Transnational social formations:
Towards conceptual cross-fertilization

WPTC-01-16

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Paper presented at Workshop on "Transnational Migration: Comparative

Perspectives", June 30-July 1, 2001, Princeton University

Cross-border and, indeed, global activities among non-government groups and organizations today take a wide variety of forms. Social scientific studies of these activities reflect various approaches and often-discrete conceptual repertoires. Although these sets of social activities and research fields share the adjective 'transnational', it is uncommon to find theoretical attempts to span them.

In this sense, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's (1971) edited volume *Transnational Relations and World Politics* arguably represents a kind of intellectual 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.

By now, thirty years later and prompted by a growing and widespread interest in the myriad facets of globalization, there has been a massive proliferation literature concerning many types of transnational collectivities. In the Introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Global Networks*, Alejandro Portes (2001a) 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 area, 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-style attempts to learn from, or through, approaches and analyses from one transnational domain to another. [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: 176ff.] call for 'comparative transnationalisms'.] This is likely one major shortcoming in consequence of years of increasing specialization in the social sciences.

At the end of the day, each transnational field of study – whether it is focused on corporations, NGOs, religions, migrants or whatever – 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).

Acknowledging a number of obvious 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 fuzzier 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

coming to realize how and why certain terms, concepts and sociological phenomena drawn from one area of social science really *don't* fit well in another.

The following essay represents an attempt to stimulate further thinking in the field of transnational migration studies by sifting through and suggesting potentially useful approaches, words and ideas in other relevant fields of social scientific research. Here, particularly, I take a look at the study of transnational business networks, social movements and so-called cybercommunities. These are but three 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 (to be discussed by my conference session colleague, Kachig Tölölyan), worldwide terrorist networks (see Hoffman 1999), transnational organized crime (see the journal of the same name), transnational policing activities (see Sheptycki 2000), religious organizations (see 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 (see Anderson 2000), seafarers (see Lane et al. 2001) or sex workers (see Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). Indeed, depending on how and just how far we wish to define transnational social formations, we also could include:

> ...tourism, charter flight *hajj* and other modern pilgrimages, invisible colleges in science, exchange students, au pair girls, foreign pen pals as part of growing up, transcontinental families, international aid bureaucracies, summer beach parties of backpacking Interrail-pass-holders from all over, and among voluntary associations everything from Amnesty International to the European Association of Social Anthropologists. It is these dispersed institutions and communities, groupings of people regularly coming together and moving apart, short-term relationships or patterns of fleeting encounter, which offer the contexts in which globalization occurs as the personal experience of a great many people in networks where extremely varied meanings flow. These networks are indeed denser in some parts of the world than in others, but they are hardly now a feature only of Western industrial society. (Hannerz 1992: 46-7)

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 lead to, or overlap with, another. Ulf Hannerz (1992) describes the possibilities of such

contiguous transnational connection. For example, such crossing is observable in the activities of female domestic workers – who may be individual transnational migrants and organized worker-activists – described in Bridget Anderson's contribution to this conference, and in what Kris Olds and Henry Wai-chung Yeung (1999) discuss as the ways in which overseas Chinese family and other personal relationships have been reshaped into powerful (and eventually less Chinese network-dependent) transnational business operations.

In undertaking such 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 the parallel fields that I shall survey in this essay. Glenn Morgan (2001) suggests ways in which recent studies of transnational migrant groups has bearing for business studies, while Saskia Sassen (1998, 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 (forthcoming) critically reviews how many current globalization theories have latched on to migration as a metaphor for broader changes in society. And 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 studies, 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 paper 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. With the topic of our conference in mind, 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 arrays of epistemological and methodological insights) chosen for brief discussion here: social networks, social capital and embeddedness. These terms are discussed below not just 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) has 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: 15). 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, recalled below, 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, 1992), 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'. Emirbayer and Goodwin discuss how 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.

