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A Global perspective on  
Transnational Migration:  
Theorizing Migration without  
Methodological Nationalism

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, I argue that if migration scholars set aside their methodological nationalism, transnational migration studies can contribute to social theories that elucidate the mutual constitution of the global, national and local. Migration scholarship can provide a global perspective on power that explains the relationship between the contemporary contradictory narratives about migrants that either demonizes them or celebrates them. Migration rather than discussed as either good or bad can be discussed as part of broader transnational processes within which nation-states are enmeshed and to which they contribute.

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**Keywords:** transnationalism, nation-state, national identity, migration policy, social cohesion.

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# **A Global Perspective on Transnational Migration: Theorizing Migration without Methodological Nationalism**

## **Introduction**

There is currently a large and growing body of descriptive studies of transnational migration. These studies document the many ways in which migrants and their descendants live their lives both within and across the borders of multiple nation-states. Often these studies seem curiously disconnected both from social theory and from a series of powerful and contradictory narratives about migration and its consequences. In these narratives migrants appear as destabilizing or even criminal intruders into nation-states, or as coveted global talent, or as the last best hope of homelands whose development depends on migrant generated remittances. Rather than addressing these contradictions within the realm of social theory, mainstream migration scholars, especially those concerned with public policy, respond to the contemporary attacks on migrants and migration by adopting the perspective of their respective nation-states. Arguing for the need for or providing evidence of the long-term trends towards integration, they accept national borders as the borders of society and as the necessary institutional nexus for citizenship, democratic rights, or a social welfare state (Alba 2003, Esser 2001). On their part, many scholars of transnational migration, despite their descriptions of cross-border processes, have also displayed what Andreas Wimmer and I (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) have called a “methodological nationalist” perspective. They have responded to critiques of dual nationalities and transnational social fields by assurances that migrants with such ties and loyalties can and will rapidly assimilate (Portes 1999, Morawska 2002). In so doing, scholars of transnational migration contribute to the assumption that has been foundational for much of migration scholarship that the migrant/native divide is the fundamental challenge to social cohesion and the stability and welfare of the states in which migrants settle.

Politicians and journalists, on the other hand, increasingly directly confront and defend the native/foreigner divide that underlies migration policy and discourses about social cohesion, integration, and ‘earned citizenship’. For example, in the UK, David Goodhart (2008), a former *Financial Times* journalist and founder of *Prospect* magazine, a current affairs monthly, argues

The justification for giving priority to the interests of fellow citizens boils down to a pragmatic claim about the value of the nation-state. Without fellow-citizen favouritism, the nation-state ceases to have much meaning. And most of the things that liberals desire - democracy, redistribution, welfare states, human rights - only work when one can assume the shared norms and solidarities of national communities.

In this paper, I argue that if migration scholars set aside their methodological nationalism, transnational migration studies can contribute to social theories that elucidate the mutual constitution of the global, national and local. Migration scholarship can provide a global perspective on power that explains the relationship between the contemporary contradictory narratives about migrants that either demonizes them or celebrates them. Migration rather than discussed as either good or bad can be discussed as part of broader transnational processes within which nation-states are enmeshed and to which they contribute.

In the first section, I will critique the taken-for granted use of the nation state as a unit of analysis that underlies much of migration scholarship including those which address transnational migration. In the next section of the paper, I look to the literature on neo-liberal restructuring of capital accumulation within specific places as a conceptual starting point for new perspectives on migration that highlight transnational processes past and present and address institutionalized power. Finally, in the concluding section of the paper I sketch some of the ways in a new perspective that I call a global power theory of migration can bring together the various apparently contradictory trends within migration discourses and scholarship, and explains their simultaneous emergence and relationships.

## **Weakness of migration scholarship**

Building on several decades of scholarship around the construction of, and naturalization of, 'national communities,' I use the term methodological nationalism to critique the tendency of migration scholars to conflate a nation state with a concept of society. I mean by methodological nationalism an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states. Members of those states are assumed to share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs, and institutions (Beck 2000, Chernilo 2007). Taking state borders as societal boundaries creates a mode of logic that makes immigrants the fundamental threat to social solidarity; natives are assumed to uniformly share common social norms. Moving from what are depicted not only as different sovereign and historically discrete states but also societies, foreigners are portrayed as carrying with them particular distinctive common national norms. Much of migration theory consistently disregards both the social and cultural divisions within each nation-state, as well as the experiences, norms, and values migrants and natives share because they are embedded in social, economic, and political processes, networks, movement and institutions that exist both within and across state borders.

