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Transnational Societal Spaces: Which Units of Analysis, Reference, and Measurement?

Ludger Pries

During the 1990s, pioneer research on transnational migration and on transnationalism in general, especially when confronted with sceptical criticism, frequently concentrated its efforts on proving the mere existence of transnational phenomena. Today, the transnationalism approach as a research programme has spread into such different disciplines as geography, sociology, political science, anthropology, economics, literature and history; moreover, the actual occurrence of transnational ‘social facts’ can be considered to be substantiated in many ways. Sometimes the terms *transnational* and *transnationalism* are used so vaguely and indistinctly that they are likely to become ‘catch-all and say nothing’ terms, as was the case with the globalisation concept. Therefore, conceptual precision and debate, as well as more explicit and closely defined empirical research, is needed. As underlined by a number of authors¹, the main task is currently no longer to show that transnational social phenomena exist, but rather, as most fellows in this research field agree, to demonstrate that the successful establishment of transnationalism as a valuable concept has led to new theoretical and empirical challenges.

Many of the volumes – already more than twenty! – of the “Routledge Research in Transnationalism” series focus on analysing transnational social phenomena in areas such as migration, identities and citizenship. Other volumes concentrate on such different topics as transnational value chains and fashion, transnational feminist approaches in literature, transnational policy and security, or regional approaches to transnationalism in the European Union, the Islamic world, or Asia. Thus, the “Routledge Research in Transnationalism” series is a vivid example of the broad scope of disciplinary, thematic and regional traditions of the

¹ Portes et al. 1999, Levitt 2001a, Vertovec 2004, the authors of the special volumes of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* No. 2/2003 and of *International Migration Review* No. 3/2003 (especially Vertovec 2003a and Levitt et al. 2003), as well as many contributions to *global networks*, the *journal of transnational affairs*, and explicitly the authors of the first part of this volume

transnational studies field. However, whereas a fair amount of volumes concentrate on empirical research in specific themes, only a few volumes focus on conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues of transnationalism as a research programme.² While many of the volumes represent specific approaches and traditions, this volume addresses both central current theoretical and methodological issues of the field as well as what has been, until now, a largely ignored aspect of transnationalism: transnational organisations. Thus, the specific ‘add on’ of this volume is twofold. In the first part, some outstanding pioneers and experts on transnationalism research present some general readings in this field and make conceptual proposals for further research. In the second part, the ‘meso-level’ of transnational organisations is treated as a specific approach to transnational research between the macro-view on general, institutional, and societal relations and the micro-level of individual and everyday life social relations.

This chapter aims at integrating the contributions of the book by identifying the main advances and challenges of transnationalism as a research programme, as derived from the first part of each chapter, and by addressing the meso-level of transnational organisations, as treated in the second part of this volume. First, it identifies four main challenges of the transnational studies approach that result from a general reading of the transnationalism debate. In a second step, it concentrates on one of these pending problems: the appropriate definition of *units of analysis* and *units of reference* for transnational social phenomena and studies. It discusses different units of reference for analysing transnational phenomena and develops a proposal for conceptualising different ideal types of transnational social spaces. Then it looks at the following chapters of the book and underlines some important proposals made in order to cope with the aforementioned general challenges, especially in the field of transnational organisations. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

Challenges to transnationalism as a research programme

Taking into account the aforementioned and other transnationalism literature, a general common sense approach to important pending problems of transnationalism as a research programme can be agreed upon. Four primary challenges can be identified. First, instead of expanding the notion of transnationalism to a new catch-all concept, and of ‘viewing

² For an overlook of the series see http://www.routledge.com/politics/series_list.asp?series=18.

transnational relations in any corner', it is necessary to *define appropriate units of analysis for transnational societal phenomena*. The simplest transnational societal unit of analysis could be a 'transnational social relation', like the communication and interchange between a migrant and his or her family abroad. But is there anything new about these types of transnational relations? They have existed for as long as nations, nation states and national societies have existed – and with these socially constructed units, social practices, such as interchanging and trading goods and information across socio-geographic units, emerged (see Khagram/Levitt in this volume). Therefore, transnational relations and transnational practices have existed since the very beginning of such social artefacts as nations, states and national societies.

In order to use the transnationalism concept in a more precise manner, transnational studies should focus not on transnational relations in general, but on transnational *societal units* as relatively dense and durable configurations of transnational social practices, symbols and artefacts (for this argument, see e.g. Hannerz 1996; Martínez 1998; Pries 2001 and 2004; Voigt-Graf 2004). To this end, it is necessary to explicitly define the specific relation between the (transnational) *units of analysis*, the (local, national, regional or global) *units of reference* and the (micro, meso or macro) *units of research*; these components characterise the transnational perspective and distinguish it from a global or simply comparative point of view. The following section of this chapter will deal with the problem of defining the appropriate units of analysis for transnational research or, sticking to the terminology used by Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt in this volume, will treat some aspects of *methodological transnationalism*.