Looking at the world as a series of networks has many potential serious drawbacks, of course. Network analysis itself has been a 'much abused concept' (Dicken et al. 2001: 92). Already in the early 1970s, the anthropologist J.A. Barnes – largely recognized as one of the first to employ the concept of social networks in the (1954) analysis of a Norwegian fishing community – complained that the notion of social networks had created a 'terminological jungle, in which any newcomer may plant a tree' (in Mitchell 1974: 279). Nitin Nohria (1992: 3) observed nearly ten years ago that the 'indiscriminate proliferation of the network concept threatens to relegate it to the status of an evocative metaphor, applied so loosely that it ceases to mean anything.' This proliferation continues through today, including some rather new permutations. For instance, during the 1990s and through the present we have witnessed the development of actor-network theory (ANT), a rather esoteric perspective arising out of poststructuralism and the sociology of science, in which humans, objects, practices, semiotic systems of discourses and rules, and environments are all conceived to be linked in a mutually conditioning configuration (see for instance Murdoch 1998, Law and Hassard 1999).

Going back to the roots of social network analysis, however, we can ground the perspective's contribution to the study of social relations. Barnes described the idea of network analysis as investigating how the 'configuration of cross-cutting interpersonal bonds is in some unspecified way causally connected with the actions of these persons and with the social institutions of their society' (in Mitchell 1974: 282). This conceptualisation was almost unabashedly an extension of classical structural-functionalism in anthropology. However, the basic idea was, and is, that network structures provide both opportunities and constraints for social action. Network ties also function by way of channelling the flow of material and nonmaterial resources (Wasserman and Faust 1994). The nature of relational ties between actors might concern: evaluation (e.g. friendship), transfer of material resources (e.g. lending), affiliation (e.g.

membership in a club), behavioural interaction (e.g. sending messages), movement between places (e.g. migration), formal relations (e.g. authority) or perceived biology (e.g. kinship or descent)(ibid.).

All of these ideas obviously have bearing for the study of transnational social formations. This is because, not least, 'Global networks increasingly give organizational expression to corporations, ethnic diasporas, professional bodies, non-governmental organizations, criminal groups, terrorists, and social and political movements' (Rogers et al. 2001: iv).

Below I briefly review some of the key terms and concepts employed in the social networks perspective (cf. Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). As with terms and concepts discussed broadly throughout this essay, these are ones that all researchers of transnational social formations would do well to bear in mind when collecting, analysing and describing data:

- *size* – the number of participants in a network;
- *density* – the 'extent to which everyone of ego's contacts know each other' (Mitchell 1969: 15) or 'the ratio of the number of ties actually observed to the number theoretically possible' (Granovetter 1976: 1288; also see Niemeijer 1973);
- *multiplexity* - the existence of two or more types of relations linking actors (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1448), or '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 (Portes 1995);
- *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);
- *intensity* – 'the extent to which individuals linked by some network relationship are prepared to honor obligations stemming from it or conversely feel free to exercise the rights implied by that relationship' (Mitchell 1974: 283; cf. discussion of 'enforceable trust', below);
- *content* – 'the actor's construction of the meaning of that relationship to him in terms of his understanding of the other person's expectation of his behavior' (Mitchell 1974: 294; cf. discussion of reciprocity, below). Mitchell consistently emphasized that 'the determination of the content involves knowing what

meaning the actors in any situation are attributing to the cues, signs and symbols being presented in the interaction' (ibid.: 296) and that this calls ideally for ethnographic research (see Mitchell 1966, 1969, 1987). Content might include economic exchange or assistance, kinship obligation, religious cooperation, friendship and gossip;

- *reachability* (or *mesh* or *compactness*) – 'the extent to which links radiating out from some given person though other persons eventually return to that same person' (Mitchell 1987: 304);

- *durability* – a function of time, since relationships might come into being, disappear, or remain potential (Mitchell 1969);

- *frequency* – regularity of contact (Mitchell 1969).

