

The Sociology of International Migration

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by

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This paper introduces the reader to the field of international migration through the perspective of an interdisciplinary sociologist. For heuristic purposes, I have divided this paper into three broad sub-sections. The first covers early attempts to make sense of the causes and consequences of international migration by equilibrium and structural-historical social scientists. Both these perspectives are largely macro-level approaches, and so the first section of the paper is primarily devoted to an elaboration of macro-level theorizing and case studies of US bound immigration. The second section of this paper focuses on an intermediate range of social science theorists who have explored the interactions between individuals who come into contact with one another as a result of migration within the North American context. In this part, I first describe classical assimilation theory and its variants such as the Anglo-conformity, melting pot and cultural-pluralist theories. I then build on the classical assimilationist perspective by discussing its early critics as well as those who have added to it such as Alejandro Portes, Mary Waters, Min Zhou and Patricia Fernández-Kelly. In the last section I introduce several of the major “new directions” that international migration scholarship has been headed over the past decade. Some of these new directions include the study of transnational communities, the second generation and the interaction between race, class and gender among migrant communities.

Sociologists who study the field of what is now called international migration have their roots in the early theoretical debates between functionalist and conflict oriented theories of social organization. Those scholars who have studied *immigration*, which was widely used as a generic term for the entire field, have historically been concerned with the processes of social change that occurs as one group of people leave their nation of birth to settle permanently in a foreign country. However, the mobility of people across national,

regional and local boundaries is certainly nothing new. Bands of human beings have been wandering the earth following food supplies, exploring, conquering and building civilizations since the beginning of human history. However, the phrase “international migration” self-consciously situates the study of human settlement within the context of the modern international political system. Therefore, it is worth remembering that the study of human mobility patterns that we call “international migration” is, by definition, limited in historical scope to the establishment of the modern nation-state. Within this context, it is also important to remember that the concept of “migration” itself often needs to be problematized. Rodolfo Acuña makes this point clear when he reminds us of the generation of non-migrant Mexicans who live in the Southwestern US. After all, it was not the Mexicans who moved to the US, it was the US that moved to Mexico: “We didn’t cross the border; the border crossed us,” (cited in De Genova 1998).

Moreover, modern sociologists primarily confine their topic of study to contemporary migrating populations within the (post)industrial age. By focusing on migration that occurred over the past hundred and fifty years however, sociologists are generally precluded from studying the colonial migration patterns of early American settlers as well as the migration behavior of merchants and other peoples across Europe during the Middle Ages. This is not to say that people didn’t move in earlier periods however, my point is only to illustrate that the contemporary field of international migration is, by definition, limited in time and scope. In addition to the decidedly modern phenomenon that sociologists study, we have also traditionally limited our concerns to the movement of people from colonial and/or post-colonial states such as Korea, Mexico and India to core states such as Britain, Canada and the United States from the mid 19th century

to the present. While some sociologists focus on emigration from core to peripheral nations, in practice, periphery to core migration is still the dominant focus of most contemporary sociological research in this field.

Early Macro-Structural Models of International Migration: The Equilibrium Approach

One of the primary questions that students of international migration ask is, ‘why do people move?’ The answer is obvious in some cases, such as when people flee natural disasters, warfare and/or political persecution, but in other cases it is not. Why was it that such a large number of Honduran victims of 1998 hurricane Mitch went to the United States? If they were fleeing the hurricane itself, wouldn’t we expect them to go to the other side of Honduras, or perhaps to a neighboring country and then return? The issue of human migration becomes infinitely more complicated when we factor in the economic, structural and political contexts in which this migration occurs.

The field of economics has provided one explanatory model for international migration. The anthropologist Eugenia Georges aptly characterizes this economic approach the “equilibrium perspective,” (Georges 1990). According to this perspective, individual migrants are thought of as rational actors who base their migration decisions on a careful consideration of the various costs and benefits associated with migration to a particular place. In addition to the obvious financial costs and benefits of migration, there are also many structural factors that influence individual migration decisions. These are known as push/pull factors in the literature on migration. Push factors can include pressures that build up within the labor market of the sending country such as high under and unemployment rates, poor pay and benefits, few professional and/or well-paid career track

professions or other similar factors. Depending on the specific conditions in the sending country, these factors often combine and put tremendous pressure on individuals to migrate so that they can take advantage of occupational opportunities that exist elsewhere (Palmer 1974; Tidrick 1971; Wilson 1985). While some factors combine to provide an element of pressure that “pushes” individual migrants away from their home countries, receiving countries and regions also act on individuals by providing “pull” factors. For example, the advanced economies of the United States, Europe and Japan have an abundance of high paying job opportunities that serve to “pull” potential migrants to these destinations (Tidrick 1971). In general, the equilibrium approach tends to view migrants as relatively free and mobile agents who will travel from regions of occupational and economic scarcity to regions of occupational and economic abundance.

One of the original proponents of the equilibrium perspective is the economist Brinley Thomas. In his classic 1973 book, *Migration and Economic Growth*, Thomas developed an elaborate econometric model based on empirical analysis of British to US migration trends during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Thomas 1973). In Thomas’ explanatory model, he argues, among other things, that “migration depends on the difference in real wages (between sending and receiving countries),” (1973:249). In addition to developing a model of economic development and international migration, Thomas was also concerned about the problem of “brain drain” which he defined as the flow of highly educated professional and technically skilled migrants from underdeveloped countries to more developed countries, at the expense of sending countries (1973). In order to counter the destructive consequences of brain drain for developing countries, Thomas recommends various policy changes in order to adjust the supply/demand mix of

professional and technical workers that are produced in the most developed nations. Ultimately for Thomas, the solution to the problem of brain drain lies in the normalization of distorted market forces that have been twisted by labor unions, popular political interventions and other anti free-market actors (1973:329). According to theorists from the equilibrium perspective, the free market model is one of the best perspectives from which to analyze the macro-structural forces that determine the essential size and nature of global migration patterns.

In attempting to determine the exact relationship between macro-structural factors and migration however, it is important to recognize that it is ultimately the state that regulates migration. There is no such thing as a “free migration market” outside of the state. All modern nation states place various restrictions on the movement of individuals across their borders as well as regulating naturalization procedures, the admittance of ‘guest workers’ and some states also regulate who is allowed to leave, where they may go, and what they are allowed to do while abroad. Therefore it is important to take a closer look at the role of the state and explore how, and why, it regulates the movement of people across its borders.

Equilibrium theorists who study migration have dealt with this issue at length, and not by simply lamenting the interference of the state in ‘the market’, but also by looking at migration from what is called the mercantilist perspective. According to mercantilists, the national economy needs to be actively administered by the state in order to bring about economic prosperity through scientifically managing the balance of trade, interest rates, the production of goods and by regulating immigration. One economist who adopts this perspective is George Borjas. In his 1990 book *Friends or Strangers*, Borjas argues

against current US immigration policies, which encourage unskilled and non-professional workers to emigrate, because he argues that unskilled workers contribute less to the national economy than professional and technical workers (Borjas 1990). Borjas begins with the same push/pull model elaborated by Thomas however he argues that it is the state that, “competes (against other states) in an immigration market,” (7). It is therefore the responsibility of the state to properly manage its ‘pull’ in order to, “increase (its) competitiveness,” (9).

In order to assess the impact that immigrants have had on the US economy since it changed its exclusionary national origins based immigration quotas in 1965, Borjas analyzes US census data from 1940 through 1980. Among some of his more interesting findings, Borjas notes that immigrants have an almost insignificant impact on the earnings and employment rates of native-born Americans (19). According to his 1990 research, a 10% increase in the immigrant population would only decrease the average wage paid to a native-born American by less than a quarter of one percent. However Borjas also found that a 10% increase would have a significantly larger effect on the average wages of the foreign-born (they would decrease by at least 2%). Borjas concludes from his data that unskilled foreign-born workers earn less than native-born workers because of their lower skill levels, and he argues that this is the biggest reason why US immigration policy should be changed to prevent unskilled immigration (1990)¹. It should also be noted that subsequent research carried out by Borjas *et al* (1996) and Borjas (1995) revisit some of

¹ While Borjas argues that skill-level alone is the source of these earnings differentials, he ignores the large literature that has established that employers do in fact discriminate against employees on the basis of a number of different factors. A good source for original writings on the debate between economists and sociologists over employer discrimination on the basis of gender, race, age, national origin and sex is part 6 in Grusky (1994), especially the concluding article by Liberson (Liberson 1994). Also see Bonacich (1972).

these early findings (Borjas 1995; Borjas et al. 1996). According to these latter figures Borjas *et al* find that immigration has a negative effect on the relative earnings of native-born high-school dropouts as did trade and immigration among high-school graduates when compared to college graduates (Borjas *et al* 1996). In addition, further analyses of the data have revealed that the effect of immigration on the earnings of the native born are not as small as initially projected. It should therefore be remembered that Borjas' 1990 conclusions are neither the definitive, nor the final word on the issue of immigrants' impact on native wages.

