



**The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies**  
University of California, San Diego

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**Diminished or Revitalized Tradition of Return?  
Transnational Migration in Bolivia's Valle Alto**

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Working Paper 172

December 2008

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# Diminished or Revitalized Tradition of Return? Transnational Migration in Bolivia's Valle Alto

Female relatives were chatting in Don Orlando and Doña Alicia's home in Arlington, Virginia. They had recently arrived from Santa Rosa, a village in the Valle Alto area (close to the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia). One of them approached to show us the baby she carried as a small treasure in her arms. We asked if she had brought it from Bolivia. "No," she told us, "this one was born in the United States." Later, at supper, Don Orlando, who divided 25 years of his life between Arbieta (his hometown in the Valle Alto) and Argentina before settling in the United States in the late 1980s, remarked that he would return to the Valley to retire and plant peaches. His wife Alicia, dressed in an elegant Bolivian skirt (which provokes tears of nostalgia among the Cochabambinos who see her at the supermarket), said that she supports him because she can't imagine growing old in the United States. However, her daughters-in-law—wives of her three older sons as well as prosperous construction workers in Virginia—laughed at the naiveté of this plan. They said they would like to return just as much, although the most likely scenario is that they would have to stay in the United States permanently.

As Alfonso Hinojosa (2006:11) points out, what could be a theoretical description of transnationalism in Bolivia, and particularly in Cochabamba, becomes a "concrete, tangible and striking" reality. Like so many other examples from rural Bolivia, the situation just narrated suggests comprehensive transnationalism—in which social, economic, and cultural ties strongly bind migrants to their homeland (Levitt and Waters, 2002). These ties are sustained in "economic, political, and sociocultural occupations and activities that require regular, long-term contacts across borders for their success" (Levitt, 2001:6; see also Portes et al., 1999). But how long will this "successful" transnationalism endure? Will these families continue to be able to manage their activities in this manner? Or are there cultural and perhaps generational differences that could lead to permanent separation?

Not far away from Santa Rosa and Arbieta, in nearby Punata province, many young Punateños (actually, half are Punateñas) are seeking their fortunes abroad, in Spain and to a lesser degree the United States, which offer better opportunities for high-paying work than Argentina—the traditional emigrant destination. But it is more costly and difficult to travel

to Spain or the U.S., so return trips are less frequent, and, arguably, home ties may attenuate over time. Bolivian migration has been dominated by a “culture of return” for many years. Is this changing?

There is no clear answer. There are relatively few studies of the comprehensiveness of transnationalism in the Valle Alto, and none on its sustainability. Also, it is a bit soon to fully judge the impact of the new geography of Bolivian emigration. But there are ways to begin appraising this impact. One way is to rely on survey data to examine transnational families (those with migrants currently abroad) across various dimensions of transnationalism (social, cultural, economic). A second way, again relying on survey data, is to ask whether those families with more cumulated time abroad have less “anchorage” (Cortes, 2002) to Bolivia, and what types of anchorage, compared to families with less time abroad. A third path is to move beyond the comparison of families at a given time, to investigate what has happened historically (and may happen) at the community level (Cortes, 2004a 2004b; de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007). We ask whether these communities preserve their transnational ties and what effect this has on their continued growth and prosperity.

This study will follow these interpretive paths, applying two different methods: (1) a detailed survey by the first author of over 400 families living in three *municipios* (counties) of the Valle Alto (a rural region near Cochabamba, Bolivia), in late 2007; and (2) extensive interviews by the second author with migrants, their families, and key informants in the same region over the past five years, supplemented by historical insights derived from his study and residence in the region. This analysis is in the tradition of the “ethnosurvey” (Massey and Zenteno, 2000), combining a closed survey instrument applied to a relatively large and representative sample; with a more open-ended field interview methodology that yields in-depth knowledge (including the reasons behind the facts), from a more selective

group. One author develops the central hypothesis while the other expands upon its possible overtones, from a complementary stance.

## TRANSNATIONALISM AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

“Core” transnationalism involves *strong* (multi-dimensional, frequent) connections between places over *extended periods of time* (Levitt, 2001:4-15; Pries, 2001; Levitt and Waters, 2002). Regarding transnational (international) migration, these connections are sustained, in particular, by economic as well as social remittances (the ideas, behaviors, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending communities), and facilitated by new communication technology. The result, as Levitt (2001) puts it, is that “village life takes place in two places”. It might be added that these interconnections are place to place rather than country to country, so the term *translocalism* may actually be more appropriate than transnationalism (Price, 2006). Support for the notion of international migration as transnationalism is widespread in the literature (e.g., Herrera, 2001; Mountz and Wright, 1996; Goldring, 2004; Rodman and Conway, 2005; Kibria, 2002:92-97; Rangaswamy, 2000; Chaichian, 1997; Zhou and Bankston, 1994; Airriess, 2008).

The question is not whether transnational migration is a useful and empirically justifiable concept, for it clearly is, but how strong these transnational connections are, and how long they last. In the case of wage labor migration from underdeveloped to developed countries, particularly over long distances, there are barriers to entry and demands to assimilate that affect both the incidence and the permanence of migration. On the one hand, these host-imposed pressures may kindle social organization and even “cultural retrenchment” within the migrant community (Levitt, 2001:19; Jones, 2008). However, these pressures and restrictions may also compel migrants to modify aspects of their culture (social mores, religious practices, language) that inhibit their social and economic

*integration* into the host society. As this integration proceeds (resulting in better jobs, the bringing of family members, home ownership, legalization), economic and social anchorage to the destination strengthen, even as anchorage to the origin atrophies. Transnational communities may become *transitional communities*—whose primary function is to promote adjustment to the host society. The depth and reciprocity of connections with home lessen, especially as more members of the family relocate to the host country and children are born and raised there.

Robert Smith (2001), in his detailed study of migrants from Ticuari (a village in Puebla, Mexico) to New York City, argues that “...an important question—largely begged by many analyses of transnationalization, especially ethnographic and contemporary ones—regard(s) the finite time period and quality of the internal dynamic of local-level transnational life, and what factors will tend to increase or decrease its durability.” He finds that Ticuari does not appear to be reproducing itself over time in New York, [for example] by incorporating second-generation or new first generation immigrants into the committee that oversees flows of resources back to the village. Although its ties to New York remain deep, the village is “emptying out” as migrants to New York become more permanent and as the declining base population sends fewer and fewer migrants. Smith’s conclusions align with other recent Mexican research concerning the increasingly permanent settlement of migrant families in the United States, and the impact this has on transnationalism over time and across generations (Cornelius, 2007; Marcelli and Lowell, 2005; Massey, 2006; Lozano, 1993:13-18; Riosmena, 2004; Reyes, 2004; Roberts et al., 1999; Binford, 2003; DiSipio, 2002; Mooney, 2004). They are also supported by research elsewhere in Latin America. Mahler (1998), for example, found that due to problems in El Salvador and the high cost of return and re-entry to the U.S., most, of her informants did not live in transnational “circuits, but were settling permanently on Long Island (see also

CEPAL, 1991). Turkish migrants to Europe exhibit analogous trends (Jergens, 2001; Escobar et al., 2006).

