

## Transnationalism, Foreign Assistance, Domestic Communities and Thomas Khun: New Opportunities and New Challenges for Canada and the United States

Carlo Dade, FOCAL Senior Advisor

In recent years globalization has dramatically changed the social, political and economic landscape in the Americas creating new challenges for governments. For foreign and domestic development agencies the most serious of these challenges is the massive migration and concomitant rise of transnational communities that obscure national borders and blur the distinction between foreign and local. Economic and social development in these new transnational communities presents an unanswered challenge to traditional development strategies that view communities as being only domestic or foreign.

### Defining Transnationalism

Massive migration flows, to the U.S. beginning in the 1980s and to a lesser extent to Canada in the 1990s, combined with declining costs in telecommunications, travel and financial transfers creating a new type of "hyper connectivity" between migrants and their home communities. From 1991 to 2000 telephone traffic between the U.S. and Latin America grew more than 250% and air travel by more than 50%. Migrants are now connected instantaneously, continuously, dynamically and intimately to their communities of origin. Today, finances permitting, one can speak daily with family back home, pay bills, buy groceries, read the same newspapers, return on daily scheduled flights and in some cases, vote abroad. This is a fundamental and profound break from the past eras of migration. As migrants act and interact in their communities of origin on a practically real time basis not only have barriers of distance and time been removed, but so too have barriers of national borders and governmental control. This is the essence of transnationalism and the challenge that it poses for governments.

### Identifying the Challenge

Transnationalism has created new possibilities for interaction between migrants and their home communities and has opened these possibilities to a wider section of the migrant community. In communities where a significant percentage of the population is migratory (leaving or arriving) modern hyper mobility means that immigrant communities, their problems, inputs and outputs are larger than the confines of the traditional state. This has created new challenges for economic and social development in these communities as not just people but also knowledge (information and disinformation), money, social ills, practices, customs and organizations move dynamically and almost instantaneously across great distances within these communities. What occurs at any point or pole in a transnational community, affects the entire community as well as communities connected to, bordering on, or interacting with it. This means that community development investments made by foreign development agencies in Guate-

**Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1860-2000**

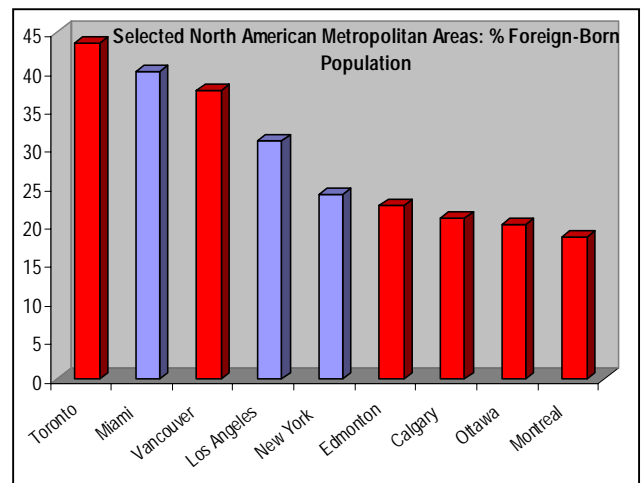


Sources: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Annual Statistical Yearbook*; and Citizenship and Immigration Canada ([www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca), accessed Jan. 9, 2002).

mala City will benefit – if not actually appear – in Los Angeles. But, it also means that manifestations of community problems in Los Angeles such as gangs and criminality will appear in Guatemala City. Again, what distinguishes our era of hyper migration from the past is that these exchanges happen instantaneously and dynamically. Social, health and education problems move within and with communities across borders at the speed of modern transportation, commercial and information exchanges. This applies to a host of community development issues such as AIDS, literacy, leadership training, nutrition and everything in between. So, how do traditional aid agencies – foreign and domestic – focused on geographically defined communities, work in an era of transnationalism?

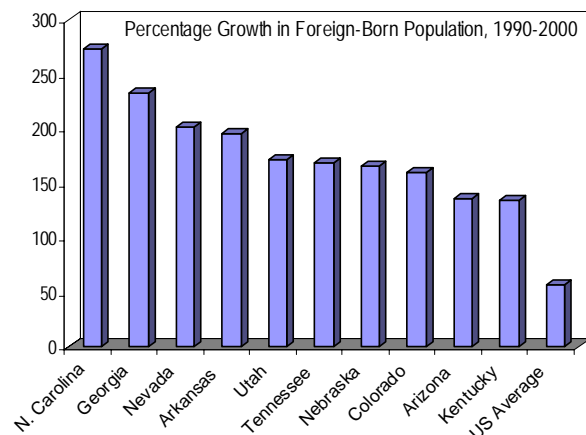
### Transnationalism in Canada and the United States

In Canada, the transnational aspect of modern migration has been intensified by the government policy of multiculturalism as developed in the 1971 Multicultural Policy, the 1988 Multiculturalism Act and the 1992 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canada uses multiculturalism to insert migrant participation into the structure of bilingualism that governs social and political interaction. For migrants who do not identify with anglo or francophone cultures, multiculturalism provides an entry into discourse on participation and interaction with the state. The policy also strengthens immigrant identity vis a vis country of origin and gives official sanction and encouragement to transnational identities and linkages. Further, the policy encourages language and cultural ties to benefit Canada through cultural enrichment and creating opportunities for trade. Though the intent of the legislation may have been to benefit Canadian society through enriching cultural diversity, there exists the possibility that benefits may be defined in terms of trade, diplomacy and knowledge.



