Migration and other modes of transnationalism: towards conceptual cross-fertilization

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Abstract

Sociological notions such as social network, social capital and embeddedness have proven valuable when adopted into a wide variety of social scientific fields. This has certainly been the case in the sociology of migration. Similarly, certain concepts drawn from studies on different modes of transnationalism –for instance, research and theory concerning the global activities of social movements and business networks– might serve as useful tools for understanding transnational social forms and practices among migrant groups.

Today transnationalism seems to be everywhere, at least in social science. That is, across the social sciences there is a relatively new and salient interest in a variety of economic, social and political linkages that cross borders and span the world. As any current internet search will reveal (or see the bibliography and other material at www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk), this expansion of interest is evident in a rapidly increasing number of publications, conferences and doctoral projects within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, geography, political science, law, economics and history, as well as in interdisciplinary fields such as international relations, development studies, business studies, ethnic and racial studies, gender studies, religious studies, media and cultural studies. And as exemplified in this volume of *IMR* and in a burgeoning set of literature (referenced in bibliographies throughout this volume), such interest is growing in migration studies too.

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Since the early 1990s research on transnational dimensions of migrant experience has expanded. There is now a substantial, and growing, body of literature concerning the ways migrants' lives are affected by sustained connections with people and institutions in places of origin or elsewhere in diaspora (family obligations and marriage patterns, remittances, political engagement, religious practice, regular visits, media consumption and so on). A number of works trace the rise of this analytical framework (such as Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Portes et al. 1999, Portes 2001, Vertovec 2001). Despite continuing criticism of the term's analytical fuzziness, overuse, and lack of historical grounding, it is still worth considering that, as Caroline Brettell suggests,

> As a theoretical construct about immigrant life and identity, transnationalism aptly suits the study of population movements in a world where improved modes of transportation as well as the images that are transmitted by means of modern telecommunications have shortened the social distance between sending and receiving countries. (2000: 104)

It is this same world of improved transportation and telecommunications that has arguably enhanced the extent, intensity, velocity and impact of other modes of global interconnectedness as well (Held et al. 1999). Can insights from the study of one kind of transnationalism have uses toward the social scientific understanding of another?

The following essay comprises a review of literature in a number of fields in order (a) to review briefly a set of sociological concepts which have core bearing across the study of various transnational social formations, and (b) to outline some ideas and perspectives drawn from work concerning other kinds of transnationalism that might have some theoretical purchase if applied to the analysis of migrant forms of transnationalism. Such conceptual borrowing might prompt insights into global processes of social transformation as well as specifically shine further light on ways that contemporary migrants create, maintain and make use of modes of exchange and relationship that span considerable distances and nation-state borders.

Cross-fertilizing transnationalisms

GLOBAL ACTIVITIES AMONG individuals, groups and organizations today take a wide variety of forms. Although these activities share the adjective 'transnational', it is uncommon to find theoretical attempts to span them.

In terms of transnational studies, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's (1971) edited volume *Transnational Relations and World Politics* arguably represents a kind of landmark. The book's contributors probed a set of transnational activities surrounding numerous kinds of border-crossing contacts, coalitions and interactions that are not controlled by organs of government. As a whole the volume importantly questioned a prevailing state-centric view of international relations. It emphasized the importance of 'global interactions' (defined as movements of information, money, objects and people across borders) and their impacts on interstate politics (see Nye and Keohane 1971). With such a broad view, contributing chapters addressed a breadth of transnational relations among multinational businesses, revolutionary movements, non-government organizations (NGOs), trade unions, scientific networks and the Catholic Church. Obviously these comprise highly diverse phenomena that operate on dissimilar scales. However, Keohane and Nye's volume attempted a crosscutting approach in order to suggest possible common functions and effects surrounding different kinds of transnational social structures.

About a decade later, another significant milestone in the field was represented in a collection of essays by James Rosenau (1980). This book highlighted tendencies toward the 'transnationalization' of world affairs through the rise of new global relations and associations among private individuals and groups, from students and tourists through NGOs and corporations. Rosenau emphasized how such non-state transnational connections could radically transform modes of collective action and global political interdependence. Among other things, he posed still-significant questions surrounding the implications of transnationalism for building a new civics in 'an era of fragmenting loyalties'.