Borjas also made a particularly contentious claim in his 1990 book when he argued that post-1965 immigrants have a higher probability of participating in the American welfare system. More importantly however, in addition to their higher numerical rates of participation, Borjas argued that because the immigrants admitted after 1965 have lower skill levels, they are therefore destined to create a, "large new underclass of workers in our society," who will, "be accorded all the dysfunctional benefits of government assistance," (Borjas 1993). In a series of heated articles and editorial responses that appeared after the publication of his 1990 book, critics of Borjas' argument pointed out that immigrants contribute far more to the economy, in terms of taxes alone, than they consume in government services (Simon et al. 1993). Disputing the methodological validity of these subsequent findings however, Borjas and others remain committed to the original conclusion that post-1965 immigrants are more of a drain on national resources than they are a benefit (Borjas 1995; Borjas et al. 1996; Simon and Borjas 1995).

In his 1990 book Borjas ultimately contends that the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which eliminated the national-origin quota

system established in the 1920's, have undermined the ability of the US to efficiently compete in the global immigration market. This is because, prior to the 1965 amendments, immigration was tied to the national origins of the US population as it was enumerated in the 1920 census (in addition to excluding certain racial and national groups all together such as the Chinese). Thus in 1930, more than two-thirds of all visas were allocated to Germany and Britain (cited in Borjas). Yet during the early years of the national-origin system, the British rarely used the number of annual visas allocated to them. By repealing the national-origins quota system of immigration preferences, the US Congress put an end to the practice of officially discriminating against non-European immigrants. According to Borjas then, the 1965 changes to US immigration policy have led to a precipitous decline in the skill levels of US bound immigrants as measured by their level of earnings relative to the native born. In order to rectify the situation, Borjas suggests that we adopt a policy that would assign points to applicants based on their skill levels. Through these, and other methods, Borjas hopes to increase the number of professional and technical immigrants in order to improve the competitiveness of the US in the international migration market.

The Structural-Historical Approach

Of course, economists are not the only social scientists who attempt to explain the process of international migration by focusing at the macro-level. Another major school of thought that is prevalent among US sociologists is called the structural-historical approach. In this model, analysts generally try to look at the larger underlying structures that connect sending and receiving countries across a variety of different axes. This approach is largely informed by the study of Marxist political economy, and in general, is highly critical of both the free-market and the mercantilist perspectives of migration. While most structural-

historical accounts of international migration still draw on the push/pull model, the factors that encourage the movement of individuals and “the market” are seen in a radically different light. From the structural-historical perspective, it is the need for pliable, inexpensive and unskilled labor that “pulls” immigrants to the US labor market. And it is this need for cheap, docile and exploitable forms of labor that has long been recognized as one of the most enduring features of the modern capitalist economy (Bonacich 1972; Enloe 1990; Fernández-Kelly 1983; Marx 1978; Peña 1997; So 1990). So pervasive is the drive for increased profits within capitalism, that capitalists themselves will often go to great lengths in order to keep labor costs down. This includes bringing in non-unionized workers during strikes, moving manufacturing facilities to locations where cheap exploitable labor is relatively abundant and even by bringing in workers from the third world for those industries that can not be readily moved overseas (Light and Bonacich 1988).

Foreign labor recruitment has in fact taken place regularly throughout US history. Chinese ‘coolie’ labor was sought out and imported by US rail lines during the early 19th century. Philippina nurses were recruited to come to the US during the 1970s as were Indian doctors. And Mexican and Caribbean laborers continue to be recruited to work in the agricultural fields of California, Texas, Florida and the Midwest through the “H-2” visa designation². Bringing in foreign workers has several advantages for employers including keeping wages low for native workers and decreasing the possibilities for worker solidarity. At an even larger scale, immigration also reduces the expenses associated with

² The H-2 visa is the US version of the German “guest worker” system where manual laborers, primarily in agriculture, are directly recruited, housed and employed by US farmers and then shipped back home after the harvest season is finished.

the reproduction of labor within the receiving country by shifting the cost of raising future workers and caring for the old and infirmed to the sending country. Thus, it is Mexico who must pay for the medical costs, education, child care and other resources that future Mexican immigrant children consume before they come to the US to work. While Mexican workers are here working, they often send cash home to their families but if they are injured on the job or otherwise unable to maintain employment in the US, they are often deported by the INS where they must be cared for by their families and/or by the Mexican state (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Thus from this perspective the burden of reproducing labor is partially shifted from developed to developing countries.

According to the structural-historical perspective, international migration is directly tied to the structure of the US and global economies. And, explaining the relationship between the development of sweatshops and the changes that have occurred in the underlying structure of society is one of the central goals of sociologists from this perspective. Since the beginning of the 20th century, up through the late 1950s, the US economy had a high number of unskilled assembly line jobs. During the heyday of the American labor movement in the 1920s, worker unionization led to a dramatic increase in wages and benefits for these workers. Because of this, assembly line and low skill jobs began to pay comparably high wages for unskilled US labor. Therefore, the cost of manufacturing in the US became high relative to those countries that had not gone through a similar industrialization/unionization cycle. One result of the increasing wages that unionization brought about was the growth of the middle class. The high wages that these low skilled jobs earned were slowly reduced however, as traditional assembly line manufacturers began to look for ways to cut wages in order to increase profit margins.

The primary difference between the structural-historical and equilibrium perspectives is their contrasting attitudes about the causes and consequences of social and economic change. Scholars from both perspectives consider the world-economy to be the primary unit of analysis. From both perspectives therefore, the global economy determines the scope and breadth of international migration; yet the two perspectives disagree fundamentally on their prognosis for the future. For equilibrium theorists, the free-market is celebrated for its efficiency and ability to allocate resources while structural-historical scholars are more critical of the long-term problems caused by capitalism. The structural-historical perspective also focuses on the major transformations that have been occurring in the world economy over the past forty years. For example, the shift from large-scale factory production based on the assembly line, to post-fordist forms of flexible, subcontracting and just-in-time production methods, have precipitated a global capitalist restructuring (Harvey 1989; Ong et al. 1994). According to structural-historical scholars, if we wish to understand international migration patterns we need to begin by exploring the effect that these underlying structural changes have on the movement of individuals across international borders.

One of the best known and widely read structural-historical scholars of migration is Edna Bonacich. The 1988 book, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs*, by Bonacich and Ivan Light is a comprehensive and extremely detailed study of Korean entrepreneurial activity in Los Angeles' Koreatown. In addition to drawing out the connections between US involvement in the Korean conflict and Korea's connections to the world economy, the authors also focus on the larger political economic context out of which Korean immigration takes place:

Immigration policy is intimately tied to foreign policy, including economic aid, trade, cultural influence, military assistance and political interference. US foreign policy in South Korea (as in many other countries) has a direct and indirect impact on the migration of peoples to this country. (Light and Bonacich 1988)

In this book the authors argue that Koreans initially came to the United States in order to fill the role of cheap labor but in the process of settlement, an *ethnic enclave* developed. In this ethnic enclave the authors surprisingly found that self-employment is three times more likely than among the native born population. One common feature of large concentrations of migrants in urban areas, such as the Chinese in San Francisco, is the development of a parallel economy that offers immigrant entrepreneurs alternative paths of socioeconomic mobility (Light and Bonacich 1988). Immigrant entrepreneurs often begin their trek up the American socioeconomic ladder by entering sectors of the economy that require low amounts of start-up capital and are labor intensive. Thus, Chinese entrepreneurial migrants were concentrated in the dry cleaning business, as were Koreans in the Los Angeles garment industry. Ethnic entrepreneurs often take advantage of the unpaid labor of family members in order to establish enough capital to sell their first business, and then purchase a bigger one. Through this process, many Korean entrepreneurs have eventually ended up being over represented among liquor store, gas station and grocery store owners.

According to Light and Bonacich, Korean entrepreneurial activity was itself utilized by US capitalists, albeit in an indirect manner. Korean immigrant entrepreneurs unwittingly act as a flexible labor source within the larger US economy due to the complex history of industrial/labor relations. For a variety of historical reasons, large multinational firms are unable to take direct advantage of immigrant workers because of the more restrictive contractual and legal protections that Anglo blue-collar workers have negotiated. As a result, there exists a niche in the low paying, non-unionized, unskilled

sector of the economy that white workers are generally unwilling to occupy. Because newly arriving immigrants are usually willing to work for less than native workers, immigrant entrepreneurs are able to tap into this group and take advantage of the need for cheap domestic labor. Thus, Korean entrepreneurs in the garment industry not only take advantage of the labor of their co-ethnic Koreans, but also the labor of Mexicans, Salvadorans and other unskilled migrants (Light and Bonacich 1988). It is in this way that ethnic entrepreneurs serve as a 'middleman' minority between the labor of unskilled migrants and the needs of the US retail garment industry for cheap products.

While Korean firms were ethnically and racially distinct within the Los Angeles region, this did not preclude US capital from taking advantage of Korean entrepreneurial and community resources in other ways (1988:371-400). Large capitalist firms such as Shell Oil, the Southland Corporation, John Hancock and Prudential extract capital from the Korean community in a variety of direct and indirect means. One direct method of extracting surplus from immigrant entrepreneurs is through direct franchising arrangements. Franchising ensures that profits made by franchise owners and their employees at the bottom are passed up to the top through licensing, advertising, purchasing and marketing arrangements.

