CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

The main question addressed by *Migrating into Financial Markets* is how migrant remittances—the resources of some of the world's least affluent inhabitants—became a development tool around the turn of the new millennium. I have shown how this discursive construction and the policies emanating from it originated in the work of remittances experts and policy entrepreneurs within a handful of international institutions dedicated to the design, application, and spread of a market-based model of development. Given this discursive model's resonance with the neoliberal ideology widely shared among policymakers the world over, these experts and policy entrepreneurs had little trouble finding partners within other international organizations, national government agencies, think tanks, and the like. The confluence of these various actors generated a relatively cohesive policy consensus—the R-2-D agenda—that presented the incorporation of migrants and their monies within global financial markets and institutions as a promising means to spur development in the migrant-sending countries and regions of the global South.

In this concluding chapter, I want to elaborate on the major findings of the book and draw out its broader political and theoretical implications related to the making of neoliberalism and migration and development policy.

THE GOVERNMENTAL WORK OF MARKET-BASED SOLUTIONS

Throughout this book I have analyzed the significant governmental work carried out by officials within national government agencies and international financial institutions (along with allies outside government) as they sought to make remittances into a development tool. As we have seen, the upshot of all this work was the identification of remittances as an underutilized financial flow amenable to a variety of market-based policy solutions. The significant work put into the construction and implementation of this market-based development tool brings to light a recurring paradox, if not performative contradiction, faced by advocates of neoliberalism and its historical precursors: despite the antigovernment rhetoric of its promoters, the "free market" can be created and maintained only by public action and intervention.

Karl Polanyi noted this paradox in his writings on the "double movement"—the advance of economic liberalism in nineteenth century England and the spontaneous self-protection of society that followed those advances. According to Polanyi, "the road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized and controlled interventionism. . . . Even those who wished most ardently to free the state from all unnecessary duties, and whose whole philosophy demanded the restriction of state activities, could not but entrust the self-same state with the new powers, organs, and instruments required for the establishment of laissez-faire" (Polanyi, 2001: 146–47). Michel Foucault made a similar point in his investigations of economic liberalism. He noted that liberalism is a practice centered on the question of how to govern as minimally as possible, of how to best achieve what Benjamin Franklin termed "frugal government." But according to Foucault, this project of frugal government is always accompanied by a series of contradictions and paradoxes, as it relies on the "intensive and extensive development of governmental practice, . . . the invasive intrusions of a government which nevertheless claims to be and is supposed to be frugal" (Foucault, 2010: 28). This paradox has not been lost on contemporary scholars of neoliberalism who also emphasize that this market-based ideology and practice relies upon the state for its construction and maintenance. (See, e.g., Davies, 2014: 310.)

The making of remittances as a development tool shows the important place in the making and maintenance of neoliberalism not just of the state, but also of international institutions and the policy entrepreneurs and experts working within them. The conventional story about the global spread of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s, of course, highlights the role of international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, that imposed neoliberal mandates through policy-based lending and structural-adjustment programs. This study shows that the role of these institutions has not been limited to the design and imposition of the macroeconomic-policy recipe of neoliberalism—privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and austerity—but they have also been involved in the more intensive work of extending the logic of the market into previously excluded or ignored terrains. Throughout the book we have seen how, in pursuit of their market-based solution, the purveyors of the R-2-D agenda—variously situated within international institutions, government agencies, and beyond—productively engaged with a variety of subjects, from banking institutions to migrants, in their efforts to reshape the way people across the global landscape viewed, imagined, and acted upon remittances.

Such engagements involved three forms of governmental work that, while analytically distinct, often overlap in real-world practices and interventions. The first of these was the *knowledge work* put into reconstituting the meaning and value of remittances, offering up a new way for peoples around the world to understand the role of migration, migrants, and their monies in the global economy. This involved the displacement of previous debates and understandings of the meaning and value of remittances, and it worked through the creation of new data-collection techniques, statistical calculations, comparisons, and visual representations to portray remittances as an underutilized financial flow that could be leveraged for development purposes.