By now, many years later and prompted by a growing and widespread interest in notions of globalization (especially as fostered by technological change), there has been a proliferation of literature concerning many types of transnational collectivities. In the Introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Global Networks*, Alejandro Portes (2001b) distinguishes between various kinds of cross-border organizational structures and activities that are, in much literature, confusingly (since they are sometimes interchangeably) called international, multinational and transnational. Portes cuts a path through the terminological jungle by delimiting each concept with reference to differentiated sources and scales of activity. In his reckoning, 'international' pertains to activities and programs of nation-states, 'multinational' to large-scale institutions such as corporations or religions whose activities take place in multiple countries, and 'transnational' to activities 'initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, be they organized groups or networks of individuals across borders' (ibid.). Such a typology is useful to avoid terminological uncertainty and to facilitate more rigorous analysis in each sphere.

While there is certainly an acute need to distinguish terms and concepts within an increasingly messy academically arena, there is still much to be gained by occasional exercises in cross-disciplinary and cross-field theorizing. There are many kinds of transnational activity today, and many rich areas of social scientific inquiry surrounding them. Yet there are few Keohane and Nye- or Rosenau-style attempts to learn from, or through, approaches and analyses from one transnational domain to another. This is likely one major shortcoming in consequence of years of increasing specialization in the social sciences. Notable exceptions include Sarah Mahler's (1998) discussion of different activities attributed to transnationalisms 'from above' and 'from below', and Michael Peter Smith's (2001) call for 'comparative transnationalisms'.

Ultimately, each transnational field of study –whether concerning corporations, NGOs, religions, migrants or other social groups– shares a kind of common goal: to look empirically at, and to analyze, transnational activities and social forms along with the political and economic factors that condition their creation and reproduction. To do this, we should be able to utilize, draw from or be intellectually stimulated by all of the concepts and methods available (while recognizing, and then perhaps bracketing, the specific meanings they hold in their respective academic fields).

Although there are a number of limitations to such an exercise, the application of terms and concepts from other fields of study can be an activity akin to looking at one's own material with borrowed glasses: usually much will become more blurry but on occasion perhaps one or two things might become clearer. The usefulness of such attempts at conceptual cross-fertilization can be judged, as J. Clyde Mitchell (1974: 279) put it, by 'the utility of the terms and concepts to which they refer for representing regularities in field data which otherwise might escape attention.' The search for more evocative terminology and concepts, while certainly not a replacement for the process of theorizing itself, can be a stimulating and sometimes revealing activity –even if only by sharpening the cognisance of how and why certain terms, concepts and sociological phenomena studied in one area of social science really *don't* compare well to others.

The following review represents an attempt to rouse further thinking in the field of transnational migration studies by suggesting potentially useful approaches and ideas from other relevant fields of social scientific research. Below, I draw on selected works concerning the study of transnational social movements and transnational business networks. These are but two areas of inquiry among several that could be drawn upon by way of parallel transnational social formations. We could alternatively conduct such an exercise concerning: ethnic diasporas (e.g., Cohen 1997), worldwide terrorist networks (Hoffman 1999), transnational organized crime (Williams and Vlassis 2001), transnational policing activities (Sheptycki 2000), religious organizations (Rudolph and Piscatori 1997), the so-called 'transnational capitalist class' of corporate executives, state bureaucrats, professionals and other elites (Sklair 2001), or globalized occupational groups such as domestic workers (Anderson 2000), seafarers (Lane et al. 2001) or sex workers (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998).

The suggestion that we might gain insight into one kind of transnational social formation by looking at another should not be very surprising, not least because it is increasingly recognized that participation in one transnational social formation might indeed lead to, or overlap with, another (Hannerz 1992). Such crossing is observable in the activities of female domestic workers, whose work as individual transnational migrants is transformed transnationally when they become organized worker-activists (Anderson 2001). Another example is that of overseas Chinese families whose kinship and personal relationships are reshaped into powerful (and eventually less Chinese network-dependent) transnational business operations (Olds and Yeung 1999).

In undertaking an exercise in drawing upon other areas of study, I am by no means arguing that migrant transnational communities are *like* these other kinds of transnational social formation. Rather, I merely wish to suggest that it may occasionally prove useful to think through some of the concepts and terminology used to describe the other formations. Resonant with Mitchell's suggestion above, such concepts and approaches might serve as potentially useful devices for re-ordering or seeing alternative patterns in data concerning specific transnational migrant groups. In this way, the essay represents an attempt at conceptual cross-fertilization between parallel fields of study.

