

**Researching Global Socio-Cultural Fields:
Views from an Extended Field Site**

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Ethnographic research based on prolonged fieldwork among localized socio-cultural groups has long been an accepted hallmark of anthropology. Difficult questions, however, concerning what sort of field sites are suitable for in-depth ethnographic enquiry within this tradition, are now being raised as a consequence of the study of migratory movements and the trans-local social, economic and cultural systems with which they are associated. These questions are related to the larger issue of how the discipline is to capture the complex and mobile socio-cultural fields of relations that characterize human life today. Such issues have led to considerable debate about the nature of non-localized communities, their significance to variously positioned people, and the sources of belonging that may be of importance within such communities.

Transnational theory, in recent years, has helped generate important new analytical and methodological approaches within migration research. Many studies of transnational socio-cultural activities have focused, largely, on formal cultural productions or social organizations. Notable examples of cultural productions are diasporic expressions of homeland within the arts, literature and music. Social organizations are exemplified by ethnic societies providing various forms of aid to the country of origin as well as platforms for engaging in cultural politics in the receiving society. The activities that take place within these formal structures occur in well defined and easily accessible public arenas where anthropologists may carry out research. These studies, furthermore, often draw, consciously or unconsciously, on the national, or ethnic, affiliation of participants and examine the particular political, economic, social and cultural status that this affords them. They thereby shed light on a salient socio-cultural dimension of transnational, or diasporic, relations. Yet there is more to cross-border socio-cultural systems than such activities. Many, if not most,

socio-cultural practices do not take the form of formal events or cultural productions, nor do they take place within the public realm. They are embedded in informal networks of inter-personal relations where social ties and cultural values are actively maintained as well as contested and changed. Such fields have usually been studied through research in the migrants' place of origin and/or in one or more of their major migration destinations.

This research has highlighted the fields of relations that span disparate places, and since these places often are located in different nation-states they have, accordingly, been termed "transnational". This term can be misleading, because the more private sphere of life that characterizes interpersonal relations is not necessarily consciously or unconsciously transnational. Ties based on kinship, friendship or patronage, for example, become de facto transnational when they expand across national borders, but they do not necessarily change character simply because a border becomes involved – though they are highly affected, of course, by the structural constraints that national borders may impose. Migrants, therefore, often travel along whichever pathways are open when pursuing the opportunities provided by such personal links. As a result, migration often leads to the emergence of geographically diffuse socio-cultural fields. This diffuse quality highlights the difficulty of capturing the complexity and dynamic nature of such fields in transnational studies focusing on movements and relationships across nation-state borders.

During the past few years, I have been engaged in field research that has focused on migrants' social relations and cultural values, rather than socio-cultural systems between nation-states. I have done fieldwork in three dispersed family networks of Caribbean background, exploring the nature of the social ties and cultural values that had emerged among relatives, their significance to individual persons and their impact on individuals'

relationship with their place of origin as well as their place of residence. My research suggests that studies of this nature can provide a new perspective on migration research because they allow for the development of an analytical framework that is grounded in the persons involved in the fields of social relations and cultural values. In this way, they complement research that takes its point of departure in movements between nation-states and the transnational socio-cultural systems to which such movement may give rise.

The notion of the transnational

Since the 1980s, transnational migration studies have developed rapidly, and they comprise today a strong and vibrant research area within several disciplines. In anthropology the notion of transnational socio-cultural systems has been an important concept, particularly since the late 1980s when it was introduced by Constance Sutton in her introductory chapter to *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions* (Sutton and Chaney 1987), and during the 1990s, a large number of studies on various aspects of transnational socio-cultural relations emerged (for anthropological discussions of the literature, see Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Kearney 1995; Marcus 1995; Mahler 1998; Vertovec 1999).

