Transnationalism - Updated

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CENTER ON MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This chapter examines transnationalism in migration studies. First, we investigate the initial conceptualizations of the transnational perspective on migration and efforts at systematization. Second, we evaluate the discussions around contentious issues regarding past vs. present transnationalism, the extent of transnationalism among migrants, and transnationalism, globalization, states and politics. We outline a typology of transnationalism in which transnational social spaces are differentiated according to the internal characteristics of group organization and the extent of common or shared values and symbols. Third, we examine methodological notes on transnational research where we assess the term transnationality. We identify multiple research techniques used in transnational studies and conclude that nowadays mixed methods research is on the rise. Finally, we offer some venues for further research through a transnational optic where the focus should be on changing boundaries as social spaces are composed of dynamic processes.

1. Introduction

"Transnationalism" entered the lexicon of migration studies in the early 1990s, over a century after earlier generations of migration researchers had introduced and made extensive use of the concept of assimilation. It did so in rather different circumstances, for whereas assimilation gained currency with relatively little reflection or debate at the moment that migration research was in its early formative period, transnationalism entered a well-developed sociological subfield dealing with migrant incorporation. Several principal advocates assertively promoted the concept, which was rather quickly embraced by many scholars. However, it was also confronted by sceptics. The result is that the concept has undergone substantial revision since its earliest formulations, the consequence of an often-spirited dialogue (see Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Over time, the debate around transnationalism in migration has concerned broader issues in the social sciences, such as nationalism, political power, methodological nationalism and essentializing ethno-cultural groups.

Those scholars who initially embraced the idea of transnational migration did so because of a conviction that it was necessary to capture the distinctive and characteristic features of the new immigrant streams and groups that have developed in the advanced industrial nations at the core of the capitalist world system. The term has emerged and evolved at a time characterized by high levels of labour migration from economically less developed nations to the most developed, and from similarly high levels of political refugees fleeing conflicts and instability in former communist and Third World nations.

The influx of these new labour migrants and refugees has reshaped, not only nation-states with long histories of immigration, the settler states of the United States, Canada, and Australia, but also states that have not been notable as immigrant receiving nations in the earlier phases of industrialization, those of Western Europe and to a lesser extent, Japan and nowadays Turkey and Lebanon due to the regional unrests. The high levels of immigration, the new locales of settlement, reshaped ethno-cultural mixes, changes in the nature of capitalist economies in a new (post-)industrial epoch, changes in the meaning and significance attached to the idea of citizenship, and the potency of a globalized popular culture have contributed to the conviction that what is novel about the present requires equally novel conceptual tools if we are to make sense of the impact of the new international migration on the receiving, transition and sending countries.

This overview proceeds by examining: (1) the initial conceptualizations of the transnational perspective on migration and efforts at systematization; (2) discussions around contentious issues regarding past vs. present transnationalism, the extent of transnationalism among migrants, and transnationalism, states and politics; (3) methodological notes on transnational research; and, finally (4) venues for further research through a transnational optic.

Transnational social formations – also called fields or spaces – consist of combinations of social and symbolic ties and their contents, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that cut across the borders of at least two national states. In other words, the term refers to sustained and continuous pluri-local transactions crossing state borders. Most of these formations are located in between the life-world of personal interactions, on the one hand, and the functional systems of differentiated spheres or fields, such as the economy, polity, law, science and religion, on the other hand. The smallest element of transnational social formations is transactions, that is, bounded communications between social agents such as individual persons. More aggregated levels encompass groups, organizations and firms. It is an empirical question whether such transnational transactions are global or regional.

2. Initial Conceptualizations

Transnational approaches certainly do not form a coherent theory or set of theories. They can be more adequately described as a perspective, which has found entry into the study of manifold cross-border phenomena. We can delineate several generations of transnational scholarship but focus mostly on those which are relevant for migration research. A first precursor to the use of the concept in migration research, flourishing in the late 1960s and 1970s, asked about the emergence, role and impact of large-scale, cross-border organizations. This literature, steeped in the field of International Relations, focused its attention on interdependence between states, resulting from the existence and operations of powerful non-state actors, such as multinational companies (Keohane and Nye 1977). Curiously, the interest in this transnational approach quickly disappeared with the onset of debates on globalization from the late 1970s onwards. Perhaps this demise was related to the fact that globalization studies re-centred the interest to how national political economies were reshaped by ever growing capital flows across borders. Almost two decades later, transnational ideas took root again in a very specific field – international or cross-border migration – and with a decided focus on the agency of a particular type of agent, migrants. It was in social

anthropology and later sociology that this lens took hold. This approach dealt with dense and continuous ties across the borders of nation-states, which concatenate into social formations.