## BOLIVIAN TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Bolivia, like Mexico, is a country with large swaths of rural poverty, a difficult physical environment, and an unfavorable political history that saw it lose half its national territory (Fifer, 1972). Unlike Mexico, however, Bolivia has been largely bypassed by the process of economic globalization. Wage labor migration has helped provide a pathway out of these difficulties. Migrant remittances not only improve the national trade balance, but also reduce national income inequalities by channeling money directly into poorer regions—a sort of grassroots foreign aid. This is an example of “transnationalism from below” because it involves the decisions of thousands of migrants and their families as opposed to those of economic and political elites—“transnationalism from above” (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).

Today some 1/5 of all Bolivians live outside their country of birth; half have a family member living abroad; and as many as 2/3 of young people intend to live abroad (de la Torre, 2006:32-33). Recent estimates by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (2006) place monetary remittances to Bolivia at close to one billion dollars per year, almost 10% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product. Mexico—the country that receives more in monetary remittances than any other—had a comparable figure of 3%. In the past few years Bolivia has surged ahead of all other South American countries in remittances as a percentage of GDP.

(Figure 1 about here)

The traditional Bolivian migration hearth is the Valle Alto region in the greater Cochabamba area of central Bolivia (Figure 1). The imprint of the *alloyu*, the Incan communal landholding system, and the colonial *mita* and *piquero* (smallholder plots) have played important roles in the current fragmentation of farmland (Cortes, 2001; Dandler and Medeiros, 1988; Zoomers, 1999), simultaneously providing little land and freeing peasants to migrate elsewhere in search of income (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:60-62). Labor migration from this region began early in the 20th century and was directed to the saltpeter (potassium nitrate) mines of northern Chile (González, 1996). This was followed by movement to the Bolivian department of Potosí, establishing a migratory cycle that in the case of many families spanned 15 to 20 years (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2006:60-67). After 1950, migration focused on Argentina, initially to seasonal agricultural jobs in the northwest of the country, and later, to construction jobs in Buenos Aires (Hinojosa et al., 2000; Hinojosa, 2002:28-30; de la Torre and Alfaro, 2006:59-86). These streams, largely male, dominated until the Argentine economic crisis of the mid-1990s shifted flows to the United States. After 2000, economic downturn and anti-terrorist policies in the United States re-directed the flows yet again, this time to Spain, which had become attractive especially for female migrants. Today, more than half the Valle Alto absentee migrants continue to go to Argentina, a fifth to the United States, and another fifth to Spain. These historical precedents suggest what Hinojosa calls a *culture of mobility*—that is to say, knowledge and practices that permit a better and more sustainable use of resources (economic, human, or natural) not only for family survival, but also for the reproduction of an entire community and society (Hinojosa, 2006:12-13). In summary, emigration is a deep and longstanding fixture of the Bolivian cultural landscape, as epitomized in the Valle Alto region. The preponderance of this migration is cyclical and temporary, and remittances are

mainly targeted to nuclear families. As a result, transnationalism is prevalent and a “culture of return” predominates.

De la Torre (2006) identifies a *transnational family* as one in which at least one family member is currently participating in international migration. In his studies of the Valle Alto, de la Torre finds that these families incorporate all the aspects of transnationalism identified by Levitt and Pries: local and external family members are related to each other on a frequent basis through monetary remittances, demonstrations of family solidarity and involvement in the community (through celebration of community saints’ days and fiestas). Just as in the case of the Mexican hearth area of Zacatecas (Jones, 1995), remittances are spent not only for direct sustenance of the family, but also for “ostentation” (to improve the family’s social status in the community), for investment in agricultural operations and home businesses, for education and medical care, and for community projects (de la Torre 2006:146-169). Some authors argue that these investments are relatively minor (Fundación Pasos, 2008:35-44). Others believe that migration leads to a deterioration of agricultural pursuits (Ramírez quoted by Roncken and Forsberg, 2007:19); and to the loss of a community’s economically active population (Camacho quoted by Roncken and Forsberg, 2007:19). Whatever their volume, community investments by migrants have increased in recent years, through organizations of Bolivians abroad such as INCOPEA (The Institute of Cooperation for the Province of Esteban Arze, in Virginia) supporting projects that include sports stadiums, cobbled paving, plazas, and church improvements (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:74-117). The adhesive that binds families across so many miles is the process of *social communication*, by which village views and values are transmitted to the destination community (*cultural/social preservation*), and host society views, values, and behaviors are transmitted to the village (*social remittances*).

Social remittances have considerable historical precedent in the Valle Alto, and these remittances affect both migrant and non-migrant households. For example, Bolivians from the Valle Alto participated in labor unions in the Chilean saltpeter mines where they worked prior to 1930 (Gonzalez, 1996). Later, these migrants returned with the mindset of salaried workers—in contrast to the semi-slavery (*pongueaje*) they had previously been subjected to as farm workers in the Valle (interviews with F. Castellón, 1/9/06; A. Linares, 16/12/06; cited in de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:62-63). Also, they returned speaking more Spanish than Quechua. Finally, they brought back a passion for soccer and eventually established sports fraternities and soccer clubs based on their Chilean experience. In Arbiето, these clubs took a leading role in organizing soccer tournaments locally as well as among Arbiето residents living in the United States.

Nevertheless, as suggested in the work of Smith, Mahler, Cornelius, Jergens, and others, transnational migration systems are susceptible to forces that make migration permanent. This appears to be especially true when there is a wide developmental gap, and a large distance, between sending and receiving communities. Dandler and Medeiros (1988), surveying families in the Valle Alto and Valle Bajo, found that length of Bolivian experience in Argentina increased the likelihood of getting married there or taking one's wife there, and of owning a home there. Combined with political, geographic, and economic barriers that make return and re-entry difficult for unauthorized migrants (perhaps 2/3 of Bolivian migrants fall in this category), these experiences lead to greater migration permanence (Bastia, 2005; Grimson, 2005). With greater permanence comes the greater incidence of legalization. For Arbiетеños living in the United States, for example, legal American residency is desirable not only because it augments migrants' rights in the host country (purchase of a home, access to credit, access to social benefits), but because legal status opens the possibility of continuous mobility between the United States and

Bolivia and confers higher social status (in this regard, they prefer to call themselves “residentes” instead of “migrantes” (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:24-29). Nevertheless, many are not returning permanently to Bolivia. Evidence for this is found in families that are split between Virginia and Arbieta, and migrants who have not been home for five years or more. Unfortunately, there are no studies addressing whether these more permanent Valle Alto migrants are cutting their transnational ties, and if they are, in what ways. This is the principal rationale for the current study.