There has been a strong tendency in studies of socio-cultural aspects of transnational migration to focus on identity issues. There has been particular interest in the relationship between migrants' identities and their enduring social and cultural ties to the nation-states represented by their place of origin and their migration destination. In her discussion of transnational socio-cultural systems, Sutton saw these systems as having emerged because of "dual-place orientations and identities resulting from the active ties Caribbeans maintain to their homelands while becoming New Yorkers" (Sutton 1987:22). This focus on

transnational identities is also apparent in the work of Glick Schiller and associates (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Basch et al. 1994), where transnational sociocultural systems are seen to feed, and to feed upon, identity politics in the receiving country. At a more general level, Kearney has noted that transnationalism "calls attention to the cultural and political projects of nation-states as they vie for hegemony in relations with other nation-states, with their citizens and 'aliens'". He has also noted that transnational identities "escape the either-or categorization" inherent in national identities (Kearney 1995:548, 558). The close association between transnationalism and identity issues is also apparent in Portes et al.'s suggestion that studies of socio-cultural aspects of transnationalism should be limited to "enterprises oriented towards the reinforcement of a national identity abroad or the collective enjoyment of cultural events and goods" (Portes et al. 1999: 221). As examples of such socio-cultural activities they mention "folk music groups making presentations in immigrant centres", "international expositions of national arts" or "regular cultural events organized by foreign embassies" (Portes et al. 1999:222).

The focus on identity issues in relation to places of origin of migrants has led to a certain merging of the notions of transnationalism and diaspora so that migrants are often referred to as constituting a diaspora. "Social formations spanning borders" have likewise become known as "ethnic diasporas" (Vertovec 1999:449; see also Cohen 1997:761). An important topic of study here has been the "diasporic consciousness" developing among people holding "dual or multiple identifications" (Vertovec 1999:450). This reconceptualization of transnational socio-cultural systems as "ethnic diasporas" is not unproblematic, as several authors have noted. The editor of the American journal *Diaspora* Khachig Tölölyan (1996) has thus expressed both surprise and concern, over the widespread use of the term *diaspora* today. He notes that "Diasporic identity has become an occasion

for the celebration of multiplicity and mobility – and a figure of our discontent with our being in a world apparently still dominated by nation-states" (1996:28). This, in turn, leads to the danger of intellectuals projecting their own personal projects into studies of transnational and diasporic phenomena, thereby causing these phenomena to become infused with intentions related to the identity politics of particular intellectual strata.

The importance of the notion of "diaspora" for contemporary identity politics has been brought out by Dominique Schnapper who argues that the great interest in diasporas is due to the "the fluidity of diasporas" that make them "more in harmony with the values and the spirit of the times than the rigidity attributed to the nation-state" (1999:251). It is rather unclear, however, what a broad range of migrants think about "the spirit" and "values" of the times. A somewhat similar point has been brought out by Mahler (1998:92) who expresses some skepticism concerning whether "transnationalism" is, in fact, as "empowering, democratic, and liberating" as is suggested by much of the literature. She calls for careful testing of the "subaltern image" projected in this literature resulting from the overwhelming interest in identity issues. In her view, studies of sociocultural aspects of transnationalism have provided "detailed information on a limited set of activities and practices, not a clear picture of the breadth of the social field, nor of the demography or intensity of players' participation in all the activities people engage in" (1998:82).

Because research on socio-cultural aspects of transnationalism has been preoccupied with identity issues, it has been limited to the range of cultural phenomena that Appadurai (1996:13) has termed "marked culture". Whereas "unmarked culture" refers to "the plethora of differences that characterize the world today, differences at various levels, with various valences, and with greater and lesser degrees of social consequences," "marked culture" only includes "the subset of these differences that has been mobilized to articulate the boundary

of difference" or "that constitutes the diacritics of group identity" (ibid.:13-14). "Marked culture," in other words, refers to a highly select subset of differences chosen from the "virtually open-ended archive of differences" presented by "unmarked culture" (ibid.). When linked to studies of transnational migration, those aspects of "marked culture" are selected that are mobilized in connection with migrants' identification with more than one nation-state. In other words, such studies of transnational migration will leave aside those forms of identity that spring from the "unmarked culture" that is associated with migrants' everyday lives.