Similar cross-fertilizations have already occurred within some of the parallel fields that I survey in this essay. Glenn Morgan (2001) suggests ways in which recent studies of transnational migrant groups have bearing for business studies, while Saskia Sassen (2000, 2001) places the study of transnational migrants in a kind of mutual interaction with attempts to understand global transformations of urban structures, national politics and international economies. Adrian Favell (2001) critically reviews how many current theories of globalization have latched on to migration as a metaphor for broader changes in society. Jörg Flecker and Ruth Simsa (2001) juxtapose the structures and practices of transnational businesses and globalized non-profit organizations. So it is perhaps about time for transnational migration scholars, too, to rummage the conceptual coffers of our colleagues who study other kinds of transnational groups.

I raise a further couple of caveats. By extrapolating from these subjects together I am not suggesting that transnational social formations are of a common type or function. Nor is this an attempt to build a single overarching theory of transnational social formations. Instead, again, in this article I selectively draw upon a diverse set of literatures to extract some key ideas, terms and approaches that seem to overlap or resonate in different areas of study. Here the aim is to suggest that the conceptual tools from parallel fields might provide insights and help to better structure ongoing research, analysis and theory concerning transnational migrant communities.

I. Some cross-cutting
concepts

First, it is important to realize how the process of conceptual and terminological borrowing from one or another sociological domain has already significantly benefited the study of international migration. This is especially evident with three key terms (each representing a wealth of epistemological and methodological insights) chosen for brief discussion here: social networks, social capital and embeddedness. These terms are discussed below not just to recap their basic meanings and to demonstrate that keywords from various realms of sociology have been utilized in migration studies. The purpose is also to flag them as fundamental concepts that run through or underpin studies and approaches to what I am calling parallel transnational social formations.

Social networks

Ulf Hannerz (1980: 181) long ago suggested that social network analysis 'probably constitutes the most extensive and widely applicable framework we have for the study of social relations.' As a method of abstraction and analysis, the social network approach sees each person as a 'node' linked with others to form a network. The advantage of the social network perspective lies in its ability to allow us to abstract aspects of interpersonal relations which cut across institutions and the boundaries of aggregated concepts such as neighbourhood, workplace, kinship or class (Rogers and Vertovec 1995). The perspective fosters empirical research 'as a way of revealing *de facto* active networks rather than *a priori* assumptions of community solidarity' (Bridge 1995: 281).

Network analysis provides a vocabulary for expressing the social environment as patterns or regularities in the relationships among actors (Wasserman and Faust 1994). However, it would be a mistake to suggest network analysis is of one method. Drawing upon earlier views of Ronald S. Burt (1980), Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin (1994: 1414) describe network analysis as a kind of a paradigm or perspective, 'a loose federation of approaches' rather than a singular predictive 'social theory'. Network analysts seek to operationalize research concepts such as social structure, social distance, cohesion and network itself. Many other sociologists, it should be recognized, use such terms simply as descriptive metaphors .

Though not without its problems and critics, social network analysis has operationalized many terms and concepts that researchers of transnational social formations would do well to bear in mind when collecting, analysing and describing data. These include: network *size* –the number of participants in a network; *density*– the 'extent to which everyone of ego's contacts know each other' (Mitchell 1969: 15); *multiplexity* –'the degree to which relations between participants include overlapping institutional spheres. For instance, individuals who are work associates may also be linked by family ties, political affiliations, or club memberships' (Portes 1995: 9-10); *clusters* or *cliques* –a specific area of a wider network with higher density than that of the network as a whole; *strength of ties*– the 'relative frequency, duration, emotional intensity, reciprocal exchange, and so on which characterize a given tie or set of ties' (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1448-9). These are often described on a continuum from 'strong' to 'weak' (see Granovetter 1973); *durability* –a function of time, since relationships might come into being, disappear, or remain potential (Mitchell 1969); and *frequency*– regularity of contact within a social network.

Although all of the above terms and concepts define (and may be used to quantify) various aspects of social ties, it remains clear that such ties are not fixed. As well as being reproduced, networks are constantly being socially constructed and altered by their members (Nohria 1992).

The general social networks perspective is not short of critics. Among problems identified by a number of social scientists, it is often pointed out that the structure of a network in itself says very little about the qualitative nature of relationships comprising it –not least concerning the exercise of power (cf. Doreen Massey 1993, 1999, Dicken et al. 2001). Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) are critical of the problems that the social networks perspective has with questions of cultural content and individual agency (cf. Hannerz 1992). Too often, Emirbayer and Goodwin suggest, network analysis can tend to reify social relationships and to suggest a kind of structural determinism.

