fieldwork, which can be mitigated through scholarly collaboration and researchers sharing with migrants their experiences of specialized local knowledge of far-flung places, there are overwhelming advantages to comparative, multi-sited fieldwork. The points on a migration circuit open up research strategies based on a version of the Millian methods of agreement and difference that is sensitive to causal connections between cases. Of course, mechanistically applying the Millian methods has long been discredited. There are inherent epistemological problems in knowing whether the proper controls have been applied to the comparison, all other things are never equal, causes of social outcomes are usually multiple and interactive, social theories tend to be probabilistic, and the units of analysis influence each other. Approaches using close empirical observation to show how social mechanisms work address these formidable challenges, and help explain how the circumstances in the origin and destination sites shape migrants' lives in interaction with their agency.

Thinking outside the national box, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) have eloquently advocated, can take many forms. *Vis-à-vis*

scholars of assimilation, I argue that expanding the field of inquiry to include the country of origin yields new points of comparison in assessing social change. Specifically, the homeland dissimilation perspective examining the difference between outcomes and opportunities in the origin and destination highlights the dramatic mobility that many migrants enjoy, even if they appear marginalized or 'underclass' in the destination. *Vis-à-vis* scholars of transnationalism, I argue that many of the reconfigurations of community and the place of technology in driving those changes are common to domestic as well as international migrations. Comparing domestic and international migrations from the same place is a useful strategy for isolating the specificity of change in the context of international migration. Methodological transnationalists should also avoid smuggling in methodological nationalist assumptions through the back door by extrapolating from local to national patterns. The *sui generis* mobility and dynamism of migration present serious methodological challenges to researchers, but the strategies advocated here can be powerful tools for meeting those challenges squarely.

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### Note

1. The homeland dissimilation perspective differs from the migrant selectivity perspective, which only compares *first-generation* immigrants and those who stay behind. The empirical question of the educational selectivity of Mexican migrants to the United States, and the implications of that selectivity, are debated by Borjas (1999) and Feliciano (2005).

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