Trust Networks in Transnational Migration
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Trust Networks in Transnational Migration

Charles Tilly

The sheer volume of migrant remittances to relatively poor countries, including those of Latin America and the Caribbean, nicely dramatizes the genuinely transnational social ties created by long-distance migration. The evidence underlines that migration flows are serious business, not only for the individuals and families involved, but also for whole national economies. Thinking about remittances also allows us to identify some crucial social processes of which most migrants and first-hand students of migration are well aware, but for which we have neither well-established theories, carefully crafted concepts, nor extensive evidence. I mean the creation, use, and transformation of interpersonal trust networks within migration streams.

KEY WORDS: trust; networks; transnational; migration.

INTRODUCTION

My friend and former student Alex Julca migrated to New York City from Huanuco, Peru, after a long intermediate stay in Lima. He tells vivid tales of his struggles to get an education in Peru, his achievement of an economics Ph.D. in the United States, his appointment as an economic affairs officer at the United Nations, and his efforts to help family members both in Peru and in New York. Speaking of another Peruvian immigrant he met in New York, Alex reports that:


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Today I will send the remittance in kind to my mother, poor woman, she will be needing it. ‘La Cholita’ would say, on one of the occasions on which she sent encomiendas to her family. Even grandparents, who often had helped parents to raise the kids, are subject to attention from Peruvian immigrants, who send them remittances when not sponsoring them to come to ‘Los Estados Unidos.’

Alex continues:

Sometimes remittances flow the other way and parents use their skills to help their grown children. For example, when parents who are construction workers might help to build or improve their children’s homes, either in Lima or in New York City. Maria invited her father to New York City on a tourist visa so that he could visit her and his grandchildren but also assist in the construction of the sewage system for her new house. ‘Here it is different,’ her father told me. ‘The parts are generally plastic, not like in Peru, where they are usually metal. But some of the parts might be interchangeable, so I am taking a few back to Peru to use with my clients’ (Julca, 2001:251).

In a recent talk, immigrant become migration analyst, Alex Julca points out that 75% of all remittances to Latin American and Caribbean countries come from the United States, that the vast majority of recent migrants to the United States from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Ecuador send remittances regularly, and that undocumented migrants send remittances more regularly than their documented paisanos (Julca, 2005).

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for which Alex works reports that during the 1990s remittances passed overseas development assistance as a source of external funds for developing countries; by the early twenty-first century officially counted remittances alone were running about US$60 billion per year. Unofficially transmitted money and goods surely added billions more. By 2004, remittances had well surpassed international development assistance and started approaching foreign direct investment as sources of external financing in developing countries. Officially counted worldwide remittance flows then amounted to some US$182 billion, of which 69% went to developing countries. Informal flows surely pushed the grand total of remittances well above foreign direct investment itself in many poorer countries (Maimbo and Ratha, 2005:3–4). Remittances have sometimes amounted to more than 60% of international monetary inflows to El Salvador and Nicaragua (United Nations, 2004:106). In 2002, the roughly 27 billion dollars officially sent to Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for about a fifth of the world total of official remittances and equaled 1.6% of the entire region’s gross domestic product (United Nations, 2004:107).

The point of this article is not to bludgeon readers with statistics on the economics and demography of transnational migration. I do mean, however, to challenge popular images of immigrants as one-way travelers, desperate for work or welfare in a richer country, who cut home ties as soon as possible in order to take advantage of their new country. The
sheer volume of migrant remittances to relatively poor countries, including those of Latin America and the Caribbean, nicely dramatizes the genuinely transnational social ties created by long-distance migration. It underlines that migration flows are serious business not only for the individuals and families involved, but also for whole national economies.

Thinking about remittances also allows us to identify some crucial social processes of which most migrants and first-hand students of migration are well aware, but for which we have neither well established theories, carefully crafted concepts, nor extensive evidence. I mean the creation, use, and transformation of interpersonal trust networks within migration streams. Trust networks play central parts in the organization, maintenance, and transformation of long-distance migration streams across much of the world. Within them, remittance flows reinforce commitments among all participants in the stream.