It is important to underscore, as Mitchell (1974) did long ago, the difference between using network terminology to describe social situations, on the one hand, and on the other hand undertaking rigorous network analysis. The former involves descriptive and metaphoric usage, while the latter involves specific methods of collecting data and often sophisticated mathematical analysis including algebraic procedures, graph theory, functional mapping and so forth. In other words, one can productively use network terms and concepts to order the research process and to significantly elucidate data without going all the way to engaging bipartite graphs, *n*-clans and Lambda sets (see Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Social Capital

A concept that is closely related to social networks (though much harder to quantify), with particular regard to their substance and impact, is 'social capital'. Portes (1995: 12), drawing especially on James Coleman (1998), defines social capital as 'The capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures. ...The resources themselves are *not* social capital; the concept refers instead to the individual's *ability* to mobilize them on demand' (emphasis in original; also see Burt 1992, Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, Portes 1998). That is, social capital is not a property inherent to an individual, but rather it exists in, and is drawn from, that person's web of relationships.

Social capital –itself a metaphoric, shorthand notion– can provide privileged access to resources or restrict individual freedoms by controlling behaviour (Portes 1998). It is based on collective expectations affecting an individual's behaviour (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), including general shared values, normative reciprocity and 'enforceable trust'– or the mode by which loyalty and morality is monitored and safeguarded within a social network. Enforceable trust mainly functions, and is reproduced, by more classical sociological notions concerning social rewards and sanctions. Social capital is maintained, for example, by visits, communication by post or telephone, marriage, participation in events and membership in associations. There is a certain amount of debate as to what degree, and how, social capital is convertible to other forms of capital, namely financial and human (see Faist 2000).

Embeddedness

A full appreciation of both social networks and social capital in any case study requires an awareness of the forms and conditions of their 'embeddedness'. Granovetter (1985, 1992) has emphasized how, essentially like all actions, economic action is socially situated and cannot be explained wholly by individual motives. Such actions are not simply carried out by atomized

actors but are embedded in ongoing networks of personal relationships. '"Embeddedness",' he (1992: 25) says, 'refers to the fact that economic action and outcomes, like all social action and outcomes, are affected by actors' dyadic (pairwise) relations *and* by the structure of the overall network of relationships' (ibid.: 33; emphasis in original).

Portes (1995) develops Granovetter's ideas by describing two kinds of embeddedness. The first, *relational* embeddedness, involves actors' personal relations with one another, including norms, sanctions, expectations and reciprocity. The second, *structural* embeddedness, refers to different scales of social relationship in which many others take part beyond those actually involved in an economic transaction. Specific exchanges of an actor can be identified with respect to either or both kinds of embeddedness in order to interpret relevant sets of conditioning factors. Thomas Schweitzer (1997) also suggests two facets of embeddedness akin to Portes's types. Schweitzer describes a kind of 'vertical' facet represented by hierarchical linkages through which local actors are connected to broader or extra-local levels of the larger society, culture, economy and polity (in much the same meaning as structural embeddedness described by Portes). He also proposes a 'horizontal' facet of embeddedness referring to the ways economic transactions, social relations, political activities might overlap in a particular (culturally conditioned) system (cf. Burt 1992, Granovetter 1985).

In each case, Schweitzer stresses, a social networks approach to embeddedness is the most advantageous for empirical and theoretical analysis. This is echoed in the methodology of many other scholars. The embedded social networks view is relevant, for instance, to Doreen Massey's (1993, 1999) notion of 'power-geometry' whereby social relations are viewed as geographic and networked at a variety of scales from household to the international arena. The kind and degree of power individuals have relies on how they are variously embedded in networks of relations found at these various scales. It is highly significant, too, for transnational studies since border-crossing social networks entail multiple forms of embeddedness that are not easily reconciled. As Peter Dicken and his colleagues (2001: 96) point out, 'A network link that crosses international borders is not just another example of "acting at a distance", it may also represent a *qualitative disjuncture* between different regulatory and socio-cultural environments' (emphasis in original).

... AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

THE STUDY OF transnational practices surrounding migration has provided a prime topic for the utilization of all three general sociological concepts outlined above (see especially Faist 2000). This builds upon a much broader use of the concepts in migration studies.