A second task identified by the scholars of transnational studies refers to what Khagram and Levitt (in this volume) label as *empirical transnationalism*: the need to measure the *real empirical extent* of transnational social phenomena and especially of durable and dense *transnational societal units*. On the one hand, the multifaceted and ubiquitous existence of transnational social *phenomena* and *relations* is a direct result of building socio-geographic container units such as nations, states and societies - and in this broader sense transnational relations are recognised as commonplace in transnational studies. On the other hand, transnational *social* or *societal spaces*³ could also be conceptualised in a narrow sense. By

³ The terms *social spaces* and *societal spaces* are used in this chapter with a synonymous meaning and just for a literal variety and change; they will be defined more explicitly in the second section of this chapter. In a strict sense, 'societal' is the more comprehensive term, including social, economic, cultural, ethnic etc. aspects or

this, they could be understood as nation states and national societies spanning interaction frameworks in the dimensions of (1) intensive and stable social practices, (2) systems of symbols, and (3) artefacts. Used in this more specific sense of transnational spaces, these could be considered as a relatively novel topic recently discussed since the last quarter of the 20th century. The development of these transnational social spaces was pushed by innovative and cheap international communication technologies, such as the telephone, fax-machine, Internet and airplane transportation (as a mass medium rather than an elite mobility system).

But where exactly do different types of transnational social spaces actually exist? Does transnational migration make up a large proportion of all international migration? Are there a lot of transnational families as a result of transnational migration relations? Do transnational business companies play an important or at least a considerable role when compared with multinational, global or focal companies? The second part of this volume will concentrate on the conceptual and empirical aspects of transnational organisations – although it has to be stressed from the start that in general there is little knowledge about the real magnitude of transnational organisations and of the spread of transnational societal units in general. It therefore remains an important issue to measure, more precisely, the range of distribution and occurrence of such transnational societal units of analysis as compared to other societal units of analysis.⁴

A third challenge pointed out by transnationalism studies is to analyse the *internal structures and processes* of such transnational societal units as well as the *interrelation between transnational and non-transnational types of societal units of analysis*. This is crucial to avoid suggesting the existence of the same structures and processes in transnational societal units as in other societal units of analysis, or – the other way round - to ascribe structures and processes to transnational units completely different from non-transnational units. This leads to questions such as: What are the similarities between the internal structures (namely the distribution of assets, interests, values and power) and the dynamics (namely the mechanisms of coordination between the different and distant units of the transnational spaces) of transnational societal spaces as compared with other types of societal spaces? Are the

dimensions. In earlier publications (e.g. Pries 1999 and 2001) I used only the term ‘social space’, but in its extensive meaning of societal space. In order to underline its broad and sociological scope it is interchanged here with the more precise but linguistically more ‘unwieldy’ term *societal space*.

⁴ For the use of terms like international, transnational, multinational, supranational, etc. see Pries 2005 and the second section of this chapter.

dimensions and dynamics of social differentiation and integration the same in transnational social spaces as in other types of social spaces? For instance, do gender aspects of social differences or religion - as an integral aspect of social life - vary systematically in transnational societal units (transnational families, for example) as compared to their dynamics in national societies? As underlined by several scholars (Faist 2000 and in this volume; Koopmans/Statham 2001; Al-Ali 2002; Al-Ali/Koser 2002; Olwig 2003), there is a need to examine both agents and structures.

Apart of the lack of insights into transnational societal units, there is also little knowledge about the systematic relation between them and other types of societal units. How do transnational families influence locally bound families? Under what conditions are transnational migrant organisations a challenge and/or an opportunity for national social integration? Is the multitude and nature of transnational societal units influenced by local, national or regional fields of power? Under which circumstances does an assimilationist approach of nation states on migrants' national society integration encourage or prevent the emergence of transnational migrant organisations? Until now, there has been little empirically based and systematic knowledge on these relations between transnational societal spaces and other types of societal spaces, that could be interpreted as part of what Khagram/Levitt (in this volume) calls "theoretical transnationalism". In the last part of this chapter some general considerations on this problem will be made.

As a fourth *desideratum* of current transnationalism studies, there still remains the need for developing an adequate methodology and satisfactory methods for transnational research. Scholars, such as George Marcus (1995), defined some excellent general rules for transnationalism studies, such as the famous 'followings' (follow the people, follow the thing/commodity chain, follow the metaphors, follow the plot/story/allegory, follow the life/biography, follow the conflict). This is definitely an important step towards adequate methods, but, in the light of the aforementioned points, these rules do not resolve the problem of how to identify transnational societal units and how to distinguish them from simple transnational relations. The qualitative methods adopted primarily from the fields of anthropology, ethnography and sociology (holistic approach, participatory fieldwork, the 'following-strategy', open interviews, etc.), and developed by scholars such as Michael Kearney (1995 and with Carole Nagengast 1989), George Marcus (1995), Karen Olwig (2003), Federico Besserer 2004, Fernando Herrera (2001) and Peggy Levitt (2001b), represent

important advances in tracing goods and people in order to identify and analyse transnational social relations. Levitt et al. (2003) argue for a dimensional focus on different aspects (economic, political, socio-cultural and religious dimensions) of transnational social life as a heuristic strategy.

In addition to these steps and in addition to taking the aforementioned first challenge - the definition of appropriate units of analysis for transnational societal phenomena - into account seriously, there arises a need for, not only new methods, but also a general development in methodology as such. In social sciences the units of analysis could be taken for granted for no reason, but always had to be constructed theoretically. Within the framework of methodological nationalism (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002), the corresponding spatial units of reference were traditionally considered as ‘naturally given’ by the local, national and global geographic level. Differentiating absolutist and relativist concepts of space (Pries 1999), however, leads to fundamental revisions of the relation between the units of analysis and the spatial units of reference – the latter cannot be taken for granted as coherent and contiguous geographical ‘containers’, but have to be considered as (potentially) pluri-local and constructed by social practices, symbols and artefacts: “The local, regional, national, and global are not automatic, taken-for-granted social arenas, but rather categories that must be investigated as constructed and contested social facts” (Khagram/Levitt 2005: 26). In qualitative terms, this raises new methodological problems, because the units of analysis and the units of reference appear definitely as what they are (and always have been): inextricably entangled. Some aspects of this fourth challenge will be treated explicitly in the next section of this chapter.

