



Transnational Imagination and Social Practices: A Transnational Website in a Migrant Community

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In this article, we examine how collective notions of belonging and imagination become a fertile terrain upon which transnational websites can sustain certain social practices across national boundaries that would be otherwise difficult. Drawing on field work carried out in the United States and Mexico, and using transnational imagination as our analytical lens, we observed three phenomena that are closely related to the use of a transnational website by a migrant community. First, the transnational website under study was a place for a collective imaginary rather than just for the circulation of news. Also, through transnational imagination, migrants can make claims about their status in their community of origin. Moreover, the website is instrumental in harmonizing the various views of the homelands' realities. Finally, the website can inspire us to look beyond dyadic forms of communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human-computer interaction (HCI) has a long tradition of studying individuals' interactions with—and through—some form of technology. Of particular interest to us are communication flows maintained by migrants, return migrants, and non-migrants, due to the insights that they may provide into transnational movements of people, objects, images, capital, and ideas, as well as into the design of better

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information and communication technologies (ICT). In the era of globalization, these movements—of people in particular—and their implications have already been a subject of study in the social and behavioral sciences (Bernal, 2006; Grey & Woodrick, 2005; Mountz & Wright, 1996; Schiller & Fourn, 1998; R. C. Smith, 1998, 2001). In recent literature in international migration, there seems to be a general agreement that revolutionary developments in transportation and the emergence of novel communication services have eroded traditional notions of migrants' assimilation and acculturation (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Mountz & Wright, 1996; Roberts, Frank, & Lozano-Ascencio, 1999; R. C. Smith, 1998). The challenge for HCI researchers and practitioners relies on capitalizing on those studies to shed some light on relatively unexplored HCI application domains, like the one presented in this article.

In this article, we examine how collective notions of belonging and imagination become a fertile terrain upon which transnational websites can sustain social practices across national boundaries that would be difficult otherwise. Broadly,

transnational¹ websites refer to websites that have been created by/for ethnic minorities in immigrant-receiving countries. Through transnational imagination, we provide an analytical framing that contributes to a growing body of literature on the transnational use of ICTs by diasporic communities. We ground our analysis in field work conducted on the use of ICTs by Mexican immigrants in the United States for maintaining connections to their homelands. In particular, this work mainly focuses on studies conducted with people from the state of Guanajuato as well as people from the state of Zacatecas, both in central Mexico and regions of concentrated outmigration to the United States.

Part of the work carried out includes studying a website from the municipality of San Carlos² in the state of Guanajuato. In this work we highlight several aspects of the transnational website of San Carlos³ that produce implications for our understanding of the transnational use of ICTs. First, through migrants and nonmigrants' social imaginary of a shared belonging—and the communication exchanges that materialize from and with it—the community comes into being, acquiring a distinct, transnational spirit. That is, as we see throughout this work, the website has become an integral part of what the community is, becoming part of the migration experience, and the community dynamics. Second, as it is, the transnational website mainly sustains the continuing of community life at the village or township level, with all the frictions that come with it, particularly when the sending and receiving communities have different social norms. Last, the entrenchment of the website in the life of San Carlos as well as the collective imaginary facilitate the production and reproduction of social practices that have helped blur the online–offline boundaries, such that some of these practices take place concomitantly.

In our investigation, we found that the extent to which the website is ingrained in many of the social practices of the community made it difficult to imagine one without the other. Moreover, through our research we found that the website represents not only a means through which communication exchanges take place but also increasingly an integral part of that collective imaginary in which several social practices are enacted and observed. Even when some residents of the community have never physically traveled between the United States and Mexico, they maintain acute awareness of events in both the sending and receiving communities. They do so through online observations of civic and secular events, religious festivities, parties, and gatherings with friends, as well as a collective awareness of occurrences within kinship and friendship networks. Our data illustrate how community members that have never had the opportunity to physically meet, find themselves to be in communion through the

¹By transnational websites we refer to websites that have been created by/for ethnic minorities in immigrant-receiving countries. In the Anthropological sense, everyone has an ethnicity, which may be linked to a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, association with a specific territory, or a sense of solidarity or belonging (A. D. Smith, 1986). Transnational websites may or may not include indigenous populations from their countries of origin.

²In this work, the names of villages, towns, and municipalities have been anonymized.

³The transnational website of San Carlos is hereinafter referred to as *the transnational website* or as *the website*.

continuous imagination facilitated through the transnational website and articulated through sustained social practices.

It is important to highlight the implications that this work may have for HCI and related fields. This work contributes to the ongoing conversation on global–local dichotomies by intrinsically revisiting both the meaning and significance of the local. Furthermore, this work unravels the potential effects that the website of San Carlos can have upon individuals and the collectivity in both the homeland and the host land by trying to harmonize the various perceptions of the homeland. Finally, we articulate on how transnational media, especially those forms in which communication exchanges extend beyond the dyad, are fundamental for keeping a continuous news stream that connects distant communities, a role that is highlighted in this work.

1.1. Locality and Transnational Imagination

Place attachment can be differently perceived across distinct world regions as governance, religion, and political and economic systems seem to have profoundly influenced the social fabric of society. At least in Mexico, this perception was greatly shaped by the colonial period’s system of social organization, wherein the Spanish Crown conceded special permits to the indigenous populations to possess land of their own and form communities, albeit without political power (Purnell, 2002; R. C. Smith, 1998). These expressions of rootedness can be also observed in other Latin American countries—see Benitez (2006)—which again can be the result of the diverse indigenous backgrounds combined with the communal organization and managerial practices of the former Spanish colonies in the Americas. Therefore, political decisions have had a strong influence on both psychological and sociocultural attachment to the land in the former Spanish colonies in the Americas.

Building on this perception of place is Mexicans’ conception of *locality*.⁴ We build on this perception of place to develop a conception of *locality*. That is, a locality can be a human settlement, community, or town that has its own identity and its own sociocultural practices, typically geographically bounded, which by definition creates boundaries with other neighboring localities. All of these localities often include members of indigenous populations, which may contribute to their distinctive culture and identity.

This attachment to place of origin is often difficult to understand in some Western societies, for its nature is multilayered, including geographic, social, moral, and economic qualities (Jacobson, 2002). The difficulty in understanding the different nuances of place relies on the creation of the concept of nation-state, which have blended, and made indistinguishable, the distinction between nation and state, the people, and the land, and they are rather conceptualized as “an integral whole, singular in their unity” (Jacobson, 1997, p. 124). Appadurai (2001) argued that the nation-state

⁴When referring to migrants’ place of origin, locality and community are used indistinctively. The use of locality is to emphasize a more territorial nature of the community based on shared kinship and propinquity rather than on a relational nature.

is probably one of the most stable objects in today's world, which includes a detached, moving population as well as a combination of transnational politics in national spaces, and other mobile objects such as technology. One of the reasons for that, Appadurai argued, is that people are able to imagine themselves as Mexicans, Indonesians, or French. Thus, imagination is a "faculty that inform the lives of ordinary people in a myriad ways: it is the faculty which allows people to consider migration, to resist state violence, to seek social redress, and to design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national boundaries" (Appadurai, 2001, p. 6). Indeed, migration is one of the outcomes of collective forms of imagination, as people often imagine their children living or working in another country. Therefore, Appadurai stated that this daily imaginative process can be the origin of many global movements. The notion of imagination for group identity has been useful in several areas, including studies in HCI and related areas (e.g., Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Lindtner, Anderson, & Dourish, 2012).