Manuel Castells, although largely employing the concept of network as a way of describing the dominant organization form of the informational/global economy (and therefore not immediately of interpersonal relationships), nevertheless underlines two network-related terms that sit well with those listed above. In talking broadly of network forms, Castells observes,

> The components of the network are both autonomous and dependent vis-à-vis the network, and may be a part of other networks, and therefore of other systems of means aimed at other goals. The performance of a given network will then depend on two fundamental attributes of the network: its *connectedness*, that is its structural ability to facilitate noise-free communication between its components; its *consistency*, that is the extent to which there is sharing of interests between the network's goals and the goals of its components. (1996: 171; emphasis in original)

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).

Social networks don't just concern how people are connected: they also affect the *circulation of resources*, which can be defined as anything that allows an actor to group to 'control, provide or apply a sanction to another social actor: money, facilities, labor, legitimacy, group size, discretionary time, organizing experience, legal skills, even violence' (Knoke and Wisely, in Bosco, forthcoming). Especially relevant here are Mark Granovetter's (1973) seminal notions of *'weak'* and *'strong' ties* in social networks. While the latter lend themselves to greater group cohesion, the former may be far more

useful by way of the distribution of resources. The 'weak ties' thesis suggests ways in which a person's indirect social connections are often important channels through which ideas, influences or information are reached.

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, Lambda sets, and Galois lattices (see Wasserman and Faust 1994).

A much harder to quantify term that is closely related to social networks, with particular regard to their substance and impact, is 'social capital'.

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).

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'.

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 power individuals hold relate to 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).

Transnational migration has provided a prime topic for the utilization of all three general sociological concepts outlined above (see especially Faist 2000).

...and transnational migration

A considerable number of works over the past few decades use, in one way or another, a social networks perspective for the study of international 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)

For migrants, social networks are crucial for finding jobs and accommodation, circulating goods and services, as well as 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 (see Portes 1995).

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 1995, 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.

General notions of social networks, social capital and embeddedness are to be found in they study of parallel transnational formations as well. In order to study these dimensions of social interaction, each field of study concerning different transnational formations has developed a variety of useful concepts and approaches.

II. Parallel social formations

In this section I briefly and selectivelyreview some current thinking around the study of transnational social movements, business networks and so-called cybercommunities. These fields of study represent, respectively, a rather well-developed one, a transitional one, and a relatively new one.

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 fashioned 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. However, definitions of social movements are myriad. Further, there are arguments and questions surrounding the designation of 'old' and 'new' social movements (ibid.). One current theorist of note, 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. This approach gives rise to various kinds and extents of social formation '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).

With regard to factors and processes of social formation, Tarrow (1998b: 235) observes that 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 in analyzing the emergence and shaping 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 should ponder, by analytic analogy, how such factors might condition transnational migrant communities as well.

1. political opportunity structures – Following McAdam et al., social movement scholars have demonstrated how the shape and activities of social movements are formed in light of the constraints and possibilities surrounding the political characteristics of 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, the presence or absence of influential allies. In any assessment of political opportunity structures, one needs to recognize '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, and in her contribution to this conference). And, although they don't phrase it in such terms, the impact of political opportunity structures can be inferred in the study of differential community developments among Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles carried out by Luis Guarnizo, Arturo Ignacio Sánchez and Elizabeth Roach (1999).

2. mobilizing structures – Such 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 process 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). Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema (1987), drawing on research concerning the Dutch peace movement, outline four aspects of mobilization: formation of potentials, activation of recruitment networks, arousal of motivation to participate, and removal of barriers to participate.

Examples in international migration studies exist here too. The relevance of a mobilizing structures concept to transnational migrant communities is evident, for instance, in the model developed by by Nadje Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser (2001) to describe factors influencing both the capacity and desire of Bosnian and Eritrean refugees participate transnationally in the reconstruction of their countries of origin. They strongly indicate how the availability of resources channels the degree , form and extent of transnational activities. [We might also add that much thinking along the lines described under this heading seems to relate closely to notions of social capital.]