Because many migration scholars accept this kind of bounded thinking and employ a container approach to society, our relationship to migration debates often ends up by unquestioningly accepting

the underlying premises of a politics and public policy of exclusion. Migration scholars speak as if there are discrete national economies and as if what happens on state territory is a product solely or primarily of state policies. More fundamentally, as Stephen Castles notes (2007), migration theory stands apart from more general developments in social theory. It is for this reason that despite more than two decades of increasingly sophisticated scholarship about past and present periods of globalization, a theorization of a global network society, discussions of a second modernism, critiques of methodological nationalism and advocacy for methodological cosmopolitanism, migration studies which examines global movements of people, has been strangely silent with regards to these developments in social theory (Beck 2000, Castells 2006, Latour 2004, Massey et al 1998, Sassen 1991)

Even the scholars of transnational migration or diaspora have often bound their unit of study along the lines of national or ethnic identities that isolate the analysis of migrant local and transborder connections both from explorations of the new flexible modes of capital accumulation and contemporary neoliberal restructuring of space, self, and society and from critiques of changing modes of legitimation. The end result is that the unit of analysis – often described as a “transnational community”--- becomes a migrating population defined and delimited by communal cultural identities that define a “transnational space”. It is for this reason, I believe, that so much of the scholarship about transnational migration is about identity formation or its persistence across borders (Levitt 2001, Pries 2001, Faist 2000). These weaknesses have led scholars of transnational migration into two contradictory, equally untenable and sometimes simultaneously held positions: the celebration of migrant-built remittance economies and the description of migrant transnationalism as an ephemeral first-generation phenomenon that portends eventual assimilation. It is no wonder, as Rainer Bauböck (2008:8) has noted, that policy discourses that recognize transnational migration are so contradictory:

There seems to be little reflection on the diversity of orientations within migrant groups that do not identify themselves as diasporas. Moreover, there is little awareness of the tension between testing individual efforts at cultural integration as a condition of admission to long-term residence or citizenship and the hope that transnational ties can be instrumentalised for co-development and reducing emigration pressure. Frequently, ministries in charge of foreign relations and development pursue agendas that conflict with policies promoted by ministries of justice and home affairs.

In building a global power perspective on migration, the concept of transnational social field allows for more conceptual clarity. Transnational social fields are networks of networks that link individuals directly or indirectly to institutions located in more than one nation-state as part of the power dynamics through which institutionalized social relations delineate social spaces (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994, Glick Schiller 2003, 2004, 2005). The term is not used metaphorically but as a means of situating individual migrants within various unequal social relationships that connect them to various

specific places and their social organized relationships: taxation, employment, education, policing, property ownership, law, and public policy, for example. The transnational social fields of migrants can contribute to, be shaped by, or contest the local or transnational reach of various states' military, economic, and cultural power. The concept of transnational social fields that I am advocating builds not on Bourdieu's distinction of discrete domains of power. Instead I build on social anthropology's grounded theorization of the social relations that intersect and transform discrete territorially based and historically bounded social spaces of local community, village, city, or state (Epstein 1958, Mitchell 1969). The theorization of the social construction of space has been prominent in geography but this work has not been taken up adequately by migration scholars despite the use of spatial metaphors by scholars of transnational processes.

### **Towards a grounded global power framework for migration studies**

To make sense of the contradictory policies that highlight, yet also impede, transnational migration, as well as to place migration within a social theory that is not constrained by borders of nation-states we need a global power perspective on transnational migration. A transnational perspective on migration that discards methodological nationalism and begins from a theorization of global power has the following merits. First, it situates migration as one of numerous processes that both cross state borders and contribute to the constitution or restriction of state powers. Secondly, it recognizes the continuing importance of states as actors within and across state borders. We cannot currently dispense with states as instruments to create and protect rights, to redistribute wealth and protect public goods and services. The legal regimes, policies, and institutional structures of power must be acknowledged in our scholarship and examined within a global power perspective. Thirdly, this perspective recognizes that states constitute only one set of institutions of power that extend transnationally. Financial conglomerates, ngos, religious organizations, treaty based organizations; corporations are also institutions of power that work across state borders. Finally such a perspective builds on yet critiques theorizations of global networks that posit that the world has been transformed into a space of flows.

It is strange that migration scholarship has had so little to say about power since the question of power structures whether or not we even define a person who moves across state borders as a migrant. Clearly those who have rights as citizens in states or confederations of states that dominate the world militarily and economically --- namely the US and the EU---have been able to move to the rest of the world with few barriers. People from the rest of the world have not been able to return the favour. This makes them migrants and the subject of migration scholarship. It would seem therefore that migration scholarship requires a global perspective on power that begins with this basic disparity

between states and examines what combination of forces makes possible and maintains this inequality (Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez 2002, Cervantes-Rodríguez 2009, Castles 2007, Mittleman 1994)

A distinction between levels of analysis perpetuates the penchant in migration scholarship to discuss the connection between states and migrants as one of push–pull, despite decades of critique of this paradigm. Even attempts to overcome such divisions such as Douglas Massey’s (Massey et al 1998) multi-factorial effort to synthesize contradictory migration theories end up reaffirming the necessity of conceptualizing different levels of analysis. Massey focuses on a “migration process” with internal dynamics that constitutes a discrete field of study. Rich in data and insights into process, Massey’s approach encourages migration scholars to systematically disregard the way in which global institutions of power shape and are shaped by social relationships in specific localities.