A considerable number of works over the past few decades use, in one way or another, a social networks perspective for the study of migration (see among others Kearney 1986, Grasmuck and Pessar 1991, Portes 1995, Douglas Massey et al. 1999, Vertovec and Cohen 1999, Brettell 2000). This is not surprising since networks, according to a longstanding view, provide the channels for the migration process itself. In his historical overview of immigration into the United States, Charles Tilly (1990) emphasizes that 'networks migrate'. 'By and large,' Tilly (ibid.: 84) says, 'the effective units of migration were (and are) neither individuals nor households but sets of people linked by acquaintance, kinship, and work experience.' Monica Boyd neatly sums up much of the network approach to migration, stating:

> Networks connect migrants across time and space. Once begun, migration flows often become self-sustaining, reflecting the establishment of networks of information, assistance and obligations which develop between migrants in the host society and

friends and relatives in the sending area. These networks link populations in origin and receiving countries and ensure that movements are not necessarily limited in time, unidirectional or permanent. (1989: 641)

It is often pointed out that for migrants, social networks are crucial for finding jobs and accommodation, circulating goods and services, as well as for psychological support and continuous social and economic information. Social networks often channel migrants into or through specific places and occupations. Local labour markets can become linked through specific networks of interpersonal and organizational ties surrounding migrants (Poros 2001). By way of example, such patterns and processes of network-conditioned migration were extensively and comparatively examined in nineteen Mexican communities and confirmed by Douglas Massey, Luin Goldring and Jorge Durand (1994). Indeed, Alejandro Portes and Robert Bach (1995: 10) propose that migration itself 'can be conceptualized as a process of network building, which depends on and, in turn, reinforces social relationships across space.' Migration is a process that both depends on, and creates, social networks.

Of course, dimensions of social position and power, such as the class profile of the network, have been shown to have considerable conditioning impact on migration processes. This has been demonstrated for instance by Janet Salaff, Eric Fong and Wong Siu-lun (1999). Following the insights of Bott (1957), Salaff and her colleagues demonstrate how middle class emigrants from Hong Kong, in contrast to working class ones, used different kind of networks for different kind of purposes in arranging their movement and resettlement abroad surrounding the period of British hand-over of the colony to China. Such studies, among many, point out the varieties of relational and structural embeddedness in migrants' networks (cf. Portes 1995).

Opportunities and constraints in the migration process arise from aspects of social capital in networks, too (see among others Grasmuck and Pessar 1991, Douglas Massey et al. 1994, Portes 1998). Significant studies here are exemplified by Bruno Riccio's (1999) research on Senegalese Mouride traders in Europe, showing how a kind of enforceable trust exists in these networks simultaneously conditioning business advantages and behavioural restrictions, and by Pnina Werbner's (1990) description of a complex economy of gift exchange among Pakistanis in Manchester that links individuals, households and entire extended families in Britain and Pakistan.

Methodological approaches and theories surrounding social networks, social capital and embeddedness have had considerable analytical power in migration studies. These three key ideas are being valuably adapted within emergent approaches to transnational connections among migrants as well: indeed, at least two significant studies –by David Kyle (2000) on modes of Ecuadorian migrant transnationalism and by Patricia Landolt (2001) on patterns of Salvadoran economic transnationalism– centrally utilize and interweave all three concepts.

With the rise and spread of cross-disciplinary interest in transnational processes and practices, the conceptual value of social networks, social capital and embeddedness can be found in the study of parallel transnational formations as well. Yet of course, in addition to adopting such pre-existing sociological terms, each field of study concerning different transnational formations has developed a variety of their own useful concepts and approaches.

II. Some other transnational social formations

In this section I briefly and selectively review some thinking around the study of transnational social movements and transnational business networks. A few key ideas and concepts from

each field are highlighted by way of suggesting their relevance to understanding migrant forms of transnationalism.

Transnational Social Movements

Since the 1970s, the expression 'social movements' has gone in and out of fashion in sociology and political science (Cohen and Rai 2000). The field, which has largely been stimulated by the writings of prominent sociologists such as Touraine, Melucci, Castells, and Tilly, concerns forms of direct political activity outside the state that usually cutting across class lines. One prominent theorist, Sidney Tarrow (1998a: 4), broadly defines social movements as 'collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.' He stresses that a key characteristic of social movements, so defined, is the mounting *contentious* challenges through disruptive direct action. For such purposes collective action is mobilized 'to mount common claims against opponents, authorities, or elites' based on 'common or overlapping interests and values' or by tapping 'more deep-rooted feelings of solidarity or identity' (ibid.: 6).