The initial phase ran from the early 1990s until the dawn of the new century. While a number of scholars contributed to this development, cultural anthropologist Nina Glick Schiller and her colleagues Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc provided the pioneering impetus (Basch et al. 1994). Based on this foundation, a number of scholars have contributed to a further elaboration of types of transnational practices, and provided typologies of transnational practices and spaces.

Transnationalism as a new mode of incorporation: Glick Schiller and colleagues

Glick Schiller et al. (1994) made two initial points, one historical and the other theoretical. Historically, they contended that there is something qualitatively different about immigrants today compared to their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century counterparts. Glick Schiller viewed this earlier era's immigrants as having broken off all homeland social relations and cultural ties, thereby locating themselves solely within the socio-cultural, economic, and political orbit of the receiving society. By contrast, she contended, today's immigrants are composed of those whose networks, activities, and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field.

From this historical comparison, Glick Schiller et al. (1994) offered a rationale for a new analytic framework, making a case for the introduction of two new terms: "transnationalism" and "transmigrants." The former refers to "the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement," while the latter refers to the "immigrants who build such social fields" by maintaining a wide range of affective and instrumental social relationships spanning borders (Basch et al. 1994: 27). Implicitly, the introduction of these new concepts suggested that existing theoretical frameworks are not up to the task of analyzing the new immigrants. To make their case, the authors presented vignettes. One of them involved a Haitian hometown association located in New York City. While the activities of the association clearly have something to do with immigrant adjustment, it has also initiated various projects in Haiti. This, Glick Schiller and her colleagues contended, distinguishes contemporary mutual aid societies from those in the past, which they argued were solely designed to address the adjustment needs of the immigrants themselves (Basch et al. 1994: 145-224). Another example involved white-collar Grenadian immigrants being addressed by Grenada's Minister of Agriculture and Development: Immigrants are at once both Grenadian citizens with an ability to influence friends and relatives who

have remained in the homeland and American ethnics capable of undertaking efforts to shape economic and political decisions in the host society. The third example looked to Filipinos and the Balikbayan box, a formalized and regulated form of remittance. This illustration suggests that remittances are not new, but that homeland governments are increasingly likely to embrace their expatriate communities when such an embrace can be economically beneficial.

From these illustrations, the authors made two main conceptual points. First, social science must become "unbound." The argument is that the problem with theories operating as closed systems in which the unit of analysis is ultimately the national state is that they fail to provide room for the wider field of action occupied by contemporary immigrants. Thus, Glick Schiller et al. argued for the necessity of recasting theory from the national to a global systems perspective. They stressed that transnationalism is the product of world capitalism that has produced economic dislocations making immigrants economically vulnerable (Basch et al. 1994: 30-34). While sympathetic to the discussions of transnationalism as cultural flows, seen in the work of scholars such as Arjun Appadurai and Ulf Hannerz, the main thrust of the authors' argument involved an articulation of a notion of transnational migration that focuses primarily on social relations.

Second, the authors pointed to the multiple and fluid identities of contemporary transmigrants, contending that their manipulation of identities reveals a resistance on the part of transmigrants to "the global political and economic situations that engulf them" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 13). This insight necessitates a rethinking of received ideas regarding class, nationalism, ethnicity, and race. Relying on the Gramscian idea of hegemony, the authors treated each of these aspects of identity as contested and pliable. The real significance of the discussion is that assimilation and cultural pluralism are inadequate to account for the distinctive character of contemporary immigration. From this perspective, whereas assimilation implies the loss of past identity, cultural pluralism advances an essentialist perspective that treats ethnic identities as immutable.