‘Interpersonal trust networks’ may strike you as a mysterious term. Out of all the various networks that connect people, it helps to single out those that involve unusual amounts of mutual trust. People rely especially on those networks when they are carrying on long-term, crucial enterprises such as procreation, child rearing, religious or political commitment, long-distance trade, and, of course, migration. In those networks, members bet valued outcomes on the likelihood that other people will meet their responsibilities competently. Trust networks include some religious communities, political conspiracies, webs of ethnic traders, and kinship groups. For thousands of years, trust networks have performed an enormous range of political, economic, and spiritual work for human beings, especially those human beings who could not rely on governments to provide them with sustaining services. But here we concentrate on trust networks’ place in long-distance migration.

This brief essay can do no more than open the door on trust networks and transnational migration. Here are the six main points:

1) Within the wide range of interpersonal networks that play some part in long-distance migration, trust networks figure importantly in solidarity between people at the origins and destinations of migration streams.
2) Members of such networks typically acquire long-term rights and obligations binding themselves to each other, which mean that the networks operate simultaneously as sites of social insurance and of social control.
3) For that very reason, migration streams attached to trust networks tend to concentrate in relatively specialized economic, geographic, and social niches as compared with all streams of migration.
4) The operation of migrants’ trust networks creates and depends on boundaries that separate members from outsiders; as a result, membership
inhibits assimilation of migrants at the destination and poses sharp choices for the second and later generations.

5) In the longer run, the survival of transnational trust networks through the second generation and beyond depends heavily on the social segregation or integration of the immigrant stream at the destination, whether segregated through self-selection or exclusion, segregated immigrant communities more frequently maintain transnational trust networks.

6) That segregation, however, generally confines members of trust networks to a relatively narrow range of opportunities for work, housing, sociability, and welfare. If those opportunities connect members with rich rewards, the network prospers. If not, it often suffers.

The Stakes of Trust Networks

Experts on migration will recognize immediately that these arguments mix familiar facts with risky speculation. I hope they will stimulate discussion, criticism, research, and new reflection on fundamental social processes, including the generation of trust. Many students of political processes, including me, believe that well-functioning democracy depends on substantial integration of interpersonal trust into public politics. If so, we are talking not merely about the lives of migrants, but about the quality of democratic life at large. As students of western democracies often fret about the impact of recent immigration on public life, we touch a sensitive junction between migration and politics.\(^2\)

What is trust? We can think of trust as an attitude or as a relationship with practices attached. For the purpose of studying migration, it helps to concentrate on the relationship, leaving open what sorts of attitudes might motivate, complement, or result from a relationship of trust. Labels such as kinsman, compadre, paisano, fellow believer, and comember of a craft provide a first indication of a trust relationship. But we know a trust relationship more surely by the practices of its participants: If you trust me, do not just tell me so; let me take charge of your children’s education, lend me your life’s savings for investment, take medicines I give you, or help me paint my house on the assumption that I will help you

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paint yours. If you do not trust me, prove it by doing none of these things and nothing like them.

Trust consists of placing valued outcomes at risk to others’ malfeasance, mistakes, or failures (Tilly, 2005a). Trust relationships include those in which people regularly take such risks. Although some trust relationships remain purely dyadic, for the most part they operate within larger networks of similar relationships. Trust networks, then, consist of ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others.

How will we recognize a trust network when we encounter or enter one? First, we will notice a number of people who are connected, directly or indirectly, by similar ties; they form a network. Second, we will see that the sheer existence of such a tie gives one member significant claims on the attention or aid of another; the network consists of strong ties. Third, we will discover that members of the network are collectively carrying on major long-term enterprises such as procreation, long-distance trade, workers’ mutual aid, practice of an underground religion, or, of course, maintenance of a long-distance migration stream. Finally, we will learn that the configuration of ties within the network sets the collective enterprise at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, and failures of individual members.

Networks reach into every corner of social life (Watts, 2003, 2004). Social networks include any set of similar connections among three or more social sites. Connections include communication, mutual recognition, and shared participation in some activity, flows of goods or services, transmission of diseases, and other forms of consequential interaction. Network sites may be individuals, but they can also be organizations, localities, or social positions. A network of connections among people you do not know and who mostly do not know each other brings you your morning newspaper. Another transmits political information. Still others lend invisible structure to flows of money, disease, and linguistic innovation.

Although segments of such networks may overlap with or even constitute trust networks, taken as wholes they do not qualify as trust networks. They do not qualify because their participants do not generally place their major valued collective enterprises at risk to malfeasance, mistakes, or failures by other members of the same networks. In that precise sense, members do not trust each other. Most or all members of trust networks, in contrast, place major valued collective enterprises such as the preservation of their faith, placement of their children, provision for their old age, and protection of personal secrets at risk to fellow members’ malfeasance, mistakes, or failures. Accordingly, trust networks constitute only a tiny subset of all networks.