## STUDY AREA AND STUDY DESIGN

The Valle Alto region (Fig. 1) is a large intermontaine valley in the Bolivian department (state) of Cochabamba. The valley lies at approximately 2700 meters (8860 feet) elevation and has a tropical highland *tierra fría* climate averaging 21 degrees C. (70 degrees F.)—ideal for year-round production of grains, orchard crops, and potatoes. Its main population centers are small (under 15,000) and they lie within an hour’s drive southeast of the city of Cochabamba (population 500,000 in 2001). The “core” Valle Alto includes three provinces: Esteban Arze, Germán Jordán, and Punata. Within this core area, three *municipios* were selected for the household survey: Punata and San Benito (in Punata province), and Tarata (in Esteban Arze province) (Fig. 1). Their choice was based on the following considerations: (1) they are relatively uninvestigated locales; (2) they represent the geographic and economic diversity of the region; and (3) they include both urban and rural centers. The urban places (above 2000 population) in the respective *municipios*, with their 2001 populations, were all county seats: Punata (14,742), San Benito (2,029), and Tarata (3,323). The rural population of the three *municipios* overall was 27,481, or 58% of their total population in 2001. Our ultimate completed sample of 417 households was 53% rural, but because rural population in the area was stagnant or declining between 2001 and

2007, this rural undersampling likely makes our analysis more representative of the current situation.

A noteworthy difference between this and previous studies is that in this study both migrant and non-migrant households were surveyed. This gives us an explicit comparative standard for judging the impacts of migration as well as its selectivity across demographic characteristics of the population. The sampling frame for each *municipio* included the county seat plus a random sample of villages above 200 population, as tabulated in the 2001 Census of Bolivia. The target sample size for each place selected for interviewing was determined on the basis of its proportion of the total families for its category of place (either urban or rural). Within the selected places, homes were chosen randomly by the interviewers. Three sociology students working on their bachelors theses at the San Simón University, Cochabamba, were recruited competitively to carry out the household interviews. These students, all with extensive interview experience as well as professional interest in the topic, administered a seven-page interview schedule to the adult household member (15 years old or above) most knowledgeable about household demographics, economics, and migration behavior. This schedule included detailed questions on possessions and expenses of the household in addition to vital statistics and migration experience of all adult household members. The questionnaire required from twenty to forty minutes to administer.

The interviews were carried out between September 5<sup>th</sup> and November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007. In addition to the 417 completed surveys, twenty open-ended follow-up interviews were conducted by the first author and an assistant, with selected families whose experiences appeared especially interesting or representative. The second author, drawing upon five years of field experience in the Valle Alto (Esteban Arze and Cliza provinces), and two

books on transnational migration in the region, provides historical and ethnographic depth to the statistical analyses below.

## RESULTS

### *The strength of Valle Alto transnationalism*

Following de la Torre (2006), we define a “transnational” household as one wherein at least one member was working or seeking work overseas at the time of the interview. Out of a total sample of 417 households, 191 (46%) were transnational on this criterion. This is close to the statistic, cited earlier, that half of Bolivians have a family member abroad. The term “absentee” has been used in other studies to refer to family members working abroad. On the other hand, 167 households (40%) were “non-emigrant” households, in that no member had ever worked abroad. The remaining 59 households (14%), referred to as “dormant” (“returnee” is an equally appropriate term) had a member who had emigrated previously but was now back in Bolivia. These dormant households are not analyzed below.

(Table 1 about here)

In Table 1, non-emigrant households provide a comparative standard for judging the social and economic behaviors of transnational households. In a sense, the former households may be taken to represent what the community would be like “without” international migration. Thus, the comparison reveals some independent influences of migration. Of course, since migration has indirectly influenced non-migrant households, this is an imperfect standard.

The results given in Table 1 suggest that transnationalism is not simply present in the Valle Alto, but deeply embedded along the dimensions of social gravitation, social remittances, and economic remittances. **Social gravitation**, conceptualized in terms of the family's relative demographic mass at origin and destination, includes the splitting of the household between Bolivia and the exterior world. The average non-emigrant Valle Alto household consists of 4.5 members. By way of contrast, the average transnational household has at least 6.5 members— 4.6 in Bolivia and at least 1.9 abroad (the 1.9 represents adults only, since children abroad were not recorded on the questionnaire). Related to this actual demographic mass is potential demographic mass as measured by whether the majority of migrants in the family intend to return to live in Bolivia. In over 80% of the families interviewed, this is the case, suggesting that this gravitation towards the destination may be temporary. However, whether these migrants actually return home is another question, and if they do, do they leave behind children and grandchildren who were born abroad?

To continue with the results in Table 1, **social remittances** include the flow of ideas, behaviors, cultural solidarity, etc., from absentee family members back to their origin families in Bolivia. *Communication* involves the frequency of contact between migrants working abroad and their families back home. Over 90% of absentees (migrants abroad) phone home at least once a month. The average migrant visits home once in five years. However, this should be understood not in terms of emotional attachment to home, but in terms of the geopolitical difficulties of migrating and then returning to the host country. Another dimension of social remittances is *cultural participation*, which involves support for Bolivian culture and social organizations. In half the transnational households, a migrant participates in Bolivian celebrations abroad (e.g., national independence on August 6 and festivals to honor saints and virgins on dates that vary with the community).

This appears to be quite high if one takes account of the long work hours and demands that Bolivians face to integrate economically and socially into host societies. Formal membership in Bolivian social organizations at the destination is much lower (1 in 5 transnational families acknowledged this).

Moving on to *cultural attitudes*, a couple of notes on measuring attitudes are in order. In our survey, the attitudes recorded are those of the interviewee, and therefore may be an imperfect reflection of family attitudes, especially when a son or daughter was interviewed. To partly correct for this, Table 1 includes only the attitudes of households in which a male or female head of household was interviewed (this was the case with two-thirds of the interviews). Given the close-knit families in the Valle Alto, it may be assumed that the opinions of heads of household do reflect to a substantial degree the opinions and experiences of their respective families. Secondly, to fulfill the definition of social remittances, an attitude should flow from receiving to sending community, rather than the reverse. Our measure of this is whether the transnational households display *less traditional* attitudes than the non-emigrant households; in such a case, it may be argued that the net transfer of beliefs is from the destination back to the origin, because migrant destinations (chiefly cities in Argentina, the U.S., and Spain) are generally less traditional than the Valle Alto. We refer to these situations as *cultural remittances*. The converse situation, where the transnational households display *more traditional* attitudes, would imply that the net transfer of beliefs is from origin to destination. That is, households have acted to ensure preservation of their traditional culture and social mores in the face of host country demands and discrimination—a situation that may be characterized as *cultural retrenchment*. In Table 2, we list several attitudes that serve as barometers for traditional or non-traditional beliefs, and then judge whether each represents cultural remittances or cultural retrenchment.

The results reveal that on cultural attitudes involving the sanctity of marriage, the ideal number of children, the value of obedience in children, and the preservation of Bolivian values, transnational and non-emigrant families share much the same, traditional, views. A possible exception is that the ideal number of children (around 3) is considerably less than the total fertility rate in Bolivia in 2007 (3.7), suggesting that non-traditional ideas about family size are diffusing back to origin families. In contrast to the four above indicators, on the three remaining indicators—the role of women in society, the importance of the local church, and the helpfulness of local government—transnational families hold noticeably less-traditional views than non-emigrant families. This may be due to migrant experiences in Argentina, the U.S., and Spain, where women are more independent, religion is downplayed, and citizens are more openly critical of their political leaders. In summary, the fact that several attitudes are clearly less traditional among the transnational families, while none are patently more traditional, provides evidence that most attitude transfer is from destination to origin, rather than the reverse, and therefore that cultural remittances are more prevalent than cultural retrenchment.