Subcontracting is another method of directly tapping into cheap immigrant labor, and the Los Angeles garment industry is probably one of the best examples of how subcontracting and flexible accumulation work in the post-industrial era. In this case large department stores come up with new clothing designs, purchase the fabric and then subcontract the actual production of the clothing to non-union firms that then turn around and give the work out to a larger number of smaller firms. Profit margins are very small in

this industry so competition is also very intense and there is tremendous pressure to keep wages low. The nature of the subcontracting relationship generally insulates the national department stores such as Wal-Mart, Nordstroms and Macy's from charges of directly exploiting the labor of immigrants and children, yet in most cases this is precisely what happens. Both legal and illegal immigrants (and their children) regularly take in piece-work for garment and other light manufacturing subcontractors, then they either do this work in their homes or in small shops (Bonacich & Light 1988). Because they do the work in a piece-rate fashion, wages are usually below minimum wage, and workshop conditions are often in violation of basic health, safety and labor codes (it is for this reason that the term *sweatshop* is often used to describe these places).

In reality there is only one way manufacturers can reduce workers wages, and that is to decrease the amount of unskilled, highly paid and unionized labor that goes into making a particular product. American manufacturers have been quite innovative in this regard. As we saw above, one option has been to change assembly operations so that the manufacturer is no longer responsible for making their products directly, and instead to subcontract production to smaller non-unionized firms. Another option, which is particularly wide-spread in agriculture, is to automate and mechanize unskilled production processes so that the use of human labor is also minimized. Yet another strategy is to move manufacturing facilities from regions where labor is expensive to where it is relatively cheap (the term for this is the 'runaway shop'). All three of these strategies have been used by American employers and all three have, in turn, profoundly influenced the structure of the US and global labor markets. These changes in labor markets do not occur in isolation of course, they too directly affect migration patterns because, according to the structural-

historical perspective, the movement of capital is directly tied to the movement of labor. Fernández-Kelly studied the impact that runaway-shops had on internal migration in Mexico as well as the larger effect that they had on Mexican/US migration patterns (Fernández-Kelly 1983).

Thousands of Mexican and foreign owned *maquiladoras* (runaway-shops) are scattered along the northern Mexican frontier. They began appearing in the mid 1960s, and but by 1965 there were only 12; however, by 1979 there were more than 500 (Fernández-Kelly 1983). With the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, a virtual explosion in the growth of the *maquila* industry occurred. As of the end of 1996, the Mexican Statistical Institute estimated that there were 2,490 plants which employed 788,205 people (cited in Prieto 1997). Because the Mexican economy has relatively high rates of under and unemployment, the large number of jobs that began to develop along the northern border, drew men up from more economically depressed areas of Mexico. Many of these men came looking for work in *maquiladoras*, only to find that, for the most part, *maquilas* don't like to hire men (Fernández-Kelly 1983; Peña 1983; Peña 1997; Prieto 1997). The reason that these types of firms prefer to hire women is essentially the same reason why the runaway shops got started in the first place: Due to the gendered division of labor and the widespread ideology of the male breadwinner, men tend to demand higher wages and are thus more prone to unionization compared to more vulnerable workers, such as young, single women.

The structural-historical perspective that Fernández-Kelly offers highlights the linkages between political economy, gender and migration. In contrast to the equilibrium approach that focuses more narrowly on individual-choice, this perspective shows how

large groups of people who share similar characteristics (gender, nationality, poverty, etc.) tend to feel the “pull” of labor markets more strongly than others. This is not to say that individuals do not make the choice to migrate, for the vast majority clearly do. Rather, the structural-historical perspective instead focuses on the ways that individual choices are constrained by structural changes in political economy. Therefore the structural-historical perspective builds on the individual centered push/pull model by focusing on the way that changes in the underlying conditions of society influence different individuals differently depending on their gender, socioeconomic status and ethnic/national identity.

While both the equilibrium and structural-historical approaches to migration look at the influence of macro-level factors on migration patterns, the two perspectives fundamentally disagree on a number of points. For the equilibrium approach, the emphasis is placed on the rational calculation of individual migrants as to the relative costs/benefits of immigration. Theorists from this perspective also embrace the free-market model as the only viable option to solve the problems associated with migration. According to equilibrium theorists like Borajs and Thomas, the operation of the free-market is often thwarted by the ‘dysfunctional’ influence of labor unions, social welfare programs and other government policies that alter the macro-economic context of immigration. Primarily as a result of the assumptions built into the free-market model, theorists from the equilibrium perspective often provide a variety of pragmatic policy suggestions in order to solve different migration problems. In comparison however, the structural-historical perspective adopts a more skeptical view of the free-market. For theorists like Bonacich, Fernandez-Kelly and Ong, capitalism itself is primarily responsible for human migration because of the built-in need of capitalists to obtain inexpensive labor. In contrast to the

emphasis equilibrium theorists place on individuals' rational choices, structural-historical theorists emphasize the unequal historical relationships between host and sending countries. According to this latter perspective, governments act on behalf of capitalists in securing sources of inexpensive labor. While immigration is one source of cheap domestic labor, so too is the support of oppressive foreign regimes that suppress their populations in order to attract global investment capital. While equilibrium theorists often have plenty of policy recommendations, structural-historical theorists tend to be much more fatalistic about government policy because they view government itself as an ally of the ruling classes. Moreover, in contrast to the individual-centered approach of equilibrium theorists, structural-historical theorists leave little room for human-agency; and are therefore often accused of being overly deterministic.

When Peoples Collide: Early Theories of Assimilation

The previous section of this paper dealt two sets of macro-level theory that both attempt to explain the underlying causes of international migration. While this is a crucial question for the field, another central concern for researchers is what happens once migrants arrive at their destinations. With respect to migrants in the US, most of the literature that deals with this question is based on the study of race and ethnicity. As we saw with Borjas, the impact of immigrants on the US economy has been a central concern, yet both the equilibrium and structural-historical approaches generally do not study actual people. Instead, they look at the macro-structural factors that influence migration without going into the details of what happens on the ground when different ethnic groups encounter one another. Fortunately, this area is explored by a variety of researchers from a

number of different perspectives and disciplines including ethnic studies, literature, American studies, anthropology, history, sociology and even critical gender studies.

The dominant sociological perspective on racial and ethnic group relations that emerged in the early 20th century is known as assimilation theory. This perspective began with the work of researchers such as the University of Chicago sociologist Robert Park who whose theory of the race relations cycle (1926) gained popular currency. According to Park, the race relations cycle consists of, “contacts, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation,” of different ethnic groups and the process is, “apparently progressive and irreversible,” (Park 1950). Park suggested that we might want to resist the move towards assimilation, but he pointed out that the power of the process itself should not be underestimated. While Park did not go into much detail as to the underlying structural causes of this process of ethnic and national group contact, his theories significantly influenced public and academic discourse on the topic of ethnic group interaction.

According to Milton Gordon’s extremely detailed and influential review of the assimilation perspective, three different versions of assimilation theory developed out of the early 20th century American experience with immigration: The Anglo-conformity, melting-pot and cultural-pluralist variants (Gordon 1964). The Anglo-conformity version of assimilation theory was essentially the argument that immigrants must loose, either by force or by the processes of acculturation, all ethnic and national allegiances to their country of origin. This popular variant of assimilation theory gave rise to the “Americanization” movement during World War I in which German-Americans were forced to choose between the German and American portions of their identity (Gordon

1964). The aims of the Americanization movement were primarily to reinforce American nationalism, and *not* to do away with behavioral or ethnic differences specifically however. At issue during this time were the supposedly split loyalties of a sizeable segment of the European born immigrant population³. Summarizing the problematic of the Americanization movement in 1915, President Woodrow Wilson, referring to German-Americans, put the issue in unambiguous terms:

America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American (cited in Gordon, 1964:101).

The other two variants of assimilation theory are largely opposed to one another. The ‘melting-pot’ theory on the one hand assumes that all vestiges of the immigrants’ culture will eventually “melt” away and the immigrant will wholly adopt the customs, behaviors, beliefs and practices of the white Anglo-Saxon majority. On the other hand is the cultural-pluralist model offered by Nathan Glazer and Patrick Moynihan which argues for a vision of linguistic and behavioral assimilation that more closely resembles the perspective of modern day ‘multiculturalism’ (Glazer and Moynihan 1970). While the melting-pot theory argues that immigrants are destined to completely abandon their distinguishing cultural and ethnic behaviors, cultural-pluralism envisions an American society that reflects a broad diversity of distinct ethnic groups and customs.

According to Glazer and Moynihan, the authors of *Beyond the Melting Pot*, New York city provides an exemplary laboratory for the study of assimilation. In the case of New York however, the authors did not see as much ‘melting’ of ethnic differences as they saw several different ethnic groups striving to maintain their own ethnic identities, communities, and material interests. It has certainly not been the case that the blacks,

³ It is important to note that Japanese-Americans were not given the same choice thirty years later during

Italians, Puerto Ricans, Jews and Irish immigrants to New York that the authors studied have become completely WASP-like over the many decades they have lived in New York. In fact, as Glazer and Moynihan ironically note, even WASPs have now become an ethnic interest group within the political landscape of the city. Instead of the unilinear process of ethnic group assimilation into the white American mainstream that the ‘melting-pot’ predicted, the authors found that the feelings of ethnic identity among group members were actually strengthened during migrants’ early period of adjustment. This has happened for a number of reasons including discrimination, neighborhood settlement patterns, labor market integration and other structural factors. In New York however, as the authors claim, *de jure* discrimination has become a thing of the past. According to Glazer and Moynihan, ethnic interest groups operate in support of group interests but these interests have gradually changed over time. As blatant forms of discrimination and structural inequalities have gradually given way to a more meritocratic division of social resources, ethnic interest groups have shifted their efforts towards political and economic incorporation instead of reacting to discrimination and other forms of hostility. Therefore, the reason that ethnic identities remain important for these ethnic groups is because they serve an instrumental purpose: Ethnic identity allows group members to gain political and economic advantages over others⁴.