Over thousands of years, nevertheless, ordinary people have committed their major energies and most precious resources to trust networks not only migration streams, to be sure, but also religious solidarities, lineages, trade diasporas, patron–client chains, credit networks, societies of mutual aid, youth groups, and some kinds of local communities. We participants in kinship and other trust networks usually take them for granted. But they pose important mysteries: How do they maintain cohesion, control, and, yes, trust when their members spread out into worlds rich with other opportunities and commitments?

Their limiting cases, isolated communes and religious communities, seem easier to explain because their very insulation from the world facilitates continuous monitoring, mutual aid, reciprocity, trust, and barriers to exit. But geographically dispersed trust networks somehow manage to produce similar effects, if not usually at the emotional intensities of isolated communities. Maintaining the boundary between “us” and “them” clearly plays an important part in trust networks’ continued operation (Tilly, 2005b).

Trust networks figure in many migration streams, especially those organized in continuous chains linking limited origins to limited destinations. In fact, chain-linked long-distance migration provides a privileged laboratory for study of transformations in trust networks. Long-distance migration poses serious risks. Those risks dispose potential migrants who

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do not have extensive professional connections or official sponsors to rely on members of their trust networks for information and advice. The same risks inhibit potential migrants who lack the mediation of trust networks from migrating at all. Instead of a broad distribution across destinations as a function of economic opportunities at those destinations, chain migration channels long-distance moves into a few origin-destination streams; large numbers of people from the same village end up in the same towns or urban neighborhoods thousands of miles away.

Networks persist in the process, but change structure and geographic distribution. As participants generally rely on strong ties to others with whom they are carrying on consequential long-term enterprises and placing those enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others, the networks in question commonly qualify as trust networks. Chain migration organized around trust networks contributes to the “segmented assimilation” that Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut see as characteristic of recent migration to the United States (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990).

Without using the term, my former colleague Robert Smith has amply documented the importance of trust networks in the connections migrants form between Mexican villages and New York City. His 15 year participant observation of the migration stream connecting the Puebla village, he calls Ticuani to mainly Mexican concentrations within New York documents both creation of a far-reaching network of trust and deep transformation of the network as a result of interaction among people moving back and forth between the two locales (Smith, 2005). By now, roughly 60% of all living people born in Ticuani live in the United States, mostly in New York (Smith, 2002:147). Many New York-based Ticuanenses, including those born in New York, actually returned frequently to Mexico and spent significant portions of their time in Ticuani. Modest incomes in New York made it possible to cut fine figures in Mexico.

Remittances within Trust Networks

At the same time, remittances from New York money earners to Ticuanense relatives, building of vacation houses in Ticuani, participation of returning emigrants in public ceremonies, direct intervention of emigrants (whether returned or not) in Ticuani politics, establishment of New York-style youth gangs in Ticuani, and entrusting of New York-born children to their grandmothers in Mexico all help transform social structures connecting New York with Puebla. These changes have triple effects:
Deeply altering the organization of power and wealth in Ticuani.
Reshaping the lives of Ticuanenses in both locales.
Creating a new transnational set of trust networks.

Without a continuous flow of earnings from mostly modest occupations in New York, the continuously changing system would collapse. But fed by those resources and by new generations of migrants in both directions, the process sustains boundaries between Ticuanenses and others, shapes relations across those boundaries in both Mexico and the United States, and increases the relative prominence of network segments closely connected to the Ticuanense population in New York. In the medium run, then, the partial success of chain migration has reinforced the viability of trust networks at its core.

Smith objects strongly to analyses of transnational migration that treat it primarily as an assault of globalization on receiving countries. Instead, he insists on the degree to which continuous flows in both directions transform sending communities as well as connections between origin and destination. He also stresses the importance of descending from the national to the local level. As he declares,

Transnational life if lived, in intimate experience, not as ‘transcendence’ of national borders but, rather, as a maintenance of links between one’s own or one’s parents’ hometown, and what it comes to represent, via concrete practices or common imaginings. These evolve, like all cultural practices, in relation to their changing material and institutional contexts. Transnational practices and institutions are thus, in the proximate sense, products of other locally lived processes and customs. In the cases I have studied, transnational life is both quotidian—mailing or receiving remittances or phone calls—and also dramatic, attending feasts and dances and fighting in the hometown, building a school in the hometown, and demanding recognition and political power from hometown authorities (Smith, 2000:205).