The fact that attitudinal differences between the two groups of households are generally not very great may be owing to the fact that non-emigrant households have been influenced by transnational households. Non-emigrant households live in *communities* that have been transnationalized in a march towards modernization in which the entire community is influenced by “pre-migration westernization” (Morawska, 2001). In addition, benefits from migration and messages about migrant accomplishments have diffused to the general population. Still, transnational households are almost certainly affected more by these developments, and by past migration flows, than non-emigrant households.

Finally, regarding **economic remittances**, the results in Table 1 show that transnational households received an average of (US) \$2201 in monetary remittances during the past year, compared to a total family income of \$3778 (as estimated from a detailed accounting of family expenses on the survey instrument)—i.e., remittances constituted 58% of family income for the average family. Many Bolivian villages are thus economically more connected to places hundreds or thousands of miles away than to the local region in which they are embedded. Furthermore, transnational heads of household perceive more improvement in their economic situation than do non-emigrant households. Whereas 2/3 of the former agreed with the statement “Our family’s economic situation is better than 5 years ago,” just over ½ (54%) of the latter agreed with this statement.

### *The endurance of Valle Alto transnationalism*

In this section, in the absence of *panel* data that would show how transnational connections of families and individuals changed over time, we employ *cohort* data for different cumulated-time-abroad groupings of families at one point in time (2007). These cohorts are suggestive of changes that would affect a given family as its migration experience increases. However, we cannot control for exogenous influences at the differing periods in which the migration experience was being accumulated. Table 2, dealing only with transnational families (n=191), illustrates how the same indicators listed in Table 1 change as we progress from families with less to those with more foreign migration experience. Regarding **social gravitation**, between the short term (less than 2 years abroad) to the medium term (2-10 years abroad), there is a slight increase in the number of adults working abroad, and a slight decrease in the size of the family at home. These changes become more pronounced between the medium term and the long term (over 10 years abroad); the number of adults working abroad increases by more than one person (1.6 to

2.8), while the number of persons in the origin household declines by one person (4.9 to 3.9). It would appear, then that there is a net shift from stem to branch (external) family, via migration that is especially strong after ten years. This shift is also reflected in the intention to return to Bolivia: this percentage drops precipitously after 10 years—from 92% to 67%, for the average migrant in the family. Moving on to **social remittances**, despite this gravitation of the family towards the destination there is no decline in *communication*— telephoning frequency in fact increases. So do visits home, after ten years increasing markedly from once every 8 or 9 years to once every three years, and we may speculate that *increasing* legal status has enabled migrants to vault over the obstacles to re-entry mentioned earlier. The reason that visits are not more frequent than every three years, however, is precisely that many long-term migrants do not yet have legal papers. Although long-term residents from the Valle Alto refer to themselves as “residentes,” the fact is that they do not yet have a visa, cédula, carnet, or residence papers. For them the term “resident” describes a way of life abroad. This way of life evolves towards a perception of permanence after a number of years.

(Table 2 about here)

This strengthening communication is accompanied by stronger socio-cultural ties between origin and destination. Regarding *cultural participation* the message is quite clear—attendance at Bolivian celebrations and joining Bolivian social organizations abroad increase regularly and strikingly over time. Whether at the beginning (between short and medium term) when culture helps cushion the adaptation process; or later (between medium and long term) when families can afford the time and money to support cultural organizations, the exercise of cultural participation appears to be a mainstay of life

among Bolivians abroad. Regarding *cultural attitudes*, the changes that occur early in the migration process (between short and medium term) are surprising (Table 2). Traditional beliefs about marriage, women staying at home, the role of the church and community leaders, and Bolivian values—rather than lessening with foreign experience, actually become stronger. This is the period in which migrants are gaining an economic foothold but are clinging to their home culture as an adaptation mechanism and a buffer against prejudice and discrimination. In other words, it is a time of *cultural retrenchment*. This changes somewhat when we move from medium to long term. Some family values (concerning marriage, woman's role, and the ideal number of children) are sustained and strengthened, but at the same time support for community institutions (the church and local government) suffer a decline. We have seen that long term families tend to have legal papers, with two quite different results. First, communication and visitation with families back home becomes easier, further strengthening these ties. But second, legalization improves integration at the destination (better earnings, less discrimination, home ownership, etc.) that eventually distances the family from its Bolivian roots. In other words, *cultural remittances* in the form of more critical views toward Bolivian institutions make their way back to the village.

Social remittances, then, generally strengthen over time; **economic remittances**, in contrast, behave quite differently. Monetary remittances sent home by absentee migrants abroad increase initially, and rather dramatically (from \$1683 to \$2619 between the short and medium term). The wage-labor migration literature explains the low initial remittances in terms of fixed and settling-in costs that must be paid over the first couple of years, leaving relatively little for sending home. After this comes a salutary period during which families are still strongly attached to the origin and (now) able to send more remittances from their burgeoning job earnings abroad. In fact, remittances rise from 46% to 68% of

total family income over this time frame. This favorable trend does not last indefinitely, however. Between the medium and long term, remittances decline in both absolute terms (from \$2619 to \$2157) and in relative terms (from 68% to 57% of family income). As we have seen, the literature explains this in terms of factors that co-vary with long time abroad, such as legalization, home ownership, and more family members abroad. These factors are further analyzed below.

The relationship between a hypothetical family's social remittances and economic remittances as its migration experience increases may be depicted schematically in a series of graphs (Figure 2). The axes represent the conceptual variables "remittances" (the dependent variable), and "cumulative work experience abroad" (the independent variable). Two separate graphs—one for social remittances and the other for economic remittances—are shown, along with a graph of total remittances that conceptually combines the two. Social remittances (Fig. 2a) exhibit an upward trending curve in which cultural retrenchment explains an early surge, and expanding communications and cultural investment, a continuing rise with a slight tapering off (after ten years) due to the counterstream of non-traditional attitudes that reflect an increasing identification with values of the destination society. Economic remittances (Fig. 2b) exhibit an early rise due to expanding earnings abroad, followed (after ten years) by a decline in remittances due to socio-economic integration at the destination. The combination of both processes, shown in the final graph (Fig. 2c), is a graph resembling the graph in Fig. 2a, but with a more gradual tapering and eventual decline after an undetermined number of years. It should be remembered that this analysis takes place at the family and not the community level, so remittance decline in individual families is not necessarily associated with community decline. At the community level, other factors such as an increased infusion of first-time migrants into the international stream; in-migration to the Valle Alto from other places in

Bolivia; and self-sustaining growth from past migrant investment and other sources, could produce a more positive outcome (economic and demographic growth). Of course, the opposite could also occur.