Strengthening the conceptual fundament for transnational research

Based on the aforementioned challenges and *desiderata* of transnational studies, four proposals will be made in this section. First, differentiation criteria between units of analysis, units of reference and units of measurement will be proposed in order to make the characteristics of transnational studies, as opposed to cross-national comparison and world system or global studies, more distinct. Second, apart from the well-known problem of constructing appropriate units of analysis in social sciences, transnational studies must pay special attention to the challenge of finding the adequate (socio-spatial) units of reference. Third, the definition of a specific and narrowly bound concept of the terms ‘transnational’ and

‘transnationalism’ must be addressed to avoid using these terms as ‘catch-all categories’. Finally, the understanding of social or societal spaces has to be made more explicit so as not to replace traditional concepts such as ‘community’ or ‘society’ by another vague term.

One crucial problem in the social sciences in general is the search for an adequate definition of ‘units of analysis’. In transnationalism studies this problem becomes even more obvious and virulent because often used traditional concepts of ‘container units of analysis’ (like the national society or nation state based social classes) will not work. In this volume, there are some interesting reflections on this problem, and proposals for defining appropriate units of analysis are made. Khagram and Levitt discuss the problem of finding clear definitions of ‘borders’ or ‘boundaries’, which are required or presupposed in order to look at transnational phenomena and units of analysis that are crossing or transgressing these borders and boundaries. Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar question the notion of ethnic groups as adequate and exclusive units of analysis for transnational studies. Instead, taking the example of religious groups analysed at city level they discuss individual migrants, networks, organisations and social fields (the latter as ‘networks of networks’) as possible units of analysis.

All the chapters of the first part of this volume stress the necessity to look for adequate units of analysis or units of reference for transnational studies. One possibility is to question units traditionally ‘taken for granted’ to relativise their boundaries, or to underscore their permeability. A second possibility - that will be developed in the following section - is to reflect upon the relations between units of analysis, units of reference and units of measurement more explicitly. This seems to be an essential endeavour in further developing the conceptual framework of the specific nature of transnational studies *in a narrow sense*. Transnational studies *in a broader sense* could be understood as all research focusing on border crossing and pluri-local objects of study. But in a programmatic way, the term ‘transnational studies’ will be developed here in a narrow and specific understanding of transnational societal spaces as units of reference. We define ‘units of analysis’ as the theoretical-analytical entities about which a scientific statement is made. In an investigation entitled “The fragmented identities of rural-urban Mexican migrants in Mexico-City during the 1990s”, the fragmented identities would represent the units of analysis – whatever the operationalisation of the theoretical-analytical concept of fragmented identities would look like. In this example, the term “rural-urban Mexican migrants” would indicate the *units of*

measurement as those entities to which the data collection would be related. Finally, the expression "in Mexico-City during the 1990s" would point to the spatial-temporal unit of reference that relates to the scientific statements.⁵

Differentiation between units of analysis, units of reference and units of measurement is useful for distinguishing systematically between different types of international research, namely international comparison, world system or global studies and transnational studies (see Table 1 with non-exhaustive examples for units of analysis and units of measurement). In the traditional case of international or **cross-national comparison**, the units of reference are the given or taken for granted nation states or national societies. The units of analysis could range from social classes to rituals, from social institutions to organizations, or from concepts of labour to religious orientations and practices. Ultimately, the units of measurement could be individuals, households, for-profit/non-profit organisations, movies, newspapers, certain products, special ceremonies (like weddings), and so on.

Table 1: Types of international studies

	Cross-national Comparison	World System Research	Transnational Studies
Units of reference	nation states, national societies, boundary fixed containers	macro regions, world system, entire globe	border crossing, pluri-local, societal spaces
Units of analysis	social classes, values, institutions, identity	centre-periphery structures of social classes, values	biographies, families, organisations, institutions, identity
Units of measurement	individuals, households, rituals, texts, practices	flows of goods and information, organisations	individuals, households, rituals, flows of goods

Whereas, in the case of cross-national comparison, the national societies are taken as the 'quasi natural' units of reference, in macro-regional, global or **world system studies** the unit of reference is extended so as to include a greater region (like Europe, the Asia-Pacific-rim or

⁵ For a similar distinction see Friedrichs 1978.

Latin America) or the world as a whole. In this case, the units of analysis could be the same as in the case of the cross-national comparison, now focusing, for instance, on a longitudinal perspective on changes in time. An example could be a study about 'Shifts in courtly life in Medieval Europe from the 14th to the 17th century' (given the fact that nation states and national societies in the modern sense did not exist at that time in the open-boundary macro-region of Europe). As an alternative to diachronic cuts through macro-regions or the entire globe, with the same units of analysis as those used in cross-national studies, there is also the possibility of creating socio-spatial (configurations of) units of analysis, such as the centre-periphery figure, and combining these with the aforementioned units of analysis. The work of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) is a good example of the embedding of the social class category not in 'national containers' but in centre-periphery circles. The units of measurement could be the same as those in cross-national comparisons, but often flows of goods and information, or the spread and structure of economic and other organisations, are the focus of world system studies.