3. framing – As defined by McAdam et al. (1996: 2), the concept of social movement framing entails 'the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediates between opportunity and action.' That is, framing is what we can call the processes of negotiating conscious, shared meanings and definitions with which people legitimate, motivate and conduct their collective activities. Fernando Bosco (forthcoming) 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.' Analytically recognizing 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 massive literature concerns these processes, of course.

The study of social movements over the past decade or so has particularly 'gone transnational' (see J. 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 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).

The transnational interest in social movements focuses mainly on activist networks that connect a range of actors sharing common values, discourse and information (cf. Tarrow 2000). Their emergence is explained again by changing (i.e., globalizing) political opportunity structures and avenues of resource mobilization (especially electronic communication). Indeed, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) emphasize the need to pay more attention to network forms of organization in the study of transnational social movements particularly and international relations generally. By way of another kind of conceptual cross-fertilization, they use an understanding of network theory and dynamics drawn from networks of individuals, but applied to networks of groups and organizations.

The study of business organizations and business systems, too, has both 'gone transnational' and come to highlight the role of networks.

Business Networks

Many social scientists have drawn from 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; cf. Vertovec 1999, Cohen and Rai 2000). Concomitant with the examination of TNCs, researchers in management, organizational and business studies have become increasingly interested in

examining the shape and functions of business networks, supplier commodity chains, production networks, and innovative networks (see 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. (ibid.: 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 the individual to attempt the 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 and the like. Again, these ideas are resonant with the basic sociological notion of social capital. And similar to other core facets of social capital, Yeung underscores the importance of trust and mutual understanding in 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

large globalized firms. Codified knowledge, which is formally taught to employees, is naturally of high significance to the running of large 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)

Tacit knowledge, a 'nexus of competences', disadvantageous network closure versus advantageous looseness are concepts that may have some merit when applied to transnational migrant social formations, particularly by way of understanding why some migrant networks stagnate and others flourish, why some remain 'broad' and others 'narrow' (Itzigsohn et al. 1999). It is highly such business studies-derived concepts will also have significance for understanding migration and the rise of transnational entrepreneurs (see Portes 2001b)

A final parallel field of transnational social formation research that also relies heavily on network concepts, among others, is that of 'virtual' or 'cyber-' communities.

Cybercommunities

Networks and communities formed around computer-mediated communication (CMC) have aroused the suspicion of many sociologists. As Tarrow (1998b: 241) describes it,

> The growing web of e-mail networks that are traversing the world may
> excite the attention of those with easy access to computers because of their
> obvious capacity to reduce transaction costs and transmit information
> quickly across national lines, but they do not promise the same degree of
> crystallization, of mutual trust and collective identity, as do the
> interpersonal ties in social networks.

However – fuelling much current debate – there is an increasing number of academic works arguing that on-line networks and relationships do indeed constitute communities comparable to face-to-face ones (see for instance Escobar 1996, Jordan 1999, Dutton 1999, Smith and Kollock 1999).

In a study highly uncharacteristic of anthropologists, Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000) have written a detailed ethnographic study of how Trinidadians, at home and in diaspora, make use of the Internet. Miller and Slater are critical of the often conventional approach that treats Internet 'cyberspace' as a kind of placeless place. Such a view, Miller and Slater say, presupposes 'online' communication takes place in a space *apart from* the rest of 'offline' social life. The notion of 'virtuality', too, only suggests people treat computer-mediated relationships 'as if' they are real. While such approaches may be valuable in certain instances, Miller and Slater argue, they are not a good point of departure for studying the actual use of the Internet by a number of kinds of communities.

Miller and Slater (ibid.: 5) propose that we need to treat Internet media as 'continuous with and embedded in other social spaces' and that Internet-mediated communications 'happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but that they cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness'. The authors (ibid.: 6) found that their informants themselves made little distinction between, for instance, 'e-commerce and other commerce, playground chat and ICQ chat, religious instruction face-to-face or by email'. The prevailing view of their informants is rather that these are simply complementary forms of communication and information alongside the newspaper, telephone and television. Miller and Slater conclude that it is fruitless to separate offline and online life: computer-mediated communication forms a *part of* everyday life for many people. Therefore we should not underestimate the Internet's importance or seriousness for transforming aspects of social life (cf. Castells 1996).