*Factors mediating between migration experience and transnationalism*

In this section we raise a final question: what are the specific forces that intervene between length of time abroad and the strength of transnational connections? As we have noted, a key empirical link uncovered in the literature is that between cumulated years abroad and the *obtaining of legal papers*. Legal migrants can leave and re-enter the foreign country without trouble, making more visits home possible, but also (ultimately) bringing about migration permanence and fewer remittances (DiSipio, 2002; Roberts et al., 1999; Massey et al., 1987:274; Cornelius, 1990:66). Legalization enables emigrants to *bring family members* across (Roberts et al., 1999; Llanque 2006), and frequently leads to *purchase of a home abroad*. These forces operate in unison to maintain communications but at the same time, lessen economic remittances to the origin (Lozano, 1993:14; Lowell and de la Garza, 2002; DeSipio 2002; Mooney, 2004). Legalization, bringing family, and home purchase abroad are intervening or mediating factors, then, that may help articulate the relationships that were discussed in the previous section.

(Table 3 about here)

Our survey questionnaire solicited information on each of the three factors shown above in italics. Proof of their mediating influence must meet two criteria: (1) they must be directly related to cumulated years working abroad; and (2) they must in turn be inversely related to social and economic remittances as defined previously. Table 3 details these

relationships. The first data panel shows how each intervening factor differs for short-term, medium-term, and long-term transnational households; the second panel reveals how each intervening factor influences a single social and a single economic remittance indicator from Table 2. Regarding social remittances, the indicator is that with the strongest relationship to the particular intervening factor (based on a ratio of dichotomous attributes); in the case of economic remittances, the indicator “remittances as a percentage of income, is used for all three intervening factors.

It is patent from Table 3 that each of the three factors increases continuously with greater time abroad. The only anomaly is the dip in legal status in the medium term—representing a holding pattern for undocumented migrants who have entered and gotten a foothold but cannot easily return. After ten years, legal status increases dramatically.

It is also clear that these three mediating factors correspond with a decrease in economic remittances, even as social remittances increase. Each of the three mediating factors will be discussed in turn. (1) **Legality** increases the number of visits to the home community (per ten years) almost fourfold; but it is also associated with lowered monetary remittances, which drop from 53% for families with a majority of legal migrants to 41% for families with a majority of non-legal migrants. Over time, the position of absentee migrants appears to change from that of active economic decision-maker to more passive cultural advocate and sojourner. (2) **Living with a family abroad** (in 2/3 of the cases, this was with spouse and/or children) generates markedly greater participation in Bolivian celebrations at the destination, even as, once more, remittances as a percentage of income drop (from 55% to 45%). For Bolivians, as for so many other emigrant groups abroad, cultural pride is often articulated through activities (school, cultural festivals, social clubs) that involve the family. (3) Finally, **owning a home abroad** is a powerful inhibitor of the family-members’ intentions to return to Bolivia; in fact, fewer than 2/5 of households that

owned a home abroad intended (in the majority) to return to Bolivia, compared to 9/10 among those that did not. Home ownership abroad is both a financial burden and an indicator that the family has many social connections abroad and intends to stay. This is not the only possible interpretation, however. Some informants in Arbiesto stated that a house in the United States was bought with the intention of selling it later. Although some explained that the sale would generate cash for meeting life plans in the United States (supporting our hypothesis), others said that the money would be invested in Bolivia. This may explain, in part, why (in Table 3) the level of remittance is only slightly smaller for households that own a home abroad, than those that do not. In either case, informants stated that fulfilling this dream is hard and demands many years of commitment linked to mortgage payments and other loans obtained for the purchase of a home in the host country—factors that would at least delay the repatriation to Bolivia of proceeds from this sale for some years.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the Valle Alto of Cochabamba, Bolivia, transnationalism strongly prevails. One in two households has at least one member working abroad. This compares to one in three in Zacatecas, an analogous emigrant hearth area of Mexico (Jones, 2007). We conclude that transnational ties are deep —monetary remittances account for almost 3/5 of total household income among our transnational families and family-members abroad strongly identify with Bolivian culture and Bolivian values. However, ideas are transferred both ways. Cultural remittances (the flow of non-traditional values from absentee family-members in more developed countries such as Argentina, the U.S., and Spain) are making inroads in our Valle Alto sample.

However, an increasingly frequent question in Bolivia and the Andean region in general arises with regard to new migration toward distant destinations and toward restrictive conditions that work against traditional circular migration (Fundación Pasos, 2008): will this new migration erode the transnational connections through which participation in migration has normally taken place? When we examine migrant families grouped by how much emigration experience they have accumulated, there is a regular increase in the number of family-members working abroad and a concomitant decrease in the number of persons living in Bolivia. Bolivian values are surprisingly resilient, especially regarding the family; although after ten years there is a decline in respect for the church and government in the home community and in the proportion of migrants who intend to return to Bolivia. From the standpoint of the local economy, however, after ten years emigrant families receive less in monetary remittances (both absolutely and in relation to income) than do families with less experience. The length of time abroad diminishes transnational ties by means of several “mediating” forces: legal status of family members, the presence of family members, and home ownership abroad. These findings on continuing (although tapering-off) social remittances accompanied by declining monetary remittances over the long-term, invite further discussion as well as further research.

Our evaluation of the possible loss of vitality that transnational ties undergo over time becomes more complex when we go beyond the family level of analysis and observe community migratory history. Following the proposals of recent studies (Cortes, 2004a; de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007), it could be argued that though at family level, current conditions suggest that Bolivian migrant families’ social, productive and political reincorporation may be at risk, over time at the community level, the situation may be different. The more cumulative travel experience abroad that communities (as opposed to families) have, the better conditions they may develop for an active, long-term

transnationalism. This may be true if one of two conditions is fulfilled: (1) new families enter the transnational migration stream even as others settle abroad; or (2) improved productive capacity (due to previous migration) and deepening transnational ties in the community provide the mechanism for families to fulfill their predisposition to return. Based on studies in the region, the latter condition may be subsumed under what Goldring (2003), and Roncken and Forsberg (2008) call “new migrant economic subsystems” in which job and investment opportunities are created that are not directly linked to current migration. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that these subsystems are, at least initially, dependent on migrant capital and investment. It may also be said that sectors like banking, transportation, construction, orchard production, dairying, etc. and the local labor market all benefit from the multiplier effects of migrant remittances. Research in Ecuador by Michel Vaillant (2006) finds that regular return migration, despite an almost full residency abroad, may provide a condition for the survival of migratory systems that generate new sources of investment in the larger community. Still, this survival in great measure relies on international policies allowing continuing free entry to destination countries.