A typology of transnationalism

While Glick Schiller et al. (1994) placed transnational social fields in the framework of world systems analysis, this raised the question of how to conceptualize transnational social formations. One answer has been the concept of transnational social space. The idea of transnational spaces entailed considering the migratory system as a boundary-breaking process in which two or more nation states are penetrated by and become a part of a singular new social space. This space involves in part the circulation of ideas, symbols, activities, and ma-

terial culture. It also involves the border-crossing movements of people who then come to engage in transnational social relations, with implications for immigrant incorporation. Social space does not only refer to physical features, but also to larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values, and meanings that the specific and limited place represents to migrants. Space is thus different from place in that it encompasses or spans various territorial locations. It includes two or more places.

Transnational spaces can be differentiated according to their degree of formalization. The degree of formalization refers both to the internal characteristics of group organization and the extent of common or shared values and symbols. On the one end there are networks with low levels of formalization, and on the other there are highly formalized institutions. Organizations are characterized by a high degree of formalized relations, for example in terms of hierarchy and control. Communities also show a high degree of formalization, though not in terms of their internal organizational structure but their common values and symbols. There are four ideal types of transnational spaces: areas of contact and diffusion; small groups, particularly kinship systems; issue networks; and communities and organizations (see Table 1).

Table 1: Types of transnational social spaces

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Degree of formalization</td></tr>
<tr><td>Low: networks</td><td>High: institutions</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>

(1) D*iffusion*:

e.g. fields for the exchange of goods, capital, persons, information, ideas and practices

</td>
<td>

(2)*small kinship groups*:

e.g. households, families

</td>
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<td>

(3) I*ssue networks*:

e.g. networks of business people, epistemic networks, advocacy networks

</td>
<td>

(4) *Communities and organizations:*

e.g. religious groups, political parties, businesses

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1) *Diffusion in Contact Fields*: This category comprises phenomena such as the exchange of goods, capital and services between businesses. People engaged in these transactions do not necessarily have sustained or close contact with each other. In some cases, strangers meet at the marketplace or at tourist resorts. Transboundary ties between individuals and organizations may also lead to a diffusion of language, e.g. specialist terms are borrowed from one language and incorporated into another. We also find social and cultural practices diffusing across borders – as in the action repertoires of social movements. Among immigrants, for example, we observe processes that partly point to cultural diffusion from the country of origin to the country of settlement. For instance, Kurds from Turkey brought their

traditional New Year's celebration (Newroz) to Germany, where it became an important symbol of common Kurdish identity. In order to take the wind out of the Kurdish separatists' sails, the Turkish government promptly responded by declaring Newroz an official bank holiday in 1996.

(2) *Small Groups – Kinship Systems*: Highly formalized transboundary relations within small groups like households and families, or even wider kinship systems, are representative for many migrants. Families may live apart because one or more members work abroad as contract workers (like the former 'guestworkers' in Germany), or as posted employees within multinational companies. Small household and family groups have a strong sense of belonging to a common home. A classic example for such relations are transnational families, who conceive themselves as both an economic unit and a unit of solidarity and who may keep, besides the main house, a kind of shadow household in another country. Transnational families make use of resources inherent in social ties like reciprocity, and also resources existing in symbolic ties, such as solidarity. Economic assets are mostly transferred from abroad to those who continue to run the household 'back home'.

(3) *Issue Networks*: These are sets of ties between persons and organizations in which information and services are exchanged for the purpose of achieving a common goal. Linkage patterns may concatenate into advocacy networks (e.g. for human rights), business networks, or science networks. Often, there is a common discourse concerning a specific issue such as human rights or a profession, and such networks and organizations are sometimes even seen as the nucleus of a "global civil society" (cf. Keane 2003). In contrast to organizations with formal membership, access to these networks is not strictly limited to interested actors. While issue networks look back upon a long tradition in the realm of human rights, and are making steady progress in ecology, they are also emerging among migrants who have moved from the so-called third countries to the European Union (EU). Regarding business networks, persons from emigration states who live abroad constitute an important source of financial transfer and investment, both as immigrant entrepreneurs in their new societies of settlement and with their countries of origin. The governments of sending nations have increasingly initiated programs to attract emigrants' investments. By far the largest set of transnational networks—a set of interlinked local, national, and regional networks—in the world is that of the Overseas Chinese and Indians abroad, promoting trade by providing market information and matching and referral services by utilizing their co-ethnic ties. Such ties alleviate the problems associated with contract enforcement and provide information about trading opportunities.