The study of social movements over the past decade represents a field that has 'gone transnational' (see Smith et al. 1997, Keck and Sikkink 1998 and Tarrow 2000). Transnational social movements themselves are nothing especially new. The 1833-65 Anglo-American campaign to end slavery in the United States and the 1888-1928 international suffrage movement to secure voting rights for women are just two examples of this kind (Keck and Sikkink 2000). Yet Robin Cohen and Paul Kennedy (2000), drawing upon both Tilly (1978) and Hegedus (1989), describe a fairly recent 'planetization' of social movement activities that entails a widening repertoire of techniques for mobilizing support and waging campaigns. The transnational repertoire of social movements includes: networking activities over long distances; enhancing possibilities for pooling resources; intensifying processes of coalition-building; empowering people 'at the base' and connecting them directly to people 'at the top'; and augmenting a 'multiplier process whereby flows of pressure feed into each other on a cumulative and mutually reinforcing basis' (Cohen and Kennedy 2000: 320).

With regard to factors and processes of social formation, Tarrow (1998b: 235) observes that transnational social movements take root among pre-existing social networks that shape trust, reciprocity and collective identity (that is, factors relevant to social capital). Doug McAdam, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1996) suggest three broad sets of factors conditioning the emergence and shape of social movements: the structure of political opportunities and constraints, the forms of formal and informal organization available for mobilization, and 'framing processes'. Migration scholars might benefit by pondering, through analytic analogy, how such factors might condition repertoires of activity among transnational migrant communities as well.

1. political opportunity structures

Following McAdam et al. (1996), social movement scholars have demonstrated how the shape and activities of social movements are formed in light of the constraints and possibilities posed by the political characteristics existing in given national and local contexts. Such characteristics include the openness or closure of formal political access, the stability of alignments within a political system, and the presence or absence of influential allies. In any

assessment of political opportunity structures, one needs to recognize a 'dialectics of scale' regarding differential connections and influences of local, national and international arenas (Miller 1994).

Concerning migrant communities, examples of analyses enlisting the concept of political opportunity structures include both Patrick Ireland's (1994) and Yasemin Soysal's (1994) comparative studies of local and national conditions and policies shaping immigrant groups' organization and mobilization. The approach is at the heart of the analysis of Kurdish transnational political activity in Germany and the Netherlands undertaken by Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (2001), while the differential effects of political opportunity structures can also be seen in the study of community developments among Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles carried out by Luis Guarnizo, Arturo Ignacio Sánchez and Elizabeth Roach (1999). Aihwa Ong's (1999) work on the relationship between overseas Chinese entrepreneurs, states and markets can also be read as an example of a transnational group creatively engaging opportunity structures.

Just as the above studies have contributed to our understanding of how migrants shape their practices in light of varying contexts, the study of transnational migration will benefit by explicitly and rigorously examining the ways in which transnational social structures and practices have emerged in light of what we can call opportunity structures –in both 'sending' and 'receiving' contexts– and how they factor into migrants' own desires and strategies for conducting their lives transnationally. However in adopting such a framework of analysis, Østergaard-Nielsen (2001: 277) importantly points out, researchers must bear in mind that opportunity structures 'are embedded in a normative definition of migrants' place and role in receiving country politics'; just how migrants engage such normative definitions and structures while also negotiating the norms and policies of their sending states remains a salient question for the political science of migrant transnationalism.

While needing to recognize, as in studies of social movements, a 'dialectics of scale' (involving structures encompassing national, regional and local contexts), such transnationalism-conditioning opportunity structures might include: national asylum regimes; provisos around visas, citizenship, voting, residency, naturalization and other aspects of legal status; sources of and access to bodies of information on migrant incorporation; frameworks for taxation (and for avoiding it); pension policies (especially whether and how one can collect it abroad); education, insurance and health care provisions; housing availability and assistance; access to legal representation; business assistance schemes; banking systems and modes of financial transfer, terms of mortgages and loans, labor union membership and activity, and the organization of local ethnic or hometown associations for migrant assistance. Of course, such opportunity structures differentially condition, and are engaged by, the transnational activity of migrants in relation to gender, class, occupational type, educational level and legal status.

2. mobilizing structures

What social movement sociologists call mobilizing structures represent 'those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action' (McAdam et al. 1996: 3). Resource mobilization theory has been influential in describing such structures and processes of social movement formation. This body of theory concerns how the presence or absence of available resources, generally defined, intervenes in the successor failure of mobility strategies of social movements (see for instance McCarthy and Zald 1977). With particular value for analyzing the course of development of any social movement, Bert Klandermans and Dirk

Oegema (1987) outline four aspects of mobilization: formation of potentials, activation of recruitment networks, arousal of motivation to participate, and removal of barriers to participate.