We build upon these two notions of locality and transnational imagination, in which the members of a population are scattered throughout several locations and still imagine themselves as members of a single, unique community. In other words, the scattered members may retain a strong sense of cultural identity with the community, both in the home location and throughout the world. Even though they live in distant places, they often share culture, meanings, and language as well as dialect or jargon, and even friendship or kinship. These types of dispersed populations have been referred to as diasporic communities, which in the context of modern forms of communication can maintain strong linkages to the homeland.

1.2. Dispersed Localities and ICTs

Studies that involve the use of ICTs by diasporic communities have placed particular emphasis on understanding how migrants obtain information and communicate with others in a similar situation, participate politically in their homelands, and express feelings of belonging and attachment to their places of origin, mainly at a national level (Bernal, 2005; Miller & Slater, 2000; Parham, 2004; Schiller & Fouron, 1998; Van den Bos & Nell, 2006). However, the use of ICTs by members of localities who are dispersed throughout several locations has received little attention. For Mexicans in the United States, maintaining their national identities can be carried out without too much effort due to the physical proximity of their home country and the penetration of Spanish-language TV and radio networks (De Santis, 2003; R. C. Smith, 1998).

Other than the federal government initiative called Programa Paisano⁵ (paisano.gob.mx), not a single effort has been made to date aiming at embracing the entire Mexican diaspora in the United States. On the contrary, there are many websites

⁵The Paisano Program was designed by the federal government to circulate information of interest for Mexican immigrants in the United States traveling to Mexico, especially by land. The word *Paisano* literally translates to *countryman* in English. In Mexico, the word *paisano* is usually used to refer to a Mexican national residing in the United States.

pertaining to dispersed populations of traditional communities organized around stable villages or towns: Previous literature reported that there are hundreds of these types of websites in Mexico (Gonzalez & Castro, 2007; Navarrete & Huerta, 2006). We refer to these websites as transnational websites. Transnational websites bring together people who, in addition to sharing several dimensions of ethnicity, used to have a shared territory, have the same socio-ethnic origins, and may even have experiences together. Through these websites, immigrants of Mexican origin can get in contact with fellow migrants from the same locality of origin (Navarrete & Huerta, 2006). These websites enable migrants, return migrants, and nonmigrants to be connected with the occurrences in their places of origin where members usually know each other. Also, these websites help them maintain local identities, which is particularly strong in several Mexican localities (Purnell, 2002; R. C. Smith, 1998). Moreover, these websites connect migrants to their home communities, which combine people and locations as well as the connections among people and the products of all those links (e.g., social events, traditions, community projects).

In literature of a more sociological tradition, these communities have been referred to as transnational communities, which have been defined as communities in which people live between two worlds (Conway & Cohen, 1998) and in which members consider themselves as part of the same community, even though they are divided by national borders (Levitt, 2001; Mountz & Wright, 1996). This resonates strongly with Appadurai's concept of transnational imagination. Here, the community is considered to be *imagined* because although their members may never know each other, yet in their minds they live and act in communion (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996).

We next describe the methods, field sites, and information related to the website of the locality of San Carlos as well as some of its members who are users of the website.

2. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

We ground our analysis in field work conducted in the United States and Mexico. Semistructured interviews were conducted with members of two transnational communities on both sides of the border during 2007 and 2008. We interviewed and observed migrants, nonmigrants, and return migrants at their workplaces and their homes, both in the United States and Mexico. In the first field study, we spent 2 weeks in Southern California and 1 week in our informants' homelands. In the second field study, we also spent 2 weeks in Southern California. In addition to interviews, we also took field notes and photographs.

2.1. Methods

Our work with these two communities was part of a larger project aimed at understanding the communication patterns of migrants and their families, exploring

the use of different media across national borders and within their places of origin. In the first field study, a total of 26 interviews (female = 7, male = 19) were conducted aiming at understanding communication practices for maintaining family connections as well as understanding the migration experience. All interviewees were originally from the same region in Mexico, and some of them were friends, spouses, or relatives.

For the first field study in Southern California, we contacted the founder and administrator of a transnational website to conduct a face-to-face interview. After the interview, the administrator introduced us to friends and acquaintances from his homeland, Las Flores, who were living in the vicinity. During this field site visit, we conducted six interviews with male immigrants. While in California, we learned that some of their male friends were living in Mexico after working for some time in the United States (return migrants). We asked our informants whether we could interview their friends, acquaintances, or their spouses in their home communities, and they generously provided contact names and phone numbers. A couple of weeks later, we traveled to their home communities, where we carried out 20 interviews. Seven interviewees were temporary workers in the United States. We stayed in their home communities for about a week where the founder and administrator of the website of Las Flores showed us around (he was visiting his parents). We did not know him before the study. At the time of our visit, the traditional annual fair of the region was taking place so the atmosphere was rather unusual with many people driving cars with foreign license plates, activities around the community, and all-day festivals. According to local accounts, many migrants prefer to visit Las Flores during the fair than during any other time of the year.

The second field study was aimed at obtaining some insights into migrants' feelings, motivations, and reasons for using the transnational website of San Carlos. The second set of interviews involved 20 migrants (female = 8, male = 12) living in the United States. Eight interviews were conducted within the home setting in Southern California, and the rest were telephone interviews with migrants from the same community living in other states of the United States. All of them were regular users of San Carlos's website, their hometown. The average interviewee had been living in the United States for 15 years, ranging from 6 months to 30 years. Fifteen interviewees had their parents living in their places of origin.

To gain access to community members, we contacted the founders and administrators of the websites of each community. Both founders agreed to collaborate in terms of contacting people they personally knew. After that, we used a snowball sampling method to contact migrants' families in their places of origin. In addition, we also received significant support from the Hometown Associations⁶ (HTA) of both communities by contacting members of the associations living in Southern California. Consent forms were signed and a project description was provided both in Spanish and

⁶Hometown Associations are groups of immigrants in the United States who are originally from the same place of origin. HTAs are entities that are recognized by the Mexican government and often play an important role in their home communities. They carry out fund-raising activities in the United States to support community projects in their homelands. As of 2007, there were hundreds of these associations. There were also grouped by states, which were called federations of associations. See Orozco and Welle (2005).

English. Because all informants were native Spanish speakers, and so are the authors, the interviews were conducted in Spanish. All interviews were verbatim transcribed for analysis. We used a comparative analysis inspired in the work of Charmaz, and Strauss and Corbin (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The Grounded Theory technique involves a systematic cross-comparative approach whereby categories and dimensions are identified through open coding. Afterward, axial coding is carried out to look for conceptual relationships among the categories. Categories were then refined and defined based on the empirical evidence gathered. Categories were discussed by both authors. We decided on the categories based on the study's stated research questions and, later in the process, on related literature.