This knowledge work, however effective, would not be enough on its own for the R-2-D agenda to have a meaningful impact on the world; if the agenda had any chance of making the world conform to its discursive representation, this would require even more governmental work. Foremost among these was *policy design and diffusion work,* through which the purveyors of the R-2-D agenda constructed particular market-based policy solutions and pitched them to government agencies, financial institutions, and civil-society actors around the world. Such work addressed a variety of obstacles to the full-scale incorporation of remittances within financial markets and institutions. For example, in an effort to improve available data and make remittance flows legible to development policymakers and financial markets, new data-collection techniques and procedures were codified and offered up to national-government agencies responsible for official reporting of remittance receipts. Cost-comparison Web sites would later be identified as a valuable means for generating transparency for consumers in the remittance-transfer industry; best practices in the design of such Web sites were identified, and standards and official requirements were laid down in a World Bank certification procedure. Sometimes the lead agencies behind the creation and implementation of the R-2-D agenda moved beyond a facilitator role to create services directly for the marketplace. This was evident with the Mexican and U.S. central banks' co-creation of the Directo a México service, which they would market across the continent to financial institutions on both sides of the financial corridors linking particular locales across the international divide; it was also evident with the World Bank's creation of its own remittance cost-comparison Web site, which now tracks costs in some 220-odd "country corridors" (http://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/en/about-remittance-prices-worldwide).

Such work often bled into a final type of governmental work—*subject formation work*—whereby various agencies sought to reshape the economic practices and calculations of financial institutions, to bring banks and credit unions to see the once-excluded population of migrant remitters and remittance recipients as a potentially profitable client base, a veritable "fortune at the base of the pyramid." This work also involved efforts to reshape the actions, desires, and identities of migrants and the friends and family they left behind, to bring these individuals to imagine themselves as good financial subjects and to act accordingly. This was recognition that, despite the discursive representation of them as already fully entrepreneurial subjects, migrants and their household units would require "improvement" (Li, 2007b), as they lacked the requisite knowledge and capacities to engage effectively in financial markets, managing risks, rationally processing all known market information, calculating costs and benefits, and ultimately deciding upon particular financial products and services. To conform to the neoliberal discourse extolling the potential of remittances as a development tool, migrant remitters and their friends and family members back home were thus targeted by financial education and literacy campaigns, interventions designed to reshape their subjectivity, to "make important changes in the way that people think about and handle their money" (Orozco and Wilson, 2005: 380): that is, to make them into good financial subjects.

Thus, despite a market-fundamentalist rhetoric that celebrated the transformative power of the market and continually counseled against public action interfering with migrants' use of "their own money," the making of remittances as a development tool came about only as the result of significant governmental work by a range of agencies across various geopolitical scales. To say that remittances were made into a development tool as a result of the governmental work analyzed throughout *Migrating into Financial Markets* is not to suggest, however, that the purveyors of the R-2-D agenda always and unquestionably succeeded in their efforts. The episodes recounted throughout the book demand a more nuanced evaluation of the effects of this neoliberal reform effort. Certainly those pursuing the agenda at various scales have achieved success on many fronts. At the most basic level, the agenda has been a tremendous success in that it brought newfound attention to remittances and generated widespread enthusiasm around the idea that these monies could help catalyze development processes in the global South. In more specific terms, the agenda also succeeded in encouraging many national governments to improve the quality of the remittances data that they report. And the increasingly visibility of remittances did bring about increased competition in the remittance-transfer industry and reduce the costs borne by remitters in much of the world.

Not all the governmental work behind the agenda, however, has met with such success. Perhaps most clearly, the efforts to reshape the subjectivities of banking institutions, migrants, and remittance recipients appear to have faced greater challenges. The policy entrepreneurs promoting the financial-democracy aspect of the agenda did successfully engage banking institutions, and their message about the potential value of migrants and their monies seems to have resonated with many of them. This was apparent when many major banking institutions in the United States began offering low-cost remittance-transfer products over the last decade. But as mentioned in chapter 3, this interest seems to be waning recently, as banks are increasingly abandoning these services in response to both stepped-up regulation and a lack of customer demand. And while significant numbers of local banks and community credit unions bought in to the Directo a México program and agreed to offer the service, the startlingly low number of transfers processed through the service suggests that few of these institutions have wholeheartedly embraced the vision and truly committed to recruiting migrants as valuable members and clients. The task of reshaping the financial imaginations, identities, and behaviors of migrants appears an even more challenging task, as I discuss in the following section.

TRANSNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: BEYOND INTERSTATE COMPETITION

Existing scholarship on state-led transnationalism has gone a long way in documenting and analyzing the efforts made by migrant-sending states to retain the loyalties and resources of their absent populations—helping to explain, in other words, what "governments do when a large part of their population simply gets up and leaves" (Fitzgerald, 2009: 2). The analysis of the emergence and application of the R-2-D agenda provides additional insight, elaborating and extending our understanding of transnational migration, the public policies addressing it, and the possibilities for social justice and transformation emanating from it.

We have seen that the transnational-engagement policies addressing migrants are no longer unilaterally adopted and pursued by sending states; the R-2-D agenda has forged a collaboration between sending and receiving states, as well as a broader range of international financial institutions and development agencies. As initially formulated, the transnational-engagement policies of migrant-sending states would seem to have been driven by a logic of interstate competition. Those policies were designed to capture the political, economic, and social resources of an absent population, gaining access to increased knowledge and skills through the so-called brain circulation (Saxenian, 2005) and to foreign exchange through continued remittance flows. Successful application of such policies held the promise of favorably repositioning migrant-sending states within the global political-economic system. The logic of the R-2-D agenda is different; this is transnational collaboration—not competition—based on a shared commitment to the expansion and extension of markets, the pursuit of utopian, market-fundamentalist public policies aimed at least rhetorically at tackling global inequality and injustice by fully incorporating migrants and their monies within global financial markets, trying to "make markets work for the poor." This project aims, in other words, at extending neoliberalism to encompass previously marginalized and excluded peoples and geographies; it is an attempt to use transnational migration as a relay to reproduce and further entrench neoliberalism.

But achieving this goal of further extending the reach of neoliberalism and its market-based solutions by engaging previously excluded peoples and places is not always easy. One of the central difficulties in making reality conform to the discursive construction of remittances as a development tool is that the R-2-D agenda's ultimate target population, the migrating subjects whose conduct it seeks to shape, transform, and improve, is often characterized by clandestinity, mobility, and mistrust. The case of Mexican migrants is instructive on this point. Mexico's state-led transnationalism policies—aimed precisely at reincorporating Mexico's absent population, at capturing the loyalties, energies, and resources of the population of *mexicanos en el exterior*—have regularly been touted as best practices for other governments to learn from and follow. The other agencies and organizations working to implement the R-2-D agenda in North America rely upon the Mexican government's transnational-engagement policies, agencies, and institutions as their means to gain entry and to connect with this mobile population. The officials within organizations and agencies collaborating with the Mexican government undoubtedly assume that these policies and practices have been effective at recapturing this absent population—and the self-congratulatory rhetoric of the

Mexican officials running these programs (e.g., García de Alba, 2010) probably does nothing but reinforce such beliefs.

But as we have seen, there are reasons to doubt the effectiveness of this transnational-policy apparatus as it expands its reach, moving beyond an elite stratum to engage the full range of migrants—and their friends and family back home—in the types of financial-education and literacy training that they hope will make the individuals within this population into good financial subjects. As noted in the previous chapter, many migrants mistrust government officials and are suspicious of their intentions when they claim they want to help improve migrants' lives. This constitutes a significant challenge for the transnational-policy apparatus and those programs aimed at educating migrants, at reshaping their attitudes and identities in ways more consistent with the logic and ethos of market fundamentalism. The fact that these educational efforts are currently being carried out in collaboration with agencies of the U.S. government likely does not help to quiet migrants' mistrust; in fact, it may well exacerbate such mistrust. This is because the inclusionary project of the R-2-D agenda sits uneasily beside another governmental project targeted at Mexican migrants within the United States—one that aims at their physical exclusion at the territorial boundary and the insertion of those who make it to the interior into what Nicholas de Genova terms a "social space of 'illegality'" (2002: 427).