It is also true that as families leave to reside abroad, their remittances may generate local job opportunities filled by internal migrants from elsewhere in Bolivia. Our data show “hinterland” migration to urban centers (like Punata) from the surrounding rural parts of the Valle Alto, as well as internal migration from both the tropical lowlands (the Chaparé) and the highlands (Potosí in particular). This “fill-in” growth compensates for the loss of transnational migrants through permanence at their destinations. The complexity of this internal migration is illustrated by Siches, a remote village near Toco in Jordán province (Figure 1) whose residents settled in Santa Cruz (Bolivia) and in Argentina, but later returned not to Siches, but to Cliza, the capital of their province. Siches has continued alive, however, because of the arrival of new inhabitants from highland rural communities

that are even more remote and impoverished. This chain of internal migration is also illustrated in Estaban Arce province, where *campesinos* (nicknamed “*latinos*”, “*mejicanos*” or “*jaliscos*”) from the highlands work in local jobs created by the *americanos* (transnational migrant owners of orchards and homes) (de la Torre, 2006: 110-114). It is a fact that the three *municipios* under study here (Punata, San Benito, and Tarata) all lost population between 1992 and 2001, as did the three “core” provinces of the Valle Alto—Punata, Germán Jordán, and Esteban Arce (Bolivia, Censo Nacional de Poblacion y Vivienda, 2001). It should be noted that there are “growth points” in the region, such as Arbieta and Cliza, that defy this trend. Internal in-migration may serve to arrest a Valle Alto population decline that would otherwise be even greater, although still not enough to bring about a reversal of the decline [Of course, even if there is community decline and loss of local culture, and this can be attributed to emigration, a larger calculus should consider the net benefits to the protagonists—once again, the families themselves, wherever they end up. After all, geographical/ anthropological decline may be accompanied by sociological advancement].

In the Valle Alto, the overwhelming use of remittances is clearly familiar as opposed to communitarian. Given the economic necessities of families, the high costs of migration, and the fledgling nature of migrant social organizations, upon reflection, this is not surprising. But it is important to note the increasing evidence for community projects in certain parts of the region, financed by migrant remittances. In the *municipio* of Arbieta, bordering that of Tarata, one sees temples, plazas, roads, sports fields, schools and other works financed by migrant contributions that total between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per year (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:79-83). Migrant contributions support soccer tournaments among locals as well as residents of Virginia, in the U.S. Participation in these projects is much higher than in neighboring communities. Contributions of \$80,000 (from residents in

Virginia) were made for a sports complex, and another \$40,000 (from residents in Florida) for cobble paving—the latter figure matched by another \$40,000 from local residents, including non-migrants and former migrants) and the municipal government (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:74-117).

The whole analysis about the endurance or diminishing returns of Bolivian transnationalism has raised questions that point to the need for further research in several topical areas. First, what are the multiplier effects of migrant remittances on other sectors of the local economy, and how important are remittances in relation to other sources of local income? Second, does a move towards migration permanence abroad help or hurt home communities over the long run? (Is there a process by which mature communities may, instead, organize and strengthen their transnational ties, especially regarding community projects and investments?). Third, does migration promote rural development in the region, or does it hinder it? Fourth, how are non-emigrant families influenced by current migration? Fifth, what is the role played by “dormant” migrants? Returnee migrants who completed their migratory cycle some time ago should be important objects of future study. We did not do this in part because dormant households constituted only 14% of our sample, and because less-detailed information was requested on dormant migrants than on absentee migrants. Yet, evidence from Arbieta tells us that households that concluded their labor migration to Argentina in the period 1960-1980 returned home with savings and bought land or financed other productive activities (de la Torre and Alfaro, 2007:35-47). The results of these investments are seen currently, although the remittances that made them possible were earned years ago. The experiences of past generations of migrants may inform discussions of migrant experiences today (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2006:206-208). Most of the current migrants that are now working in the U.S. or Spain were born when their parents (and aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.) were

working as migrants in Argentina or in the Bolivian mining regions. It may be profitable to study the experience of these earlier generations to gain insights on how transnationalism persists for current migrants and their children who are creating the new geography of Bolivian migration.

Many answers to these questions must come directly from the words, the expressions and the emotions of the actors themselves—that is to say, from research that takes an ethnographic and even artistic approach. As Hinojosa (2006:12-14) reminds us, transnationalism is a new concept because it considers migrants as social agents rather than as passive commodities in a globalized system. From Crosta's notion of "itinerant dimension of living" (2006), we should focus our glance not only on the new geographical spaces but on what the actors do in them. This approach includes the costs of migration as revealed in migrant accounts of separation, sacrifice, and family disintegration. Although outside the scope of this article, these accounts are important. López Castro (1986:36) in his book *La Casa Dividida* ("The Divided House") about migration from western Michoacán quotes a popular Mexican song: "*Dicen que mi amor se va pa' la frontera del Norte, dime si es cierto para ponerme a llorar.*" [They say my love is heading North, tell me if it is true, so I can begin to cry]. Quite possibly, popular songs, poems, votive paintings (retablos), etc., have dared to speak about these topics more bravely than social researchers. While we look forward to a better comprehension of these dynamics, we also respect the decision of millions of such migrants who choose to emigrate even in the face of the pain they know they will endure. They are not deluded. They make their own calculations of costs and benefits with far more information than we may be willing to give them credit for.

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## TABLES

TABLE 1: DIMENSIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE VALLE ALTO, 2007

Indicator		Non-emigrant households	Trans-national <sup>a</sup> households
<b>SOCIAL GRAVITATION</b>			
	(n=)	(167)	(191)
Mean number of years working abroad, per migrant		0	5.8
Mean number of adults working abroad		0	1.9
Mean number of adults and children living at home		4.5	4.6
Migrants <sup>b</sup> intend to return to live in Bolivia (%)		-	81.7
<b>SOCIAL REMITTANCES</b>			
<i>Communication:</i>			
	(n=)	(167)	(191)
Migrants <sup>b</sup> phone home at least once monthly (%)		-	90.2
Number of visits home per 10 years, per migrant		-	2.06
<i>Cultural Participation:</i>			
	(n=)	(167)	(191)
At least one migrant participated in Bolivian celebrations at destination (%)		-	50.6
At least one migrant joined a Bolivian social organization at destination (%)		-	22.1
<i>Cultural Attitudes<sup>c</sup>:</i>			
	(heads of household only: n=)	(128)	(111)
“Marriage is forever, and should not end in divorce” (% who agree)		84.3	86.5 <sup>f</sup>
“My ideal number of children is:”		2.9	3.1 <sup>f</sup>
“Women should stay home, instead of making a career” (% who agree)		54.8	45.9 <sup>d</sup>
“A child must always follow the advice of his/her parents” (% who agree)		93.7	93.7 <sup>f</sup>
“The church’s role in the community is very important” (% who agree)		78.0	61.3 <sup>d</sup>
“The local government helps this municipio a great deal” (% who agree)		55.1	45.0 <sup>d</sup>
“Preservation of Bolivian values is more important than modernization (% “)		65.3	67.9 <sup>f</sup>
<b>ECONOMIC REMITTANCES:</b>			
	(n=)	(167)	(191)
Estimated mean family income in the past year, US \$		3106	3778
Monetary remittances received in the past year, US \$		29	2201
Remittances as a % of family income		0.9	58.3
“Our family’s economic situation is better than 5 years ago” (% who agree)		54.3	67.3

<sup>a</sup> Defined as households in which at least one member was working or seeking work abroad the time of the interview.

<sup>b</sup> Based on the average for all migrants in the family.