Previous attempts of migration scholars to look beyond the nation-state built upon a world systems, world society approach, or Braudelial world scale approach in ways that have maintained distinctions between levels of analysis or spatial hierarchies (Wallerstein 2004, Luhmann 1997, Braudel 1980). Such distinctions maintain reinforces methodological nationalism by assuming that processes within the boundaries of the nation-state can be analyzed without reference to globe-spanning institutions of power. For example, Alejandro Portes (2006: 8), a pre-eminent US migration scholar, in a recent paper on migration and development states:

At a higher level of abstraction, we find world-systems and other neo-Marxist theories that view labour migration as a natural response to the penetration of weaker societies by the economic and political institutions of the developed world. The concept of “structural imbalancing” (Portes and Walton 1981) was introduced to highlight this process that takes multiple forms – from direct recruitment of workers to the diffusion of consumption expectations bearing little relation to local lifestyles and economic means.

If looking beyond the nation-state is conceptualized as a higher level of abstraction, that is to say a macro-level analysis, then we are unable to observe and theorize the interpenetration between globe-spanning institutions that structure imbalances of power and migrant experiences within and across states borders. Yet it is this imbalance of power that shapes the circumstances that compel people to migrate while simultaneously shaping the conditions under which they attempt to settle and develop transnational social fields. The signing of NAFTA, which Portes (2006) in the same paper consigns to the macro-level, is not an abstraction. It represented the power of an imperial state—the United States— instituting its agenda through its control of finance capital and military force. Capital is at its core a social relationship that links people together unequally within and across national borders. Notions of levels of analysis obscure this basic transnational aspect of daily life around the globe, which not only penetrates states but also shapes distinct migrant social fields across and within states.

In a very different approach to the integration of migrants, Helmut Esser (2004) uses a rational choice framework that is a form of methodological individualism rather than methodological nationalism. Esser places the onus of assimilation on the rational choice of the individual migrant who must come to terms with the structural conditions she or he faces. However, generally, societies for Esser are discrete sending and receiving countries that he describes as sending and “host” societies. For him, transnational ties are simply a sign of ‘ethnic capital’. In his view, ethnic capital in contrast to more generalized (mainstream) capital leads to segregation. Consequently, transnational for Esser is simply another term for segregation because he cannot conceive of incorporation “beyond” the nation-state. The transnational networks of migrants in this approach are simply allocated to the category of the migrant’s sending country based capital rather than an indication that, as Peggy Levitt and I have argued, society needs to be reconceived so it is not assumed to be coterminous with nation-states (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

Immigrants have (or should have) an objective interest in assimilative actions and investments in receiving country capital, like formal education or the acquisition of the host society’s language, and one would expect the same investment strategies to apply as for the indigenous population. The problems migrants (and their offspring) face (in relation to most sections of the indigenous population) are obvious: what they mainly have at their disposal is ethnic group capital, like the sending country’s language or ethnic social capital. However, ethnic group capital is clearly less efficient than receiving-country capital. By comparison, it is, in most cases, specific capital, because its usability depends on special circumstances, such as the existence of an ethnic community or a transnational network (Esser 2004: 1135).

Even those social theorists who speak of world society have tended to focus their concerns about migration on their own nation-state and its institutional nexus in ways that make national society the unit of analysis. For example, Michael Bommers (2005) claims that together with Luhmann he is replacing “a concept that understands society as a big collective/ collectivity by a concept of modern world society”. However, the relationship between these nation-state systems and the world society remain under-delineated and unclear in Bommers migration theory, leaving the door open to a continuation of methodological nationalist framing of debates on immigration. For example, Bommers’ arguments about migrant assimilation are accompanied by a list of institutions, many of which---even in the context of the European Union-- can only be sensibly read as remaining embedded in national regulatory systems such as the welfare system of individual states: “the main point of reference for assimilation are differentiated social systems: organisations and functional realms like the modern economy, law, politics, science, education or health but not groups of (majority) societies.”

The problem in his theorization is not his insistence on the continuing significance of nation-states and national institutions but rather his failure to provide a way to address on the level of theory the restructuring of local and national governance including the constitution of the workforce to serve

the broader needs of finance capital and the institutional nexus in which it is located (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Thus Bommers (2005) argues

The nation state is still a decisive frame for the structure of the relations of distribution and inequality even in a globalised world society. The connections between the different forms of assimilation remain regulated and strictly coupled because of the continuous importance of the nation state. Even under the conditions of globalisation these relations are still not loosely coupled and contingent. To put it differently: It remains unlikely that especially the structural, social and identificational forms of assimilation vary arbitrarily. Hartmut Esser has emphasised this point by arguing that the education systems are moulded by national cultures and that national languages preserve their continuous relevance....

There are several bodies of literature from which to draw to develop a global perspective on transnational migration that can illuminate the current contradictory narratives on migration but have not been used to address transnational migration within global fields of unequal power. Scholars such as Manuel Castells (2000) and Bruno Latour (2004), who trace networks of interconnection that are not confined to nation-states provide the basis for an analysis of migrants transnational social fields within the current historical conjuncture and its transformations of human relations, but neither have addressed migration nor migrants encounters with regimes of borders, racialization, and dehumanization. Ulrich Beck (2007) provides a critique of methodological nationalism that posits transnational migrants as cosmopolitan actors that necessarily and properly destabilize nationalist projects. His approach, while allowing for a global perspective and the role of migrants as transnational actors, homogenizes migrants who may reinforce or contribute to rather than contest neoliberal projects. A global power perspective on migration must address the various positionalities migrants have assumed within attempts to implement neo-liberal capitalism and the types of contradictions these positions are currently engendering.