These inclusionary and exclusionary governmental projects run at cross-purposes. Given that most Mexicans from peasant or working-class backgrounds have little to no realistic chance of entering the United States legally (Spener, 2009: 9–10), contemporary Mexican migration is largely unauthorized. Nestor Rodríguez has usefully conceptualized this as "autonomous international migration" (Rodríguez, 1996; Spener, 2009), migrant self-activity undertaken despite the existence and objectives of state regulations seeking to restrict their movements across the international boundary. Autonomous migrants have developed an elaborate repertoire of attitudes and actions to evade detection by the agents of government who would deny them a livelihood within the United States, practices that have been carefully honed through a process of what Rodríguez (1999: 70) terms the "social accumulation of knowledge and skills." This set of attitudes, practices, and mentalities adopted by the population of undocumented Mexican migrants to remain untouched by government authorities, to keep themselves outside the view and reach of boundary policing and immigration-enforcement regimes, render this population slippery and intractable when government agents of various sorts target them with productive modes of power, with attempts to include them in financial markets, shape their individual subjectivities and practices, and turn them into good financial subjects by way of financial-literacy and education schemes. In large part this is because migrants do not stop to inform authorities on either side of the boundary of their comings and goings. The prevalence of clandestine entry means that there is no accurate register documenting the identities of migrants or where they are physically located. The lack of such registries makes it difficult to develop any finely calibrated efforts to target and recruit migrants for financial education and training.

While the prevalence of clandestine and autonomous migration constitutes a significant obstacle for governmental projects targeting and seeking to "improve" migrants and their communities, the agents pursuing the R-2-D agenda are elaborating and drawing upon new surveillance technologies that may facilitate this task. In the North American case, for example, certainly no accurate register exists of the entire population of autonomous migrants entering the United States from Mexico. But Mexican authorities are trying to remedy this deficiency through their Matrícula Consular (MCAS) initiative. As we have seen, the MCAS played a key part in the Mexican consular corps's efforts to promote financial education and literacy, particularly as a means to negotiate with banks and other financial institutions to provide workshops and public presentations to the captive audience of Mexican migrants within consulate waiting rooms. These authorities are also beginning to use their database of all MCAS cardholders to target particular segments of the larger migrant population. This is most clearly seen with the *corredores financieros* program. Here the database is being used to identify community-level trends, to specify geographic concentrations in the United States of migrants from particular localities in Mexico, and to shape and engage those migrants as good financial subjects within these socially constructed translocal financial corridors.

Autonomous migration is sometimes presented as fully transformational, as having somehow freed the undocumented migrant from the moorings of nation-building projects and states' "monopoly on the power to assign identities to those who enter [their] space" (Kearney, 1991: 58). The findings of this project would seem to caution against any such overly celebratory readings of the meaning and consequences of autonomous migration. The pursuit of the R-2-D agenda in North America may face challenges in reaching and impacting certain segments of its target population, particularly undocumented migrants, but that does not mean that this target population has been freed completely from the gaze of these governmental authorities. Quite the contrary. The elaborate governmental project that public officials in both the United States and Mexico, as well as their partners in international organizations, have carried out—targeting migrants, their monies, and their communities for improvement—dispels any facile suggestion that autonomous migration necessarily transgresses the reach and power of the territorial nation-state and the more expansive networks of governmental power that these are currently forging.

Today's undocumented Mexican migrants may have more latitude and room for maneuver than if they were enrolled in a new guest-worker program, and they would certainly seem more "free" than the Philippine migrants caught up in that state's "labor-brokerage" programs, which involve government officials in all aspects of the migration process, from recruitment and training to job placement and contract enforcement (Rodriguez, 2010). But that freedom comes at a price, including the monetary cost of hiring *coyotes* to guide migrants around the militarized enforcement apparatus of the U.S. Border Patrol, the physical cost of the perilous journey across the international boundary, the emotional cost of living with the ever-present danger of disruption and dislocation as the U.S. government's detention and deportation regime further penetrates the spaces of migrants' everyday lives, as well as the less tangible costs of enduring family separation. Lamentably, all these costs, and the human suffering that they entail, are erased from view as the R-2-D agenda touches ground in North America.