According to Glazer and Moynihan then, the ethnic interest group does not regularly fight discrimination, but instead works to promote the economic and political interests of its constituents. The authors note that, while some ethnic groups are

World War II.

⁴ For a nice review of the history of race and ethnicity theories of identity formation, see Cornell and Hartman (1998) and Espiritu (1992).

assimilating in some respects, others are remaining distinct. For ethnic groups such as Jews and Puerto Ricans, membership in the group retains its appeal because of the organizational and collective life that is provided in the ethnic neighborhood⁵. Yet, the organized ethnic interest group will readily mobilize in support of what are perceived to be ethnic group interests. For example, Moynihan and Glazer claim that black groups will readily fight for affirmative actions programs (69-70), while Puerto Ricans will mobilize against proposed cuts in welfare payments (17) and Jews will disagree virulently with middle class Italians, Irish and Germans over the issue of housing antidiscrimination laws (xc)⁶. For Glazer and Moynihan, the *ethnic group* has given way to the *ethnic interest group* and this has essentially become a new form of social organization.

The problem with cultural-pluralism, according to its critics, is that its advocates largely ignore the structural and historical context out of which cultural-pluralism arose (Steinberg 1982:254). The existence of distinct ethnic sub-groups, for example, has been a feature of the United States since its inception. Native Americans were physically evicted from their land and never considered part of the American national project (at least once the colonists safely outnumbered and outgunned them). Mexicans are another group who we described above that involuntarily became part of the expanding United States as were blacks and Puerto Ricans. In each case, these groups became part of the US against their will. It is thus essential to take into account both the groups circumstances of

⁵ See Durkheim for a discussion of the importance of group solidarity (Durkheim 1951).

⁶ The reason why blacks and Puerto Ricans mobilize for welfare rights instead of for cutting capital gains taxes is linked to Glazer and Moynihan's understanding of the central role of values in accounting for the socioeconomic performance of groups. For example, the legacy of slavery is said to have severely undermined the traditional black family and this is the best explanation for the poor socioeconomic mobility of blacks. The same is said of Puerto Ricans in Glazer and Moynihan, yet in this case the Puerto Rican family and culture were, "sadly defective," (88). For a good critique of this view see Steinberg (1981) and Wilson (1987).

incorporation, and their race in order to fully understand the different positions these groups occupy relative to the majority. To be sure, non-European immigrants were despised, but at least they were permitted to work for wages in the developing blue-collar industries of the North. Their labor was needed, while non-whites were excluded from taking advantage of these economic opportunities because of their race. For example, unions excluded blacks, Asians, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans from membership so these groups went underrepresented in blue-collar industries. This did not change significantly until white-workers (many of whom were recently Italians and Irish) began striking for higher wages. Again we see that race played a critical role because non-whites were only brought into factories as strike-breakers, not because of the employers', or unions', overriding sense of racial justice.

Race and the mode of ethnic group incorporation are therefore essential factors that need to be considered when comparing the assimilation experiences of different migrant groups. According to Stephen Steinberg, the only meaningful way this can be done is by taking a long, hard look at the mode of production and exploring the way it helps structure racial and ethnic group relations (1982). The critics of cultural-pluralism are extremely skeptical of the suggestion that different economic outcomes for ethnic groups are based on the inherent characteristics of the groups themselves. Because they argue that this perspective ignores the importance of the class system in reinforcing ethnic boundaries (Steinberg, 1982). It may also be helpful to note the parallels between the cultural-pluralist/structural-historical debate and the one discussed earlier between equilibrium and structural-historical theorists. The cultural-pluralist approach that Moynihan and Glazer articulate is theoretically grounded in the functionalist sociology that developed at the

University of Chicago during the early 20th century. On the other hand, critics of the cultural-pluralist model such as Stephen Steinberg tend to rely on structural-historical theories of social organization which are informed by Marxist political-economy.

Contemporary Theories of Assimilation and Adaptation

The discussion of ethnic group interaction has so far largely taken place within the sphere of socioeconomic differences between ethnic groups. While Moynihan and Glazer focused on both political incorporation, and the emergence of ethnic interest groups, most of these early debates on assimilation theory did not specifically deal with the dynamic process of migration itself. Instead, the early debates on assimilation tended to focus on either the structural-historical causes of persistent socioeconomic inequality, or the process of immigrant incorporation. When these theorists *have* taken up the issue of assimilation, they often fail to move beyond Robert Park's initial race relations cycle which then leads to a somewhat two dimensional view of the migrant assimilation process. Contemporary sociological research has attempted to rectify this situation by paying greater attention to the different possible outcomes of the assimilation process.

Contemporary scholars have found that while the term *assimilation* refers to the final stage of an immigrant groups' incorporation into American society, this process rarely happens the same way for every group (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Portes and Zhou 1993). First however, in order to more fully understand the assimilation process, it is necessary to define the terminology more carefully. The concept of assimilation, as it is used today, refers to the process by which migrant groups are inserted into the American socioeconomic system. This definition does not include a consideration of whether or not the migrant's ethnic behaviors and practices are absorbed, abandoned or modified by

contact with other cultures. Assimilation in this case simply refers to the end stage of a process of group adaptation and integration. The first step in this process is called acculturation and it is the stage where migrants begin to familiarize themselves with the language, culture and institutions of their new home. Moving from acculturation to assimilation is never a quick process however as the following hypothetical example demonstrates. The first generation often speaks a language other than English, and even if they do learn English in their lifetime, they will usually retain an accent that marks them as immigrants. The second generation will often become bilingual, as parents speak their natal language at home, but will also become conversationally fluent in English via public school. While the second generation will often be linguistically indistinguishable from natives, they may retain identifiable ethnic traits such as their clothing, dietary preferences, folkways and religious customs. By the time the third generation comes along however, they may be far enough removed from their grandparent's ethnic behaviors as to allow them to reach the end-point of the assimilation process. Of course, this all depends on the cultural context in which migrants find themselves. For 19th century German-American farmers in the Midwest, this process took significantly longer than three generations due to the formation of a distinct, and reproducible, German-American cultural milieu (Cornell and Hartman 1998). And, it is primarily for this reason that the Americanization movement singled out this group (Gordon 1964).

Of course, race too plays a critical role. Compare for a moment the experiences of German-Americans in World War I and that of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The Germans were culturally different, yet racially indistinguishable from WASPs, while the Japanese had moved much closer to whites in terms of their degree of cultural

assimilation yet they could obviously not pass as members of the white “race”. Consequently, Japanese-Americans were forcibly relocated into concentration camps while German-Americans need only “drop the hyphen.” This example clearly demonstrates the relatively greater significance that race plays in some situations, regardless of the degree to which a racial sub-group had culturally or ethnically assimilated into American society. In order to understand the assimilation process in the United States then, we need to also understand that American society has multiple dimensions. Successful assimilation therefore entails learning the racial dimensions of American society. If migrants wish to successfully “become American,” they need to learn which racial groups are at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, which are at the top, and more importantly, where they fit into the racial pecking order (Cornell and Hartman 1998).

All these factors complicate the assimilation process and thus it becomes difficult to generalize about it. Contemporary sociological research into the assimilation process has however uncovered a number of additional factors that come into play. Portes and Zhou argue that the end-point of the assimilation process is *segmented* into a number of different possible trajectories (Portes and Zhou 1993). Which path the second generation follows, depends primarily on their mode of incorporation and on their race. Thus, while some immigrant groups such as the children of Punjabi Sikhs in Northern California have been incorporated into American society in a rural context, others end up settling in urban enclaves such as with Haitian migrants in New York. Punjabi children regularly face active discrimination from white children but due to their geographical location, they lack any alternative reference group to influence their assimilation trajectory. Portes and Zhou found that Punjabi children often end up doing better academically than white children

because the ethnic community organizes its resources to maintain an academically oriented sub-culture that highly values educational achievement and closely supervises the behavior of Punjabi children. In short, the assimilation trajectory of Punjabi parents and children are closely tied.

On the other side of the spectrum, Portes and Zhou offer an example of the children of Haitian immigrants in New York who are exposed to the inner-city sub-culture of “truly disadvantaged” black Americans (see Wilson 1987). This environment readily provides an alternative reference group to the racially parallel Haitian ethnic enclave. Thus, there exists an opportunity for the Haitian second generation to be assimilated as inner-city blacks instead of as Haitian-Americans. The problem with this is that the alternative ethnic group with which the second generation can identify is more familiar with the effects of discrimination and thus tends to be more fatalistic about the future. As a result of their less favorable (and in many cases more realistic) assessment of the future, many inner-city blacks then devalue education as viable means to achieve socioeconomic mobility⁷ (Portes 1993:81). This has a negative effect on members of the Haitian second generation because some will invariably be assimilated as inner-city blacks, and thus lose their connections to the more academically oriented Haitian-American community. Consequently, some Haitians will experience downward mobility while those that remain more firmly ensconced in the Haitian-American ethnic enclave will often experience upward mobility. Along this same line of inquiry, the sociologist Mary Waters found that

⁷ This logic comes quite close to that which is offered by various ‘culture-of-poverty’ theorists who essentially blame the poor for their condition rather than looking at the structural conditions that cause poverty in the first place. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into this argument at more length, in Portes and Zhou’s defense I would point out that the comparison between Punjabi and Haitian migrants is a valid one. Though in this context a more appropriate set of cases for comparison would be between rural

among the West Indian New Yorkers she studied, those who self-identified as West Indian experienced greater opportunities and rewards for their efforts at self-improvement than those who self-identified as black, or African-American (Waters 1994). Waters further found that the ethnic options among the second generation were strongly influenced by the social class of their parents. Thus, class and race factors interact with one another in important ways within the assimilation process.