Such potential social transformation is suggested by what Barry Wellman (1999b) calls 'computer supported social networks (CSSNs)'. These networks form around electronic mail, electronic bulletin-boards, newsgroups and multi-user dungeons (MUDs) or virtual chat rooms. 'Such groups,' Wellman (ibid.: 336) suggests, are 'a technologically supported continuation of a long-term shift to communities organized by shared interests rather than a shared place (neighborhood or village) or shared ancestry (kinship group).' not just exchange of information in a uniplex mode of relationship, but may be multiplex too. CSSNs can offer important nonmaterial social resources akin to face-to-face relationships, including psychological and emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging. Like face-to-face networks, cybercommunities can exhibit facets of social capital and reciprosity as well. 'Such norms typically arise in a densely knit community, but they appear to be common among frequent contributors to distribution lists and newsgroups. People having a strong attachment to an electronic group will be more likely to participate and provide assistance to others' (ibid.: 343).

Wellman also insists that rather than remaining wholly anonymous online (through their 'avatars' or internet pseudonym identities), people often do bring important aspects of their offline selves to cybercommunication: gender, age, stage in life cycle, cultural milieu and socioeconomic status. For example, this might be the case for computer-mediated groups formed around such situations as drug addicts, people with specific physical handicaps or mental illnesses, or the victims of sexual abuse. Yet 'The limited evidence available suggests that the ties people develop and maintain in cyberspace are much like most of the "real-life" community ties: intermittent, specialized, and varying in strength' (ibid.: 353). Computers accelerate the ways people operate in and manipulate networks. Through cyber-networks, people now have an 'enhanced ability to more between relationships' (ibid.: 356).

In a similar manner, David Elkins (1999) outlines the rise of 'virtual neighbourhoods' in which affinity among electronically-connected 'neighbours' is based on voluntary participation by interest rather than proximity. However, Elkins warns against danger of such neighbourhoods becoming 'virtual ghettos' in which people only communicate with others who share the same interests or views.

There is a good deal of interest in ways electronic and computer-mediated communication links transnational migrant communities, channels information between home and away, and enhances coherent identities (see Rai 1995, Miller and Slater 2000, Mandaville 2001). Surely a grasp of certain concepts and debates in the social scientific study of cybercommunities will be an asset in studying transmigrant uses of technology.

A central notion in the study of computer-networked communications is that of 'cyberspace'. This is obviously a metaphoric usage with advantages and disadvantages for conveying the nature of communication and interaction. Interestingly, it is paralleled in the study of contemporary migration by notions of 'transnational space'. The penultimate section of this paper discusses issues concerning the evocation of space in relation to transnational social formations.

III. Spaces of social formation

Studies of social practices and relationships among migrant communities spread across multiple localities have stimulated the metaphoric use of concepts of space. How does this relate to the goal of furthering our understanding of social formations?

In the study of transnational migrant communities, the theoretical evocation of spatialized social relations echoes decades of theory particularly in human geography (e.g. Harvey 1969, 1990, Benko and Strohmayer 1997). Following much of this body of theory, Castells (1996: 410) summarizes, 'Space is the expression of society'. Yet it is especially at the present historical juncture, he (ibid.) conjectures, that 'Since our societies are undergoing structural transformation, it is a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that new spatial forms and processes are currently emerging' (1996: 410). Castells further contemplates the changing conception of space in ways highly relevant to the understanding of transnationalism. '[S]pace brings together those practices that are simultaneous in time, ' he (ibid.: 411) writes,

> Traditionally, this notion was assimilated to contiguity. Yet it is fundamental that we separate the basic concept of material support of simultaneous practices from the notion of contiguity, in order to account for the possible existence of material supports of simultaneity that do not rely on physical contiguity, since this is precisely the case of the dominant social practices of the information age. (ibid.)

