MORE OR LESS TRANSNATIONAL:
TWO UNWRITTEN PAPERS

Per Gustafson

Introduction
As the title indicates, this is not a paper, but a few pages about two different papers that I have not yet found the time to write. It is a fairly personal account of what I, with my own research experience as a starting point, consider to be some characteristics and possible benefits of the transnational perspective – or rather of different transnational perspectives – within migration research. After an initial digression on globalization, I make a distinction between two different transnational perspectives. I then outline my two unwritten papers, which provide examples of these two perspectives, and conclude with a brief discussion about their benefits and possible drawbacks.

In my research and writings so far, I have not used the specific term “transnational spaces”, so I will not go into any detailed discussion about different transnational concepts (transnational, transnationalism, transnational spaces, transnationality, etc.), but will consider transnational research perspectives more generally. As regards disciplinary perspectives, I am a sociologist, but as migration studies constitute a strongly multidisciplinary research field, I gladly read and find inspiration in research from other disciplines than my own. Thus, what is specifically sociological about the following pages I do not know – but perhaps a cross-disciplinary context is a good way of finding out.

A Global Parallel
When I started PhD studies, the new buzzword in sociology was “globalization”. My own research interests, although somewhat unfocused, con-
concerned the importance of place and territorial identities in contemporary society. Consequently, I read a lot about theoretical and empirical debates on globalization in general, and on socio-spatial implications of globalization in particular. Early on, I got stuck with the “What’s new?” question, which was intensely debated by several social scientists. Some writers claimed that globalization, during the past few decades, had brought about fundamental changes in social, political, economic and cultural structures and relationships. Because of globalization, they argued, we were living in (or at least were on our way towards) a new world, and the understanding of this new world, of course, required new social theories and concepts (e.g. Albrow 1996; Albrow et al. 1994). Others, on the contrary, were more sceptical about the newness of globalization, claiming either that (what was described as) globalization was nothing really new, or that globalization was a continuing process stretching back several centuries in time (cf. Hirst and Thompson 1996; Beck 2000: Ch. 3).

Gradually, I realized that the notion of globalization did two different (although interrelated) things, both of which were useful, but which might at the same time seem contradictory and indeed caused considerable and not always very fruitful debate. On the one hand, the notion of globalization pointed out things that were new, demonstrated what was new about them, and explained how and why they had come about at this moment in time. Manuel Castells’s trilogy (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998) on the network society was, of course, a good sociological example (cf. the footnote argument in the final chapter of Castells 1998, where he vigorously defends his claims about newness against more sceptical readers!). On the other hand, the notion of globalization made us see things that had been there all the time (or at least for a long time) but that had been obscured or even made invisible by previous social theories and understandings of the world. One apparent example, highly relevant for this publication, is what Beck (2000: 64ff) discusses as the refutation of ”methodological nationalism”. The social sciences, and not least sociology, have very often treated the nation-state as an unproblematic research setting or unit of study, implicitly assuming that nation-states are bounded, stable and homogeneous units. Scientific debates about globalization, on the contrary, have demonstrated the importance of actors, structures, relationships and dependencies that transgress national borders.

Thus, the notion of globalization represents both a new world (with a focus on the description and analysis of empirical phenomena) and a new way of regarding the world (with a focus on theoretical perspectives). My idea here is that the same goes for notions of transnational spaces or transnationalism (cf. Gustafson 2002a: 32ff). I will develop this idea, about two complementary transnational perspectives, in the following sections.
Transnational Migrants and Migration Movements

First, the "transnational" represents attempts to identify something new. During the past decade or so, researchers have observed that international migrants often, and seemingly to an increasing extent, retain bonds of various kinds with their countries of origin (Basch et al. 1994; Pries 1999a, 2001; Vertovec 1999). They produce and reproduce relationships and practices that connect sending and receiving countries. They also develop individual and collective identities that refer to more than one place or nation-state. In the conceptualization suggested by Basch and her colleagues (1994: 22), transnationalism represents "a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries". A number of reasons have been suggested for the emergence and/or increasing significance of such transnational phenomena.