It is, of course, entirely valid to examine socio-cultural aspects of transnationalism in terms of "marked" culture. This focus is rather narrow, however, unless one is content to define research on socio-cultural aspects of transnational migration as a small subfield within migration studies dealing with special events among organized groups of migrants. Furthermore, one might question whether it is possible to examine "marked" culture without having some understanding of the vast field of "unmarked culture" upon which it draws and within which it is embedded. From a socio-cultural point of view, I am particularly concerned about the way that a focus on "marked" culture, defined as migrants' assertion of their national identities in foreign migration destinations, tends to define the socio-cultural dimensions of migration primarily in terms of national identities as they are understood and evoked in receiving countries. In studies of transnational migration, the receiving countries have been, overwhelmingly, North American and European. Research on socio-cultural dimensions of transnational migration therefore becomes narrowed down to studies of constructions of national identity in relation to North American or European national ideologies.

The Role of Nation-States in migration and migration research

As is well known, modern nation-states are predicated on the nationalist ideology that they correspond to specific socio-cultural "communities" that constitute natural places of belonging and dwelling for their citizens. From this point of view international migration, therefore, does not simply involve the crossing of a political border protected by a legal and administrative apparatus. It also means leaving a native country and culture in order to settle in a foreign country with a different culture. In this way, migration comes to implicate rupture and break with former modes of life and integration into new ways of living. In the United States, in particular, there is a long tradition for studying how immigrants from different parts of the world are integrated into the receiving society.¹ As noted by American sociologist Mary Waters, "immigration is at the very core of American sociology" (Waters 1999a:1264). In a recent special issue of the American journal *International Migration Review* re-examining the integration paradigm in migration research, Josh DeWind and Philip Kasinitz (1997: 1096) conclude that important questions in the field of research concern "how immigrants and their children are being incorporated into the fabric of American life. What sort of Americans will they be, and what sort of America is being created in the interaction of immigrants and natives?" This research, in other words, is primarily concerned with the creation of new American citizens and the future development of American society (see also Olwig 2001a). This perception of migration is understandable in the light of the massive immigration into North America that has taken place over the past several hundred years and the central role that immigration has played in the development of the modern society of the United States. The recent interest in transnational socio-cultural

systems may be seen as a variant of this immigration research because a major interest in transnational theory is the relationship between transnational socio-cultural systems and integration processes in receiving societies. The development of transnational socio-cultural systems is thus seen to be closely related to migrants' attempts to avoid subjecting themselves to the discriminatory structures of race, ethnicity and nationalism that tend to place them in a marginal position in the receiving society. From an American point of view it makes good sense to regard the maintenance of transnational ties as a form of resistance to the natural process of integration into the United States, a country that developed as a powerful modern nation-state by integrating millions of immigrants into American society. From the point of view of the migrants, transnational relations may not, however, primarily constitute a mode of resisting integration into a migration destination. They may rather be an integral part of a way of life that developed independently of migration to a particular migration destination.

In a forthcoming collection of articles edited by Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and myself (Sørensen and Olwig forthcoming), a number of case studies from South America, the Caribbean, Africa as well as North America show that livelihood practices quite commonly engage people in extensive movements at local, regional, national and transnational levels. Such mobile livelihoods evolve not just in order to explore economic opportunities not available within local communities, but also in order to pursue particular types of culturally and socially desirable livelihoods. This suggests that movement is an integral aspect of the life trajectories of many individuals and groups of people, not an abnormal interruption in normal stationary life. Whether this movement is transnational or not depends, to a great

¹For a critical historical point of view see Tilly 1990. It is only since the 1950s, when immigration to

extent, on the nature of the nation-state within which the movers are born. A comparison of the meaning and significance of the national and the transnational in the Caribbean and North America exemplifies what I mean.