Increased attention to non-contiguous relationships have given rise to notions of transnational spheres, spaces, fields and similar spatial concepts. For instance, 'Something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community obsolete,' Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992: 9) contend, while 'At the same, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount.' the notion of a transnational public sphere is also invoked by John Guidry, Michael Kennedy and Mayer Zald (2000). They describe the emergence of such a sphere through the elaboration of discourses and practices connecting distinct places (states of localities) and transnational entities (for these authors, especially meaning organizations or firms). Like the broad notion of globalization, Guidry et al. (ibid.: 7) propose, a transnational public sphere:

> …involves 'action at a distance' that must be understood in terms of its consequences for real actors, all of whom occupy specific places and communities. That is, the transnational public sphere is realized in various localized applications, potentially quite distinct from the original product of the discourse or practice in question.

For the contemporary sociology of social movements, a transnational public sphere represents a space in which social organization and tactics for collective action can be transmitted to particular places around the world. In business studies, Yeung (1998) describes 'a transnational platform' that refers to the practical space in which transnational business transactions take place. Such a 'platform' serves as both a medium of, and constraint upon, TNC activities.

Anthropologists have been involved in attempts to conceptualize activities and orientations spanning localities, or taking place both 'here and there' (see Clifford 1994). 'Translocality' is a notion hit upon to describe the multiple, intimate relationships and senses of belonging engaged by members of communities based in more than one place. Arjun Appadurai (1995: 213) discusses translocality with regard to 'the growing disjuncture between territory, subjectivity and collective social movement'; Appadurai correlates this disjunction strongly with 'the steady erosion of the relationship, principally due to the force and form of electronic mediation, between spatial and virtual neighbourhoods.' The concept of translocality is employed by both Luin Goldring (1998)

and Rob Smith (1998) specifically with regard to migrants. It is invoked with a rather different sense – that is, of dual attachment – than the idea of 'transnational circuits' suggested, for instance, by Rouse (1991) and Massey et al. (1994) to describe perpetual back-and-forth border-crossing movements among migrants.

In the study of migrant communities perhaps the most used notion is 'transnational social fields' which was underscored in the seminal collection published Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992; see also Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Mahler 1998, Goldring 1998, Itzigsohn et al. 1999). The term tends to be invoked as a rather quick way of suggesting practices and interpersonal relationships than span specific places.

The concept of a social field has a theoretical pedigree in the Manchester School of Anthropology, however, that is rarely cited. Drawing on the ideas of Max Gluckman and other colleagues in this intellectual group, Mitchell suggested that

> A social field may be thought of as a series of inter-connecting relationships all of which in some way influence one another. …[E]ach field is a segment of the social system which may be isolated in terms of the interdependency of the relationships and the activities of the people involved in it. Overlapping the fields together, therefore, comprise the total social system, though we are not sure whether the social system itself should be thought of in terms of the aggregate of social fields or whether it should be thought of as a 'field of fields' in which the various *fields* of social relationships are themselves connected (1966: 57; emphasis in original)

The sense of inter-dependency and overlapping systems is often lost in much current literature on transnationalism. Instead, if not clearly elaborated, the notion of transnational social field might paint a picture that suggests a rather singular or homogeneous set of relationships. One corrective is offered by Micheal Kearney (1995), who insists that the transnational migrant moves through 'multiple social fields' (also see Levitt 2001).

The same potential problem holds for the often-invoked concept of 'transnational social space' within which migrants live (cf. Smith and Guarnizo 1998, Pries 1999). This term, too, could potentially suggest a reductive or simplistic model, but a number of theorists have worked on clarifying its meaning. The concept of transnational social space is explored by Ludgar Pries (2001), who describes it as comprising 'dense, stable,

pluri-local and institutionalized frameworks composed of material artefacts, the social practices of everyday life, as well as systems of symbolic representation that are structured by and structure human life.' [This merging of human, non-human and symbolic or discursive elements, it seems, suggests an approach corresponding with Actor Network Theory.] 'The metaphor of transnational social spaces,' similarly says Faist (2000: 13), 'helps to broaden the scope of migration studies to include the circulation of ideas, symbols, and material culture, not only the movement of people' (cf. Goldring 1996).