Several researchers point out that new information and communication technologies have greatly facilitated the development and maintenance of transnational relationships and practices (Glick Schiller et al. 1999: 81; Portes et al. 1999: 223f). Whereas the economic and social success of immigrants previously depended very much on their assimilation into the receiving society, the cultivation and utilization of transnational networks of various kinds have thus come to constitute an alternative path to success (Goldring 1999; Portes et al. 1999: 229).

Also, the maintenance of cultural ties with the country of origin may give those who are less successful a sense of self-esteem and identity, and ethnic communities and organizations may provide support and protection against social exclusion in the new home country. These tendencies have been reinforced by current political developments in receiving as well as sending countries. Many receiving countries in the Western world have recently experienced economic recession, rising unemployment and a simultaneous rise of xenophobic sentiments (e.g. Castles and Miller 1998: 263ff; Pred 2000), all of which render the integration of immigrants more difficult than before. At the same time, governments in sending countries have increasingly come to regard their expatriate populations as sources of economic benefits and political influence, and therefore introduced policies to maintain good relations with nationals abroad (Goldring 1999: 166f; Portes 1999: 467). Thus, migrant populations as well as sending countries participate in the construction of "deterritorialized nation-states" (Basch et al. 1994: 269ff) that include not only the sending countries' resident populations, but also their dispersed expatriate populations. All these developments, it is argued, contribute to the emergence of transnational spaces.

In this first sense, "transnational" concepts are used to point out things
that are new, demonstrate what is new about them, describe (or explain) how they have come about, and analyze their consequences. With this perspective, the transnational becomes a matter of empirical investigation and description: what transnational phenomena are present, to what extent and in what form(s), in this particular group of migrants or in this particular kind of migration, and what are their causes and effects? One important implication of this perspective is that some migration movements can be described as transnational whereas others cannot, or, more pragmatically, that some migration movements stand out as more transnational than others. Several writers have suggested criteria and typologies along these lines (e.g. Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000).

Transnational Understandings of Migration

Second, transnationalism represents a new understanding of migration that enables us to see things that were there all the time, but that were obscured by previous social and scientific understandings of migration. As several researchers have pointed out, previous scientific understandings often regarded rootedness and national belonging as something natural and desirable. Migration, on the other hand, was regarded as exceptional and abnormal – a temporary deviation from this normality (cf. Malkki 1992; Olsson and Grandin 1999; Gustafson 2002a).

This understanding was, and still is, associated with a strong focus in migration research on immigration and its consequences (mainly the problematic ones) in the receiving countries, whereas relations and exchanges between sending and receiving countries get little attention. Such relations and exchanges are, of course, nothing new (e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki 1958; see also Kivisto 2001: 554ff). They are, to various degrees and in various forms, present in most, if not all, kinds of migration, but have to a large extent been marginalized in earlier understandings of migration. From a transnational perspective, on the other hand, these relations and exchanges are central to the understanding of migration. Table 1 (adapted from Gustafson 2002a: 34) indicates some broad distinctions between such "traditional" and "transnational" understandings of migration. The table draws heavily on the writings of Pries (1996: 464ff, 1999b: 20ff).

Two points should be made about this table. First, some readers may regard it as a gross simplification of previous migration research, and they are, of course, right. The purpose of the table, and of the writings that it draws upon, is not to do full justice to earlier perspectives – but to demonstrate the characteristics and possible benefits of a transnational understanding of migration. Second, a transnational perspective, with its focus on mobility and exchanges, is not always and necessarily "better" or more useful than perspectives that focus on rootedness and national integra-
Both perspectives can, in my view, make important contributions to our understanding of migration. They help us see different things, different aspects of migration, and the usefulness of the different perspectives will depend on the object of study as well as on the purpose of the investigation.