In conclusion, the body of literature called assimilation theory attempts to explore what happens to immigrants once they settle into their new lives in the United States. Early assimilation theorists argued that immigrants would ultimately lose all vestiges of their natal cultures as immigrants adopted the norms, values and beliefs of the majority society. This version of assimilation theory gave way to the cultural-pluralist version based primarily on the wave of ethnic-group revitalization that occurred during the 1960s. Most cultural-pluralists envisioned assimilation as a move from more parochial ethnic group interests to more mainstream issues of political incorporation. However, cultural-pluralists often explained socioeconomic differences among ethnic/racial groups by accusing the least successful groups of having cultures that are somehow defective. Therefore, cultural-pluralists predicted that ethnic interest groups would ultimately end up using their ethnic/racial identities instrumentally in order to gain political patronage. For example, Glazer and Moynihan argue that because Puerto Ricans lack the values necessary to successfully compete in American society, they instead use their ethnic group resources to fight political battles for greater welfare benefits (1970:86-136). Contemporary assimilation theorists on the other hand, focus on the different

and urban black migrants. Unfortunately however, I am unaware of any rural black migrant groups in the

socioeconomic trajectories of immigrant groups. Among the most important factors that influence the socioeconomic assimilation of immigrants in this perspective are the immigrants' race, their mode of incorporation and their region of settlement.

While all three assimilation perspectives study the same fundamental process, the perspectives diverge because they are each based on the specific immigration patterns that were evident during specific historical periods. The early theories of assimilation applied mainly to early European immigrants who tended to become slowly reoriented towards mainstream US cultural and political practices in a process that closely resembled the popular "melting-pot" analogy. Cultural-pluralists, on the other hand, were more concerned with the increasing mobilization of ethnic-group identities that they witnessed during the turbulent period of the 1960s and 70s. The theory of assimilation that this perspective articulated attempted to reconcile the assimilation process with the resurgence of ethnic identities that this era witnessed. And finally, contemporary assimilation theory deals with issues of race and modes of incorporation because of the changes in the 1965 immigration laws that fundamentally altered the racial and socioeconomic composition of the US bound migrant stream. Because of the increasing racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the immigration stream, this most recent perspective is primarily concerned with the way that different variables interact in the unfolding process of socioeconomic assimilation. However, all three assimilation theories remain fundamentally committed to the underlying premise that immigrants will eventually become reoriented to, and participants in, mainstream US political and cultural life.

New Directions in International Migration Theory

It is interesting to note that all the literature so far has dealt only with immigration from the countries of the periphery to the United States. As was previously mentioned there are a small, but growing, number of researchers who also study core to periphery migration (Taussig 1987). Throughout the colonial era for example, there were a significant number of American, British, French and other colonials that left the core in order to work in the colonies of Asia, Latin America and Africa. Our understanding of the process of group interaction would benefit however by a closer examination of the processes that unfolds when migrants from the core encounter the native born living in the periphery. One text that is illustrative of this process is Michael Taussig's experimental historical ethnography of life in the Colombian rubber plantations during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Taussig 1987).

In the Amazonian jungles of Columbia, colonial and corporate migrant plantation managers created an intricate economy of terror that linked enslaved Indian's coerced labor and their cultural practices to the culture of migrant Europeans within the world rubber trade (Taussig 1987). In the Amazonian jungles, European migrants 'assimilated' the culture of the different Indian bands *into* a system of pseudo-capitalist production. This occurred *in lieu of* the assimilation of European migrants into the 'host' culture. By focusing on the unequal relations of power between European migrants and Native Americans within the context of the Amazon, the relationship between the global capitalist economy, local conditions of production and zones of cultural contact and conflict offer a disturbing, yet fresh, perspective on 'assimilation' and international migration. While Taussig's research is not about international migration *per se*, when we consider the

greater emphasis that international migration theorists put on periphery-to-core movement, research that explores the effects of core-to-periphery migration needs to be examined more closely.

The work of Mitziko Sawada demonstrates another important variation on the methods and foci of traditional migration research (Sawada 1996). In *Tokyo Dreams*, Sawada shows how early 20th century literary representations of American culture helped drive a great deal of early urban middle-class Japanese/US migration. In contrast to the migration of unskilled Japanese workers to the West Coast and Hawaii, the more cosmopolitan middle-class Japanese who were exposed to the pro-Western literature of the late Meiji and early Taishō periods visualized America as the exotic Occident. By looking at the way that American culture was portrayed, experienced and reconstituted by urban upper-middle-class Japanese, we can gain a better understanding of the way that cultural change is influenced by both migration, and the media. For example, the American inspired ideal of *renai* (marriage for love) was written about extensively in Japanese travel diaries and helped create ‘compelling expectations’ that American style *renai* was a possible alternative to *koi* (marriage for duty) (Sawada 1996:172). One important conduit by which these new ideals found their way into Japanese elite institutions and culture was through the experiences of return migrants from abroad.

In addition to the possibilities that core-to-periphery and core-to-core migration research offers, several other new perspectives have developed over the past decade as well. Among these are the study of transnational communities (Basch et al. 1994; Georges 1990; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Gmelch 1992; Small 1997), the role of the nation-state, citizenship and globalization (Heisler 1992; Soysal 1994), and the interaction of gender,

race and sexual preference on the process of immigrant adaptation (Bau 19??; Enloe 1990; Espiritu 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1993). While some of these new perspectives come out of the sociological tradition, others do not. The field of transnationalism for example developed largely out of the work of anthropologists who became persistently frustrated by the migration of their research subjects to the core. Now however, the existence of transnational communities is commonly recognized as a fundamentally new form of social organization by migration researchers from most disciplines, including sociology. In this final section, I first define the concept of transnationalism and then consider how different migrant groups have experienced it. I then turn to a discussion of contemporary research on migration, gender and race in order to introduce the complexities of collective identity and the migrant experience.

Transnationalism

The assimilation perspective discussed above assumes that immigrants lose all, or most, of the vestiges of their former cultures once they leave the familiar confines of their natal homes. This is not the only possibility however, as the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz reminded us in the 1940s (cited in Comitas 1992). According to Ortiz, the process of acculturation, “carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomena,” (cited in Comitas viii). This ‘new phenomenon’ is what contemporary scholars call *transnationalism*, or the emergence of migrant groups who maintain and reproduce social relationships that cross political, cultural and geographic borders (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Unlike assimilation theory, the transnational perspective does not automatically assume that migrants give up their natal cultures in favor of wholly adopting the culture of the host country. Indeed, the entire immigration model that describes the

settlement process by reference to individuals who leave their natal country to settle *permanently* in another nation, has become increasingly inadequate to describe the experiences of a growing number of migrants (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Today, a large number of migrants maintain dual identities as members of two or more communities simultaneously, thus giving rise to the ‘new phenomena’ that Ortiz noted nearly fifty years ago. For those migrants who actively construct and maintain multiple national identities, the notion of assimilation becomes largely irrelevant. They cannot assimilate because assimilation entails the loss of their natal culture. Because they are in the process of creating a new cultural phenomenon that combines *both* natal and host cultures, the assimilation paradigm therefore becomes essentially meaningless.

According to migration researchers who study this new phenomenon, an increasing number of migrants can be characterized as belonging to two or more two communities at the same time. Not only do these *transmigrants* regularly communicate and visit with their families, friends and neighbors back home, many also send cash remittances, work on (and run for) political campaigns, exchange gifts, invest in business ventures and help build community infrastructure projects. In addition, the existence of transmigrants has not gone unnoticed by the state. For example, Schiller *et al* offer the example of a Grenadian Minister of Agriculture and Development who met with his New York “constituency” in order to gather support for development policies in Grenada. By seeking the support of Grenadian migrants living in New York, the Minister helped reinforce the national identity of Grenadian transmigrants. As Mary Waters points out, this type of national identity provides these transmigrants with a powerful alternative to the loss of status entailed with becoming black in the US (Waters 1994; Waters and Mittelberg 1992). Similarly, Kasinitz

also notes that when black Caribbeans residing in the US have been confronted with discrimination many retort, “I am a British subject, I will report this to my consulate,” (Kasinitz 1992). Accordingly, maintaining real or imagined ties to a national identity can help insulate individuals from some of the destructive consequences of discrimination.

