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Paper: Intimate Labors Conference, October 4-6th, 2007, University of California, Santa Barbara

Building Communities of Sentiments: Money, Emotions, and Decision-Making Among Maya Migrants

In the year 2006, Mexican migrants sent an estimated US\$25 billion dollars to their natal communities in Mexico. The potential development impact of remittances on the economies of underdeveloped countries is no longer disputed (Martin 2001). As a result, understanding migrant remittance practices has become a critical area of study for migration scholars. By focusing primarily on economic transfers, however, these studies overlook migrants' *non-monetary* contributions. Peggy Levitt (1998) has shown that "social remittances"—the ideas, values, behaviors, and social capital migrants acquire in the migrant site—also transform the cultural, social, and political life of natal communities.

But are migrant contributions limited to economic and social remittances? Building on the efforts of these scholars to address migrant contributions beyond the economic, I examine the role the emotive plays in the formation and maintenance of migrant communities. The act of migrating involves sentiments. Fear, love, anger, pain, and isolation are evoked throughout the processes of departure, settlement, and return. What role do these sentiments play in social relationships that exist across an expanded space? It is these sentiments that help imagine community or the lack thereof that weaken social relationships across space.

Through a qualitative investigation of Maya migrants' resource allocations in the Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, I focus on the care and emotional work involved in sustaining such ties and analyze how class, gender, and race relations manifest themselves in this type of intimate labor. I argue that "sentient resources"—the sentiments distributed within a migrant circuit with the intention of improving the quality of life of its members—also sustain and develop communities in Mexico by providing emotional and social support to natal families. The distribution and use of sentient resources suggests that they enhance the quality of life of rural residents and strengthen community ties within migrant circuits. Studying the qualitative, sentient resources that exist within a migrant circuit offers social scientists the opportunity to understand the kinds of relationships that develop as a result of migrant contributions and the emotional attachments that underlay these practices. Finally, I discuss the implications of this research for transnational communities. While the resources found within a regional circuit may not be replicated or accessible within a transnational circuit, the absence or continuing presence of these resources presents an opportunity for us to reflect on how the local shapes the transnational, how immigrants construct a transnational community, on what binds people together, and on the ruptures that occur as people cross national boundaries.