Thus, in this second case, the transnational does not represent a set of (more or less new) empirical phenomena, but a (more or less new) theoretical perspective, a specific understanding of migration. It allows us to see and understand things that we would not recognize if we used another theoretical perspective. The question, in this case, is not whether or to what extent a migration movement is transnational, but how a transnational perspective can contribute to our understanding of migration in ge-

---

**Table 1. Traditional and transnational approaches to migration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional migration research</th>
<th>Transnational migration research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migration is regarded as a unidirectional movement, a one-time permanent change of home place.</td>
<td>Migration is regarded as an ongoing process. Special attention is given to continuing transnational mobility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration is explained by an interplay of &quot;pull&quot; factors in the receiving country and &quot;push&quot; factors in the sending country.</td>
<td>Migration is explained by more complex &quot;cumulative causal dynamics&quot; (Pries 1999b: 24). Special attention is given to the role of &quot;migration networks&quot;, based on transnational interpersonal relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving countries and sending countries are examined separately. Most often, migration research focuses on receiving countries, on the integration of immigrants, and on social problems related to immigration.</td>
<td>Sending countries, receiving countries, and the relationships and exchanges between them may all be included in the investigation. Special attention is given to interaction across national borders, and to the social practices and institutions that arise from such interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research tends strongly towards &quot;methodological nationalism&quot;, as migration is understood as a move from one national &quot;container space&quot; to another.</td>
<td>Research often links up with theories about globalization. Special attention is given to the interconnectedness of places and/or nation-states.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will now turn to my two unwritten papers. They are both based on my dissertation research, and I hope that I will sooner or later find the time to write them. What hopefully makes them useful here, although they are not yet written, is that they illustrate (to some extent at least) the two different views or uses of transnational perspectives that I have tried to sketch out above.

**Retirement Migration and Transnational Spaces**

My first unwritten paper draws on my study of seasonal retirement migration between Sweden and Spain. For my dissertation, I made interviews with Swedish retirees who spent their summers in Sweden and their winters in Spain. The purpose of that study was to examine their experiences of living their everyday life in two different countries, with a focus on their accounts of mobility and place attachment, and the analysis produced a typology of different ways of managing this form of life (Gustafson 2001). A detailed study of the retirees’ accounts about tourists and tourism turned out to be an interesting side-track in the analysis (Gustafson 2002b).

The two papers printed in my dissertation mainly concerned lifestyles, conceptions and strategies of adaptation on an individual level. During the analysis, I sometimes reflected on possible ways of describing and analyzing the Swedish retirees in Spain, and perhaps retirement migration more generally, from a more macro-oriented perspective. However, from the perspective of traditional migration research, my "Swedes in Spain" were immigrants in Spain who failed to integrate – or perhaps no "real" migrants at all, as they still had residences in Sweden as well. An alternative might be to describe and analyze their seasonal journeys as a kind of tourism, but that would be strongly against their own definition of their way of life (cf. Gustafson 2002b).

I then read, and was greatly inspired by, Pries’s 1996 article and his edited book from 1999 about transnational social spaces. This approach seemed to be better suited for the kind of migration that I was studying. Also, my initial focus on relationships between place attachment and mobility, which I had developed independently of the transnational perspective, fits very well into this way of thinking of migration. I continued exploring the "transnational" literature, and worked some of its thoughts into my PhD thesis.

Thus, my unwritten paper uses a transnational approach in order to broaden the perspective on retirement migration, from a focus on individual experiences and conceptions to a more general interest in the charac-
teristics and consequences of this specific form of migration. As a starting point, I suggest a model with a number of analytical dimensions – mobility, place attachment, politics and legislation, economy, social life, and culture – and a distinction between a macro and a micro level (Table 2).

Table 2. Dimensions of transnationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro</th>
<th>Micro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Place attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructures for mobility</td>
<td>(Re)construction of place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals of mobility</td>
<td>Emotional bonds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice of dimensions may be subject to discussion. It is inspired by my own research (especially with regard to mobility and place attachment) and by previous theories of transnational social spaces or transnationalism. For example, Pries (1996) suggests four analytical dimensions for the examination of transnational social spaces: political-legal frames, material infrastructure, social structures and institutions, and identities and life projects. Portes and his colleagues (1999) suggest a typology of economic, political and socio-cultural transnationalism, complemented by a distinction between transnationalism "from above" and "from below". Vertovec (1999) discusses transnationalism as a social morphology, as a type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural reproduction, as an avenue of capital, as a site of political engagement, and as the (re)construction of "place" or locality.
Whether these specific dimensions will be used, or some dimensions will be excluded, reformulated or replaced by others, the model will hopefully be useful for two things. First, it provides a systematic framework for describing and analyzing a specific migration movement – in this case retirement migration from Sweden to Spain – with regard to its transnational characteristics and consequences. An initial purpose of my unwritten paper will thus be to consider, using this model, in what respects and to what extent international retirement migration gives rise to transnational spaces. The analysis will be based upon my own interviews with seasonal migrants, but will probably also use other research on retirement migration.