Another benefit that some transmigrants have enjoyed is the ability to participate in the political systems of both nations (Georges 1990). By drawing on their existing social networks and voluntary organizations, transmigrants such as Roy Hastick, who was the leader of the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce, have become active in US politics (Kasinitz 1992). Hastick endorsed the New York mayoral campaign of Ed Koch citing his concern about, “the absence of West Indian elected officials talking about West Indian interests,” because, as he put it, “for too long West Indians have been taken for granted... We have to make sure that we have friends in high places,” (Kasinitz 1992, and cited in Basch et al 1994:117). As this quote demonstrates, West Indian transmigrant activists have been concerned that representatives in the US political system remain friendly to ‘West Indian’ interests, however those interests may be conceived and articulated. Transmigrants are often simultaneously incorporated into the political arena of their natal homes as well. During the 1991 US Presidential primaries in New Hampshire, hundreds of Haitian transmigrants protested the treatment of Haitian boat people by US immigration officials. During this protest Haitian activists also challenged presidential candidates to support the return of President Aristide to power in Haiti. The Haitian’s political action in the US influenced both US foreign *and* domestic policies regarding Haitian transmigrants. Transmigrants are often politically active in both cultural contexts because they truly live with one foot in each world.

Some states with large transmigrant populations residing in the US are becoming increasingly aware of the significance that these individuals have back home. Most transmigrants send cash remittances home to support family, and in several countries, the total amount of remittances received from citizens residing abroad has actually become the largest single source of foreign exchange. Realizing the tremendous economic importance of transmigrant remittances, several states have begun reaching out to these individuals. For example, the Mexican congress has recently begun a policy of lodging official protests to the US when high profile cases of abuse are reported against Mexican migrants in the US. Mexico has also recently considered granting Mexican transmigrants the ability to vote abroad, while both St. Vincent and Grenada already permit it. Haitian migrants have also moved in this direction as indicated by president Aristide's use of the term "*Dizyèm-nan*", or the tenth department, to refer to Haitians living abroad (Haiti is administratively divided into nine departments) (Basch et al. 1994). While many Haitian transmigrants had previously considered themselves to be part of the Haitian *diaspora*, the president's use of the new term facilitated the development of an extra-national political identity virtually overnight. This transnational phenomenon is not limited to Mexico and the Caribbean however. In the Philippines, President Marcos began defining transmigrants as, "*balikbayan* (homecomers) to entice them to back home," (Basch et al. 1992). And, in a further challenge to the notion of a geographically bounded nation-state, the Marcos regime initiated a controversial policy of taxing the earnings of *balikbayan* working overseas.

Generally, anthropologists have done the most work on the emerging field of transnationalism. One of the benefits of studying international migration from an

interdisciplinary perspective is the ability to use a wider array of research methodologies that can uncover new data on the migration process. For example, the anthropologist George Gmelch recorded the oral histories of Barbadian return migrants and discovered that his respondents' experiences did not conform to the expectations that prior theories of migration predicted (Gmelch 1992). While the equilibrium and structural-historical perspectives both assume that unskilled migrants to the US tend to be the poorest of the poor, Gmelch's data contradicted this view. Most of the migrants he studied were actually relatively well off working-class and middle-class Barbadians. Georges made a similar finding in her study of the village of Los Piños in the Dominican Republic, as did Hondagneu-Sotelo in the case of Mexican migrants (Georges 1990; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). What appears to be occurring among transmigrants in these countries is that members of the relatively better off middle-classes are sojourning in order to supplement their incomes at home. Instead of providing rapid upward mobility however, Georges found that, "for most (subjects), migration represented a holding strategy in a rapidly deteriorating economic environment, a means of skirting the impoverishment that afflicted the bulk of nonmigrants," (1990:247). For the Dominicans then, the larger economic problems precipitated by the Latin American debt crisis of 1989 threatened the economic stability of all households. Yet, many of the more affluent families that Georges studied had the necessary resources to send family members overseas to earn badly needed cash that helped cushion them from the shocks of the debt crisis.

Both Gmelch and Georges found that overall, the cash that was saved and sent back home tended to be used for the purchase of consumer goods, the construction of modern homes and less commonly for investment in business ventures and development projects.

Cathy Small found a similar pattern among Tongan transmigrants who tended to use their savings to purchase luxury items and ship them back home either as gifts or for household consumption (Small 1997). The impact that the emergence of a remittance economy based on the consumption of consumer goods has on the long-term economic development of the sending countries is unclear. With the exception of the increases in employment opportunities associated with money changing, housing construction and shipping, few new long-term sustainable employment opportunities seem to have been created. What appears to be happening in the sending communities instead, is the development of a system of rising aspirations resulting primarily from the influx of consumer goods and increasing affluence (Georges 1990). As aspirations for consumption increase simultaneously with the growth of migration chains, the number of individuals who wish to migrate as a means to increase their consumption options also grows (Georges 1990). This pattern helps increase the pool of individuals who are seeking transmigrant opportunities, and helps partially explain why it is that the transnational phenomenon is becoming so widespread within specific transmigrant networks.

According to its proponents, the transnational paradigm raises fundamental questions about the applicability of the assimilation perspective. If migrants are constructing new transnational identities via institutions that connect them to two or more cultures, then the idea of “assimilation” becomes largely irrelevant (Gmelch 1990, Basch 1994). However, transnational identities are not the only identities that migrants adopt. Ethnic, sexual and gender identities are, in many cases, equally important sources of collective identity. While transnationalism, as a concept, generally privileges national identity over other possibilities, individuals may have overlapping and contradictory

interests that are not adequately represented by reference to 'the nation'. In the case of the Garifuna of Honduras and other indigenous groups, their relationship to the state has almost always been tenuous and adversarial (Palacio 1982). It is difficult to imagine the Honduran State consciously facilitating the incorporation of ethnic minorities living abroad. Refugees are another group of migrants who face greater obstacles to the maintenance of transnational ties. In addition, not all individuals in a given migrant population will be interested, or able, to sustain transnational identities. Some migrants consciously reject their former national identities and actively attempt to assimilate into the host society, while others may attempt to maintain a national identity and yet be unsuccessful.

The process of segmented assimilation described earlier demonstrates the disparate experiences that the second generation may have with respect to their incorporation into the transmigrant community. As Mary Waters has shown, social class has an important constraining effect on the second generation's identity options (1994). In the context of the current discussion, it is not difficult to imagine that the second generation of more affluent transmigrants will be more likely to visit (and thus be socialized) in two different cultures. For example, the opportunities that a poor Chinese illegal migrant in New York City will have to regularly visit with family members in China will undoubtedly be different from the opportunities of a middle-class Chinese professional migrant. Thus, it is unclear how much the development of transnational orientations undermine the assimilation perspective, though it obviously poses some serious theoretical challenges to it.

A contrasting sociological study of a similar phenomenon may help to clarify the similarities and differences between transnationalism and other forms of national migrant

orientations. In Yasemin Soysal's 1994 book *The Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*, Soysal explores migrants' incorporation strategies by reference to the tactics they employ. In her research on 'guest workers' in the European Community, she found that migrants readily drew on the international discourse of human rights in order to mount successful social movement challenges to the state. While her study was not grounded in the transnational literature, she argues that *postnational* forms of citizenship have developed which increasingly serve to undermine geographically bounded notions of citizenship and the nation-state. Her concept of postnational citizenship visualizes a universal, extra-national identity, instead of the pluralist orientation described by advocates of the transnational perspective. By utilizing the *postnational* discourse of universal human rights that has been established through various legal codes and institutions (such as the UN Declaration on Human Rights), these migrants have been able to challenge the host states' exclusionary and discriminatory policies. In the context of the discussion of transnationalism, what is important about Soysal's work is her finding that migrant identities are in a state of flux. While some of Soysal's migrants are likely embedded in transnational relationships they articulated a global identity in lieu of a transnational one. In addition, the identity/discourse that these migrants adopted undermines the hegemony of the nation-state itself, in both the host country and back home.

One of the reasons that transnationalism has emerged as a distinct and new phenomenon, is primarily due to advances that have been made in telecommunications, transportation and the shrinking of the psychological distances that formerly separated geographically disparate regions (Portes 1997). Some critics of transnationalism question

the uniqueness of this phenomenon however. After all, some migrants from earlier cohorts also maintained ties between their natal homes and the areas of settlement. While it is true that earlier migrants did maintain relationships with kin back home, overall, they did so with much less frequency than their contemporary counterparts. For the sake of simplicity, there are three defining features of transnationalism (Portes 1997): First, the sheer number of people involved in transnational networks is far beyond that which existed among earlier migrant cohorts. Second, the speed at which communications takes place between different areas, via family networks and through advances in communications technology, has created new types of transnational ties. Finally, there is a strong tendency for transnational forms of organization to become normative among the second generation. These three features of transnationalism are what mark it as distinct from earlier forms of migrant social organization, yet further research clearly needs to be done in order to improve our understanding of this phenomenon.

In summary, the emergence of transmigrant communities is a new development but one that remains constrained by communications and transportation technologies and markets. In addition to these constraints, the formation of transnational identities is also fostered by racial stratification, which, in the US, ascribes lower status to individuals with darker skin colors (Cornell and Hartman 1998). Because of racial stratification in the US then, transnational identities provide an attractive alternative to the loss of status that racial ascription entails; yet the adoption of a transnational identity is also circumscribed by social class (Waters 1994). While transmigrants may maintain multiple sets of national identities, it is unclear that the opportunities to develop these identities are universally available to everyone within the community. Some transmigrants have taken advantage of

these new identities in order to mount political challenges to national immigration and foreign policies of sovereign nation-states, while others have participated in electoral campaigns in order to advance their own group interests across national boundaries (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992). By strategically mobilizing the facets of a migrant group's collective identity that resonate with the discourses of specific institutions and contexts, some migrants have been able to mount effective social movement challenges against discriminatory and exclusionary state policies (Soysal 1994).