There is a scholarship that addresses unequal power and connects social forces that extend beyond individual states to the experience of people in particular places as they contribute to the substantiation of both locality and nation-states. This literature emerges out of the analysis of uneven globalization. It has been led by geographers concerned with the neoliberal restructuring of governance, the processes of capital accumulation, and the reinventing of cities and urban life. With few exceptions, such as the global cities literature, this scholarship does not address migration. However, the research and theorization contained in this literature can prove useful to the project of developing a global power perspective on migration.

Neoliberalism can be defined as a series of contemporary projects of capital accumulation that beginning in the 1970s sought to reconstitute social relations of production, including the organisation of labour, space, state institutions, military power, governance, membership, and sovereignty (Harvey 2005,

2006, Jessop 2002). Neoliberalism has allowed for the creation of wealth by destroying and replacing previous relations of production, consumption, and distribution and generation new forms of desire. The neo-liberal agenda reflected, therefore, more general processes of capital accumulation characterized by Marx as 'creative destruction'. There are always within capitalist economics contradictions between the need first to construct and then replace previously built social relations, ideas, values, political arrangements and institutions that regulate, circulate, and protect capital. The accumulated impact of the transformations wrought by these projects and the policies and technologies that accompany them can be called neoliberal restructuring and the policies that institute the transformations can be termed the neo-liberal agenda.

The term agenda is useful because it reminds us of several aspects that have structured contemporary moment and produced the current global crisis. Neoliberal projects have taken the form of specific sets of ideas and policies that may or may not be successfully implemented. These ideas have been held, shaped defended and contested by a range of actors including social scientists, whether or not they are directly linked to policy. The broader projects involved not just the domain of economics but also politics, cultural practices, ideas about self and society, and the production and dissemination of images and narratives. In terms of specific social policies that affect the quality of life for migrants and natives alike, neoliberal restructuring has included the reduction in state services and benefits and the diversion of public monies and resources to develop private service-oriented industries from health care to housing (sometimes in arrangements called public-private partnerships). It also has constituted a relentless push towards global production through the elimination of state intervention in a host of economic issues – from tariffs to worker's rights. Finally, the term neoliberal agenda and the work of geographers in exploring the implementation of these agendas is useful because neoliberal projects are implemented on the ground and differentially, depending not just on different national policies but on specific local histories including that of migration.

By conceptualizing the global restructuring of capital accumulation and its relationship to urban and state restructuring processes, migration theorists can examine the ways in which the migration process is shaped and shapes local space and is at the same time reflective of and contributes to transnational processes. They can address Stephen Castles' (2006) call to analyse the way in which 'migration plays a central role in current global processes of social, economic and political change,' and his observation that 'migration is both molded by and helps to mould these global transformations.' At the same time, migration scholars will have an analytic that does not dichotomize macro-level versus micro-level analysis, does not speak of levels of abstraction, and does not make the nation-state the unit of analysis. It allows us to put migrants into the spaces where they live and to which they are connected through various social networks.

Of particular interest in this regard is the debate in geography about the meaning and utility of the concept of geographic scale (Brenner 1999, Herod and Wright 2002, Marston, Hohn and Woodward 2005). Previously, geographers worked with a concept of scale that portrayed the local as nested within larger encompassing units, which often have political boundaries---municipalities, sub-state administrative units, nation-states, geographic regions such as Europe, and the globe. Over the past few decades, geographers have had to confront a restructured world in which the implementation of neo-liberal agendas disrupted fixed notions of nested and territorially bounded political units. Cities became dynamic players within global fields of power and flows of capital and labour, globally marketing their urban brand and in some ways creating their own foreign policies and alliances (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Peck 1998). They competed in an effort to attract flows of capital and a mix of 'new economy' industries and their clients and customers. 'New economy' industries are ones that produce services demanded within the global economy including the very consumption of locality in the form of tourism. Central to this new economy are 'knowledge' industries, which produce the workers, skills, technologies, and consumptive patterns necessary to organize, agglutinate, and concentrate capital.

Geographers and scholars of the urban began to describe the neoliberal rearrangements of governance of territory as 'rescaling processes' through which localities change the parameters of their global, national and/or regional connectedness so that they 'jump scale' (Swyngedouw 1992). The term rescaling emerged as a way to address the repositioning of the status and significance of cities, both in relationship to states and within global hierarchies of urban-based institutional power. Rather than understanding the local and global scale as either discrete levels of social activities or hierarchical analytical abstractions, as in previous geographies of space, 'the global and the local (as well as the national) are [understood to be] mutually constitutive' (Brenner 2001:134-135).