Second, the model may also be used for comparisons between different forms of migration. The empirical basis of the existing transnational literature is mainly studies of labour migration from Third World countries to the US and Western Europe. It would therefore be interesting, as a second purpose of the unwritten paper, to compare such labour migration with retirement migration, with regard to its more or less transnational characteristics.

Thus, the first unwritten paper uses a transnational perspective that focuses on empirical description and analysis of specific forms of migration with regard to the presence or absence of transnational characteristics. Transnational spaces are mapped out, and migration movements can thus be categorized as more or less transnational.

Dual Citizenship in Sweden:
Towards a Transnational Understanding of Migration?
My second unwritten paper is based upon another study from my dissertation work – a documentary study of the debates preceding the decision by the Swedish parliament in 2001 to accept dual citizenship. The persons who, once the new citizenship law was passed, could obtain dual citizenship were mainly migrants, and the initial purpose of my study was to examine how attachment and mobility were discussed in the context of dual citizenship. However, the paper printed in my dissertation was a more general review of the different arguments that were used by the proponents and opponents of dual citizenship, and of the “framings” of these arguments in the debate (Gustafson 2002c). The analysis showed that the national frame that had previously been predominant in discussions about dual citizenship was now challenged by two other frames – one individual, the other global or international. Theories about citizenship, migration, globalization and individualization were useful in that analysis.

The purpose of my unwritten paper is to return to the question about how the relationship between (national) attachment and (international) mobility was understood in the different arguments about dual citizen-
ship. My idea is that the discussion above about different understandings of migration may be useful for that purpose. The analytical task will then be to identify arguments in the debate that reflect transnational versus more traditional understandings of migration, and to examine the consequences of these different understandings.

Following Table 1, we can presume that a traditional understanding of migration illuminates some aspects of migration, and obscures other aspects. A transnational understanding may throw new light on those latter aspects whilst, on the other hand, obscuring things that were clearly visible from a traditional perspective. Important questions for the analysis will be what aspects of migration are made visible – and invisible – by the different perspectives, and what the consequences are with regard to opinions about dual citizenship.

An underlying question is whether the acceptance of dual citizenship reflects a change in public understandings of migration – from traditional to transnational understandings. Some findings in my initial analysis suggest such a hypothesis. Opponents of dual citizenship often seemed to regard migration as exceptional, as a temporary deviation from a norm of national homogeneity, undivided national belonging and integration. From that (traditional) perspective, dual citizenship was abnormal and potentially harmful, as it might discourage immigrants from full integration into Swedish society. On the other hand, the proponents of dual citizenship (at least some of them) described migration, ongoing international mobility, and dual or multiple national bonds as something normal, and considered the legal acceptance of dual citizenship as an adaptation to such an understanding of migration.

Yet I think the question will need one or two qualifications in order to avoid unnecessary simplification and dichotomous thinking. First, I will consider the possibility of traditional and transnational understandings combining (or getting mixed up?) in some arguments in the debate. Second, it may also be useful to make an analytical distinction between descriptive and normative claims in the arguments, in order to capture the implications of the different understandings of migration. Debaters who recognized that migration brings about dual (or multiple) national bonds and continuing mobility back and forth did not necessarily regard this as something good. An important part of the analysis will be to bring out such variation and complexity, rather than to reduce it by means of a traditional/transnational dichotomy.