2.2. The Field Sites

All of our informants emigrated from two regions in Mexico. According to the National Population Council in Mexico, both regions have a high migration index (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2005). In the first field work, we interviewed people from the municipality of Las Flores, an administrative division with slightly more than 12,000 inhabitants. Las Flores is located north of Guadalajara nestled in a canyon between the Sierra de Morones and the Sierra de Nochistlán. There, we interviewed people from three communities: Las Flores, a major town and seat of the municipal government (~6,000 inhabitants); El Torbellino (~750 inhabitants), about 3 km away from Las Flores; and Cerro Azul (~300 inhabitants), about 3 km away from El Torbellino. In the municipality of Las Flores, according to official numbers, around 27% of the families are female headed. The male/female ratio (91.3 men per 100 women) in the population is below the state (95.2) and national average (95.4), meaning there are in general more women than men. Education (7.4 years) is also below state (7.9 years) and national average (8.6 years). During conversations with locals and with interviewees, they told us that some of the roads were paved through funding coming from HTAs through the 3x1 program.⁷ In Las Flores, the main town of the municipality, there is access to medical services, police, and the Internet, the latter through cybercafés and home access. However, in the neighboring communities, like El Torbellino and Cerro Azul, townships still had a single landline in the community, also known as *caseta* (see Muse-Orlinoff, Matus-Ruiz, Ambort, & Cardenas, 2009; Wang & Brown, 2011), which was still the main way of communicating between migrants and nonmigrants. In addition to this landline, there were some fixed telephones in a few households, which work via mobile networks such as Telcel. Both of these communities have kindergarten and elementary school facilities; El Torbellino also has a junior high school, but in both communities children have to travel daily to Las Flores if they are to attend high

⁷The 3x1 program was designed so that HTAs could carry out community projects. Through the program, migrant associations can obtain up to 3 pesos per peso invested in their places of origin; several works have been devoted to studying the results and effects of this program.

school. For university degrees, people usually study in the capital of the state of Zacatecas (around 3–4 hr by car) or Guadalajara (2–3 hr).

In the second set of interviews, we interviewed people from San Carlos, in the central state of Guanajuato. In San Carlos, around 26% of the families are female headed. The population male/female ratio (89.8) is below the state (92.7) and national average (95.4), meaning there are in general more women than men. Education (6.8 years) is also below state (7.7 years) and national average (8.6 years). Being a major town with a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants, San Carlos offers many services, including universities.

2.3. The Website of San Carlos

Created in 2000, the website of San Carlos, according to their founders, is aimed to “promote the municipality and place the town closer to those born there but currently living away and nostalgic for their homeland.” The site provides a number of information services including general information about the municipality such as history, culture, local handicrafts, regional myths and legends, traditions and regional dishes, bloglike comments by the administrators, video and photo galleries, links to regional newspapers, advertisements from local business, a chat system, a message board, and homeland weather information. The website of San Carlos serves to inform users about current affairs in the municipality through reports of locals. In the same way, people from San Carlos can contact others through the message board section or the chat system. From 2006 onward, the website of San Carlos added richer media services with different types of audio and video content. Music tracks of local bands are featured with an embedded player. Public events such as parades, shows, or ceremonies are video recorded and published on the site; some of them have been even broadcasted live (e.g., religious processions in December). Finally, the local radio station recently began broadcasting through the website during weekdays from 14:00 to 23:00 hr. All those services provide new ways to interact and be aware of daily life in the hometown for those living abroad.

During our interviews with one of the administrators, he proudly commented on how the site has served to reunite friends who had not seen each other for a long time and to find out about the whereabouts of immediate family members. The founders of the website are three brothers who migrated to the United States. The U.S.-based founders of the site work closely with their siblings in San Carlos to maintain a continuous news stream about San Carlos. For instance, in 2007, one of the historical buildings in town was severely damaged by a car driver who crashed into it. This event, which was very unlikely to be reported by state or national online newspapers, was accounted for with photos and comments. For several weeks, the photos of the affected building generated many comments. Those away could share the concern of locals about the incident and closely follow the actions of the local government to repair the building. The brothers have also seen the website as an opportunity for a transnational business. For instance, the website sells flowers on

special occasions such as the Mother's Day. Migrants can pay in the United States and flowers could be shipped from local stores in their hometown.

Users do not need to be registered to share photos or post comments. Therefore, users of the website do not have personalized profiles like in many other websites. Instead, every time users wish to share content, they must write their name, e-mail, and an optional photo caption. This registration-free publishing process makes it difficult for researchers to profile a typical user, but from the server logs we learned that users abroad were sharing content twice as much as local users. However, this disparity could have been due to differences in access to the Internet.

According to the founders, the anonymity of users gave place to flaming, and rants were commonplace. For this reason, the administrator implemented an approval mechanism for photos and messages, delaying publishing by hours or days and creating additional overhead for him. At the time of the study, the webmaster was the only one who could approve material to be posted on the website. Once implemented, some considered this to be a form of censorship, as some messages did not get published or it took a few days to get them published. This perceived censorship had negative consequences. For instance, some users reported having decreased the frequency in which they were posting content on the website. It is important to note that, at the time of the study, the use of social networking sites was still not widespread in many regions in Mexico. For this reason, the website of San Carlos, in this case, was instrumental to maintaining online linkages to the informants' home communities.

3. RESULTS

Drawing on our field work, and using transnational imagination as our analytical lens, we observed three phenomena that are closely related to the use of the website. We begin by illustrating how migrants' transnational imagination enables them to use the website instrumentally, to produce and reproduce social practices in their home communities. First, through transnational imagination, migrants and nonmigrants imagine themselves as part of the same collectivity, identifying with each other. Second, we move to a discussion wherein through transnational imagination migrants can make claims about their status in their community of origin. Finally, we include a discussion about the role of the website in harmonizing the various views of the homelands' realities.

3.1. Identification With Others

Perhaps not very surprising, we found that our informants were very interested in the occurrences in their home communities. During our interviews, they constantly referred to the website as one of the most important means of communication they have. One of the interviewees referred to the website as "the connection" to his

homeland. As such, they commented on how frequently they visited the website. Being a site where everyone could upload photos or post messages, the website seemed to have rapidly become *the* channel of communication through which migrants, nonmigrants, and return migrants could maintain a continuous news stream about themselves and the community.

Rediscovery of Migrants' Roots, but Only From Abroad

We observed that photos that symbolize or represent the community such as the cathedral, landscapes, or distinctive cultural aspects were frequently found on the website (along with other types of photos). Other aspects such as stories about local myths, official, and nonofficial historical narrations were also found on the website. According to their own accounts, all this information, in some sense, contributed to the feelings of attachment and belonging to the community. This rediscovering of their roots seems to be an important part of the migration experience, as reported by others (Hiller & Franz, 2004). However, in contrast to what others have reported, some of our informants acknowledged that it was not always like that. Before emigrating, they had other concerns in the homeland and focused their attention to other types of issues or interests. For example, Leticia,⁸ 53, who at the time of the study had been living in the United States for 16 years, commented, “When you live there [in her homeland], you don’t pay attention to the history of places or things. After you leave, you want to know why those things are there or to learn about the places where you have been.” Like her, others also commented on how when they are in the United States, apart from becoming interested in regional history, they also want to get every single detail of occurrences in the homeland.

What was surprising to us was that these interests seem to change once individuals go on holidays to their places of origin. For example, one of our informants told us about a time when she was religiously following—through live video streaming—some of the processions related to the Virgen de Guadalupe’s Day (on December 12). However, she also reported that in one occasion she was in her hometown for the regional fair, but she did not attend because it was overcrowded. Therefore, it was interesting to us how being away from the homeland seemed to change the type of information you are interested in about the homeland. In this case, the reported reason for not going to the event was of a more pragmatic nature. A couple of our informants also reported similar behavior when visiting their homelands, in which they usually have little time to spend with close and intimate ties. Thus, instead of spending time at the regional fair, for instance, they prefer to throw parties so they can see more relatives and friends at the same time or visit them in their homes. Therefore, this example illustrates that the website is an intrinsic part of the migration experience. That is, the website seems to be not that interesting when migrants are in the homelands, as they can personally experience community life and have other interests (e.g., spending quality time with close and intimate ties).