The theorization of rescaling provides a way to analyze questions of governance that neither ignore nor privilege nation states. It allows for the acknowledgement that state sovereignty, never an accurate description of the differential powers of various states, is now more mythical than ever. But states remained players within neo-liberal restructuring. States were rescaled to play new roles by channelling flows of relatively unregulated capital and participating in the constitution of global regulatory regimes enforced by the World Trade Organization and international financial institutions. At the same time, specific states such as the US and in Western Europe remained the base for globe-spanning financial institutions such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization. Currencies based in these states remained necessary for global transactions but linked through the restructuring of finance capital to investment strategies of China, Japan, and Middle-eastern oil states. A broader range of states including Russia and China, who maintained their position as military powers, contribute to the global dynamic through which capital accumulation is secured or protected.

As I have indicated, discussions of migration and migration policy generally have not been part of the study of neoliberal restructuring of governance and localities. While there are geographers such as Katharyne Mitchell (2003) who have approach studies of single cities from this perspective, the full implications of this framework has not been broadly applied to migration studies. The one significant exception is the global cities literature (Friedmann 1986, King 1991, Sassen 1991). Looking at the a small handful of cities urban scholars have noted that their prominence has been linked to their dependence on migration flows of highly skilled professionals and on migrants who staff the related service sector of the new economy. However, global cities often have been described as exceptions, as if all other cities and migration flows reflect only the dynamics of national terrains and policies. Yet the scholarship on neo-liberal restructuring noted that all localities began to compete globally.

Migration scholars, constantly pulled into discussions of national migration policies, have not paid sufficient attention to the way in which the neo-liberal restructuring of specific localities shapes the way in which migrants live in a specific place. Neither urban geographers nor migration scholars have examined how migrants become active agents of rescaling policies as they settle in specific places. Drawing from the literature on urban restructuring and repositioning, Ayse Caglar and I (2006, 2009, forthcoming a, b; Caglar 2006, Glick Schiller 2005) argue that to differentiate and understand the dynamics of migrant incorporation and transnational connection in different cities, it was necessary to situate migration within an analysis of the neoliberal rescaling processes.

In combining the scholarship on the neo-liberal structuring of space with migration studies in order to speak to the current apparently contradictory migration policies and their accompanying discourses and polemics, it is also useful to draw on the emerging critique of migration and development. An increasing number of scholars, some in migration studies and others in development studies, have responded to current celebrations of migrant remittance economies by offering a potent critique of the policies of co-development and migrants as key agents of international development (Delgado-Weiss and Covarrubias 2007, Faist 2007, de Haas 2007). These scholars have taken to task “the global lending community”, i.e. the World Bank, Inter-American Development Fund, and other regional banking interests. According to these major institutions, which structure the terms under which 2/3 of the countries of the world have been able to obtain financing, migrant remittances can serve as a major source of capitalization for growth in less developed states (Wimaladharm, Pearce and Stanton 2004). Those critiquing this development strategy look at the way in which under colonial regimes, as well as today, wealth is actually drained from less powerful regions of the world to enrich Europe and the United States. Transnational migration that emerges as a way in which families in those regions attempt to meet their needs for housing, education, health care as well as basic nutrition takes place in the context of this redistribution of wealth. Critics of migration and development policies look beyond

methodological nationalism to understand both the context of international migration as a product of uneven fields of power. However, these critics have not sufficiently addressed the specific and varying roles that migrants have been playing in relationship to neo-liberal restructuring and rescaling in both localities of departure and settlement and the forces that configure migrant's agency. Nor have these scholars analyzed the contradictions between the migration and development policies and the efforts of states throughout the world to restrict, control migration and access to residency and citizenship, and subject migrants to neoliberal labour policies.

## **Explaining Contemporary Contradictory Discourses**

By paying more attention to the global role of power holders, including financial institutions, organizations, and states that serve as base areas of capital, in reconstructing and locally situating reconfigurations of various forms of capital and labour, migration scholars can begin to address the seeming contradictions that I outlined in the beginning of this paper. This includes the national anti-immigrant discourses, the celebration of migrant remittances by global financial institutions, and the policies that divide global talent from the apparently unwashed and unwanted. We can also introduce new topics, locating tensions within and resistances to the implementation of the restructuring agendas in specific places as these localities are affected by the introduction of new migration regimes. Furthermore, new vistas for migration research open up including explorations of the multiple and significant roles played by immigrants in the localities in which they reside or to which they are transnationally connected. First I review the relationship between neo-liberal restructuring that was instituted globally and its intertwined migrant regulatory regime in order to examine the underlying coherence of the apparently contradictory aspects of migration discourse and policy. Then I briefly speak to some of the variability of locality, migration, and neoliberal restructuring.

I will begin with neo-liberalism and the anti-immigrant rhetorics adopted by so many countries. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century state- based institutions provided a common national infrastructure that materialized and legitimated the claims of the state to constitute a single national community of shared norms and practices. Beginning in the 1970s, these trends were reversed as a worldwide, although differently implemented, neo-liberal agenda of privatization and the diminution of public services made inroads in the quality of life and the social cohesion of nation-states and public life. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as discrete realms of economic production were ever more integrally linked to production and consumption processes elsewhere, state narratives and citizenship regimes were reinvigorated to once again stress the distinctness and exclusivity of national identities based on cultural difference. In short, nation-states have become identity containers that maintain and

disseminate images of the nation as a society that have little to do with the contemporary transnational institutional structures within which social life and relations of power are actually produced. The fewer services and rights states provide for their citizens and the more they produce citizens educated to identify as customers enmeshed in cultures of consumption rather than within forms of civic and social engagement, the more these states promote discourses of social cohesion and national community. The inside is increasingly constructed in relationship to framing foreigners as the source of disruption, the decline of social services, and of community. The more large numbers of citizens in states around the world find their futures circumscribed by poverty or lack of social mobility, the more they are told by political leaders that the problems are caused by persons from elsewhere.