Race, Gender and Migration:

As the discussion of transnationalism makes clear, collective identity is a critical dimension of contemporary studies in international migration. As I briefly mentioned in the preceding section however, many other collective identities also circumscribe the lives of migrants. Because it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all possible permutations of these identities, I limit my discussion in this final section to the interactions of gender and race as they pertain to international migration.

As we saw with Fernandez-Kelly's study of the *maquila* industry in Mexico, gender has played an important role in shaping migration patterns along the US/Mexico border region as well as within the larger Mexican state. Mexican *maquiladoras* and other unskilled manufacturing facilities in international export processing zones throughout the world take advantage of the most vulnerable sectors of society in order to maximize profits. This strategy is of course not limited to the developing world. Karen Hossfeld found a similar preference for high-tech manufacturing workers in Silicon Valley (Hossfeld 1994). As one Silicon Valley production manager explained:

Just three things I look for in hiring (entry-level, high-tech manufacturing operatives): small, foreign, and female. You find those three things and you're pretty much automatically guaranteed the right kind of work force. These little foreign gals are grateful to be hired-very, very grateful-no matter what, (Hossfeld 1994 as cited in Espiritu 1997).

By looking for small, foreign women, this employer demonstrates a clear preference to hire workers based on racial and gender factors. As we have seen, most scholars attribute the preference of employers to hire migrant women for these positions because of the gender ideologies that assign men the breadwinner role. According to the logic of this ideology, women do not need to earn as much as their male counterparts because they, as the logic goes, do not need the income to support their families. Other factors also contribute to employers' preferences to hire foreign women including women's lower rates of unionization and their greater docility when confronted with conflicts with management (which is the result of gender specific socialization practices).

As we saw in the case of Haitian migration that followed the debt crisis in Latin America (Georges 1990), structural macro-economic factors provide the context within which migration takes place. Yet structural factors alone are unable to account for the different patterns of mobility and experiences that men and women have with migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo's work on Mexican migration to Northern California, she found that gender relations structure the migration process in significant and numerous ways. For example, the author found that the 'unitary-family' model, which takes the household as the unit of analysis, ignores the different interests that men and women have within the family. She found examples of women who prayed that their partners would be apprehended by the Border Patrol. She also found that husbands and wives often relied on separate social networks and sources of income to facilitate their

independent migration schemes. Not surprisingly, while some families were more 'unitary' than others, the vast majority fell somewhere in between the two extremes.

During the 1970s, social scientists noted that family migration tended to unfold like a chain, with the husband migrating first in order to establish a beach-head, and then later sending for his wife and children. While this pattern of 'chain migration' characterized much of the migration that occurred prior to the 1970s, a new division of household resources, coupled with changes in traditional gender roles, have tended to undermine this pattern. As Blumberg and others note, when women gain control of more economic resources, they tend to gain a commensurate increase in decision-making power (Blumberg 1989; Blumberg 1995; Boserup 1970). Because women have been increasingly forced to work outside the home (due to national economic dislocations and the growing number of export processing zones seeking their labor), they have gained greater autonomy from traditional gender roles. For example, due to their independent earning power, many women are choosing to remain single, and many also choose to migrate by themselves. Moreover, married women who earn incomes independently of their husbands are also demanding greater input into family migration decisions. Therefore, class and gender intersect with one another as both factors combine to help shape family and individual responses to migration opportunities.

Race too plays an important, albeit generally unrecognized, role in organizing migration patterns. For example, one distinctive and pervasive pattern of international Mexican migration has been the relative absence of indigenous peoples. While the vast majority of the Mexican poor are racially mixed (*la raza cosmica*), the truly destitute are predominantly Native American (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 1994). Because economic

barriers deter members of the poorest classes from migrating, the more middle-class Mexican migrants who do come to the US, tend to be ethnic Mexicans. While some Indian groups do migrate internally within Mexico, such as Mixtec agricultural laborers in Northern Mexico, few members of these indigenous groups have access to the social networks and capital that international migration to the US often requires. The Garifuna of the Eastern Caribbean are one migrant group that appears to be an exception to this pattern (Gonzales 1988). However, in many important ways the Garifuna more closely resemble Caribbean migrants. For example, the Garifuna have a long history of sojourning, migration and resettlement which may give them certain advantages with respect to the development of social networks and an outward oriented mobility ethos.

We have seen how class, race and gender help organize migration decisions and patterns for different migrant groups, but migration simultaneously acts as a catalyst for reconstructing these very social relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). For the majority of unskilled migrants there are few well paying job opportunities. The US has been going through a fundamental economic restructuring which has led to what Alvin So calls *reindustrialization* (So 1990). As a result, many low skill manufacturing jobs have reappeared in the inner cities of Los Angeles, New York and Miami such the burgeoning garment industry, piece-rate subcontracting and, in some cases, medium sized high-tech assembly operations. As we have already seen, employers in these predominantly non-unionized sectors prefer to employ women migrants which puts migrant women at an employment advantage relative to migrant men for these positions. Not only do relatively more employment opportunities exist for women in these sectors, but because low-skill jobs tend to pay wages that are insufficient to sustain a family, migrant women have little

choice but to seek employment as wage laborers. As migrant women are pushed into the labor market, the household begins to show more egalitarian gender relations due to women's increasing control of resources. As a result of these structural pressures, unskilled migrant households have a difficult time trying to maintain the traditional gendered division of labor. In addition to the increased control that migrant women have over economic resources, they have also gained status relative to migrant men. Mexican men for example often experience a loss of status when they come to the US because of their race, immigration status and occupations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). While women often face this same set of experiences, their status often increases relative to men because women are often moving from the unpaid domestic sphere to the paid labor market. This pattern of greater relative equality between migrant women and men has also been found among Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese and Korean migrants⁸ (Espiritu 1997; Kibria 1993).

Because of the increasing status of migrant women, traditional patriarchal family structures are becoming increasingly fraught with tension (Espiritu 1997; Kibria 1993). Kibria cites one Vietnamese man who described the traditional Vietnamese family hierarchy in stark terms: "In Vietnam the man of the house is king. Below him the children, then the pets of the home, and then the women. Here, the woman is the king and the man holds a position below the pets," (1993:108). Because many migrant men no longer fill the breadwinner role, they often feel frustration caused by their loss of power

⁸ It should be noted that greater participation in the paid labor market has not necessarily translated into more egalitarian changes in the household division of labor (see Espiritu 1997). In many cases the 'second-shift' (Hochschild and Machung 1989) remains women's work, while in others women have met with some success in negotiating a more egalitarian division of labor. One of the benefits that skewed gender ratios from earlier periods engendered was that it forced men to rely on their own labor to maintain their households. Many early migrant men therefore learned to do domestic work because of the scarcity of migrant women (see Kibria 1993, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994 and Espiritu 1997). In some cases these domestic skills were

within the family. In some cases this results in increasing incidences of family violence as men have attempted to reassert their control over family members through physical means. Kibria reports that among her research subjects, the most frequently reported difference between Vietnamese and US culture was the position of women (1993). Migrant men and women are beginning to experience more egalitarian family relations, due in part to changes in the relative economic power of women but also because of American legal and moral sanctions against domestic violence. In some cases, migrant women and children have involved the police when instances of abuse occur and this has the effect of underscoring the greater relative equality of women, men and children in the household. Some observers also attribute greater rates of family violence among migrant households to the more permissive attitudes that migrants natal culture has towards domestic violence. Yet, the structural strain that migrant families experience as traditional power relationships are undermined clearly plays an important causal role in domestic violence as well.

The advent of the transnational paradigm and the study of race and genders' influence on migration patterns are examples of some of the 'new directions' that migration research has been going over the past decade. While gender and race are certainly nothing new, the recognition of their centrality in shaping the migration experience has only recently begun to be recognized. With the dismantling of the 'Eurocentric' system of immigration preferences that existed prior to 1965, there has come a huge increase in the number of non-white immigrants that are legally admitted into the US. This change in the migrant stream has had important implications for the study of migration and this helps explain why racial and gender relations have become increasingly

'forgotten' with the arrival of migrant women, while in others, men remained more closely involved in

relevant for migration scholars. On the other hand, transnationalism has forced researchers to reconsider the fundamental assumptions of assimilation theory, but because it is such a new concept, it is difficult to predict where future research in this area might be headed. Transnationalism certainly has the potential to fundamentally change the way researchers understand the adaptation process of migrants, but I believe it would be premature to jettison assimilation theory at this point. However, coupled with the study of citizenship and nationality, transnationalism provides an excellent opportunity to study new social responses to the increasing pressures that globalization has had on our traditional concepts of geographically bounded national actors. Transnationalism has clearly identified a new phenomenon, but the challenge for future transnational researchers will be to analytically distinguish nationality based components of identity from those that deal with race, class, gender and other equally important dimensions of collective identity.