<sup>c</sup> Attitudes of the interviewee, representing the household.

<sup>d</sup> Supports the notion of *cultural remittances*, since transnational households hold less traditional beliefs than non-emigrant households.

<sup>e</sup> Supports the notion of *cultural retrenchment*, since transnational households hold more traditional beliefs than non-emigrants households.

<sup>f</sup> Supports neither the notion of *cultural remittances* nor that of *cultural retrenchment*, since transnational households and non-emigrant households hold essentially the same beliefs.

TABLE 2: TRANSNATIONALISM AND CUMULATIVE WORK EXPERIENCE ABROAD: VALLE ALTO, 2007

Indicator		Total cumulated working time abroad, transnational <sup>a</sup> households			
		less than 2 years: <i>short-term</i>	2 – 10 years: <i>medium-term</i>	more than 10 years: <i>long-term</i>	
SOCIAL GRAVITATION:		(n=)	(53)	(72)	(66)
Mean number of years working abroad, per migrant			1.1	3.7	11.7
Mean number of adults working abroad			1.1	1.6	2.8
Mean number of adults and children living at home			5.0	4.9	3.9
Migrants <sup>b</sup> intend to return to live in Bolivia (%)			84.4	92.4	67.2
SOCIAL REMITTANCES:					
<i>Communication:</i>		(n=)	(53)	(72)	(66)
Migrants <sup>b</sup> phone home at least once monthly (%)			84.3	91.0	93.3
Number of visits home per 10 years, per migrant			1.33	1.10	3.66
<i>Cultural Participation:</i>		(n=)	(53)	(72)	(66)
At least one migrant participated in Bolivian celebrations at destination (%)			26.7	44.4	72.4
At least one migrant joined a Bolivian social organization at destination (%)			7.1	17.2	39.1
<i>Cultural Attitudes</i> <sup>c</sup> :		(heads of household only: n=)	(33)	(41)	(37)
“Marriage is forever, and should not end in divorce” (% who agree)			81.8	82.9 <sup>e</sup>	94.6 <sup>e</sup>
“My ideal number of children is:”			2.9	2.9 <sup>f</sup>	3.6 <sup>e</sup>
“Women should stay home, instead of making a career” (% who agree)			36.4	43.9 <sup>e</sup>	56.8 <sup>e</sup>
“A child must always follow the advice of his/her parents” (% who agree)			97.0	92.7 <sup>e</sup>	91.9 <sup>d</sup>
“The church’s role in the community is very important” (% who agree)			63.6	73.2 <sup>e</sup>	45.9 <sup>d</sup>
“The local government helps this municipio a great deal” (% who agree)			21.2	65.9 <sup>e</sup>	43.2 <sup>d</sup>
“Preservation of Bolivian values is more important than modernization (% “)			63.6	70.7 <sup>e</sup>	68.6 <sup>d</sup>
ECONOMIC REMITTANCES:		(n=)	(53)	(72)	(66)
Estimated family income in the past year, US \$			3682	3871	3755
Monetary remittances received in the past year, US \$			1683	2619	2157
Remittances as a % of family income			45.7	67.7	57.4
“Our family’s economic situation is better than 5 years ago” (% who agree)			66.7	73.2	61.1

<sup>a</sup> Defined as households in which at least one member was working or seeking work abroad the time of the interview.

<sup>b</sup> Based on the average for all migrants in the family.

<sup>c</sup> Attitudes of the interviewee, representing the household.

<sup>d</sup> Supports the notion of *cultural remittances*, since traditional beliefs decline relative to the previous period.

<sup>e</sup> Supports the notion of *cultural retrenchment*, since traditional beliefs increase over the previous period.

<sup>f</sup> Supports neither the notion of *cultural remittances* nor that of *cultural retrenchment*, since traditional beliefs neither decline nor increase relative to the previous period.

TABLE 3. FACTORS INTERVENING BETWEEN CUMULATED WORK EXPERIENCE ABROAD AND REMITTANCES: VALLE ALTO TRANSNATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS, 2007

Intervening (mediating) Factor	Antecedent relationship with total cumulated working time abroad, transnational <sup>a</sup> households:			Subsequent relationship with indicators for social and economic remittances:		
	less than 2 years: <i>short-term</i> (n=53)	2 – 10 years: <i>medium-term</i> (n=72)	more than 10 years: <i>long-term</i> (n=66)	Indicator	Attributes	
Legal papers, most recent job abroad <sup>b, c</sup> (%)	28.3	25.4	58.6	Number of visits home per 10 yrs. per migrant <sup>d</sup>	Do not have legal papers (n = 107)	Have legal papers (n = 64)
				Remittances as % of income <sup>g</sup>	1.0	3.6
					53%	41%
Live with immediate family member abroad <sup>b</sup> (%)	28.3	55.2	72.4	Participation in Bolivian celebrations at destination (%) <sup>e</sup>	Do not live with family member (n = 79)	Live with family member (n = 92)
				Remittances as % of income <sup>g</sup>	20%	53%
					55%	45%
Owned home on most recent job abroad <sup>b</sup> (%)	4.4	7.7	35.0	Migrants intend to return to live in Bolivia (%) <sup>f</sup>	Do not own home abroad (n = 142)	Own home abroad (n = 28)
				Remittances as % of income <sup>g</sup>	90%	39%
					50%	47%

<sup>a</sup> Defined as households in which at least one member was working or seeking work abroad at the time of the interview.

<sup>b</sup> Based on the average for all migrants in the family.

<sup>c</sup> Includes the following forms of entry papers, as indicated by the respondent: visa, carnet, cédula de identidad, residencia.

<sup>d</sup> Social remittance indicator most strongly associated with legal status.

<sup>e</sup> Social remittance indicator most strongly associated with family accompaniment abroad.

<sup>f</sup> Social gravitation or social remittance indicator most strongly associated with home ownership abroad.

<sup>g</sup> Economic remittance indicator.