Smith shows, among other things, that a hometown association operating from New York City regularly intervenes in Ticuani’s local affairs to the extent of financing the water supply and backing candidates for public office.

Since the 1970s, in fact, many Ticuanense New Yorkers fulfill their village work obligations, or faenas, by means of financial contributions channeled to Mexico through a powerful New York-based committee of emigrants. Smith tells the story of accompanying committee members to JFK airport in 1993 as they went off to consult with Ticuani authorities and contractors about a new water system for the village. For this, he reports,

the largest Ticuani project ever, the Committee raised more than two-thirds of the $150,000 cost of the project, exceeding the Mexican federal, state, and local contributions combined. The Committee has also become involved in Ticuani politics
helping to fashion a set of rules and practices for participating in transnational public life. Fund raising in New York by Ticuanenses has become increasingly important in Ticuani electoral politics (Smith, 2005:3).

In New York, the Committee had assessed each household in New York or Ticuani it judged able to pay a $300 tax they called a “cooperation,” threatening delinquents that their Ticuani houses would not receive water; almost everyone paid, regardless of how long they had been away from Ticuani (Smith, 2000:212). By competing with local Mexican authorities, the New York Committee’s activity was undermining the old structure of local power. It was also converting a segment of the migration-formed trust network into a transnational political institution.

Members of the second generation born in New York, Smith reports, also maintain contact with Ticuani, with the young men importing New York street gang styles, getting respect they cannot command in New York, and adopting macho manners in the village their sisters and girlfriends do not tolerate in New York. Nevertheless, on the average second- and third-generation Ticuanenses establish far broader connections outside the hometown community than did their first-generation forebears (Smith, 2002).

In the longer run, we can speculate that further New York success of Mexican emigrants will increase differentiation within the network, enhance involvement of New York emigrants in competing projects, reduce the average commitment of emigrants and their offspring to enterprises operating in Ticuani, and thereby undermine the system. They will probably multiply external connections with different segments of the migrant population, erode the group boundary, reduce collective control over means of sustenance, and fragment internal relations. So far, however, Ticuani transnational trust networks remain viable.

Similarly, Sarah Mahler’s ethnographic study of migration between El Salvador and New York’s Long Island suburbs documents the profound effect of remittances on sending communities, maintenance of transnational ties into the second generation, the frequent care of U.S. born children by their relatives in El Salvador, and the investment of people at both ends of the migration stream in maintaining their trust network. More numerous than permanent return migrants, Mahler reports that Salvadorans:

Are who enjoy legal immigrant status in the United States and who return for family and community events, such as marriages, baptisms, funerals, and village festivals. Increasingly visible are older returning migrants, generally men in their forties to sixties who fled El Salvador during the war, leaving behind their spouses and young children. With limited education and skills for advancing economically on Long Island, many of these men desired to return home—indeed their families begged them to return—but the families had also grown too dependent upon remittance income to forsake migration altogether. So, before returning, migrants
first sponsor the migration of at least one child, grooming him or her in the basics of migrant life—housing and job. The children ensure that remittances will continue to flow homeward, cash that even highly self-sufficient farmers need to purchase fertilizers and pay for clothing, medical care, and so on (Mahler, 2001a: 120–121; see also Mahler, 2001b; for the terrible toll of the Salvadoran civil war, see Brockett, 2005; Wood, 2003).

While in New York, moreover, Salvadoran immigrants maintain continuous contact with their places of origin by means of letters, dollar remittances, and gifts that flow in both directions. Specialized viajeros who travel frequently between the two countries, Mahler reports, play crucial parts in moving goods, money, and information between Long Island and El Salvador (Mahler, 2001a:117). Salvadorans’ reliance on those intermediaries indicates that they connect via a trust network with the capacity to limit malfeasance, mistakes, and failures.

Clearly such trust networks go beyond simple means-end instrumentalism. They engage their members in webs of rights and obligations. Unlike the short-term contract with Western Union for the transmission of funds from New York to a Salvadoran village, relations with a viajero typically last from one trip to the next. More important, they articulate with larger, longer-lasting networks of social insurance and social control, especially ties among kin and friends at both ends of the migration stream.