None of this is new; nativism and anti-foreign sentiments have been an aspect of successive stages of nation-state building (Higham 2002). Anti-immigrant discourse remains a nation-state building process, a ritual of renewal that engages its participants in defining their loyalty to a country by differentiating them from stigmatized racialized others. Currently movements of national renewal are taking place in the wake of the growing negative consequences of several decades of neoliberal restructuring. In this context, they have fuelled a revitalized nationalism that has distracted public attention from the hollowing out of the state and the growing disparities of wealth and power facilitated by neo-liberal measures. By providing a foundation for new migrant labour regimes, anti-immigrant discourses also have contributed to new sources of profitability for investors in a situation of falling profits.

World-wide competition in the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lead to the development of global assembly lines that moved industrial production away from North America and Europe and into to far-flung regions where labour was cheap and unregulated. Tariff barriers were demolished and export-processing zones that were untaxed were established through out the world. At the same time, first in the US and increasingly in Europe, service jobs in restructured cities geared for consumer industries and tourism or agricultural jobs that could not be exported were filled to some degree by undocumented migrants, who provided the quiescent, hyper-exploited, and flexible labour (Anderson 2007). In some countries in Europe such as the UK, asylum seekers and refugees—legally or illegally—provided this form of labour. Undocumented migrants working in non-union sweat shops kept industrial production closer to US consumption centres (Kwong 1987)

Increasingly agricultural and industrial corporations based in Europe and North America have faced a contradiction in their production processes ---the balance between near and far production. This contradiction was heightened by the rise in oil prices and the prediction of future oil scarcity, which means it will become more profitable to locate productive processes closer to the areas of high consumer demand. As many observers in Europe have pointed out, the low birth rate and aging

composition of European and North American populations will heighten these contradictions (Castles 2006).

In response labour regimes developed that were more suited to the production needs of neo-liberal economies and their inability to realize sustained profitability. These provide work forces that are cheap, controllable, and relatively near-by. The crisis of profitability of the 2008 downturn only increases the pressures to obtain such a workforce, even in the face of dramatically rising unemployment in Europe and the US. The contemporary denigration and criminalization of asylum seekers and the undocumented and the new enforcement regimes of bio-surveillance measures that limit mobility are integral to this transformation. The new labour regimes once again offer limited short-term “guest workers” contracts to persons of various levels of skill, who migrate from states that cannot sustain the work force they produce and educate. The expansion of the EU labour market that offers the most recent accession states policy initiatives that emphasize the merits of circulating labour are part of this new configuration. It seems likely that we are witnessing a movement to a labour regime made up of circulating labour from within the EU and new and very controlled forms of contract labour from elsewhere. As Steve Vertovec (2007) has pointed out “circular migration is ... being advocated as a potential solution (at least in part) to a number of challenges surrounding contemporary migration”.

Dehumanized through rhetorics of national difference, policies of short-term contractual migrant labour met the needs of neo-liberal agendas and their current profitability crisis more efficiently than the previous use of family reunion, asylum, and the undocumented to supply flexible and politically silenced labour. Global talent specifications that allow work visas, sometimes with time-limited contracts, only to persons with technical and professional educations complements rather than contradict the overall thrust of anti-immigrant narratives. The discourse highlighting a “global war for talent” commodifies skilled workers, denying their rights to family life and full personhood.

If we examine the relationships between the neoliberal restructuring of capital and its profitability and legitimacy crisis and the emerging regimes of controllable and flexible labour, the underlying unity between the various seemingly disparate trends in migration policy and discourse becomes clear. Nationalist rhetoric and exclusionary policies pave the way for production regimes that rely on highly controllable labour. Faceless migrating labour is portrayed as invading borders, potentially lawless, and so requiring restriction, regulation, and contractual constraints that limit the rights of workers to change employers or challenge working conditions. The depersonalization of labour as contractual services allows for labour policy statements in which separation of workers from home and family without rights of settlement and family reunion become good economic policies. The depersonalization of the process highlights the category of unskilled, despite the fact that many such workers have relatively high degrees of education. Their willingness of the university educated, teachers,

health professionals, engineers and architects to migrate as “unskilled” labour has everything to do with structural adjustment and privatization policies in their home localities that led initially to the depression of wages and the unemployment of professionals and increasingly to world-wide crisis.