In the case of cross-national research, methodological nationalism is prevalent and obvious, but for traditional regional and world system studies the globe as a whole is divided into concentric circles and geographic spaces that are mutually exclusive with midpoints of repulsion. In both cases - cross-national comparison and world system studies - the time-space related units of reference are basically rooted in absolutist concepts of space and in the 'double binding' and mutual exclusiveness of geographic space and social space: (1) in one geographic-spatial unit (like the territory of a nation state) there is place for just one social-spatial unit (like a national society); and, (2) each social-spatial unit needs just one geographic-spatial unit. In social sciences in general, the units of reference have long been conceptualised as contiguous and (related to the social spaces *inside* this geographic unit) relatively homogenous geographic units (as compared to the socio-spatial differences *between* various geographic units).

During the 1990s scholars such as Saskia Sassen (1991) began to question this classical model, arguing that, for instance, global cities could combine the very centre and the real periphery in just one geographic place. At the same time the units of analysis and the units of reference became more complex, as they could be divided among different geographic places or plots in completely dissimilar socio-cultural regions, as in the case of international for-profit and non-profit organisations. In this way, the relation between social spaces and

geographical spaces became more complex. In **transnational studies** the units of measurement could be quite the same as in cross-national research – even if, empirically, the analysis of *flows* of social practices, flows of symbols and flows of artefacts are more frequently observed. The units of analysis in transnational studies are most frequently biographies, families, organisations, institutions and identities. The units of reference, by definition, are considered as pluri-local and geographically dispersed, distributed and non-contiguous, but socially more or less homogeneous and coherent societal units.

But how could these transnational societal spaces, such as border crossing and pluri-local units of reference, be defined and identified? This is an epistemologically challenging question. In the case of cross-national research, the units of reference are taken for granted as nation states and national societies. These are defined by referring to one social unit within one geographical unit, as could be confirmed in practically all dictionaries or encyclopedias of Sociology. To cite an example: in the Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology (Jary/Jary 1991: 467) the term ‘Society’ is defined as, “1. the totality of human relationships. 2. any self-perpetuating human grouping occupying a relatively bounded territory, having its own more or less distinctive CULTURE and INSTITUTIONS, for example, a particular people such as the Nuer or a long- or well-established NATION-STATE, such as the United States or Britain” (capital letters retained from the original). Shmuel Eisenstadt (2004:25) refers to this dominant view and argues: “many of sociology’s basic images refer to *Gemeinschaft* und *Gesellschaft*. And *Gemeinschaft* is the nation-state. When people talk about the *Gemeinschaft*, the image of the *Gemeinschaft* they have, unless it is a tribe, is the nation state. Other types of *Gemeinschaften* have not really been studied except esoteric *kleine Gemeinschaften*. So what is difficult for sociologists is to free themselves of the implicit assumption that any society means nation state.”

While sociologists were used to having to construct their units of analysis by theoretical-analytical reasoning, they generally took the units of reference as given. This is no longer the ‘natural’ or adequate approach. Peter Mandaville, citing James Clifford and George Marcus, points to this problem as the crucial issue of social sciences:

There is no longer any place overview (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life...Mountains are in constant motion. So are islands: for one cannot occupy, unambiguously, a bounded cultural world from which to journey out and analyze other cultures. Human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate, and subvert one another. Cultural analysis is always enmeshed in global movements of difference and power. How [then]... can ethnography – at home or abroad – define its

object of study in ways that permit detailed, local, contextual analysis and simultaneously the portrayal of global implicating forces?' I take this to be the central problem of the social sciences at the present time. (Mandaville 2001: 29)

The problem of how to define the units of analysis, reference and measurement (called altogether "object of study" here) is exactly one of the most challenging questions for transnational studies. In the case of world-system studies the unit of reference is just expanded to the maximum (in the geographical sense of the globe and/or in the theoretical sense of Wallerstein's functionally integrated system, or of Luhmann's "possible reach of communication"). For transnational studies, this way of treating the relations between societal and geographic spaces is not adequate. A first step in dealing with this problem is – as proposed above – to distinguish explicitly between units of reference, units of analysis and units of measurement, and to reflect on the theoretical-analytical construction of the units of reference in the case of transnational studies. A second step is to reflect on how to construct adequate units of reference for analysing transnational societal spaces. Recalling the fundamental epistemological considerations of John Stuart Mill (1860[1843]) about the scientific methods of comparison, these transnational units of reference should comply with the following conditions. First, the similarities of relevant variables or characteristics *within* the transnational unit of reference should be considerable in comparison to the similarities in other (local, national, regional or global) units of reference. In order to identify a transnational societal space in the context of labour migration, the similarities in money spending and household economies of those units of measurement (e.g. individuals, households), possibly ascribed to this transnational space, should be greater than the common features of money spending and household economies at a local or national level. Second, the differences *between* the transnational societal unit of reference and the local, national, regional or global units of reference are considerable in comparison to the differences between the local, national or regional units of reference. Concerning the example of transnational labour migration, money spending and household economies in transnational societal spaces should differ significantly from the corresponding patterns in local, national or regional units of reference.

