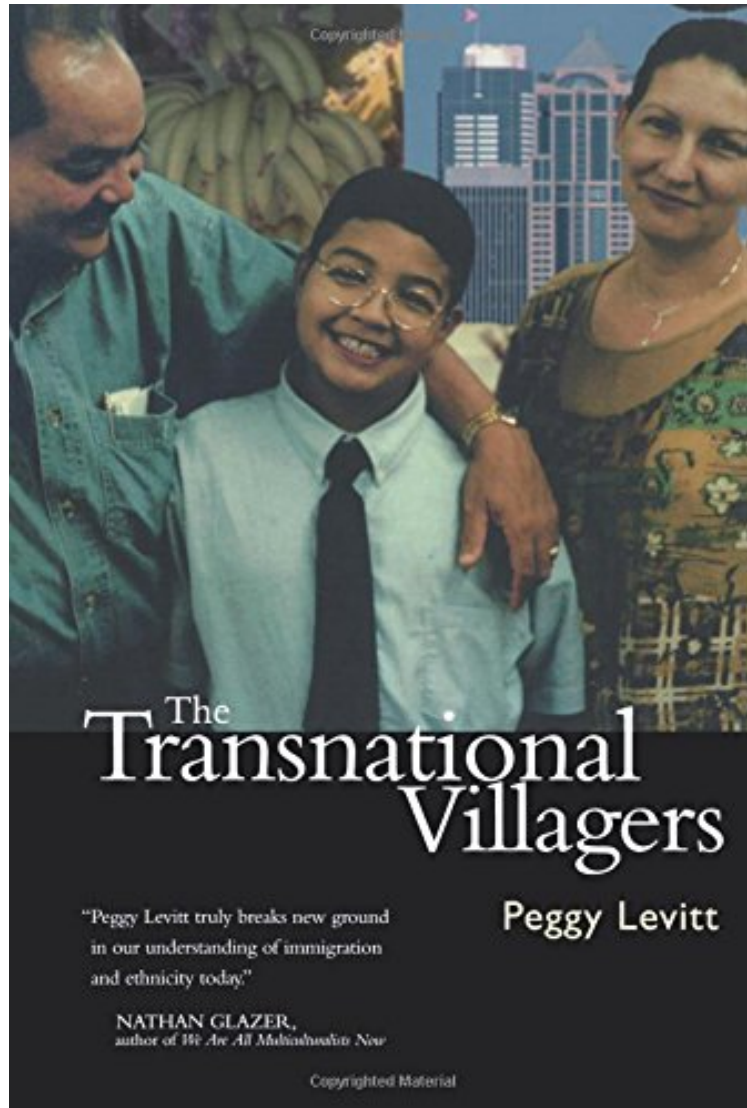


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## The Transnational Villagers

*Peggy Levitt*

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**Peggy Levitt : The Transnational Villagers** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Transnational Villagers:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Happy CustomerBy Jenn UnknownVery satisfied with my purchase and price. I was pleased with the overall service and time it took to get to me.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Better than would be expected explanation of Migrant LifeBy Daniel A. StoneOver eighty years ago, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki postulated that the effect of immigration to the United States by over a million Poles would not only change the Polish arrivals, but would also alter the definition, at least slightly, of what it meant to be