Legitimizing the migrant/native divide, both scholars and policy analysts justify legislation that excludes the permanent settlement of migrant workers and their families in the name of importance of transnational fields and the remittance economy for sustaining less developed countries. These migration experts report that circular migration increases the likelihood that “both countries of origin and destination can make gains from migration according to their respective preferences. Many migrants and their descendents also prefer to move back and forth between their ancestral and settlement countries. At their best, circular migration policies align the objectives of origin countries, destination countries, and the migrants who comprise these flows” (Newland, Agunias, and Terrazas 2008:2) Portes (2006) goes even further, emphasizing that “returnees are much more likely to save and make productive investments at home; they leave families behind to which sizable remittances are sent. More importantly, temporary migrants do not compromise the future of the next generation by placing their children in danger of downward assimilation abroad. To the extent that sending country governments provide the necessary educational resources, these children can grow up healthy in their own countries, benefiting from the experiences and the investments of their parents.”

When migration scholars emphasize the benefits to all concerned of transnational migration and remittance economy development without addressing the severe and permanent restriction of rights that increasingly accompany this form of labour, they support a regime of hyper-exploitation. Short-term labour contracts resurrect older forms of indenture with limited rights and mobility. Condemning workers to a regime of a life of short-term contracts only means they are caught within a system of long-term family separation without the right rights, protections, and benefits from the states whose infrastructure they are building with their labour, services and taxes. When families separated by migration regulations that allow no family reunion, they reproduce social life at great personal sacrifice: parents live separated from children, spouses are divided from each other, and elderly parents are left to survive without the assistance of children (Constable 1997).

The global system of power in which this is all happening and the human costs of this new arrangement of labour are too rarely addressed within migration studies. While potent critiques have been made about each strand of the contemporary apparently contradictory narratives--- such as significant critiques of the migration and development paradigm—such critiques are weakened by their remaining within separate migration literatures. It has been far too easy within the different streams of research to take for granted neo-liberal restructuring rather than questioning the underlying values it fosters and the human toll it extracts. The seemingly disparate scholarships and narratives about

migration are part of the globe-spanning mutual reconstitution of transnational social relationships. Neoliberalism has been both embodied and contested as global processes of the reproduction of capital come to ground and are reconstituted by local populations—migrants and natives alike. By globally examining the fields of power constituted by transnational processes we can develop a research agenda that both calls attention to human costs of neoliberal restructuring and traces the various trajectories and the resistances it engenders.

In developing this perspective, it is also important to note that global financial institutions have made migrant remittances a growing industry just at the moment when many migrants may be less interested in transnational strategies. To some degree, transnational migration has reflected a “hedge your bets” strategy on the part of migrants who were unsure of the long term welcome they might receive in the states they were settling, even if citizenship rights were available and utilized (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994). Migrants sending remittances to be invested in homes and businesses make certain assumptions about the viability of local economies in sending states. They assume that there will be enough security of persons and enough of an opportunity structure for those with capital, that investment is a viable strategy that will benefit them or their families. Increasingly, in many regions of the world these assumptions no longer hold. Increasingly regions of states or entire states have become destabilised as a result of structural adjustment policies, the hollowing out of national economies through trade agreements such as NAFTA and WTO restrictions, the growth of international arms and drug trade and the fostering of proxy militias and war. The result is that migrants from some regions in the world might prefer settlement, family reunion and unilateral rather than simultaneous incorporation, at the very time that this strategy is being foreclosed to them. Transnational migration and connection are not inherent features of migration but reflect conditions in localities in more than one state.

Some of these perspectives emerge when we examine the varied roles that migrants have been playing in relationship to the neoliberal restructuring and rescaling of localities. Migrants can be “scale makers” who reshape places as they integrate them within transnational social fields of familial, commercial, religious, political and organizational relationships (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009, forthcoming a,b). Migrants’ multiple and contradictory transnational incorporations into localities in more than one state cannot be analyzed by reference to globalization from below, or transnational social spaces or communities, if these terms direct us to separate the analysis of migrant agency from other aspects of the structuration of a transnational social field: class positioning, localized economic and political opportunity structures, cultural politics, racialization and non-migrant actors. The multiple positionalities of migrants cannot be encompassed within analytical frameworks that approach migrants

solely within a context of resistance to uneven globalization, as ethnic communities or as labour, whether skilled or unskilled.

Instead, building on the growing body of data on transnational migration, researchers can specify a series of differentiated roles that migrants living within transnational fields have been playing within efforts to implement neo-liberal agendas. These roles include but are not limited to: (1) agents of neo-liberal neighbourhood gentrification; (2) exemplars of neo-liberal values; (3) significant actors in efforts to revitalize urban centres and deindustrialized cities; and (4) links to transnational flows of capital. These roles make clear that rather than being agents of national development in their homelands or disruptive of social fabric in the states in which they settle, migrants can be agents of differential development or resistance to neo-liberal agendas in specific places and at specific points of time. What roles migrants play in localities around the world has been shaped in the past few decades by the interpenetration of the neoliberal agenda and local histories and structures. Hence localities differentially inserted in the global economy offer different opportunity structures, pathways of transnational connection, and barriers to incorporation.