⁸The names of our informants throughout this article are pseudonyms.

The nature of the content published on the website either by the administrators or other users is instrumental to maintaining a continuous news stream through which migrants can keep abreast of events in the homeland. These news notes and reports, however, seem to be more relevant for those who live abroad. One plausible explanation is that, when migrants go back home, they have other means to obtain the news such as *viva voce* accounts from family, friends, or neighbors, or even themselves.

Apart from staying in touch with others who have emigrated and obtaining firsthand accounts of their migration experience, it seems that the website is not as appealing to someone who lives in San Carlos. The only empirical evidence to support this was a remark by one of our interviewees, Natalia, 25, who had migrated to the United States only 6 months before the study. In our interview, we asked her about the sensations of visiting the website and whether they have changed since she moved to the United States, and she articulated as follows:

At the beginning [before moving to the U.S.] I was using it to keep abreast of occurrences in my hometown. I didn't go very often to San Carlos because all my friends went to other cities for college. Then, now what I do more than anything is to be in touch . . . it changes a lot, now I understand the people who leave [emigrate] and are in the United States, the feelings and joy they get when they visit the website. I didn't understand and I used to laugh about it, but now it's important. . . well, interesting, how what I feel has changed. I thought I was never going to feel that way.

Natalia pursued a university degree in the capital of the state, and she moved to the United States hired by the Mexican government to work as a migrant counselor. She, like many others who moved to the United States, has changed her way of seeing and perceiving the website. Now, apart from its instrumental nature, it has affective and symbolic meanings attached to it. To us, this feeling of connection has much to do with nostalgia and other forms of attachments⁹ but is still very unclear and difficult to determine.

Identification With Community Life

Like Natalia, other informants find the posted information to be a very valuable asset upon which they might capitalize in several ways. When asked about the type of news obtained through the website, Rodrigo, 36, who had been working in Southern California for 8 years, commented,

[You get] a narrative of what happened "La fiesta de la Toltequidad took place, it was like this, people who were involved, visitors came, locals also participated, there were music bands, the cultural events were like this." It is a description more

⁹Some works delineate community attachment according to several factors such as environment and landscapes (Cooper Marcus, 1992; Riley, 1992), childhood experiences (Chawla, 1992), symbols (Low, 1992), and sociocultural ties (Hummon, 1992), or spatial range (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

than anything, and because of the way they put it, you feel very identified . . . they say “from this neighborhood to this one, this happened, this street was closed” and then you say “oh! I know what they’re talking about!” then those are the types of news that you get [on the website].”

The Fiesta de la Toltequidad is an annual festivity that refers to the indigenous origins of the region. Thus, for Rodrigo, not only the writing style but also the jargon used in the website’s accounts of local events makes it very special and unique in its own way, such that he feels that he can truly identify with the website, the newsmakers, and the events being described. One of the reasons for this is his familiarity with the terminology, the locations they are talking about, his own memories during the events, and his longing for the homeland. This type of identification is unlikely to occur among people who lack a meaningful attachment to the place, the people, and to the events per se (e.g., tourists).

This identification with familiar places and events is also likely to occur among others who also emigrated from the same community. Our informants repeatedly reported having established new relationships with other emigrants from San Carlos through the website, even when they had not previously met. Indeed, one of our informants, Rodrigo, commented on how the website was a form of international hub in which people from San Carlos can meet. Rodrigo articulated that if he was to initiate a conversation with people on the website, with a high degree of certainty they must have some form of connection to San Carlos, or at the very least have something to do with it. Thus, the website became an international social hub, and central to socializing and starting conversations with others from San Carlos. We might therefore see the website as a transnational *plaza del pueblo* (the town square), where people gather and eventually get to know others from the community. In the communities we visited in Mexico, la plaza del pueblo is a common place for male or female adolescents to look for a boyfriend or girlfriend, for older adults to spend some time in conviviality, and for families to spend some quality time together, especially during weekends.

Drawing on the concept of transnational imagination, the website is a location that enabled our informants to imagine themselves as part of the same, unique territorial community, even when they are spread throughout several locations, divided by national borders, and might never spend time in face-to-face conviviality again. Being a public, collective site, it enabled our informants to share content from several locations. This feature alone is a powerful tool that helps circulate images of migrants and nonmigrants within the community. From what we observed, many of these images are homeland bound, directed at everybody and no one in particular, as articulated by Juan: “While being on this side [of the border i.e., the U.S.], you have the desire of being in touch . . . of connecting with San Carlos. Then, putting a photo [on the website] . . . it isn’t directed to a person [in particular] but it’s more like a way of still being in San Carlos.” Juan had been living in the United States for 12 years, but he saw the website as the site where he could contact others with shared identity and his membership to the community could be publicly enacted.

It is not immediately clear if this membership could lead to action or solidarity with other fellow members of the community, but later in the conversation Juan seemed to be very concerned about the future of his hometown. When talking about the role of the website in the community, he commented that the website should play a more active role in raising awareness of negative aspects of the community such as underage alcoholism. In doing so, he commented, the community could react accordingly to seek corrective measures for the good of the community, such as creating social programs, educating people, or supporting local educational programs in the community. He also expressed his hope that the site should publish not only such negative aspects but also those positive aspects that might help migrants rethink their opinion about the opportunities for personal development that exist in their homeland. He remarked that the dissemination of opportunities in the homeland in terms of education is important as many migrants encourage new generations to migrate, due to misconceptions about their homelands. From our observations of the website, the owners have not intended to make any significant difference in the community; a couple of informants commented on how the founders had even hindered attempts to use the website as a political platform by banning messages that could be considered controversial. One explanation could be that the owners do not see the website as a platform for community change but as a family business, and thus they do not want any trouble that might interfere with it.

A Good Cultural Exchange

From abroad, migrants saw value and potential in the website as a way to have some positive influence on the community. This influence, however, had to be a positive one as commented by Miguel, a member of the HTA of San Carlos in Southern California, when asked about negative aspects of the website:

[I have seen] a bad influence of people who sometimes visit it, they advertise themselves, and I don't like their way of dressing . . . like gang members. I don't like the influence that they are carrying [to San Carlos]. It's like the people from there [his hometown], the young, are imitating them. . . . If you leave your homeland, it is to improve yourself, to be a better person, to be a better human being . . . not to take bad things to your place of origin. You have to take the good things! . . . Let this be a good cultural exchange, not a bad one. That is my personal opinion, and I always say that to my friends. I see it as a bad influence because I had an experience like that. The grandchild of my brother is around 10 years old and they dress him like that, and I told them "Why are you getting him clothes like those? That is not right!—Well, we think he looks cute. His uncles brought him those kinds of clothes" and I told his mum "Hey, tell them to bring him normal clothes. Those are for gang members."

This cultural exchange, often referred to as social remittances (Levitt, 2001), is facilitated in some way by the website. In this particular case, our informant elaborates

on the idea of improving yourself, of being a better person. Apparently, he was reflecting on how younger people (teenagers and people in their 20s) portray a very different image of his conception of what makes a good migrant. From Miguel's point of view, the cultural exchange can also be a bad one, especially if their values do not match. In the case of Miguel, this negotiation of values provides some friction within the community.