Based on interviews with Hispanic migrants to Miami and Los Angeles in 2002, a Pew Hispanic Center study documents the centrality of remittances to connections between sending and receiving communities. Almost all respondents reported sending remittances to support families back home. Most gave remittances priority over their bills and expenses in the United States. “Before anything,” Mexican emigrant respondent Marisela remarked, “I send them the money because they count on it. Then afterwards I pay the bills, my rent, but the first thing I do is send it” (Suro et al., 2002:7).

When it came to basic family expenses back home, most migrants left budgetary control to their families. A Mexican emigrant, Eduardo, told interviewers:

One part is for savings, the other part for the primary necessities like education. It depends on my wife and the priorities she has. So I go ahead and send the money, and it just goes where she uses it (Suro et al., 2002:8).

When it came to investments such as buying land, however, remitting emigrants exercised extensive control over the money; they negotiated binding earmarks with their families in the home community. Each of these arrangements clearly involves mental accounting. In each, earmarking concerns budgeting of remitted funds into distinct categories of legitimate expenditure.
Latin American migrants to the United States commonly use wire services to transmit money back home. A simple search of almost any American city’s Latin American neighborhoods for stores with envíos—remittances—among their advertised wares will verify the importance of wire services. Many migrants also use couriers (often known as viajeros or travelers) to carry money and other valuables. Finally, migrants who return home for visits regularly carry not only money but also other gifts including household appliances. Anyone who has ever taken an inexpensive flight from a U.S. airport to the Caribbean or Latin America can testify to the importance of hand-carried remittances.

To be sure, all such remittance relations mix good will with extensive obligation. Relations between emigrants and households at the origin provide mutual support, as well as reinforcing the migrants’ longer-term claims on membership in the sending community. Earmarked remittances buttress the crucial relations as they assert the senders’ power over those relations. The boundary between faithful remitters and defaulters divides upstanding family members from dishonorable exiles, but it also separates households that regularly receive support of their migrant members from less fortunate households at the origin.

Reporting on his extensive fieldwork in the Caribbean island of Montserrat as well as in London, Stuart Philpott describes a powerful system of informal controls over remittances from migrants in Great Britain. He remarks,

Children are impressed with the behavior expected from the migrants from a fairly early age. These expectations are implicitly taught in the home through the praise of migrants who send remittances and through the condemnation of the ‘worthless-minded’ kin who do not ‘notice their families.’ Stories such as one about the migrant who returned from America with 32 trunk loads of gifts for distribution to his family and friends and another about a woman who literally sent her brother a car from America in the days when the only other cars were owned by the wealthiest estate owners have virtually become moral precepts (Philpott, 1968:468).

Philpott documents children’s trips to the post office in hopes of retrieving money-bearing letters, children’s visions of the future in which they emigrate and send back support for their families, complex allocations of money received among family members, reciprocity by sending of homegrown products back to Britain, black magic employed to coerce reluctant remitters, in short, a large array of controls backing up the general understanding that honorable emigrants meet their obligations to family and friends by means of remittances. The obvious consequence: Division of emigrants into the two categories of honorable and dishonorable (see also Roberts and Morris, 2003).
At the United States end, such trust networks offer connections with jobs, housing, sociability, and care all crucial forms of insurance for high-risk migrants. At the Latin American end, they offer opportunities to return home after a U.S. stint, to receive respect that runs very short in New York or Los Angeles, to secure care for young children born in the United States, and to integrate older versions of the same children into the rituals, routines, language, and interpersonal ties of the home culture (Hodagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Hodagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 2002; Levitt, 2001a,b, 2004; Menjivar, 2000, 2002). All this depends on rights and reciprocity over the longer term.

**Trust Networks as Obligation and Constraint**

At the same time, membership in trust networks imposes stringent obligations. If you fail to help new arrivals in the United States, default in your sending of promised remittances, or neglect fellow members of the migrant stream in favor of newfound American friends, you are likely to find yourself criticized or shunned. In trust networks, criticism and shunning regularly signal that if a wayward member does not reform, she will lose access to the social insurance ordinarily provided by the network. Some of the strife and misunderstanding between first and second generations stems precisely from the attempt of older members to keep youngsters within the web of mutual obligation. But differences by gender also arise, for example as wives discover that they actually enjoy the marital leverage that employment and city life give them, while their husbands resist the loss of their macho authority (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1992; Hirsch, 2003).