In order to avoid any over-general conceptualizations, as Luin Goldring (2001) urges, we must 'disaggregate' transnational social spaces (not least by gender and citizenship practices). This kind of exercise is undertaken by Michael P. Smith (2002), who points out that 'there are many ways of "being transnational" and that these are linked to distinctive types of social space.' Smith suggests,

> For instance, different kinds of transnational practices are enacted in *domestic space* by women's household consumption practices at both ends of a trans-local migrant circuit and by social actors, often men, in the *public space* of political diasporas. The *discursive space* of the global human rights arena is another distinct site where differently situated social actors enact different kinds of transnational practices. The same is true for the *transactional spaces* of trade diasporas, labour recruiters, and cultural and religious brokers; the *institutional spaces* where NGO politics are enacted; and the *global media space* which local and trans-local actors seek to appropriate in their struggles for life, livelihood, and political empowerment. (ibid.; emphasis in original)

It is not only vital to disaggregate the notion of transnational social space, but to think through it terms of multiple and differential embeddedness. That is, each point within the transnational social space (or better, sub-space or field) will present an array of conditioning factors affecting social, economic, cultural and political dynamics. It is the confluence of these that colour the nature and development of any social space and, thereby, the community that inhabits it.

The importance of this sense of differential embeddedness is highlighed by Ninna Nyberg Sørensen (forthcoming) by way of invoking Doreen Massey's (1993) central concept. '[T]he transnational social field,' Sørensen says, 'becomes a more differentiated space when two or more destinations are included in the analysis. The "power-geometry"

between New York City/the Dominican Republic on the one hand, and Madrid/the Dominican Republic on the other, is *not* of the same nature' (ibid., emphasis in original).

Saskia Sassen (2000: 151) also addresses the new cross-border geography of transnationalism as 'a space that is both place-centred in that it is embedded in particular and strategic locations; and it is transterritorial because it connects sites that are not geographically proximate yet are intensely connected to each other'. One consequence, Sassen obverses, is that 'The "de-nationalizing" of urban space, and the formation of new claims by transnational actors, raise the question *Whose city is it?*' (ibid. 152; emphasis in original).

Geographical metaphors of space, field and (trans-)locality can certainly be used very evocatively to suggest the changing nature of human encounters and exchanges that develop when people are actually situated over great distances. The concepts are in danger, though, of presenting a circular or tautological argument: social practices create spaces / spaces are comprised of social practices. While we are coming to get a better sense of transnationalism through such spatial metaphors, they may not necessarily get us anywhere analytically.

Similarly there is much worth in the usage of non-spatial metaphors derived from a kind of phenomenological approach. For example, Rob Smith (2001) describes the practices and relationships linking home and abroad as a 'life world' among immigrants and their descendents. Luis Guarnizo (1997) draws upon Bourdieu (1977) to propose the idea of the transnational *habitus*, whereby practices and social positions spread across borders produce conscious and non-conscious dispositions to act in specific ways in specific situations. The effects of transnationalism for changing meanings, attitudes and experiences are also relevant to studies concerning migrants and transformations of the meaning of 'home' (Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Peggy Levitt's (2001) notion of the 'transnational village' is of value here, too, in that it simultaneously invokes a sense of space, common experience and intimacy of social relationships.

All of the terms and concepts discussed in this section contribute to the study of transnationalism, but do so in very different ways that the approaches described in the previous two sections. Ideas around spaces, fields, and such suggest a *context* for transnational activity rather than something to do with things like the *type, duration,*

regularity and *extent* of activity. That is, what, by way of spatial metaphors, can be applied to data to suggest patterns of relationship?