The utility of such analytic devices may be valuable in migration studies too. The relevance of a mobilizing structures concept to transnational migrant communities is evident, for instance, in the model developed by Nadje Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser (2001) to describe factors influencing both the capacity and desire of Bosnian and Eritrean refugees to participate transnationally in the reconstruction of their countries of origin. Al-ali et al. demonstrate how the availability and modes of use surrounding resources channel the degree, form and extent of refugees' transnational activities. Research on collective practices (including association meetings, the pooling of funds, visits by delegations, and community development projects) –such as Rob Smith's (1995) on Mexican villagers in New York and Mexico and Peggy Levitt's (2001) on Dominican villagers in Boston and the Dominican Republic– exemplifies a important approach to migration studies that underscores the role of what arguably might best be call mobilizing structures in shaping transnational practices.

There is much need for further study into the ways migrants collectively manage resources over long distances for purposes of community development in areas of origin (such as supplying water systems or building healthcare centres, sports facilities or places of worship). Klandermans and Oegema's (1987) four aspects of social movement mobilization structures, noted above, suggests but one useful set of conceptual tools that might be drawn from this area of research and adapted for researching and analyzing transnational migrant collective activities.

3. framing

As defined by McAdam et al. (1996: 2), the concept of social movement framing addresses 'the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediates between opportunity and action.' That is, framing refers to processes of negotiating conscious, shared meanings and definitions with which people legitimate, motivate and conduct their collective activities. Fernando Bosco (2001) reinforces the concept by discussing 'conscious and strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.' The recognition of such processes is urged as a way of 'bringing culture back in' to social movement studies (McAdam et al. 1996: 6).

The framing process is certainly no stranger to students of international migration. This is so because, in this field, it seems to describe the core process of ethnic community formation whereby groups in migration/minority situations self-consciously reflect upon their identities, symbolically define ethnic group boundaries, and organize themselves for the purpose of political empowerment. A substantial body of literature concerns these processes.

In the study of transnational migrant groups there is a growing set of work concerning the ways in which the negotiation of identity both shapes, and is shaped by, embeddedness in more than one location and one social order (see for instance Vertovec 2001, Heisler 2001). It is clear that the study of transnational migrant groups has much to gain from further, specific attention to what social movement sociologists call the framing process. It has special significance with regard to transnational migrant communities, not least because such processes of negotiation are often undertaken within and across highly variegated contexts. Transnational migrants often embark on a process of 'making values from two worlds fit' (Levitt 2001: 97). Such negotiations of meaning can raise fundamental questions among groups as to: who we are, who is not part of us, and how we (perhaps differentially our men, our women, our children) are to act properly or morally or politically in relation to the perceived conditions of location *A* or *B*.

The social scientific study of social movements has adapted its own concepts and methodological tools to 'go transnational.' The transnational interest in social movements focuses mainly on activist networks that connect a range of actors sharing common values, discourse and information. The emergence of transnational social movements is often explained with reference to changing (i.e., globalizing) political opportunity structures and avenues of resource mobilization (especially electronic modes of communication and financial transfer). As noted early in this article, interests in and explanations of contemporary migrant transnationalism seem to share many of these very similar bases. In a similar way, the study of business organizations and business networks has also 'gone transnational.'

Transnational Business Networks

Many social scientists have drawn from research on processes and practices surrounding transnational corporations (TNCs) in order to broadly understand the nature and dynamics of transnationalism and globalization (e.g. Sklair 1995, Castells 1996, Dicken 1998). Concomitant with the examination of TNCs, researchers on management, organizational and business practices have become increasingly interested in the shape and functions of transnational business networks, supplier commodity chains, production networks, and innovative networks (see for instance Yeung 2000, Dicken et al. 2001).

Henry Wai-chung Yeung (1998: 3-4) discusses how, for most large businesses and corporations, networks have become 'an all-embracing organizational structure for transnational activities'; hence, 'the network form of organization has come to dominate today's world of international business.' Yeung (ibid.: 65) describes a business network as 'an integrated and coordinated structure of ongoing economic and non-economic relations embedded within, among and outside business firms.' In his analysis of the geographical spread and structural transformation of Hong Kong Chinese firms –and representing another instance of conceptual cross-fertilization– Yeung draws specifically on Granovetter's ideas concerning embeddedness.