As reported in other studies, second-generation migrants are more vulnerable to exposure to and influence by the new culture (see Shain, 1999–2000). In our previous example, it is not clear if Miguel was referring to second-generation or younger first-generation migrants, but it was clear that there were some frictions between his understanding of good behavior and what he perceived through website postings. This type of behavior was also noted by Ramona, 53, a teacher at a L.A. elementary school:

Boys who are over here and send [post] gang-related signals, their clothes, showing off their tattoos. . . . I feel that's because of the age of those who came here younger. . . . they might not identify with those from here [Americans] . . . and that's why they hang out with those who have something to do with that. . . . They begin with the outfit, behavior, the language, but above all body language, very much. . . . It's very sad and very depressing seeing them that way.

Ramona and Miguel were reflecting on how the website could be used a vehicle to transmit what they considered wrong images of the community. Although Ramona was reflecting on how younger members decide to join what she perceived as gangs, Miguel was reflecting on how the website—through the portrayal of these images—could send the wrong message to the homeland about being “on the other side” (the United States). However, on the other hand, just like other informants, they reflected on the positive aspects of the website such as observing the dynamics of the community, and reviving in their minds what daily life in their communities was like.

Thus, the website makes evident that transnationalism is accompanied by many frictions as scholars (Tsing, 2005) have described. In San Carlos, these frictions can be observed, for instance, between first- and second-generation immigrants: two generations of the same descent, yet with very distinctive cultures. First-generation migrants keep much of their culture, they struggle in the host land, and they may have trouble with assimilation and adoption of the host culture due to language barriers. On the other hand, second-generation migrants, although they usually identify themselves as originally from San Carlos, are educated in U.S.-based schools and may regard English as their mother tongue. It is usually these frictions between the two cultures that challenge, in the view of migrants, San Carlos's identity and culture by incorporating words, way of dressing, and behaviors that are usually perceived as alien by first-generation migrants. Most frictions, however, seem to be mostly experienced by first-generation migrants who have to work as cultural translators between those who have never been to the United States and second-generation immigrants.

3.2. The Importance of Valorizing Social Status

In this section we illustrate how the website can be used to renegotiate migrants' social status in the homeland. *Social status* can be understood as one's position in a society. Every community has a shared understanding of practices, rituals, goods, and other factors that contribute to social status. Studies have reported that for migrants, their home communities provide a special context in which people can improve their social position, make claims about their changing status, and participate in changing their place of origin so it becomes more consistent with their claims (Goldring, 1998). We illustrate in this section how the practices related to social status could be hardly conceived without the notion of transnational imagination as a central framing. In these transnational fields, political organizations as well as migrant families tend to be extremely gendered (Goldring, 2001).

Gender and Status Loss

In many cases, men usually occupy places of power and women are mostly relegated to traditional roles as mothers, spouses, and cooks. In this regard, social practices for having status revalorized seem to be also gendered.

A recurrent phenomenon that we observed on the website is a significant number of photos of people posing next to cars or houses (see Figure 1c). This appears to suggest that practices related to social status are also being portrayed online with the help of transnational websites. A possible explanation for the public display of properties, as it happens on the website, is the symbolism attached to such ownership (Malkin, 2004). In her work, Malkin (2004) argued that through images of modernity such as cars, houses, and other goods, migrants struggle to transform their migrant experience into symbolic capital that might be used to contest power relations and social status within the community. The website represents a unique social space through which community members can make such claims, allowing social mobility through images of modern, often expensive objects. From our observations on the website, posing next to material properties such as cars or houses was a predominantly male activity. A possible explanation is concordant with other scholars' reports—that male migrants are more affected in terms of status than females (Burrell

FIGURE 1. Images shared on the website: (a) a worker at a construction site, (b) two young men showing their tattoos, (c) a male posing by a truck, and (d) a teenager's self-portrait. (Color figure available online.)



& Anderson, 2008; Goldring, 2001), therefore male migrants must compensate for their status loss. The main reason for this, Goldring (2001) argued, is that occupational status loss (e.g., migrants with university degrees must take jobs that do not match their skills) generally does not apply to women, as in many cases they did not work before migration. On the contrary, the husband's loss in occupational status and the wife's entry into the U.S. labor force initiates the redefinition of gender relations and therefore a new demarcation in decision making and control over the household.

Even among men, status loss is likely to affect some more than others. For instance, Pedro, 30, who works at a construction company, commented on how he did not like it very much when people "brag" about their properties:

Most people, I've noticed, they put photos like they want to show off many things, because I have seen photos like "this is my truck, I will take it to Mexico in December" . . . but there are also other photos . . . things. . . I have also seen pictures of the ranchos over there in San Carlos. There is a little bit of everything.

It appears that Pedro does not like "show-off" people. This could be fueled by envy, as the show-off person may have obtained something he can barely afford. It could also be that those kinds of values do not match his, or that he did not experience a major status loss when moving to the United States. However, Pedro's point of view might not be uncommon among migrants. During the interview, Pedro expressed that he was planning to return for good the year after the interview as he was skilled enough to obtain a good job back in Mexico: This suggests that he either did not experience a major status loss when he moved to the United States or did not manage to achieve significant upward social mobility after his relocation to the United States, so he was dismissive of the system and its effects.

Upward Mobility in the Social Structure

For men who are single, the upward mobility in social status means that they can aim at having a better partner. During the interviews, one of our informants, Ramiro, suggested that having a better car or a better house could increase your chances of obtaining a girlfriend or wife. In his own words, Ramiro commented on how not owning a car might be detrimental to any plans of looking for a girlfriend. He also articulated on how some girls preferred men who are well-off rather than those who might be struggling to make the American dream come true. Even though this behavior can be negatively perceived, it seems that this is also an incentive for seeking and achieving social mobility, thus material culture is being gradually incorporated into these practices of status.

Overall, whatever the personal motivations, many male migrants seem to proudly show their properties and possessions on the website. One explanation is that they do it to "claim and valorize their social status" (Goldring, 1998, p. 173). This behavior is also externalized by gift giving to family and friends—mostly women—during return visits. In all this process of production and reproduction of social status, women seem to play a more traditional role as cooks, mothers, or beauty queens

(Goldring, 2001). “Women play an important role in mediating this material culture of migration, which both represents and manifests modernity and which for many absent migrants may be the only route left to them for generating social status and respect” (Malkin, 2004, p. 81). For married women, the display of gifts means that the household has a provider and is therefore respectable rather than abandoned by a husband in the United States (Mahler, 2001). In the case of our informants, those who were temporary workers reported traveling home once a year at best, or once every 3 years for most of them, meaning that their wives, and children, or parents are left behind to receive remittances and gifts during this time or upon their return. The fact that we did not observe many women showing material properties on the website is consistent with what others have reported in migration literature regarding men’s inclination to display spending power, claim status, and have it valorized. It is significant, though, that many of these practices seem to be moving online, because the website represents a transnational space, having symbolic meanings ascribed by migrants and nonmigrants and attained by means of a collective imagination of their communion.

On the other hand, in the case of single women, they are left to obtain social mobility through other forms of expressions. From our observations, becoming “beauty queens” is the primary role through which they can achieve some social mobility. For example, we observed numerous photos of girls posing (see Figure 1d), apparently single, who contrasted to other photos of women in which there were more family and friends present. In this case, women’s behavior can be understood as a way to move upward in the social position in the community, either by being considered the “beauty queens” or marrying a man with a better social status.