(4) *Transnational Communities and Organisations:* Communities and organisations constitute highly formalized types of transnational spaces with an inherent potential for a relatively long life-span. Close symbolic ties are characteristic of transnational communities, whereas a more formal internal hierarchy and systematically structured controls over social ties exist within transnational organizations.

Transnational communities comprise dense and continuous sets of social and symbolic ties, characterised by a high degree of intimacy, emotional depth, moral obligation and sometimes even social cohesion. Transnational communities can evolve at different levels of aggregation. The simplest type consists of village communities in interstate migration systems, whose relations are marked by solidarity extended over long periods of time. Members of such communities who are abroad or have returned home often invest in private or public projects for the benefit of the community in question. The quintessential form of transnational communities consists of larger transboundary religious groups and churches. World religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism existed long before modern states came into existence. Diasporas also belong to the category of transnational communities. In classical renditions, these are groups that experienced the territorial dispersion of their members at some point in the past, either due to a traumatic experience, or specialisation in long-distance trade. Jews, Palestinians, Armenians and Greeks can be named as examples here. Generally, members of diasporas have a common memory of their lost homeland, or a vision of an imagined one to be created, while at the same time the immigration country often refuses the respective minority full acknowledgement of their cultural distinctiveness (see Gold 2002).

An early type of transnational organization – interstate non-governmental organizations (INGOS) – developed out of issue networks like the Red Cross, Amnesty International and Greenpeace. At the other extreme there are organizations which are based in one specific country but whose sphere of influence extends abroad, as with the ethno-nationalist Kurdish Workers Party PKK. Transnational enterprises constitute a further type of transnational organization. Overall, such transnational communities and organizations must be theoretically linked to transnationalism from above, rather than treating transnationalism from above and from below as discrete parallel phenomena.

What makes transnational communities different from the more familiar form that typified immigrant enclaves in industrializing nations a century ago is that they are located in a space that encompasses two or more nation-states, a situation made possible by time-space compression. Metaphorically, assimilation is associated with the image of "the uprooted" (Handlin [1951]), and cultural pluralism with "the transplanted" (Bodnar 1985). An appropriate transna-

tional metaphorical alternative may be – borrowing from the novelist Salman Rushdie – the idea of "translated people," that is, migrants are continually engaged in translating languages, cultures, norms, and social and symbolic ties. Transnational migrants forge their sense of identity and their community, not out of a loss or mere replication. Crucially, it is not simply individuals living with one foot in two places that constitute the sole occupants of transnational communities. The later do not necessarily require individual persons living in two worlds simultaneously or between cultures in a total "global village" of de-territorialized space. What is required, however, is that communities without propinquity link through exchange, reciprocity, and solidarity to achieve a high degree of social cohesion, and a common repertoire of symbolic and collective representations.

Summarizing the various strands of research sketched here, Steven Vertovec (1999: 449-456) points out several recurring themes that shape the ways the term is employed. He identifies six distinct, albeit potentially overlapping or intertwined, uses of the term: (1) as a social morphology focused on a new border spanning social formation; (2) as diasporic consciousness; (3) as a mode of cultural reproduction variously identified as syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity; (4) as an avenue of capital for transnational corporations (TNCs), and in a smaller but significant way in the form of remittances sent by immigrants to family and friends in their homelands; (5) as a site of political engagement, both in terms of homeland politics and the politics of homeland governments vis-à-vis their émigré communities, and in terms of the expanded role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs); and (6) as a reconfiguration of the notion of place from an emphasis on the local to the translocal.

Transnational social spaces and globalization

When comparing transnational and global approaches, transnationalism is an older term, predating globalization by some 10-15 years; around 1970 as compared to the early to mid-1980s. Methodologically, most globalization approaches are concerned, in the first instance, with macro-dynamics, whereas accounts of the transnational tend to be more agency-oriented. This is very visible in world systems theory, which is, in essence, a top-down, outside-in approach. In contrast, transnational approaches take an agency-oriented view, usually starting from small groups and networks of mobiles. In its broader meaning, "transnational studies" (Khagram and Levitt 2008) thus tends to be concerned with topics such as migrant networks, traders and ethnic business constellations, politics of place among migrants and returnees, diasporas and development, immigrant incorporation – but also social movements and advocacy networks.