Third, strengthening the conceptual foundation for transnational studies concerns the differentiation between transnational and other types of international relations and characteristics. In order to develop a specific and empirically useful approach on transnationalism, generally societal spaces are considered transnational only if they differ

from other types of international and transnational relations and conform with the following criteria: the distribution of resources, culture, interests and power is polycentric and not monocentric; and, the relations and coordination between the different nations spanning local subunits are strong, dense and durable. This sets transnational societal spaces apart from, for instance, simple multinational societal spaces in which the distribution is polycentric but coordination is only weak, and from monocentric societal spaces where coordination mechanisms could be strong but distribution is centre-periphery-like rather than homogeneous (Pries 2005). In this sense, the proposed concept of transnational societal space is narrower than the rather unspecific terms ‘transnational network’ or ‘transnational field’, as used by Glick Schiller and Çağlar (in this volume).

Using these defining criteria it is possible, for instance, to distinguish a transnational migration family from a simple emigration/immigration, return migration or Diaspora migration family. In the *immigration/emigration* case, the ongoing coordination mechanisms for resources (like sending remittances) for culture (such as making transnational phone calls once a week or sending letters), for interests (like going to school or having a stable working career) and for power relations (such as the competency to decide over who goes where and when), become more and more centred in the society of arrival. In the case of *return migrants* all these aspects are strongly centred and focused on the society of departure. In contrast, actual *transnational migration* and the corresponding transnational societal spaces span more or less homogeneously and without a clear centre or point of reference between different locales, countries or regions. Gipsy families, and clans and organisations like Attac or McKinnsey, could come near to this ideal type. But many durable and dense border crossing societal spaces are not transnational but come close to a type of *Diaspora migration*. In this case, the border-spanning activities are “anchored” in an imagined and/or in a physically existing ‘promised land’.

Fourth, an element in strengthening the transnationalism studies approach refers to the concept of social, respectively, societal spaces itself. If ‘society’ and ‘community’ are problematic or misleading terms – as mentioned above by Shmuel Eisenstadt – for representing the only or unquestioned social units in times of global changes, the concept of *societal spaces* could be a promising approach for qualifying transnational societal units.

Social spaces, understood and perceived as human life relations, generally comprise three different dimensions, analogous to the x, y and z axes of social life. Firstly, social spaces

always contain the *social practice* dimension as the active examination and working by actors with other people, with nature and with oneself. All three relations (human-nature, human-human and ego-self) are constitutive and indispensable for any form of human life-practice. By definition, these relations imply an expansion in space and time and refer to the active and intervening side of human life entanglements. Work (in the form of hunting, constructing dwellings, sowing and reaping corn, baking bread, building machines, preparing food, etc.) has been the most important social practice in the human-nature relation for millions of years, but it also always encompassed the human-human and the ego-self relation. In the transition to the knowledge and information society, work increasingly takes on an intermediary role between human-nature, human-human and ego-self relations. Additionally, however, informing, recounting, loving, representing and thinking have all been genuine parts of social practice since humans' anthropogenesis from the ape and encompass all three human life relations.

Secondly, social spaces always include the dimension describing the presence and effectiveness of symbol systems, i.e. of complex frameworks of significant symbols. In this sense, symbols are not simply to be understood as sensory inputs, just as, for example, certain light-waves are registered on the retina as signs for the colour red or green, or as the temperature of a fluid or object is registered by the skin as a sign of warmth or cold. Rather, a symbol is a complex sign for and in a context. It represents a mode of giving sense to social practice and of structuring social practice by meaningful behaviour. A symbol is primarily conditioned not by a 'natural situation' but rather by culture. Significant symbols evoke the same connotation in differing agents living within the same cultural context. For example, in north-western European social spaces, a wedding ring represents a very complex context of an enduring (and up until the 20th century) heterosexual relationship based upon mutual affection and free will, approved by religious institutions and by the state. The relative importance of certain symbol systems (e.g. characters, movies, funeral rituals) can vary tremendously. Language is a very complex, universal and indeed constitutive symbol system in human social spaces.

Finally, the third dimension, which encompasses all social practices, comprises the production and use of artefacts. This includes all objectified results stemming from human action - especially human work. As objects formed by humans, artefacts are also always the result of the active human-nature relation. However, the two other human acquirement relations – the

human-human and the ego-self relation – cannot be separated. Crafting a spear for hunting, forging a ring and preparing a meal are results of and aimed at all three human life relations. Certain social theories are almost completely blind regarding the importance of artefacts from human beings' social world and social spaces. For example, in Luhmann's system theory artefacts are not ascribed the deserved systematic consideration when compared with social practices and symbol systems. It should therefore be stressed that the two other dimensions of social spaces – social practices and symbol systems – cannot be understood without making systematic reference to artefacts. In distinguishing social practices, symbols and artefacts as the three constitutive dimensions of dense and durable societal spaces with 'relations of entanglement' (Verflechtungsbeziehungen in terms of Norbert Elias), at least three ideal types of societal spaces could be identified as relevant for transnational studies: everyday life, organisations and institutions.

When developing his concept of *everyday life*, Alfred Schütz differentiated between two ideal types of the social: the *social environment (soziale Umwelt)* and the *social co-world (soziale Mitwelt)* of human beings. According to Schütz, social environment denotes the immediately perceived world as a simultaneity of space, time and the co-presence of a 'you'-perspective. It is a world in which "I focus upon the conscious experiences of others by my own vivid and open awareness" (Schütz 1993: 202). The social environment is therefore oriented towards the alter ego, towards my fellow humans. Alfred Schütz distinguishes between the social environment and the social co-world as follows: "Beyond this social environment which connects me to the community in time and space, further social spheres exist. Some, I currently experience because they were formerly my environment and I can (at least in principle) always make them my environment. Others which were never part of my environment and of which I could therefore have no experience, represent possible experiences. Let us call these social regions the social co-world" (ibid.: 202).