On one hand, Canada uses multiculturalism to incorporate migrants into Canadian society; on the other hand, the policy has the obvious potential to weaken integration into Canadian society. This tension appears at the local level where integration occurs. The policy also impacts foreign relations as it creates opportunities for leveraging trade and foreign policy opportunities. But, as shown in a recent paper by Michael Szonyi of the University of Toronto, a 10 per cent increase in immigration to the U.S. will increase U.S. exports and imports to the country of origin by 8.3% and 4.7% respectively. In Canada, given a similar increase in migration, imports rise only by 3.3 per cent and exports by only 1.3 per cent. Also, as recent events with Canadian dual nationals in Iran and Palestine have shown, these linkages also create new obligations and complications for the government. In short, transnational migration and the policy of multiculturalism create a host of potential, and apparently unrealized benefits and a host of very real and realized problems for Canada.

In the United States the challenges posed by the rise of transnational communities arises in the recent surge in migration to non-traditional migration areas. The communities into which these immigrants and migrants are landing face accelerated strains in integrating new arrivals because



transnational ties enhance mobility of new arrivals and provide competing sources of attention and news. Providing services for and incorporating migrants was easier when the government did not have to compete as hard for their attention and when health and social issues impacting these communities were localized as opposed to globalized as they are today. At the same time, because of welfare reform and decentralization states have increasing responsibility for designing and delivering services to these populations. Further, according to an Urban Institute analysis, the states to which immigrants migrated from 1995 to 1999 were *not* the ones with the most generous benefits for non-citizens.

In foreign assistance, U.S. agencies are just beginning to fully grasp the impact and involvement of U.S. immigrants and migrants in their communities of origin. For example, Dr. Manuel Orozco of the Inter-American Dialogue has estimated that Mexicans in the U.S. invest on the order of US\$30 million in small-scale development projects in their communities of origin. Based on interviews in Brooklyn, this author estimates that Haitian Hometown Associations invest an average of US\$10,000 each per year for clinics, schools and small-scale infrastructure projects in their home communities in Haiti. In addition to financial resources immigrants and migrants are transferring skills and knowledge that are likely more useful and important to support development projects in their home communities. Some U.S. foreign aid agencies such as the Inter-American Foundation have had great success in incorporating similar types of financial and non-financial resources from the private sector in support of community development and USAID is devoting considerable and increasing amounts of new spending in this area. There exists a strong potential to assist immigrants and migrant organizations and to incorporate them into the development process. In an era of increasing demands on U.S. foreign aid due to the war on terrorism, all sources of leveraging take on added importance.

### **Policy Challenges and Opportunities**

The challenges and opportunities for foreign and domestic development agencies presented by transnational migration point to a need to review and reconcile foreign and domestic development priorities to find synergies and rationalize work programs and investments. Foreign aid agencies in both governments have invested substantially in literacy, basic education, health and citizenship programs in communities that are sources of migration to the U.S. and Canada. These investments in materials and training could be leveraged to support community work with migrants in receiving communities. Further, financial literacy programs in the U.S. can be extended to countries that are sources of migration. Development of immigrant and migrant organizations and hometown associations in receiving communities strengthens civic participation by immigrants in these communities in the U.S. and Canada also creates partners to work with foreign aid and trade promotion agencies. Maintaining contact with Canadian and U.S. local and federal government agencies throughout the transnational spectrum would help integrate these communities in both domestic and foreign development processes. In addition, Canadian and U.S. agencies can work together, share resources and reduce costs in developing outreach and assistance programs. Important target communities for the U.S. will be Mexico and Central America while for Canada these would be India, the Philippines, China and the Caribbean. Yet, the U.S. has substantial migrant populations from Asia and the Caribbean and Canada has significant and increasing migrants from Mexico under its migrant farm workers program.

Clearly, dealing with the impacts and exploiting the benefits of transnationalism will require a reconceptualization, realignment and perhaps a reconstitution of foreign and domestic aid agencies. Yet, despite early experimentation by CIDA, USAID and some U.S. community foundations this is not and will not prove to be an easy task. Our current understanding of community, and hence of community development, is rooted

firmly in a pre-globalized, pre-transnational worldview. As such, foreign development agencies have strict mandates to carryout and finance projects outside of national borders while conversely community development foundations and their municipal counterparts have even stricter mandates to work in even narrower geographic areas. Yet, globalization has wrought a fundamental change in the physical nature of community and eventually our institutions will have to adapt to this shift. The key to managing this shift is incremental change and experimentation. For Canada the best opportunity appears to be to work through nascent institutions and bureaucracy of multiculturalism while for the U.S. the best opportunity is developing alliances between foreign aid agencies and domestic community foundations.

-----

Federal Communications Commission, 2000 International Telecommunications Data. Washington, D.C.:

FCC and Bureau of Transportation Statistics, National Transportation Statistics 2002.

Fix, Zimmermann & Passel. The Integration of Immigrant Families in the United States. Urban Institute. July 2001.

Capps, Fix & Passel. The Dispersal of Immigrants in the 1990s. Urban Institute. 2002.

Michael Szonyi. Asian-Canadians and Canada's International Relations. Paper for Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada's Roundtable on Foreign policy Dialogue and Canada-Asia Relations. March 27, 2003. University of Toronto.

Kuhn, Thomas. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. University of Chicago Press. 1996