Transnationalism as a discourse could be regarded as a stepping stone towards globalism and even cosmopolitanism – but also on the contrary, reinforcing nationalism. After all, transnationalism refers to the Janus face of cross-border processes and conditions which may foster long-distance nationalism. Nationalist claims are frequently articulated and mobilized within cross-border groups and structures. Nationalism is not always geared towards achieving congruence between national-cultural boundaries and state borders. Nation-building may be confined to sub-state territories without ever crossing the threshold to secession, and it may extend beyond state borders by attempting to bind together populations in a homeland territory and abroad without trying to remove the borders between them or to bring back external kin-populations into the homeland. An example of the former has been, until now, Québec in Canada; an example for the latter has been the Irish diaspora in the USA since the nineteenth century.

3. Open and contested questions

A number of contentious issues have characterized the debate around transnationalism since the late 1990s: Is transnationalism a mode of immigrant incorporation or is it a mode of activity? If it is a mode of incorporation, is it antithetical to assimilation or multiculturalism? How many transnationals are there? What is the role of national states in forging transnational social ties and spaces?

Migrant Incorporation: Assimilation and Transnationalism – Exclusive or overlapping?

What is the relationship between transnationalism and assimilation? It is noteworthy that the pioneers of this understanding of the transnational challenged the notion that the incorporation of immigrants takes place in the container of the respective nation-state in which immigrants settle for longer periods of time in their life course. In the early Glick Schiller and colleagues (Basch et al. 1994) formulation viewed assimilation and transnationalism as contrasting, antithetical modes of incorporation, the former being at the least an alternative to the latter and perhaps—as a form of resistance—a direct challenge to it. Later contributions conceptualized the two as distinct modes of incorporation, which existed side by side, such as assimilation, partial adaption, or integration in transnational groups. More recent arguments point towards assimilation and multiculturalism as modes of incorporation and transnationalism as distinct activities which may contribute to incorporation in various ways (Kivisto 2005); for example transnationalism, rather than being seen as something that slows assimilation, might actually accelerate the process.

A general consensus has emerged among key proponents of transnationalism that "simultaneity" is the characteristic relationship between assimilation and transnationalism. The point is that assimilation and transnationalism ought not to be construed as competing alternatives and the reason is clear: whereas assimilation refers to a mode of immigrant incorporation into a receiving society, transnationalism does not. Rather, it is a mode of connection between and across the borders of various states, a mode of connectedness that is achieved to the extent that a dialectical relationship between the movers and stayers in the two worlds is achieved in one or more arenas of social life: familial, religious, economic, political, cultural, and so forth.

How many transnational migrants?

The guiding assumption of the first phase of transnational theorizing was that all, most, or at least a significant percentage of contemporary immigrants were transnational. Alejandro Portes and associates were among the first scholars to offer empirical evidence about the scope of transnationalism, studying three specific immigrant groups in the U.S.: Colombians, Salvadorans, and Dominicans and three fields, economic, political and socio-cultural. Their conclusion was that a relatively small minority of immigrants can be defined as transnational. Looking at the economic realm, they focused on self-employed immigrants whose business activities require frequent travel abroad and who depend for the success of their firms on their contacts and associates in another country, primarily their country of origin. They discovered that the percentages of immigrants from each group that were transnational entrepreneurs was very small, ranging between 4 to 6 percent. Similar results were obtained in their examination of the political activities of these three groups. The study examined such practices as memberships in home country political parties, giving money to those parties, taking part in home country electoral activities, membership in civic hometown associations and charity organizations, and giving money to such non-electoral organizations. The percentages of immigrants involved in regular engagements with these practices ranged from 7 to 14 percent. While the percentage of migrants engaged in routine and sustained cross-border activities may be small, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that transnationalism is a minor side stream (Portes 2003).