Members of migrant trust networks reinforce the rights and obligations built into those networks by traveling recurrently in both directions. As a result, ideas, practices, and symbols also flow between the United States and Latin America. Peggy Levitt describes the circulation of U.S. cultural artifacts between Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, and the Dominican town she calls Miraflores from which a nucleus of Jamaica Plain Dominicans migrated:

In Miraflores, villagers often dress in T-shirts emblazoned with the names of businesses in Massachusetts, although they do not know what these words or logos mean. They proudly serve their visitors coffee with Cremora and juice made from Tang (Levitt, 2001a:2).

But, so to speak, these artifacts are merely the cream on the coffee. They register the regularity of contact within migrant networks. The same Dominican villagers who display Boston-area gear also take care of the
emigrants' children, handle local business for them, and arrange lodging and entertainment for them when they return to the Dominican Republic.

Back in the United States, membership in trust networks facilitates immigrants' lives in some regards, but it also tends to confine them to niches created and inhabited by other immigrants. Even in the market-dominated U.S., most people acquire jobs, housing, and major consumer goods through personal contacts (DiMaggio and Louch, 1998; Smith-Doerr and Powell, 2005; Tilly, 1998; Tilly and Tilly, 1998; Chapter 9, Zelizer, 2005).

If you live in a constricted network, your contacts confine you to a limited range of opportunities. Patricia Fernández Kelly and Richard Schauffler describe the plight of a San Diego family from Michoacan, Mexico, the Mendozas. The family had entered the United States in a car trunk 14 years earlier but had since become legal residents in an amnesty program. Fernández Kelly and Schauffler report:

For the past 10 years, Mr. Mendoza has worked as a busboy in a fancy restaurant that caters to tourists, a position he secured through a Mexican friend. He is a hardworking and modest man who wants his son, Carlos, to study so that he can get a good job: ‘I want him to be better than me, not for my sake but for his sake and that of his own family.’ Mrs. Mendoza ironed clothes at a Chinese-owned laundry and complains bitterly that her employers are prejudiced toward her and other Mexicans.

Carlos is doing well in school; he was the only boy at Cabrillo junior high to be elected to the honor society last year. He wants to become an engineer and go back to Mexico. Life in San Diego has been hard on him; the gold chain his parents gave him as a gift was ripped from around his neck by neighborhood thugs; his bicycle remains locked up inside the house, because riding it would mean losing it to the same local bullies. His younger sister, Amelia, is not doing as well in school and dresses like a chola (female gang member), although she insists it is only for the style. Her parents worry but feel helpless (Fernández Kelly and Schauffler, 1996:38).

This account does not tell us, of course, to what extent the Mendozas have maintained their membership in the trust network that brought them to the United States. But the family’s limited opportunities and precarious survival in San Diego clearly depend in part on the narrowness of their current networks. Even today, affluent Americans are unsurprised when we notice that the busboys in a fancy restaurant are Mexican, but impressed when the waiter or waitress turns out to come from Mexico. Niches based on trust networks help immigrants locate themselves in a new land, all right. But they also channel opportunities into a relatively narrow range. If the opportunities include access to capital, advanced education, or stardom, network members often do well. If they concentrate in low-wage labor, network members suffer the consequences.
Precisely because they are shielding serious long-term enterprises simultaneously from external predation and internal failures, trust networks always erect tougher, sharper us them boundaries than the blurred edges of friendship and neighborhood. All such boundaries produce sharp implicit choices. On one side of the boundary lie security, solidarity, mutual aid, and restricted opportunity. On the other side beckon new opportunities, more extensive connections, and escapes from tyranny. Those who stick faithfully within trust networks generally reach new opportunities, fresh connections, and personal independence more rarely and slowly. They also suffer more acutely from shunning and expulsion when those punishments occur.

Whether trust networks retain their vigor into the second and later generations depends on the extent to which members of those generations continue to gain from membership. If the networks adapt, incorporate new connections, and facilitate members’ opportunities at the migrant stream’s destination, they more frequently survive and prosper. If they do not adapt, incorporate new connections, and facilitate members’ opportunities at the destination, then transnational ties decline in the long run. Whether they survive or not, nevertheless, trust networks shape the lives of successive immigrant generations.

Here is another way of putting my main point: By sniffing out the operation of trust networks, students of Latin American migration to and from North America have a splendid opportunity to illuminate fundamental social processes that go on throughout the world.

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