# FIGURES

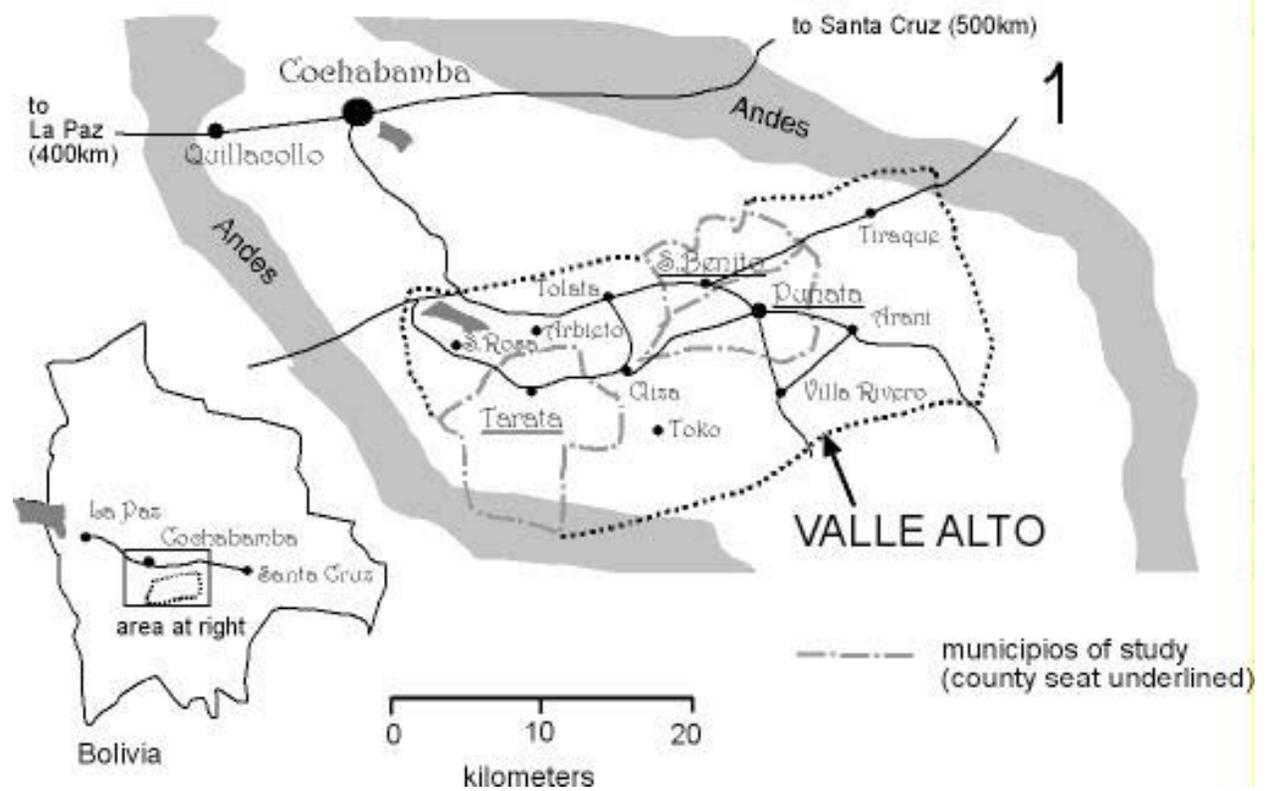
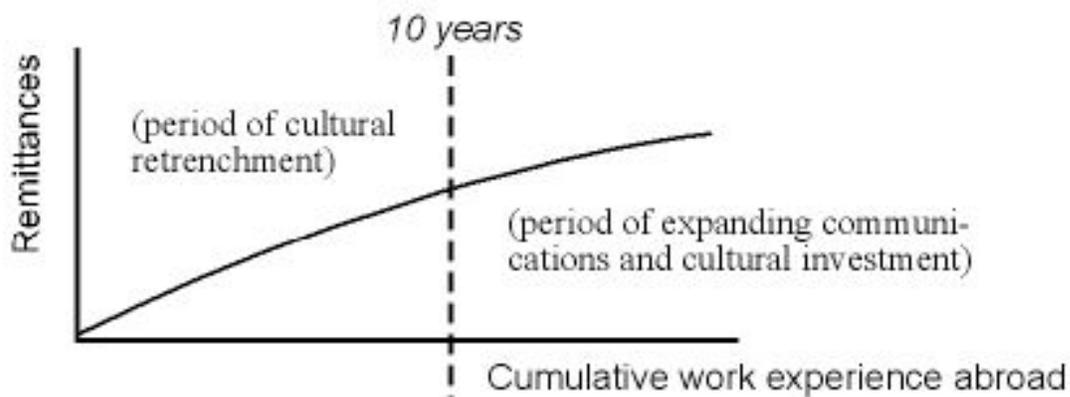
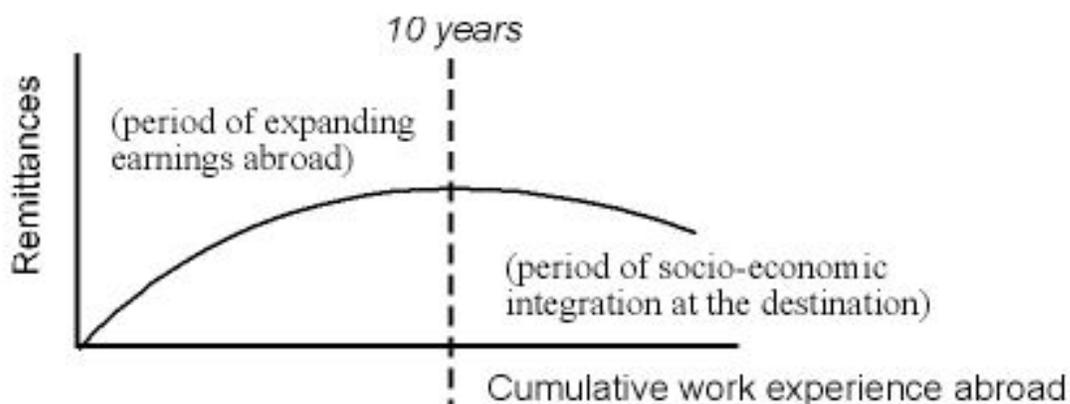


Figure 1. The Valle Alto

### a. Social Remittances



### b. Economic Remittances



### c. Total Remittances

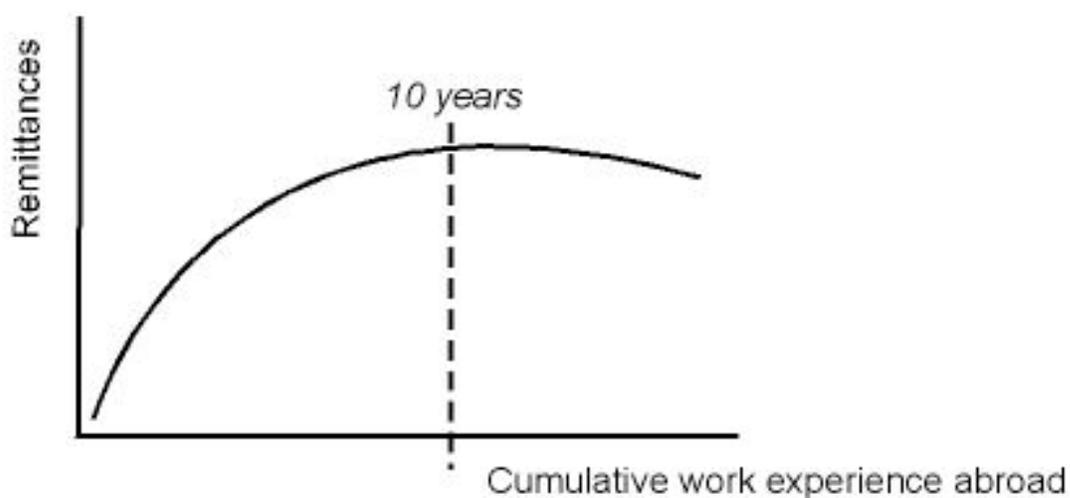


Figure 2. Social and Economic Remittances with Cumulated Time Abroad for a Hypothetical Valle Alto Family