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► **To cite this version:**

Josepha Milazzo, Thomas Lacroix. How “Migrant Organizations” Impact Globalization: Interview of Thomas Lacroix by Josepha Milazzo (Migration Systems). 2017. hal-01618960

HAL Id: hal-01618960

<https://hal.science/hal-01618960>

Submitted on 6 Mar 2024

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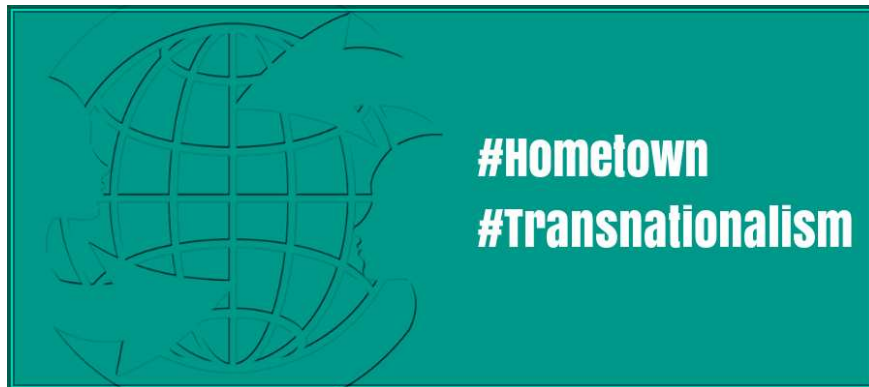
Migration Systems

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Aug 26, 2017 · 4 min read

How “Migrant Organizations” Impact Globalization



Migrants often have transnational lives; engaging in the society of the country they migrated to, as well as in their origin society. Thomas Lacroix’s book, “Hometown Transnationalism”, based on 15 years of research on diaspora communities, explains the crucial role of organizations created by migrants have in an increasingly transnational environment.

Josepha Milazzo: How do you define ‘Hometown Transnationalism’?

Thomas Lacroix: Hometown transnationalism (or “transnationalisme villageois” in French) is the set of social practices and ties that migrants maintain with their place of origin. There is a growing evolution and complexity of this transnationalism: practices are becoming more and more sophisticated, we move from sending simple money to more and more complex projects (construction of schools, etc.) These practices are a consequence of attachment of migrants to their community of origin, as well as their anchoring in the host society. Through their actions, ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations are a vector of both development and modernity.

JM: What is the impact of these ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations on integration and on development in origin countries?

TL: The presence and actions of ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations allow individuals to maintain a connection to their origin culture, while continuing their integration in the host country and helping others integrate. In the short term, ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations make it easier for newly arrived migrants to settle in, by providing support and information to help the new comers access housing and employment. In the long term, ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations serve as a vehicle through which people give meaning to their migration experience and maintain a connection to their origin society. They make it possible for individuals to be involved in organizing and contributing to festivals and ceremonies in the origin country; to respond to specific needs of people back home; and above all, to send money to families who stayed behind. ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations are therefore “mediating institutions” between migrants and the communities in the origin countries. They play a role in integration and development, both “here” and “there”.

JM: Your research shows that ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations in different countries develop similar solutions to their address needs. Can you explain these findings?

TL: Since the mid-1990’s, the involvement of ‘Hometown Transnational’ organizations in development of their country of origin has been increasing. One can observe this increase in migrant groups I have studied—including the Maghreb diaspora in France and the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, and also amongst sub-Saharan or Latin American migrants in Europe or the United States. This dynamics is on one side the product of a greater integration of migrant communities in the receiving spaces, since having access to more resources makes it possible for migrant communities to engage in ever more complex projects. At the same time and on the other side, the increased involvement of diaspora communities in development in their origin country is a response to a growing need in origin societies, many of which are under the effect of structural adjustment policies (“free market” economic reforms, JM) in which the State is increasingly neglecting to supply the infrastructures it once did.

MS: What other research on migration and transnationalism are you currently working on?

TL: I am interested in the behavior of states vis-à-vis non-state actors on the international scene and in particular towards migrants. The countries of the South have led, under the influence of structural adjustment policies, to a reform of their local development strategy.

This strategy is based on the greater delegation of powers to local authorities but without increasing financial resources, which leads them to turn to national or international actors (i.e. NGOs, or migrant associations). There is thus a trans-nationalization of the policy of local development, often supported by the policies of co-development in the North. I am thus interested in the idea of transnational State, visible through the search for complementarity between circulation and territorialization. This dynamic is, in my view, a fundamental but little-known facet of globalization.



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