National states, politics and transnationalism

What is new is the role some emigration country governments are playing in attempting to encourage ongoing connections with their expatriate communities. Immigrants in Europe and North America a century ago confronted governments and cultural elites that tended to be

overtly hostile; today's counterparts, in contrast, frequently find their emigrants to be useful economically, and sometimes politically and culturally as well. Thus, rather than condemning their decision to exit or enticing them to return, they instead work to create relationships with the immigrants that are beneficial to the homeland.

Moreover, for a viable transnational community to be established and to sustain itself over time, a continual pattern of involvement with both governmental and civic institutions in the homeland and receiving country is essential. This is because transnational immigrants qua transnational immigrants are engaged in activities designed to define and enhance their position in the immigration region, while simultaneously seeking to remain embedded in a participatory way in the everyday affairs of the homeland community, be that national or local or both. What is distinctive about this type of communities without propinquity is that over time the transnational social space thus carved out makes the dichotomous character of host society concerns versus homeland concerns if not irrelevant, at least less pronounced and at some level part of a transcendent structure of border-crossing social relations. Instruments include dual citizenship, tax incentives for investments by expatriates, additional social security schemes and consular services abroad. Vice versa, there are manifold efforts of diasporas to engage in "homeland" politics. Migrant transnational activities are part of broader transnational politics, expressed in studies of social movements and advocacy networks. This literature mainly does not address competitors to the state, such as multinational companies, or flows across the borders of states, such as transnational migration, but emphasizes issues prevalent in the public spheres and involving mobilization of target groups around various issues, such as the environment, production chains, human rights, gender, religion or crime (see collection in Khagram and Levitt 2008).

Methodological notes on transnational researchCurrent scholarship has taken off with the criticism of methodological nationalism and groupism. Methodologically, both criticisms are crucial points of departure toward developing a transnational or transboundary methodology. First, studies in a transnational vein are critical of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003), that is, the often unstated assumption that national society or the national state is the 'natural' unit of analysis and of data collection as if they are the only main relevant contexts. These assumptions are usually prevalent in studies investigating migrants' integration, assimilation, multiculturalism, migration regulation and control. Previous studies explore policies and indicators of migrants' integration and assimilation in the countries of immigration with a container way of conceptualizations. Yet there is a need to go beyond criticism and explicitly name the reference points for transnational analysis in addition to the

receiving contexts as well as not only from the perspectives of researchers but also from the researched.

Second, the concomitant danger of groupism (Brubaker 2004) refers to studies that treat diasporic and transnational communities as units that are stable over time, and of overriding importance for the individual identities and social practices of their members. Migrant formations can be built around various categorical distinctions, such as ethnicity, race, gender, schooling, professional training, political affiliation, and sexual preference. Ethnicity constitutes a particularly vexing issue in transnational studies. On the one hand, a transnational approach should be able to overcome the ethnic bias inherent in much migration scholarship. The fallacy is to label migrants immediately by ethnic or national categories. Often scholars presuppose prematurely that categories such as Turks, Brazilians and so forth matter a lot for all realms and purposes, since they often do in public discourse. In so doing, those studies fail to account for other important markers of heterogeneities such as gender, age, language, worldviews, life styles, and migration histories. On the other hand, methods should enable researchers to trace actually existing social formations, such as networks of reciprocity built around ethnic markers, which are of great importance, for example, in informal transfer systems of financial remittances. This means to turn the issue of the importance of ethnicity into an empirical question. So far, both qualitative and quantitative approaches to transnational phenomenon have used ethnicity as a category during data collection and analysis (Amelina and Faist 2012). While investigating ethnicity self-reflection of researchers is necessary as they investigate the perspectives, experiences, and attached meanings of the researched population which might not totally overlap even if they share the same ethnicity.