Traditional Gendered Expectations and Public Morality

For single women, especially those living in the United States, seeking upward social mobility, posing online caused also some frictions. Single women struggle on the borderline between conservative social norms in their places of origin and more liberal ones in the United States. In one of the cases, our informant Ramona considered the behavior of younger women posing in a very “sexy” manner as indelicate: “Some girls send [post] pictures where they are very sexy, I don’t know . . . like announcing something, offering themselves.” Ramona was referring to photos of girls who are posing, although she did not provide details about the meaning of the word *sexy*. In a more traditional culture, especially that espoused by (particularly rural) Mexicans, women are not supposed to take the initiative in a relationship. In fact, the expression that Ramona used (i.e., “offering themselves”) means that she thinks of their behavior as immoral and disrespectful toward the community. This is related to the normative roles of women in her society: In this case, women are supposed to dress more conservatively and be courted by men, not the other way around.

Miguel, 45, does not fully understand this behavior either: “A girl, just because she’s very pretty, she put [post] her picture, send greetings to a random person. [I think it’s] maybe because of her ego, because ‘I want everyone to know that I’m pretty.’”

Miguel's point of view draws an insightful contrast between the collective nature of the website and personal, ego-centric uses of websites, like in social networking sites. In his view, Miguel refers to the girl's ego, having a more individualistic perspective of the image being portrayed, rather than community oriented. However, his opinion places particular emphasis on the collective nature of the website by saying, "I want everyone to know that I'm pretty," meaning the he views the website as collective, mass media for the community. For Miguel, it is not hard to imagine the website as *the* means of communication of the community, facilitated by his imaginings of the overall community as a unity rather than scattered members.

3.3. Harmonizing Migrants' Social Reality

The third phenomenon we discuss in this work is social reality. Social reality—in the terms of Berger and Luckmann (1966)—encompasses the accepted social principles, norms, and beliefs that sustain a community. In this sense, reality is socially constructed and construed, and subjectively meaningful to the members of a collectivity. In this section, we illustrate how the website is instrumental in maintaining a sustained stream of news aiming way beyond the dyad. We argue that this news stream is used to harmonize the various perceptions and distinct interpretations of the homeland that may exist, particularly between migrants and nonmigrants, to produce a hybrid social reality for participants in Mexico and in the United States. We found that migrants are heavily interested in the everyday life of their homelands, which is not surprising as such. What we illustrate here is the remarkable form in which the website is used to this aim and how these harmonized perceptions of the homeland enable migrants to imagine themselves as a cohesive, integrated community.

Here and There

Although the reality of everyday life has been considered to be organized around the "here" of one's body and the "now" of one's present, this "here and now" can be experienced at different degrees of closeness and remoteness, both spatially and temporally (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The closest zone (e.g., the world within one's reach, one's "here and now") refers to what is directly accessible to one's influence and bodily manipulation: essentially *my* world. These *manipulative* zones can differ for migrants in one way or another. For example, one of our informants, Francisco, 47, commented on how he had more roots in the United States than in Mexico:

In my case I'm more rooted here [the U.S.] than there [Mexico]. If I came here when I was 16, then I have more time living here [he's 47] . . . but . . . in one's mind there is always that 'going back there', because one feels that *there* is one's . . . [that one is] from there . . . and you come here and you feel like you are in an alien house, to put it that way . . . even if you become a [U.S.] citizen. In my case, with my business here . . . but I feel that the whites don't want us, you can feel that in the environment.

During our interview in his business's offices, he proudly showed us a portfolio of community projects in which he had participated from abroad. What is being portrayed here is that his feelings of belonging and imagination make it possible to conceive his "there and now" more important to him than his "here and now," therefore making that far-flung there essentially *his* world. This experience was not unique. Several of our informants had participated from abroad in a variety of projects that have had a direct impact on their homelands, and so their daily lives are in some sense somewhere in between the "here" and "there"—for example, having to deal with family issues on both sides of the border, that is, children on the U.S. side and parents/sibling on the Mexican side.

To some extent, it is clear that for Francisco, *his* reality was more "there" than "here." In this process, social networks are instrumental in conveying the social reality of their homelands, that is, the current perceived norms and beliefs in the community. Through a combination of the website and alternation of dyadic forms of communication such as e-mail, telephone calls, instant messaging, or text messaging, our informants managed to obtain a somewhat continuous news stream about the homeland. Among this array of ICTs, the website is central to this process of "being up-to-date." This was articulated by Rodrigo when asked about the first thing he does when visiting the website:

The first thing I do is reading the news . . . the latest news, the last thing that has happened. Whatever they post, that's more or less what I learn . . . news notes are not precisely as we know them on TV or the newspaper . . . for me, news means knowing that a new company was established, that so-and-so set up a business, that the direction of a street was changed. [News notes are about] Very particular things of the area."

To a significant extent, our informant's reality is largely shaped by what is shared on the website. "Whatever they post, that's more or less what I learn" indicates that the news obtained from the website is central to being informed about the events at San Carlos.

Of course, this also applies to dyadic media (telephone, e-mail, SMS, etc.) as well, in that news is shared through particular people. Thus, individuals' selection of what news to share and their judgments of relevancy are important. However, the difference lies in that the website is less prone to the kind of gatekeeping of news typical in traditional media outlets, as different stories and points of view about the same occurrence can be obtained. It is not immediately clear how the reality that community members construct through the website supplements the reality obtained through dyad-based media. However, it is important to remark that the website and all other dyad-based media help in this process of reconstruction of the reality through a sustained stream of news (Tuchman, 1978). In this process of reconstruction of the homeland's reality, transnational imagination provides an excellent framework for imagining how occurrences and events that happen in disparate locations have effects upon the homeland.

Harmonizing the Perceptions of Reality

The previous example reinforces the idea that the website can be used to update migrants' perceptions of the reality of everyday life in *their* world. Even more important, the website is used to adjust the correspondence between migrants' and nonmigrants' reality, that is, to harmonize their perceptions of the community. Thus, when they have conversations, migrants' meanings and nonmigrants' meanings in *their* worlds properly correspond. That is, they share a common sense about the reality of their community. This applies not only to "objective" facts (e.g., a hospital was built, larger police force) but also to aspects that are meaningful to the society because we *believe* in them, such as better health services or a positive endorsement of public security. In the particular case of the website, our informants seem to use it to obtain factual information as well as other opinions or information of a more subjective nature. First, our participants obtain information about events, occurrences, and stories that they might consider newsworthy. Some of the stories refer to one-off occurrences, whereas others are recurrent, periodic events related to traditions, folk festivals, and celebrations. For instance, many of these reports are incidents, accidents, or some other event in the community that takes place at certain times in the calendar year.

Therefore, the website is in some way *the* communication channel used by our informants to keep abreast of everyday life in their homeland, with perceived realities comparable to those by nonmigrants. For example, Rodrigo nicely articulated the sensation he obtains after using the website:

It's a nice sensation . . . of being in touch, of knowing what's going on. Sometimes I learn the news faster than my parents, so they won't know until I let them know [about recent news] . . . Then it's funny that [they don't learn the news] even when they are over there. Perhaps it's because they don't have access to the Internet so they can be tuned in.