UNSEATING THE HEGEMONY OF MARKET-BASED SOLUTIONS

Finally, a few words are in order regarding the political implications of the foregoing analysis of the content and consequences of the R-2-D agenda. This agenda and the governmental agencies driving it are ultimately pursuing a rather straightforward objective. The basic formulation is: migration leads to development, which leads to the end of migration; that remittance-led development can (and should) lead to a postmigration future. This book has detailed the significant governmental work required in the attempt to make this formulation a reality and has documented the uneven effects of the policies put into practice to achieve this objective. In this final section I want to move beyond this line of analysis to entertain alternative ways of thinking about migration and development, most of all by calling into question the taken-for-granted assumption that development should be pursued in the global South so that people can stay home, so that they can remain in the places where they were born and "where they belong."

Even some of the more creative voices in recent debates over immigration reform in North America, themselves highly critical of the types of market-fundamentalist policies underlying North American economic integration and the R-2-D project, have attempted to redirect the political debate around immigration and the need for policy reform to focus on the need to stimulate economic development in Mexico's migrant-sending regions so as to assure the people living there "the right to stay home" (Global Exchange, 2008). These voices advocate a "comprehensive effort to slow or reverse the outflow of Mexicans to the United States," an effort that would need to focus on reducing "the crushing economic pressures that have won Mexico the unenvied position of being the world's undisputed leader in out-migration" (Lewis, 2008: 6, 7). There is certainly much value in these calls for improving the economic conditions and opportunities available to workers and small farmers in Mexico's migrant-sending regions. But this critical perspective really offers little in the way of an alternative, as it shares two problematic features of the market-centric R-2-D agenda. First, by representing migration as "economic expulsion" (Lewis, 2008: 8), migrants are framed as agencyless victims of macrostructural forces, and the full range of social and cultural, as well as political-economic factors, that have made migration into a self-sustaining process are steadfastly ignored. Second, migration is taken to be perverse, a pathological social process that needs to be undermined and ultimately reversed.

Some of the more nuanced contributions to debates about migration and development have, commendably, framed the ultimate objective of public policies not as putting a stop to migration but instead as making migration an option rather than a necessity. While this formulation does, unfortunately, reproduce the understanding of migration as driven exclusively by economic forces, as compelled by economic necessity, this nuanced statement of objectives helps point toward new ways of thinking about the future of migration and the policies addressing it. Most important, it helps to emphasize the value of making international migration and mobility into a real option accessible to peoples around the world.

The R-2-D agenda gives no sustained attention to the severely limited availability of legal channels for labor migration into the global North, and this constitutes one of the most glaring absences from this policy agenda. An alternative approach to migration and development[1] would need to remedy this silence, insisting that the potentially positive relationship between migration and development cannot be realized if migration is not truly an option, if the dearth of legal migration channels renders substantial portions of migrants "illegal," entails migrants' long-term separation from family and friends, and often requires death-defying treks through the most inhospitable terrains.

Through their collective forging of enduring transnational social spaces, migrants can valorize and find dignity in their engagement in political, economic, social, and familial life in multiple spaces across international borders—as was clearly evident in the CCIME *consejera* María Antonieta González's address to President Felipe Calderón, recounted in chapter 4 above. Perhaps this form of "transnational living" (Guarnizo, 2003) is not a problem that needs to be eliminated or reversed; perhaps the problem resides, instead, in exclusionary boundary-enforcement policies designed to restrict mobility, to bound social life within the limits of the territorial nation-state, and to contain peoples within the places where they were born and are thought to belong. If this is the case, undermining and reversing these exclusionary policies should be the objective of any political project designed to truly make migration an "option." This would likely contribute to a much more attractive form of "development" for the world's poor and excluded than the financial inclusion promised by the R-2-D agenda.