Schütz constantly stresses the importance of the simultaneity of space and time for the social environment: "The spatial and temporal immediacy is fundamental for the environmental situation" (ibid.: 228). In my opinion, this is where, at the beginning of the 21st century, fundamentally new developments arise. Modern transport and communication infrastructures available to broad population groups today makes "conscious experiences of others by my own vivid and open awareness" possible even across long geo-spatial distances. Thus, social environments can span across several spaces pluri-locally and transnationally more easily

than, for example, a century ago. The term ‘more easily’ is meant to imply that pluri-local and boundary-transgressing social spaces have already existed to a certain extent – as in the form of the millennia-old church and monastery tradition and the even older Jewish Diaspora (cp. e.g. Smith 1997).

Apart from everyday life on a micro-level, *organisations* represent a second ideal type of societal spaces. They may be defined as relatively durable interaction-frameworks (of people) with membership rules (who belongs and who doesn’t belong to the organisation), deliberately established structures and processes of division of labour (who has to do what), rules and rituals of behaviour (what is accepted and expected behaviour and what is not), power (who says what is to be done and who reports to whom) and planned and variable goals and ends. Whilst organisations as ideal typical societal spaces are situated on a meso-level, societal *institutions* represent the macro-level of societal spaces. They can be understood as inherited frameworks of routines, rules, norms and mutual expectations, which structure specific areas of human life and offer action programmes, identities, integration and stability for relatively expansive interaction-networks (e.g. societies, communities, ethnicities, organisations etc. Examples: heterosexual matrimony, professions, 15th birthday festivity).

Transnationalism studies – central issues and new proposals

The contributions in this volume relate to the conceptual definitions and proposals for developing transnational studies, which have been presented in the preceding section, and represent substantial contributions to the ongoing debates. The first part concentrates on résumés and proposals of outstanding international scholars of transnationalism and migration studies. The second part integrates theoretical and empirical studies of specialists from a broad spectrum of disciplines, which apply the transnationalism approach to different areas of transnational organisations.

Transnational phenomena and transnationality are not novelties ascribed to the 20th or 21st century. Contrary to some transnationalism scholars who stressed or are stressing the ‘newness’ of their field of study, many historians argued that transnationality is as old as nations and national societies themselves (Morawska 1998; Osterhammel 2001; Patel 2004). Khagram and Levitt (in this volume) reaffirm this argument, distinguishing systematically between transnationality as social matters of fact and transnationalism or transnational studies as the scientific reflections on such societal reality and phenomena. The general notion of

transnationalism is used for the ‘real phenomenon’ of transnational practices, symbols and artefacts, and could be defined as “a set of sustained, border-crossing connections” (Vertovec 2003b:3); however, Khagram and Levitt use this term and the term ‘transnational studies’ in the narrower sense of the specific scientific endeavour and perspective on social reality.

In order to develop an integrated and interdisciplinary view on this field Khagram and Levitt distinguish between five different intellectual cornerstones of transnationalism: *empirical* transnationalism as the field of empirical research about transnational phenomena and dynamics, *methodological* transnationalism as the effort to reclassify existing data and develop innovative research designs and methods, *theoretical* transnationalism as the search for new scientific interpretations and theoretical frameworks (sometimes reconstructed from or completing existing theories and sometimes forming new theoretical constructs which compete with existing paradigms), *philosophical* transnationalism as fundamental and epistemological reasoning that social life is first and foremost transnational in nature and, finally, *public* transnationalism as the discursive arena where (normative) options for (transnational) life and social spaces could be detected, developed and discussed.

After this stimulating invitation to an interdisciplinary streaming of the transnationalism studies field, based on empirical fieldwork in the USA and Germany, Glick Schiller and Cağlar start her chapter questioning the normally taken for granted category of ‘ethnic group’. In order to conceptualise a framework for the study of migration, settlement, and trans-border connection, they focus on the role of the location of settlement in the migrant incorporation processes.⁶ According to this, the main indicator of incorporation is to be seen in the participation of an individual in personal or organisational, formal or informal networks and the access to social fields provided by these networks. The significance of these social fields is based on their ‘capacity to command scarce resources’. With this proposal, Glick Schiller and Cağlar open empirical, theoretical and methodological transnationalism in a very interesting manner: there is no longer a need (like in classical integration studies) to define neither the interesting and/or most important dimensions of incorporation nor the locations of specific groups nor their ethnic ascription *ex ante*. Rather, the transnationalism researcher can explore the dimensional significance and local reach or scope of local, national and transnational relations by following the network ties of individuals. Relevant resources to be

⁶ Concerning the concept of incorporation see also Glick Schiller 2003 and Levitt/Glick Schiller 2004; in Pries 2003a und 2003b this term is developed explicitly against the notions of assimilation and integration.

included could be money, employment, social recognition or prestige; also, identifying the units of analysis is part of the research outcome, not its input. In terms of the proposal made here to differentiate units of analysis, units of reference and units of measurement, taking individuals as units of measurement and their networks as units of reference, Glick Schiller and Çağlar could inductively construct their units of analysis by looking for different modes of incorporation (like politics or religion) without changing their research in accordance with assumptions about the existence of ethnic communities or ethnic identities.