Conclusions:

I began this paper by pointing out that my approach to the field of international migration is interdisciplinary. In the course of my review of the literature I have drawn from the fields of economics, anthropology, geography, political science, history, ethnic studies, international political economy, critical gender studies and of course sociology. The field of international migration itself is necessarily interdisciplinary because human migration touches on so many different facets of social life. One of the challenges that has accompanied the writing of this paper has been situating my own perspective relative to those of scholars in such a wide variety of different fields. Not only have I had to contend with multiple, disciplinary specific, research methods and perspectives, I have also had to

domestic labor.

sort through the different ideological and political perspectives of individuals within each discipline. Separating the functionalists from the neo-Marxists and the postmodernists has been no easy task, but the reward is greater clarity with respect to the distinct intellectual themes and continuities running through related intellectual fields.

There are many interconnections between the different perspectives I have discussed in this paper. For example, the equilibrium and structural-historical perspectives both attempt to explain how and why it is that people migrate. While each perspective offers a radically different critique of the macro-structural determinants of migration, both perspectives generally visualize migrants as passively reacting to changes in political economy. While the two perspectives unsatisfactorily deal with issues of gender, racial and other forms of domination and inequality, I continue to believe that it is critically important to understand the macro-structural context that shapes international migration patterns. Even if we come away from this discussion with only a general understanding of how these two perspectives disagree with one-another, we still benefit by gaining an understanding of *which* macro-structural factors each perspective argues to be most critical.

One of the shortcomings of the macro-structural approach is that it largely neglects the human dimension of migration. In other words, the research methodologies that macro-structural scholars employ tend to exclude *people* because they focus primarily on systems of national and global relations. That is where the discussion of assimilation makes its strongest contribution. By exploring the different experiences of migrant communities and the individuals within those communities, it is possible to get a much clearer sense of how migration influences the lives of individuals living within the world-system. While some of the functionalist assumptions of early sociologists seem naïve in

retrospect, we had to start somewhere! After all, if sociologists such as Robert Park had never speculated about the processes and parameters of racial inter-group relations, what would the conflict-oriented Neo-Marxist sociologists of the 1960s have responded to?⁹ By focusing our attention at the level of inter-group relations, assimilation theorists have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of power and its influence on group dynamics. Assimilation theory also paved the way for discussions of the role that ethnic and racial identities play within the broader context of economic and cultural domination. By understanding how assimilation theory has given rise to the study of identity politics, we are thus in a better position to understand the role that identity plays in facilitating, or impeding, social change.

It is unfortunate that there has been relatively little research done on migration other than that which occurs between the periphery and the core. There are several different permutations of migration that have, therefore, been largely neglected in the literature on international migration. Listed in the order of their depth of coverage in the contemporary literature, the possibilities look something like this:

1. Periphery to core migration (a very large literature).
2. Core to core migration (a small but substantial literature).
3. Core to periphery migration (a negligible literature within 'migration studies' and a small literature from other perspectives).
4. Periphery to periphery migration (theoretical work is virtually non-existent, a few case-studies in fields other than international migration).

I linked Michael Taussig's work on the zones of contact between European rubber station managers and Native Americans in order to suggest what a study of core to periphery migration might look like. I also suggested that the work of Mitziko Sawada on early 20th

⁹ While I'm not arguing for some sort of simplistic dialectical process of the sociology of knowledge (think of it as a Kuhnian paradigm shift instead), I believe knowledge should be thought of as a social product.

century middle-class Japanese men's construction of America as an exotic Occidental 'other', might provide a fresh perspective on core-to-core migration. This particular reading of core-to-core migration is of practical use because it can help us understand how the return migration of elites has influenced high culture in both the US and in Japan.

As the review of transnationalism makes clear, the concept of the nation-state itself is being problematized in the literature on migration, citizenship and globalization. So, in addition to the substantive gaps in the literature on migration, the term 'international migration' is itself somewhat problematic. Because the geographically and temporally bounded concept of the 'nation-state' is under more scrutiny within the field, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the rubric of *international* migration in the face of nations that are themselves migratory. The ongoing conflict in Albania and Yugoslavia serves as one example of 'migrating nations'. In this case, the partial state apparatus of an NGO (the United Nations) has 'migrated' into formerly sovereign Yugoslavia. Other examples of migrating states include the reconfiguration of the concept of the *polis* among transnational political actors so that physical state boundaries no longer coincide with the citizenry. So that politicians seeking offices in Haiti must campaign in New York, while Haitians living throughout the Caribbean pitch in to help organize the election of Haitian-friendly politicians in the US. If citizenship is defined by an individual's political, economic and psychological orientations and interactions with a particular state, then the state itself has truly become transnational. While it is true that modern nation-states and the concept of citizenship itself are being increasingly undermined by the forces of globalization however, it seems premature to abandon the concept of the 'nation-state' at

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that the process of 'knowledge making' is itself always steeped

this point. After all, the state remains the preeminent institution responsible for the regulation of immigration and it remains quite capable of defining and regulating the individuals that occupy its physical geography.

With respect to the transnational perspective and migration, it is important to remain wary of the encompassing tendency that the ‘transnational’ and ‘international’ labels entail. Internal migration is no less important a phenomenon than migration across formally national borders. After all, the line that separates Turkish guest-workers in Germany who migrate ‘internally’ within the EU to France, from those that migrate ‘internationally’ from Turkey is very thin. This is even doubly so, considering that Turkish transmigrants are positioning themselves politically as international citizens, with fundamental human rights guaranteed to them by an extra-national treaty on human rights written in the United Nations and signed by member states. In one sense, all these issues of citizenship, transnationalism and bounded national territories are ultimately identity issues. New forms of identity have begun to develop among sojourning Caribbean, Filipino and European transmigrants (and/or *postnational* guest-workers). And, for analysts, the existence of these new collective identities raises important questions about the relationship of the individual, and groups, to the state. What will become of transmigrants and/or the Enlightenment definition of the sovereign nation-state is open to speculation. What this discussion makes clear however, is that the field of collective identity has become the battleground where many of these political, economic and cultural struggles over group definition and membership take place.

in systems of power relationships.

Through the discussion of gender, race and migration we have seen how social structures shape migration patterns while in turn, migration patterns shape social structures. The familiar theoretical theme that emerges from this situation is the relative importance of social structures versus individual agency in engendering social change. Examples of migrant agency include European guest-workers organization of social movements that challenge bounded and exclusionary ideologies of national citizenship, Mexican migrants in California organizing opposition campaigns to anti-immigration legislation (and some even organizing coalitions against bilingual education). Latino migrants to the US are learning political-leadership and organizational skills from non-governmental organizations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994) and then engaging in a wide range of community building activities with these skills. Migrants are also taking advantage of their developing organizational skills to interact with the political institutions of their natal homes. Garifuna transmigrant activists have invented an extra-national ethnically based imagined community called the “Garifuna Nation” in order to promote Garifuna culture (Cayetano 1997). Moreover, the ideological justification for the creation of the Garifuna Nation has come, in part, from the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, some Garifuna transmigrants have been actively forging cross-national and cross-group coalitions with members of the Chorti, Lenca and Pech Indians to seek the protection of indigenous lands from the encroachment of Honduran farmers and peasants. Everywhere we look we find examples of individuals and groups engaged in actively challenging social structures by creating social movements that are based on the articulation of collective identities. And, as we have also already seen, social structures

give rise to the historical and social contexts that permit the development of these very social movements.

Social structures shape the context within which individual agents operate and when agents attempt to challenge social structures, they most often do this by articulating collective identities that facilitate collective action. For example, Espiritu argues that one solution to the predicament of structural oppression is to create an “imagined community” that is, “bounded not only by color, race, gender or class but crucially by a shared struggle against *all* systemic and pervasive forms of discrimination,” (1997:119). The struggle to create ‘imagined communities’ is fundamentally a struggle to articulate a collective identity that can serve as a means to challenge structures of domination.

One of the benefits that this review of the migration literature has provided me, is a clearer sense of where my personal research interests fit into the larger fields of social movements and migration. As I have indicated here in my conclusion, I believe that collective identity is the linchpin that connects individuals to struggles for social change. But, individuals do not construct identities as they please. Identity formation is constrained by structural forces. I may choose to identify myself as an *activist academic* because my professional identity as an academic is what is most meaningful to me in my present economic, political and ideational position in US society. However, the *choice* that I have of naming my identity is largely due to my fortuitous socioeconomic circumstances. For other groups, such as the Garifuna migrants to Los Angeles (who I plan on making central to my dissertation research), the US racial structure prevents them from freely choosing their identities. Social structures constrain individual agency while individual agency in turn, challenges social structure.

What interests me then, is the study of how agents attempt to construct identities which challenge the social structures that circumscribe their lives. As is the case with all groups, the construction of identities is contingent on a number of structural factors. In my research on Garifuna migrants, I hope to explore the different strategies that Garifuna activists use to construct collective identities that challenge systemic forms of domination. While I hope to find that they are able to create a pan-ethnic, gender inclusive, poly-vocal identity which does not exclude or oppress other groups; I suspect that Garifuna activists lack the necessary resources to systematically identify all the sources of domination that circumscribe their lives. As the example of the Garifuna Nation suggests, I suspect that Garifuna activists will tend to organize their collective identities around those axes of greatest cleavage, though fortunately, further research clearly needs to be done.

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