For Rodrigo, the website keeps him informed in a way that clearly surpasses that of his parents who live in his hometown. However, at times Rodrigo feels that he is more informed than his parents of the occurrences in his hometown because local news does not seem to reach them, especially if they do not go out very often. What is important here is that he perceives the website as the main reason for this imbalance, which to a certain extent is true. In addition, his sensation of "being in touch" is related to being "up-to-date" and to knowing about local occurrences and events in a very detailed manner.

Nevertheless, there are some indications that harmonizing the perceptions about the community is not a trivial process. One of our informants, Juan, commented on how shocking it was when he visited his hometown after a few years:

I get the impression that the news notes are very superfluous, very . . . They don't talk about safety, what is going on there, they don't talk about education programs. Last time I went to San Carlos I found out that there are three universities and one institute of technology. You don't find such topics [on the website]. For someone who is here in the United States and has her or his children in Mexico,

it would be good to know that there are [career] opportunities for their children [there]. I don't know . . . that they can study. Many bring their children over to work because they believe that in Mexico there is not even a place to study.

Juan went even further: “[They should] write about the school opportunities that there are for the young, so that the adults know that their children have an opportunity . . . and so that they won't be encouraged to come over here to experience difficult situations as undocumented.”

Here, Juan reflects on the importance of news for contributing to the changing perception of the homeland's reality. Even though he mentions that he can obtain news, it appears that the website focuses on sharing news that is not fully relevant, at least not for him. He reflects on how the website conveys news that has no significant impact on the community such as an increase in living standards. One explanation for this mismatch is that, through dyad-based media, he obtains news that pertains to his closest social circle (e.g., parents, siblings, friends), but rarely beyond those circles. Another explanation is that changes happening in the community might be perceived as trivial for nonmigrants who decide not to communicate them. Because Juan is not made aware of these changes, he does not ask about them. This type of behavior has been reported before, in which some people act as “hubs” or gatekeepers controlling the information flows within migrant networks (Muse-Orlinoff et al., 2009; Shoemaker, 1996). From the newsmakers' side, it can also be the case that the administrators are not interested in sharing those types of events, or do not have the resources to do it.

While Juan was commenting on how he could not find this sort of information on the website, this type of information can help reconstruct *his* world, a reality that somehow harmonizes with other fellow migrants' perceptions. Juan's home community was no longer what it was when he left for the first time, but his visit helped him make the necessary adjustments to his perception of his hometown's reality. According to some of our informants, these types of news items were once being published on the website, but during the interview with one of the U.S.-based administrators, he commented that one of the persons helping them locally was no longer collaborating with them, so it was more difficult to keep up from abroad. Therefore, one of the reasons for this mismatch is that, at least in this case, the newsmaker was also a migrant himself, and he may have similar perceptions to other fellow immigrants. It is important to remark that realities are perceived and they are always in the making, but the extent to which this perceived reality is malleable depends very much on the success of the website for conveying news items that are timely, meaningful, and newsworthy to migrants.

4. DISCUSSION

In this work, we have examined the role of a transnational website through the lens of transnational imagination. We aim at investigating the ways in which

imagination has created a fertile terrain upon which social practices are enacted and observed, transcending national borders. Two main contributions arise from this work. First, we illustrate how the collective sense of belonging and the communication exchanges within the collectivity bring the community into being, and how the website is an integral part of this community. Second, we illustrate how this imagination enables the members of the community to enact social practices that would have been difficult otherwise. Paradoxically, at the same time, these social practices produce intracommunity frictions that are also concomitant with the same process of imagination.

4.1. Transnational Imagination

Several scholars in HCI-related areas had turned their attention to the use of ICTs in transnational fields (Best, Smyth, Serrano-Baquero, & Etherton, 2009; Lindtner et al., 2012; Muse-Orlinoff et al., 2009; Navarrete & Huerta, 2006; Srinivasan & Shilton, 2006; Wang & Brown, 2011; Williams & Dourish, 2008). In part, this is due to the growing importance that these processes have in the global arena. In this process, the transnational imagination has an important role in understanding social practices in geographically dispersed localities. It could be argued that without this framing, the connections among the practices seem difficult to conceive.

In his seminal work, Appadurai (1996) argued that it is through collective forms of imagination that we are able to imagine ourselves in a different position, and possibly come into action with others who have the same imaginations. In his work, he sees imagination as the source of many global movements, including migration. Through collective imagination, our informants identify with others, possess strong feelings of shared belonging, and view themselves as members of a single, unique territorial community that transcends local and national space. It is here that transnational imagination serves to provide a framework to understand not only patterns of communication and of physical travel but also those social practices that do not make much sense if analyzed outside this framing.

The Website and the Community Become One

Through transnational imagination, our informants could obtain a sense of belonging that they could hardly obtain from the localities they are residing in the United States. Images, ideas, and lifestyles can travel through the website at the speed of a click. Our informants were witnesses from abroad of religious observances as well as folk traditions in the homeland. Among other things, this helped them not only to stay abreast of many of these events in the homeland but also to maintain a collective sense of belonging.

The establishment of this transnational space leaves open the door for a sociocultural exchange between the sending and receiving societies. In this sense, the website works as a conduit through which our informants could maintain acute awareness of the occurrences in the community but also through which our informants and

their families could make an exchange of ideas and lifestyles. Rodrigo and Ramona were upset to see that people who had never physically traveled between the United States and Mexico started to dress their children like “gang-members.” Perhaps nonmigrants were lacking any sort of context of the implications of being a gang member, or they just thought it was the way Mexicans dressed in the United States. However, what is remarkable is that the website was one of the main conduits whereby these exchanges were possible, together with gift-giving practices. In this sense, one can argue that this cross-border conversation could become an endless cycle of exchanges between the sending and receiving societies, and within the community. Thus, through transnational imagination, our informants’ identities have been always in-the-making through the continuous incorporation of new cultural elements into their mix of practices, values, and meanings, along with their accompanying frictions (Tsing, 2005). The extent to which the sending and receiving communities are being redefined is highly debatable, but the exchange between them is evident, particularly in the areas we visited, where outmigration and immigration is commonplace.

The transnational exchanges in the work presented fulfill two main purposes. On the one hand, our U.S.-based informants and their descendants can retain their ethnic identities through a continuous flow of images, messages, music, and videos of local festivities, traditions, and the like. On the other hand, the daily lives of our informants’ families and friends in Mexico seem to be permeated by *other* values which, paradoxically, are conveyed by the same migrants and their families through the website. Thus, the transnational website under study can be seen as a collective, transnational space through which the homeland and the host land merge together to varying degrees. What’s more, the website has become an integral part of what the community is, and due to this intimate relationship, one cannot imagine one without the other.

Revalorization of Status in the Community

We have discussed how the website was used to reproduce migrants’ social status in the community. This is possible due to the collective imagination of migrants and nonmigrants by conceiving of themselves as a singular community. Aside from the physical confines of the community, this may be the only place where migrants and nonmigrants can be together and maintain acute awareness of each other. As previously discussed, one of our informants commented on how the website was *the* place for finding people who have some form of connection with his homeland. We also illustrated how the website was being used to claim social status. In particular, we saw how and why these claims varied between men and women. That is, after migration men experience status loss not only within the household (e.g., both have comparable incomes) but also within the community (e.g., migrants with university degrees have positions that require low skills). One way to reclaim some status is the display of spending power. In our interviews, migrants commented on how others seem to “show off” their properties through the website. In addition to photos, our

informants also commented on how others posted messages saying that they would be traveling to the homeland with a truck over the coming holiday. These social practices are difficult to imagine in any other type of media.