Taking the dense and diversified transnational networks and governance structures, as outlined by Federico Besserer, and the transnational pathways and mechanisms of incorporation, as developed by Glick Schiller and Çağlar, an important question develops, leading directly to the chapter written by Thomas Faist: Would it be possible to make use of these transnational connections of people for the economic, social, cultural and/or political development of societies? Faist argues that transnational ties and flows deriving from international migration have definitely increased in the last decades in absolute and relative volume; they have also increased in their forms, such as economic remittances, knowledge and human capital impacts in the region of migrant departure, or in 'political remittances' as ideas and knowledge of the principles of law, good governance or human rights. This emerging issue of transnational social ties and flows of remittances still has not been included into the general strategic outlines of international bodies such as the United Nations – it is worth considering more systematically the relationship between communities, the state and the market as three important 'principles of how social order is produced'.

Faist differentiates between the constituencies and action logics of communities - the state and the market - and he proposes a theoretical frame of reference that could be combined with the notions of units of analysis, units of reference and units of measurement. While all three ideal types could be used as theoretical-analytical units of analysis, states could also function as socio-spatial units of reference. Markets, on the contrary, are similar to the world system figure as more or less globally spanning logics and mechanisms of social order. Communities (as defined by Faist) as integrated upon the principles of trust, reciprocity, loyalty and solidarity are quite amorphous units of research that have to be defined as units of analysis in order to define more explicitly the corresponding units of measurement and units of reference.

Whereas Faist concentrates on community, markets, and the state as three types of social order, another very important type of social order or societal space is *organisation*. The topic

of transnational organisations is at the very centre of the second part of this book. In the following section, some general aspects of these contributions are resumed.

Can transnational organisations be the micro-macro –link in transnational studies?

During the last twenty years or so, transnational studies developed strongly in anthropology and sociology, but also in other scientific disciplines such as economics, political science and history. But until now, only in the field of economics was the meso-level unit of analysis of organisations addressed systematically. Most social scientists, especially anthropologists and sociologists, focused either on the micro-level (i.e. on individuals, households and their social networks) or on the macro-level (i.e. on social institutions, governance or migration systems). All chapters of the first part of this volume try to overcome this micro-macro schism, including Glick Schiller's and Çağlar's chapter, which focuses on the meso-level of ethnic groups and the scale of cities, and Faist's chapter, which, starting with a macro-level distinction of community, state, and market as social orders and institutions, arrives at a more meso-level oriented notion of communities.

In organisation studies - as well as in economics and management or economic sociology - a long tradition of theoretical and empirical research about international (that is, border crossing in a general sense) organisations exists. This branch of research first concentrated on profit-organisations, but, following the massive emergence of non-profit and non-governmental social movements and organisations in the international arena during the last twenty years or so, a broad variety of literature on all types of international and transnational organisations has emerged. One general aspect that transnational studies, in the Khagram/Levitt sense, could adopt from these organisation studies is the differentiation between ideal types of international organisations, according to their structure of resource distribution and coordination mechanisms. Organisations with internationally decentralised resources (e.g. investments, employment, production facilities, research and development) and weak coordination features (control and communication direction and intensity, e.g. of a 'centre' over 'peripheral' sites) are usually referred to as *multinational organisations*. Organisations with centralised resources and strong coordination are generally referred to as *global organisations*. Organisations with decentralised resources and strong coordination patterns are frequently called *international or focal organisations*.

In this framework, *transnational organisations* are characterised by their decentralised resources and, at the same time and opposite to focal organisations, intense coordination. Therefore, transnational organisations could be understood as highly decentralised and border-crossing pluri-locally distributed and, at the same time, intensely coordinated, stable and dense cooperation frameworks with membership rules, deliberately established and variable structures, as well as more or less explicit goals and intentions. Since approximately fifteen years ago, transnational organisations have become more and more of an issue in organisational research. This is due, on the one hand, to increasingly complex and internationally spanned production and value chains of goods and services and, on the other hand, to the emergence of important transnationally active non-profit organisations with more or less decentralised resource structures and, at the same time, effective and strong coordination patterns (such as Greenpeace, Attac and Oxfam). International for-profit and non-profit organisations are all confronted with the challenge to “square the circle”: On the one hand, optimal decentralisation and adaptation to local conditions are necessary, while on the other hand, optimal generalisation of knowledge and resources is also a requirement (Keck/Sikkink 1998; Doz et al. 2001). Using such a narrow and specific definition of transnational organisations, the chapters of the second part of this volume all focus on measuring the existence and extent of this ideal characterisation of transnational organisations in a broad range of non-profit organisations.

Dennis Dijkzeul analyses international humanitarian NGOs, and concretely presents the case of Malteser International’s work in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He argues that international humanitarian aid organisations have to adapt smoothly to the specific circumstances, conditions, power relations, norms and values and ways of do things in sometimes very local contexts. However, these organisations have a responsibility to their donors and supporters in other countries, and they have to coordinate their local activities, for example in the DR Congo, with other internationally active NGOs, with national governments and with international organisations. The chapter presents the state of research in this specific sector of international organisations and asks whether Malteser International comes close to the ideal type of transnational organisation. In general, until now there are not very many scientific studies on the topic of international aid organisations, and even fewer scientific studies oriented towards the aforementioned contradicting needs and challenges of international aid organisations.