> The concept of 'embeddedness' helps revitalize network analysis by injecting social and historical dimensions into the study of transnational production systems in their time-space contexts. By recognizing the cultural and social *embeddedness* of the function of network relations and economic transactions, we can better understand the nature of production systems prevailing in different societies and localities. (Yeung 1998: 59; emphasis in original)

In other words, transnational corporate networks are empirically embedded in their structural contexts as well as in ongoing business and personal relationships.

Yeung (ibid.: 65f.) importantly suggests that participants and agents in transnational business networks benefit from an 'economics of synergy' through which they can achieve what is otherwise impossible were an individual to attempt a specific mode of action alone. The 'economics of synergy' becomes manifest in information sharing, pooling of resources (capital, labour and technology), mutual commitments and reciprocity regarding personal favours. These ideas are resonant with the notion of social capital. And similar to other core facets of social capital, Yeung underscores the importance of trust and mutual understanding within a network in order to avoid opportunism and to promote the general welfare of the network.

It can also be said that social capital is relevant to the ways in which business networks

mobilise different forms of knowledge, skill and competence. This is evident in what Ash Amin and Patrick Cohendet (1999) describe as tacit vs. codified knowledge in globalized companies. Codified knowledge, which is formally taught to employees, is naturally of high significance to the running of large, decentralized firms. Yet it is tacit knowledge (of operations, strategies, competitors, markets) which is often critical in gaining competitive advantage. This is imparted particularly through face-to-face contacts and the high degree of mutual trust and understanding they sustain. Further, Amin and Cohendet point to the potential benefits of the network as a 'nexus of competences' drawn from the experience and expertise of its members.

Amin and Cohendet also derive their analysis from Granovetter, here with reference to notions of strong and weak ties in networks and especially regarding processes of learning and adaptation within organizations. Within business networks, they say,

> What matters most, however, is not the presence of ties of association, but their nature. For example, ties which are too strong and long-standing –for instance those involving dependent subcontractors to networks of interests jealously guarded by dominant players– might actually prevent renewal and innovation by encouraging network closure and self-referential behaviour. In contrast, where economic agents have the option of participating in many competing networks on the basis of loose ties, reciprocal relations, and independent intermediaries, the prospect for innovative learning through interaction seem to be enhanced. (ibid.: 92)

An 'economics of synergy', tacit knowledge, a 'nexus of competences', and the idea of disadvantageous network closure versus advantageous looseness are concepts that may be revealing when applied to transnational migrant social formations. The concepts might stimulate researchers to look into, or re-evaluate data concerning, specific aspects of migrants' transnational practices. For instance, the notion of an 'economics of synergy' might prompt migration scholars to think further about the modes and impacts of close-knit or pooled economic exchanges within transnational migrant networks (cf. Guarnizo in this issue of *IMR*). Analyses surrounding disadvantageous network closure versus advantageous looseness may be important for trying to understand why some migrant networks stagnate and others flourish, and why some forms of transnationalism remain 'broad' and others 'narrow' (Itzigsohn et al. 1999). Research on the content, management and reproduction of tacit knowledge and the exploitation of a 'nexus of competences' within migrant networks might have significance for analysing patterns in the rise of, and discrepancies of success among, transnational migrant entrepreneurs (Portes 2001c).

Conclusion

In this article I have looked at a few terms and concepts drawn from the study of two modes of transnational parallel to that of certain contemporary migrant groups. The purpose has been to suggest some notions that it may be 'good to think with' when collecting and interpreting material regarding transnational migrant communities.

Such an exercise should not remain simply one of trying on hats. As Adrian Favell (2001) emphasizes, 'doing theory' is not merely a matter of adopting and adapting new metaphors. The usefulness of any concepts brought into a field of study should be observed in the ways they can shape the gathering and analysis of empirical and ethnographic data.

The study of transnational processes and practices is arguably rather new to all three fields discussed in this piece: migration, social movements and business. By way of fashioning an

appropriate language, analytical concepts and methodological approaches, social scientists in all three fields are still finding their way around. Obviously certain sociological notions –such as social networks, social capital, and embeddedness– have been adopted and had important bearing on conceptualization and theoretical analysis in each one of these fields. Especially since the study of these topics is still somewhat nascent, further conceptual cross-fertilization –between these fields of transnational study or from elsewhere in the social sciences– will likely prove as fruitful.

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