Here, a link with the social networks perspective might be of most value. Metaphoric 'space' and social networks both suggest the 'shaping power' of patterned and embedded relationships (Kearney 1995: 231). These affect identities and, concomitantly, social relations. Interweaving the two conceptual vantage points, Kearney suggests that 'people move – migrate – through spaces inflated by the networks' (ibid.).

Alisdair Rogers and I (1995) have discussed how the social network perspective challenges the ready equation of spatial proximity with social interaction. 'The trick,' according to Barry Wellman (1999a: xv), 'is to treat community as a social network rather than as a place.' In this way, 'The principle defining criterion for community is what people do for each other and not where they live.' Fernando Bosco (forthcoming), too, contributes to the view that 'social networks do not necessarily determine social action, but rather *create a context* that facilitates or impedes social interaction' (emphasis in original). The network – the situationally embedded, set of potential interactions and repository of social capital that may be dispersed throughout several actual places – represents that context (call it field or space if you will) in which people carry out their daily social lives.

Conclusion

Addressing the question of how globalization and migration interact to affect social change, Adrian Favell (forthcoming) believes,

> …it will be necessary to systematically take the daily structures of
> everyday life in the old bounded world of the nation-state-society – one
> thinks of family structures, the structures of professions, social mobility,
> the life-cycle, etc. – and, via the empirical study of individuals whose lives
> have crossed boundaries, see how and where these structures are being
> transformed.

Implicit in Favell's advice concerning the importance of 'structures' is, by extension, the importance of studying networks. '[T]he network remains useful as a root metaphor,' Hannerz (1992: 51) insists, 'when we try to think in a reasonably orderly way (without necessarily aiming at rigour of measurement) about some of the heterogeneous sets of often long-distance relationships which organize culture in the world now – in

terms of cumulative change or enduring diversity.' Other such advantages of a social networks perspective are described by Thomas Schweitzer (1997: 739):

> On the one hand, network tools are very specific and thus ideally suited to the investigation of embeddeness in depth. On the other hand, the concepts, procedures, and hypotheses of social network analysis have a general formal core that facilitates productive comparisons across cases and thereby addresses the problem of theoretical synthesis.

Of course, as argued by strongly by Bruno Riccio (2001), we must try to avoid the reification of social networks in the study of transnational migrant communities. Instead, Riccio proposes, we might focus on the ongoing processes of networking or network formation by which they are actively reproduced, maintained, transformed and extended.

This paper has surveyed and summarized some key terms and concepts drawn from the study of transnational social formations parallel to those of migrant groups. The purpose has been to suggest notions that it may be 'good to think with' when collecting and interpreting material regarding transnational migrant communities. A recap of some of these terms and concepts includes:

> *social networks:* size, density, multiplicity, normative content, connectedness, consistency, weak and strong ties;
>
> *social capital:* normative reciprocity, loyalty, rewards, sanctions and 'enforceable trust';
>
> *embeddedness:* relational and structural types, vertical and horizontal facets;
>
> *social movements:* political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, framing, resource mobilization, enhancing possibilities for pooling resources, transnational repertoire;
>
> *business networks:* economics of synergy, tacit knowledge, nexus of competences, network closure vs. innovation;
>
> *cybercommunities:* question of on-line vs. off-line ties, enhanced ability to quickly move between different kinds of relationships, computer-mediated communication forming a *part of* everyday life, virtual neighbourhoods vs. virtual ghettos.

Such an exercise should not remain simply one of trying on hats. As Favell (forthcoming) emphasizes, 'doing theory' is not merely a matter of adopting and adapting new metaphors. Any concepts brought into a field of study should remain 'operationalizable' by way of gathering and analysing empirical and ethnographic data. A

network approach, which itself cross-cuts a number of research fields, seems to be the best way to structure research and analysis of transnational social formations. It is especially around the study of transnational networks (among migrants, social movements, business or computer-linked collectives) that conceptual cross-fertilization might prove most fruitful.

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