In cities and towns that are not among the handful global cities but have very much been subject to and participants in world-wide flows of capital and the implementation, migrant activity in labour and property markets, in establishment of small businesses, in neighbourhood gentrification, or in the attraction of international investment capital and infrastructure investment may prove vital to a localities efforts to restructure and reposition itself regionally, nationally and globally. This general statement applies to localities around the world. On the one hand, the impact of migrant connections and the range of roles migrants have been able to assume within these localities varies in relationship to various localities' ability to successfully compete and rescale. On the other hand, migrants' participation and shaping in transnational processes are integrally related to larger flows and redistributions of capital, economic, political, social, and cultural

In some localities, corporations in order to maintain their investment in that place have worked together with organizations of transmigrants to recruitment and retain highly skilled technicians (Brettell forthcoming). In other urban areas, migrants and persons of migrant background may serve as crucial middlemen linking a deindustrialized struggling city to foreign capital (Feldman Bianco forthcoming). In contrast, in some localities, migrants contribute to restructuring and rescaling by providing primarily low wage factory and domestic labour (Salih and Riccio forthcoming). In cities where work is scarce, migrant businesses may provide crucial economic activities as well as necessary products and services to natives and migrants alike, who are faced with widespread unemployment and impoverishment as a result of the destruction of local industry Drawing on transnational supply networks to stock businesses and transnational family networks to supply inexpensive labour, migrant businesses may fill up otherwise

empty storefronts near the city centre, contributing to the vitality of a city (Glick Schiller and Caglar forthcoming a).

By utilizing a global power perspective, we can trace the transnational social fields within which migrants appear not as foreigners to be differentiated from natives but as actors that connect local people to global processes. An industry that has become as commonplace as that of kebab shops that provide inexpensive food for urban populations throughout Europe and much of the US can provide an example of the utility of this perspective. It is possible to trace the connections between websites in Spain offering kebab equipment, long-established German factories producing grills, knives, and spits, meat packagers in various European cities serving the kebab industry, middlemen, shop owners and clerks who have migrated from North Africa, South Asia, Muslim central Asia, and consumers of all backgrounds throughout Europe. Some in the network reap sizeable profits while others toil long hours for low wages. The transnational networks of production, distribution, and consumption are simultaneously part of the restructuring of localities, the reimaging of local cultures, and the reconstitution of the local, national and global.

Migrant sending localities that provide the people power of transnational social fields have also experienced uneven development in relationship to the global economy and structural adjustment policies. As states have withdrawn public services as part of structural adjustment policies, those localities that have been able to receive remittances have developed to the detriment of other municipalities and regions. Remittances have not brought development but rather growing disparities within and across a national terrain. The differential success of those localities that do send sizeable numbers of migrants also opens different possibilities for return, investment, and transnational connection. Significant investment or return depends on local and regional security, itself an outcome of the balance of power between sending states and larger global institutions and powerful states and their configurations of power including their drug and arms industries. In some states such as Mexico, government policies of matching remittance based electrification or other public service improvements with government funds have exacerbated differences between town and regions. Growing insecurity and the power of drug cartels threatens local development.

## **Conclusions**

Within these brief profiles of different trajectories of local restructuring, it becomes obvious that migrants occupy a range of positions in each city in which they settle including unskilled labour, cultural promoters, city leaders, small business people, global talent and transnational capitalists. It is also clear that migrant transnational social fields contribute to the varying positionality of migrants and to the

restructuring and rescaling of cities. These transnational ties and the resultant local developments have been part of a global migration regime in which movement and family reunification was possible, often legally and sometimes despite barriers to movement. In general most states where migrants live have allowed some form of settlement with rights either at the time of entry or as a long-term aspiration and realizable possibility. If migration is restricted to those with short-term labour contracts or professional skills, migrants will not be able to play the varied roles described in this chapter. Their multiple positionings in relationships to the restructuring of localities stems from their ability to travel, obtain rights in multiple states and establish transnational social fields.

In short, a global power perspective on migration allows scholar to speak to a series of integrally related processes that cannot be understood separately. First, the projection of migrants as undesirable 'others' revitalizes national identities and loyalties of citizens whose relationship to the state as provider of services and social supports has been undermined by neo-liberal projects. At the same time, the dehumanization of migrating bodies allows for their insertion and control as various forms of unfree contracted labour. Meanwhile, migrant professionals can be welcomed in specific places as contributors to the neoliberal restructuring and rescaling of various cities. And migrant remittances can be relied on to transmit foreign currency to families, localities, and regimes left behind enabling their inclusion, however unequally, in global patterns of consumption and desire. Migration scholars need to put aside all forms of methodological nationalism so that their units of analysis do not obscure the localized processes through which capitalism is continually restructured, reproduced, experienced and contested. To understand the dynamics that surround us, we need to examine simultaneously the cultural narratives of everyday forms of nation-state formation, the global efforts to reconstitute capital and facilitate its flexible accumulation, and struggles of people around the world to live their lives with dignity and justice.

By developing such a framework, migration scholars will be able to enter into the policy arena with perspectives that do more than follow the well-worn path of sterile debates about the effects of immigration on social cohesion. We can speak to the factors that truly are eroding various human experiences of social solidarity as well as highlight the every day experiences of openness that bring people together in their search for life with meaning, respect for all varieties of human difference, and opportunities to explore their shared humanity.

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