More democratic than any other type of mass media reaching the community, the website enables migrants to publicly participate in as well as contest power relations and social status in their communities of origin. Practically anyone can post, share content, or make comments about particular aspects of the community. This feature can prevent authorities, companies, or powerful political figures with particular agendas from dominating the public discourse through conventional mass media. Although we did not explicitly obtain empirical evidence to support these claims, it was suggested by migrants when they commented upon the site's content-approval policy implemented by the administrators.¹⁰

The Telescoping of News

Some of our informants used local news to reconstruct their perceptions of their hometown's reality. This process, however, is hard to conceive outside of the framework of the transnational imagination. Through news, stories, and events shared on the website, people maintain an acute awareness of the occurrences in the community. We observed that the website can be *the* channel through which timely news on the community can circulate.

The extent to which the website can help our informants in the United States and their families in Mexico to harmonize their perceptions about their homeland are very debatable; however, the role of news—and that of newsmakers—is central. Stories that are newsworthy and timely help our informants attach meaning to objects or events in the community. The website then is capable of “making present” a diversity of occurrences, events, and stories that occur in a geographically remote space, but which pertain to the community. To what extent “the local” matters for our informants? It is still unclear what the local means to them, as it does not seem to be a territorial entity, in space or in time. It appears that many of our informants seem to have a different sense of what the local is, of what the community is, and of what the implications of these associations are. It is also unclear whether having an updated notion of the reality of everyday life in the homeland can influence migrants' desire to return, or increase their sense of civic participation and collaboration from abroad.

¹⁰One of our informants, Rodrigo, was sort of nostalgic about the time when posting was “more interactive,” as he said. Rodrigo mentioned that some people felt some form of censorship and that they were commenting things like, “Why do they [the administrators] have to read it before than anyone else?” In the end, he said that the administrators were right about implementing such feature, as users were not behaving appropriately (e.g., flaming, gossiping). He mentioned that the website was still OK, but he felt retrained in terms of “interactivity” and that the website was “slower,” referring to the news flow. During the interviews, there were two more informants who had similar thoughts about the website becoming “slower,” in terms of conveying timely news. These perceptions about the website were derived from the content-approval policy. Although important, this issue deserves much more in-depth research, and it is out of the scope of this article.

4.2. Implications for HCI

We have seen how the social practices enacted through and because of the website can be partially explained by imagination. Now we turn to how these findings may relate to HCI and the type of research that we do. This article provides some implications that may be considered valuable for HCI as they provide the HCI community with a wider focus on implications for design. This section provides reflections that can help us, as a community, to ponder different methods for design and evaluation.

On the one hand, this research speaks to the consideration of an expanded context and domain of focus for users in the design of technologies. In the last few years, with the advent of mobile and ubiquitous technology, HCI and Ubicomp have placed a special emphasis on evaluating systems “in the wild,” beyond the desktop (see Carter, Mankoff, Klemmer, & Matthews, 2008; Castro, Favela, & García-Peña, 2011; Iachello, Truong, Abowd, Hayes, & Stevens, 2006; Oulasvirta, Kurvinen, & Kankainen, 2003). Overall, the HCI community has greatly benefited from methods that have been conceived in other areas such as social sciences and that were adopted for designing and evaluating systems. However, given the context presented in this article, we envision the conception of more holistic approaches that consider community collectivity and transnational imagination that unites individuals across borders. Design and evaluation of dyad-based media, although themselves complex phenomena, are easier to study and more manageable than methods that have the collectivity as their main focus instead of an aggregate of individuals.

Further, traditional design methods in HCI (or Ubicomp for that matter) generally strive to foresee how new systems will be adopted and adapted in real scenarios, although not necessarily the qualitative impacts that these systems may have in people’s daily lives. As we have discussed throughout this article, the type of website we describe can have a significant impact on the lives of migrant communities. Individually speaking, the website helped our informants to maintain an informed reality of their places of origin. Also, it enabled them to concomitantly carry out processes to have their status revalorized from afar. Collectively speaking, the website could have significant impacts on the everyday practices of the members of the community as well as the products from those members working and socializing together, although not necessarily co-located. How can traditional methods in HCI offer a perspective on these terms? In our view, they could hardly do so, as many of them study individuals, aggregates of individuals, or networks rather than communities. Even more, how can we account for the collective nature of the community under study? We could study the use of websites as a group of interconnected individuals, but as we have discussed, these websites often represent, and have impacts, beyond the individual. Therefore, assessing interactive systems that have the potential of permeating everyday life and reshaping community life, whether locally or transnationally, deserve different methods that allow us to study the relationship between online and offline communities, as well as the social practices or products that are the results of those interactions. This latter aspect we believe is important.

At least in the case presented here, interactive systems that could capture the complexities and vicissitudes of daily life and provide support for situated interactions based on propinquity would be an interesting first try. Then, the evaluation of such a system would present an entire different challenge. We believe we have big questions ahead as the systems we deploy in daily life are increasingly being designed, used, and adopted in contexts beyond offices and interpersonal spaces. Therefore, we call for the development of methods for the research, design, and evaluations of systems wherein interactions not only take place but also have effects in contexts beyond the dyad.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Migration is a multidimensional phenomenon that deserves attention from a diversity of disciplines. Migration is also manifold in that it is represented through diverse manifestations with implications at different levels of society such as in the public and private spheres, the global and the local; and, above all, it has effects in several aspects of everyday life in the sending and receiving communities. We have presented a case in which a website was used in a migrant community. In the particular case of the transnational website presented in this work, one of its main salient features is that it provides support for transnational communities. Their dispersed members, by means of collective imagination, consider themselves to be part of the same community. In this article, we examined the use, adoption, and effects that a website of this type can have not only on individuals but also on their community.

In this work, we aimed at providing some sensitivity to the design process coming from topics that are not commonly found in HCI. Through the work presented in this article we hoped to expand the conversation on global-local dichotomies by providing a very particular view on a local phenomenon. Drawing on the notions of transnational imagination, this article unraveled the potential effects that a website can have upon the homeland and the dispersed community. We illustrated how the website became an integral part of what the community is. Also, we showed how migrants can instrumentally use the website for upward mobility in the social structure of their communities. This sole social practice could not be possible without the collective imagination of communion. Finally, the website was also used as a way to harmonize migrants' perspectives about the homeland.

More in-depth work is needed to fully understand not only the way websites are used but also the long-term impacts on the community. Communities such as San Carlos are increasingly global but at the same time intensively local, presenting additional challenges to approach these types of studies. This work may be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to studying the effects that these websites can have upon the individual and the collectivity. Therefore, studies of this type merit careful consideration for the implications that they may have for sending and receiving

immigrant communities. For the HCI community, we hope this article can provide a positive basis for discussing and expanding current studies and frameworks that can help us better design and evaluate systems that might fit into social practices such as the ones discussed in this article.

NOTES

Background. This article is based on the Ph.D. thesis of the first author, where, based on reviewers' suggestions, the work was reframed using transnational imagination as our analytical lens to arrive at the final discussion and form. An early version of this article was presented as part of the authors' participation at the CHI 2011 workshop, "Transnational HCI: Humans, Computers, and Interactions in Transnational Context."

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