Admittedly, this example (and especially the latter qualifications) to some extent blurs my initial distinction between the investigation of more or less transnational empirical phenomena, and the use of transnational (versus traditional) theoretical perspectives on migration. My second unwrit-
ten paper does not use a transnational perspective to analyze a migration movement. Instead, it uses a comparison between transnational and traditional perspectives as a tool for analyzing the understandings of migration held by the different participants in the debate on dual citizenship. By doing so, the paper hopefully makes possible an investigation of some possible consequences of these different perspectives. However, it remains to be seen (as the text remains to be written) how much "added value" this transnational turn in the analysis may bring to the paper.

Transnational Perspectives: Benefits and Risks
The focus of my PhD research, which is the frame of reference for these pages, was not primarily migration but place, place attachment and mobility – and in particular the relationship between mobility and attachment. As my research proceeded, and to a considerable extent came to involve international migration, I started to look for migration research that could help me understand the attachment/mobility problematic.

However, my impression was that migration research, at least in Sweden, most often investigated problems related to immigration in the receiving country. Issues of attachment and mobility were then reduced to "integration problems" which, although not completely irrelevant for me (cf. Gustafson 2002b, 2002c), did not capture the variety of experiences and opinions that I found in my empirical data. Another field of research was the critical analysis of current discourses on immigrants and immigration in Sweden (mainly discourses produced by politicians, public authorities, social scientists and the mass media). Although important in terms of self-reflection and critical debate, studies along these lines provided little knowledge about migrants’ experiences and conceptions of mobility and attachment. There was also some research on multiple identities, cultural hybridity etc. among immigrants and their children. Studies in that field often had interesting things to say about attachment and mobility, even though they, too, often examined migration from a receiving-country perspective.

At this stage, I found and started to read texts about transnational social spaces and transnationalism. From my perspective, the most important benefit of these texts was that they transcended (or at least made it possible to transcend) the national/immigration perspective on migration inherent in most Swedish research. True, most research on transnationalism and transnational social spaces also focuses on "transnational immigration" (Kivisto 2001), but transnational perspectives explicitly frame migration as a process which encompasses both sending and receiving countries, and which involves continuing mobility and often the development and maintenance of emotional and other bonds with both countries.
It was precisely this kind of phenomena that I examined and tried to understand in my empirical studies. Thus, when the purpose is to investigate the relationship(s) between mobility and attachment, I feel that transnational perspectives have important advantages over approaches that only consider migration from a receiving-country perspective (Gustafson 2002a).

These advantages are present in both the two transnational perspectives that I have discussed here. Both perspectives enable us to transcend the strong focus on immigration and immigration-related problems that has so far dominated Swedish migration research. But there are also differences between the two perspectives – both have their merits and their possible drawbacks.

The first perspective, with its focus on the examination, description and analysis of specific migration movements that display transnational characteristics, may provide rich empirical material (ethnographies as well as more structured data), that both has a value of its own and can give useful grounding for further theoretical development. However, as discussed previously, claims about (empirical) newness are often important in this line of research, and such claims may also involve a risk that too far-reaching conclusions are drawn on the basis of quite extreme or marginal empirical phenomena (cf. Kivisto 2001: 559). If some forms of migration are indeed more transnational than others, generalizations must be made with caution.

The second perspective, where the transnational represents a way of conceiving migration, may improve our understanding of migration in general. Especially, as I have argued above, it provides tools for transcending the methodological nationalism that has so far been predominant in migration research. Yet this perspective involves risks as well. One risk (clearly demonstrated by Table 1 above!) concerns the construction of simplified dichotomous oppositions between traditional and transnational understandings of migration. Another risk that may also merit some discussion concerns the increasing popularity of transnational concepts and perspectives within social science today. Concepts that rapidly become popular in academic discourse tend to become so widely used, and used for such divergent purposes (or with no clear purpose at all), that they lose much of their original meaning and substance. Such tendencies, I think, are visible today with regard to concepts like "transnational", "transnationalism", "transnational spaces" and "transnationality".

Thus, transnational research perspectives involve risks as well as benefits, whether they imply the identification and examination of specific transnational forms of migration, or they imply a specific understanding of migration and regard all kinds of migration as more or less transnational.
REFERENCES