Researchers with a transnational lens investigate multiple relevant frames of references migrants and non-migrants experience going beyond the nation-states in order to capture cross-border ties, practices, and their implications. In order to unearth transnational phenomena variety of methods has been utilized. The most popular ones in transnational migration literature have been multi-sited ethnography, mobile ethnography, and recently network analysis. Multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) has been the long-standing empirical tradition approaching transnational formations through simultaneous fieldwork in manifold locales and contexts across countries (e.g. Falzon 2016). Inspired by multi-sited ethnography, mobile ethnographic research in transnational studies investigates social practices across borders where the context is usually defined by the researcher along the fieldwork as they trace and observe migrants. In this vein, multi-sited matched sampled studies captured experiences, practices, and lifeworlds of manifold actors who are also positioned in a variety of places and social spaces (e.g. Barglowski et al. 2015; Mazzucato 2009). Moreover, social network

analysis began to be utilized by migration researchers lately going beyond its metaphorical use by the motto that the dynamics of cross-border interconnectivities can be captured through the systematic analysis of social networks concocting transnational social spaces (Bilecen et al. 2017). Social networks are acknowledged to be important perpetuators of international migration which is termed as 'cumulative causation' theory indicating that once started migration will continue by information flows through personal ties (Massey et al. 1993). Networks are also proved to be important not only for international migration itself but also after migration through fabrication of safety nets (e.g. Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015) and contexts of belongings (e.g. Lubbers et al. 2007). Currently mixed-methods studies are also on the rise in the realm of transnational methodology as researchers are after a combination of multifarious perspectives in order to assess in-depth the significance of socio-spatial categories, practices, resource flows as well as meanings surrounding them. For instance, lately transnational social protection has been studied through a mix of methods including multi-sited ethnography, document analysis, and personal network analysis through which reciprocity has been identified as an overarching mechanism in the flows of protective resources in differently characterized transnational social spaces (e.g. Barglowski et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, transnational studies are not short on further criticisms. Of particular importance one issue raised by Portes (2001) pinpointing to a methodological trap most of the researchers are prone to is the overestimation of transnational phenomenon through the use of only ethnographic case studies. In other words, bias in transnational research should be avoided by not sampling on the dependent variable, namely transnational phenomenon, highlighting the idea that not every migrant is transnational and transnational activities should not be generalized to all migrant populations. Following this critique, recently the term transnationality has been coined and studied with a mix of methods and methodologies. Transnationality refers to the strength of ties individuals, groups, or organizations entertain across the borders of nation-states, ranging from thin to dense on a continuum. While a high degree of transnationality indicates higher probability of informal social protection within families and friendship cliques to be organized across borders, low degree of transnationality highlights the importance of orientation towards to locally bounded ties and practices of social protection (Faist 2014). In a similar understanding, for instance, Barglowski and colleagues (2015) mapped strategies to capture transnationality of migrants through investigating their social protection practices while arguing for avoiding predetermined socio-spatial categories in any of the methods so that researchers would not jump into direct and non-reflexive conclusions.

4. Outlook: beyond methodological nationalism and groupism

Against this background, future research should be concerned less with accounting for cross-border ties and flows of fixed categories of persons or groups, but focus more on changing boundaries. This is so because social spaces denote dynamic processes, not static notions of ties and positions. The main point is a concern with boundaries demarcating social spaces in a wider sense – in particular, how the boundaries themselves come into existence and change. Boundaries may refer to distinctions along categories such as groups, organizations and cultural differences. In general, if it makes sense, as the critique of methodological nationalism charges, that national states – and, by implication, ethnic or national groups – are not quasi-natural entities, it is of prime importance to get a distance to fixed notions of social formations and their boundaries. It is then useful to start with less obtrusive concepts such as boundaries and spaces. This way offers a chance to look at changing boundaries – in relation to existing ones (e.g. national states) and to new ones (emergent properties of transnational and global systems), and explore how old spaces are transformed and new spaces emerge. It is an approach cognizant that borders and, more broadly, boundaries, are ever shifting and changing.

Looking at cross-border transactions is intimately connected to changing boundaries along economic, political and cultural lines. Boundary changes are essentially a question of power constellations. The creation, maintenance and enforcement of boundaries are functions of power, be it authoritative (non-)decision-making or symbolic power of generating frames through which persons, groups and events are slotted. Just take geographical mobility across borders and boundaries. States make rules of admission and membership; they exercise the power of ascription in that they and other agents are involved in definitions of "us" and "them", or desirable and undesirable migrants. The early transnational migration literature portrayed the power aspect as dichotomous. Transnationalism from above referred to the practices of multinational corporations, or international institutions, such as the IMF's structural adjustment programs in the 1990s. By contrast, transnationalism from below was supposedly found in grassroots transnational enterprise, social movements, and migrant networks – and challenged the institutionalized power structures. In early formulations one almost gets the impression that transnational migrants are a cross-border substitute for the lost working class as a historical subject of social transformation. Such a conceptualization of above vs. below is misleading, however. As we know, practices from below may also reproduce authoritarian structures or exclusion along gender, class, religious, ethnic or racial lines (e.g. Goldring and Krishnamurti 2008). In short, the above and below are found in all social formations, however small and grassroots they may (appear to) be. If this is plausible, then