Another important area of transnational organisational studies refers to international women's networks and issue-centred organisations. Starting with the groundbreaking study of Keck/Sikkink (1998) about transnational advocacy networks, Ilse Lenz argues that many transnational women's networks could be characterised as issue networks. They are flexible and quite horizontally organised, and follow the logic of issue-development instead of interest orientation. Analysing two concrete case studies (the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network and the Network on Violence against Women in Asia), the author concludes that it is difficult to view transnational women's networks as transnational organisations in the sense of the above outlined ideal typical characteristics (decentralised resource distribution and strong pluri-local coordination). International women's networks often have a clear centre-periphery structure or are very weakly coordinated.

Whereas in the case of international women's networks and organisations a body of literature now exists, in the field of international educational organisations the state of scientific knowledge is similar to the field of international aid organisations - that is, there are only few studies referring to the transnational dimension, even if the term 'transnational education' has recently become quite popular. Christel Adick starts by distinguishing between national, international and transnational educational spaces as units of reference, characterised by their corresponding mode of regulation or decision-making and their framework of reference for legitimacy. These transnational educational social spaces consist of individual actors and their social practice, of network relations and of (in)formal groups and organisations.

The author distinguishes between four different subtypes of transnational educational spaces: the education and socialisation of individuals into transnational social spaces, the transnational educational advocacy by international or transnational NGOs, the border crossing educational programmes, practices and institutions not pertaining to any national educational system, and the transnational educational corporate business organisations. Analysing, in more detail, four transnational corporate business organisations (Jones International University, University of Phoenix, Sylvan Learning Systems, and German University of Cairo) Adick concludes that transnational educational organisations still play a minor role as compared to international or national educational spaces and organisations. Transnational educational organisations will expand in the future, but be concentrated in the spaces outside the compulsory educational systems. The challenge to develop towards a truly transnational organisation stems from the need, on the one hand, to circulate knowledge,

programmes, contents and people transnationally, and, on the other hand, to adapt to the corresponding national and regional environments and institutions in order to attain legitimacy and recognition.

Another area of research into the possible emergence of transnational organisations is the broad field of international interest organisations *within* international companies. A unique example is the institution of European Works Councils (EWC) as international non-profit organisations regulating labour related interests in Europe-wide active for-profit organisations. EWCs were introduced by the European Council in 1994 as a new interest mediation mechanism at the European level. Their legal basis is a complex multilevel framework of supranational European law, inter-national treaties, national implementation law and transnational agreements, all at the company level. A further major characteristic is their quality as European law-based non-profit organisations working with and embedded in and towards national law-based for-profit organisations. Even taking into account that only about one third of all companies falling under the EWC directive actually count as an EWC, their importance and impact for labour regulation at a transnational level should not be underestimated: they represent a total of about 17 million employees and workers across the entire European Union.

The corresponding last chapter in this volume by Ludger Pries first presents a brief history of the emergence of EWC as a new type of organisation. It then goes on to present some empirical findings and the state of empirical research about EWC, stating that the corresponding studies focus on an industrial relations approach and a capital-labour view. In a third step, an alternative perspective is proposed to view the EWC as a special type of international non-profit organisation, and a distinction is made between global, focal, multinational and transnational organisations. Finally, some hypotheses on the spread, conditions and dynamics of transnational EWC are developed.

Outlook: Organisations as a new research field of transnationalism

Both the first and second part of this volume suggest that transnationalism and transnational studies could gain a lot from the organisational research approach on transnational organisations as a micro-macro link. Between the micro-level research topics such as everyday life, identity, migrant families and mobility on the one hand, and units of analysis such as border crossing transnational migration systems or governance structures, societal

institutions that structure transnationality, citizenship and value chains on the other hand, lies the perspective of meso-level units of analysis such as (transnational) organisations. Broadening the focus towards transnational organisations could integrate other scientific disciplines, such as economics, organisation research or sociology of organisations. At the same time, the organisational perspective invites interdisciplinary research between historians, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, lawyers and others.

Developing the organisational perspective in transnational studies could definitely help to cope with the challenges that the study of transnationalism faces. In organisational research a long tradition of differentiating between transnational and other types of international organisations such as multinational, global or focal exists. For the field of transnational studies, this tradition facilitates a precise and narrow concept of transnationalism and transnationality, thus avoiding the argument that transnationalism converts into just a new fashion and catch-all term, replacing global and globalisation. The organisational approach is also helpful in reflecting on the relation between geographic and societal space more explicitly. As long as all types of international organisations are societal units distributed over different geographic locales, the problem of reflecting on the interrelations between the social and the spatial is inevitable. Another advantage of concentrating on organisations is based on their 'operationalibility'. Organisations are defined by more or less explicit structures and boundaries, as indicated by the membership criteria. This makes it easier to define who belongs to an organisation and who does not. At the same time, there is a long tradition of developing and testing the instruments in order to characterise and measure the structures of organisations (e.g. Scott 2003). Ultimately, the organisational research tradition allows for comparisons of for-profit and non-profit organisations, thus integrating different streams of transnational studies, such as economic or sociological analysis of corporate business and for-profit organisations on the one hand, and anthropological, sociological or political analysis of non-profit organisations on the other hand.

In summary, a lot of theoretical and empirical research still has to be done to explore the field of transnationality. The contributions of this volume add some valuable knowledge on the conditions, forms and impacts of transnational societal spaces; they also make many conceptual proposals for analysing transnational societal spaces and for coping with the theoretical challenges of transnationality. In future research, the organisational perspective in

the transnational studies field still has to be integrated, exploited and developed adequately. Furthermore, the transnational debate on transnational studies still has to be organised in the most integrative way possible.

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