American-their study showed little concern for what would happen in Poland, and need not have contained any concern for a concept such as trans-nationality. As Peggy Levitt shows though in her study of Dominican immigrants- specifically, and it would seem exclusively, Miraflores- to the Jamaica Plains section of Boston, *The Transnational Villagers*, large scale immigration of Dominicans to the United States have brought about radical and far reaching effects on the culture and economy of the Dominican Republic. As Levitt demonstrates through the anecdotes of informants and about informants, Miraflores' residents, whether migrants or non-migrants, have had their ways of life thoroughly altered by the presence of so many of their townfolk in Jamaica Plains. These changes, in things as frivolous as dress and as serious as attitudes towards the opposite sex and marriage, are all part and parcel of an ideological and material dialectic going on between perceived Dominican norms and those arising from extended contact with American culture and economy. Dominican contact with American society is not a new occurrence. The fact baseball is more popular than soccer is but only one example of cultural exchange, and like the vast majority of immigrants making their way to the United States, they have some acquaintance with American popular culture even if only through media images. Trans-nationality among Dominicans of working class status is a relatively new affair, but one which is beginning to have far reaching effects- such as the relative ease with which Dominicans can attain bi-nationality because of legal reforms. In regards to assimilation into the mainstream of American culture, trans-nationalization can be as much an inhibiting factor as it is a promoter. Considering the examples that Levitt gives of the working and living conditions of Dominicans in Boston, where most immigrants work long hours at jobs that do not bring them into contact with the larger Anglophone world, and the kind of problems that children apparently have trouble adjusting to either world when they go back and forth between the two, would both seem to be indications that trans-nationalization was not helping assimilation along. The fact that the Dominican Republic's government no longer treats trans-nationals as suspect, at least to the extent that people who hold American citizenship can hold most offices, may promote some form of assimilation, because the legal consequences of doing such has become virtually non-existent for those who may hope to return home. This will be a different form of assimilation than nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants experienced, but it will be assimilation of a sort- a kind that is much more capable of maintaining close ties to the home country than the generations before. As Levitt shows almost uncategorically, trans-nationalization has thoroughly altered gender roles among Dominicans in the United States, and has altered gender roles to a limited degree on the island itself- at least among return migrants. This, though, is not a case of immigrants assimilating American values about gender, which run the gamut from machismo to conservatism to feminism, but is rather a pragmatic response to the material changes arising from immigration. In Jamaica Plains, life is dominated by work to such a degree that many men simply do not have the time to have extramarital affairs. Also, since women are working, a great many men find themselves in the unfamiliar position of having to take on at least a few tasks which would have been considered solely women's work on the island. As Levitt further points out as well, relative poverty and cold weather even have the affect of keeping couples closer together- forms of single gender sociability prevalent on the island simply become impractical to maintain. Return migrants, if Levitt's sources are any indices; do not completely revert to old gender based habits upon their return to the island- though men especially may be subtle about just how much their behavior has changed. This response barely touches upon the theoretical frameworks which Levitt works within, partially because of reasons of space, but mostly because theory is not one of my strongest suits. Please forgive the omission.

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Neo-Modernization Theory at It's Best! By A Customer Levitt offers us a number of interesting insights into the lives of Dominican migrants in the 21st Century. She tells us that the lives of Dominicans in the U.S. and those who remain in their local communities at home are shaped by the transnational experience. This is largely the product of what she refers to as "social remittance." Levitt also goes into a long discussion of the role that institutions like political parties, the Church, and community development organizations play in this process. In many ways this analysis is a re-cycled version of earlier analyses of immigrants. For instance, Bodner gives us a version of this story in "The Transplanted." Of course, Levitt attributed this new form of "Transnationalism" to things like improvements in technology, communications, transportation, and interpretations of citizenship by governments. For those of us who remember the heyday of modernization theory, much of this sounds familiar, and wanton for a critique focusing on issues of inequality. Although Levitt takes the discussion of Transnationalism further than some of her contemporaries, it remains encumbered by the theoretical limitations of her selected framework.

Contrary to popular opinion, increasing numbers of migrants continue to participate in the political, social, and economic lives of their countries of origin even as they put down roots in the United States. *The Transnational Villagers* offers a detailed, compelling account of how ordinary people keep their feet in two worlds and create communities that span borders. Peggy Levitt explores the powerful familial, religious, and political connections that arise between Miraflores, a town in the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood in Boston and examines the ways in which these ties transform life in both the home and host country. *The Transnational Villagers* is one of only a few books based on in-depth fieldwork in the countries of origin and reception. It provides a moving, detailed account of how transnational migration transforms family and work life, challenges migrants' ideas about race

and gender, and alters life for those who stay behind as much, if not more, than for those who migrate. It calls into question conventional thinking about immigration by showing that assimilation and transnational lifestyles are not incompatible. In fact, in this era of increasing economic and political globalization, living transnationally may become the rule rather than the exception.