we need to turn to a more nuanced discussion of borders and boundaries within social spaces going beyond and intersecting with places such as nation-states. It is important to unpack the notion of power and identify the social mechanisms which are at work in the making and unmaking of boundaries in social spaces (Faist 2016).

The search for mechanisms indicating change of boundaries leads to a distinction of two crucial fields, namely, first, accounting for the integration of social spaces and, second, accounting for changing boundaries in social spaces. The first realm has received some attention. Transnational ties can concatenate in various forms of transnational social spaces, namely transnational reciprocity in kinship groups, transnational circuits in exchange-based networks, and transnational communities such as diasporas, characterized by high degrees of diffuse solidarity. Thus, mechanisms such as various forms of exchange, reciprocity and solidarity are operative in ensuring the integration of cross-border social formations. What has received much less attention is the transformation of boundaries in intersecting social spaces. We need to understand how boundaries in such spaces change, are redrawn, reinforced or transformed.

It is therefore helpful to think about how boundaries change and by which mechanisms such transformations occur. Social boundaries interrupt, divide, circumscribe, or segregate distributions of persons and groups within social spaces which cross the borders of national states. Shifting boundaries are indications of the changing of institutions, practices and cognitions. The dynamics of changing boundaries can be nicely captured in the debate on the newness of migrant transnational social spaces. Some transnational scholars early on claimed the newness of such phenomena. It did not take long until historically minded social scientists showed convincingly that not only have return migration and occasional visits to home regions existed for quite some time (Foner 2005), but also that transnational communities, with dense internal ties both within states of immigration and towards regions of emigration, have likewise existed for a long time. Max Weber, for example, spoke of the Auslandsgemeinschaften of German immigrants in South and North America in the late nineteenth century.

Certainly, these cases were not as widespread as they are today, and were not further encouraged by means of instant long-distance communication. Yet these technological changes would not have translated into social change if it had not been for the right towards collective self-determination, and boundary shifts in thinking and acting upon cultural diversity which have produced the new trends. Among these socio-political processes are a higher extent of tolerating cultural pluralism (multiculturalism) and dual citizenship provisions, in conjunction with other changes in the national and international political contexts. All of these

have added new dimensions to and altered the scope and thrust of transnational cultural, political and economic involvements.

It is useful to analyse actual boundaries as the institutionalization of the relations and differentials of power. There are four types of how boundaries are being redrawn (inspired by the typology in Zolberg and Long 1999): First, existing boundaries become porous, as in the case of dual citizenship when more and more national states tolerate overlapping membership in nations. Second, boundaries may shift, as when lines between "us" and "them" do not run along national lines but along religious ones. This has happened in many states in Western Europe over the past three decades. Public debates have come not to portray nationalities but conflicts between Muslims and "us" as relevant trench lines. Third, boundaries can be maintained or even reinforced, as in the extension of border control in the European Union to both the patrolling of exterior borders, the emergence of buffer zones with adjacent countries, and an increase in controls internal to national states. And fourth, new boundaries emerge, as evidenced by the portrayal and public policies towards transnational activities. While transnational practices of highly-skilled and prosperous migrants are celebrated by immigration country and increasingly also emigration country governments as a significant contribution to the competitiveness of national economies, transnational ties of other categories of so-called low-skilled migrants are often seen as contributing to segregation and self-exclusion. Or, to give another example, transnational ties may represent a security risk, as in the case of terrorists, on the one hand, but international migrants are also cast as a new type of development agent, on the other hand. The exact mechanisms of boundary genesis and changes need to be researched in order to gauge how new societal formations emerge across borders but also in what ways well-entrenched institutions such as national states and international organizations change and adapt.

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