The National and the Transnational: North American and Caribbean Perspectives

Much of the literature on transnationalism has dealt with Caribbean migration to North America (see, for example, Sutton and Chaney 1987; Georges 1992; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Sørensen 1995; Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Levitt 2001). This literature examines movements between a nation-state in the Caribbean and a nation-state in North America and the sociocultural fields spanning these two nation-states that have emerged in this connection. From a formal legal and political point of view, it may be meaningful to equate Caribbean and North American nation-states. They all have their own and separate political, legal and administrative systems which represent the nation-states both internally and externally, in the international community of nation-states. They have their own national flags and national anthems, and they have the right to full representation in the international community of nation-states in a host of fora ranging from the United Nations and the world bank to the Olympics and Miss World Beauty Queen Shows. Yet, behind these formal similarities, that place the United States and Caribbean nation-states on an equal footing, there are a multitude of differences that overshadow, and make ludicrous, any notion that they share a common status as independent, autonomous and equal entities. A comparison between the nation-states of United States and St. Kitts-Nevis will illustrate my point.

Europe became important, that European scholars have become interested in integration research.

The United States is a country of 3,615,123 sq. miles, covering an area that spans the vast continent between the Atlantic Ocean in the east and the Pacific Ocean in the west, and it is inhabited by at least 250 million people. St. Kitts-Nevis is a country of 152 sq. miles and populated by less than 50,000 people. The United States is a world power with a strong military and economic system as well as a large body of variegated media that disseminate American popular culture on a global basis. St. Kitts-Nevis is a developing country with no military to speak of, an economic system that is highly dependent on off-shore investments and economic aid, and few locally based media. The general social infrastructure of the United States is extensive and well developed within all areas, whereas that of St. Kitts-Nevis is limited and entirely undeveloped in certain areas. As far as the educational system is concerned, for example, no less than 6,259 institutions of higher learning are listed on the internet for the United States. For St. Kitts-Nevis, three "off-shore" universities are listed, all of them run by and for foreigners.²

There can be little doubt that citizens of the United States and St. Kitts-Nevis will have quite different understandings of the nation-states in which they live, and that the meaning and relative significance of the transnational will vary accordingly. The United States comprises a large physical territory and a self-contained structure with a fully developed political, legal, social and economic system. This country offers a rather "complete" framework of life for its inhabitants. St. Kitts-Nevis, on the other hand, is a tiny country that is only partially developed as far as many aspects of modern life are concerned, and there are severe limitations on the sort of life that can be pursued within the borders of

²One offers courses in business, education, the two others offer courses in medicine (Saint Kitts-Nevis, Higher Education,

the nation-state. This means that the nation-state is not necessarily regarded as a natural framework of life for everybody at all times. A typical feature of national elections is thus to tease local nationalist politicians about the fact that they have a green card. Transnational moves, and transnational relations, are the order of the day (Olwig 1997).

Given the small size of the nation-state of St. Kitts-Nevis, its relatively weak and limited infrastructural system, and its brief history as an independent nation-state it may be argued that this is an extreme case that can have little interest except as a curiosity. I would contend, however, that one might equally argue that the United States is an extreme case. Few, if any countries, are so large and so infrastructurally self-contained, and as vibrant in terms of social and economic opportunities as the United States. Many countries, in particular in the third world, are recent historical constructions that are poorly developed in terms of their social and economic infrastructure, and they are therefore highly dependent on outside sources of opportunity for their populations. This dependence will only grow as people become more exposed, through the media, to the various opportunities available in other parts of the world (cf. Appadurai 1996). Furthermore, a large number of countries in the economically developed world, many of them with long histories of independence, are relatively small and offer only limited opportunities for their citizens in today's increasingly specialized world. With easy transportation, travel across political borders therefore has become a common feature of modern life in large parts of the world.

Most countries, I would suggest, are somewhere between the St. Kitts-Nevis and the United States, and this means that many people combine various national and transnational elements in their lives, depending on their particular circumstances. Rather than studying

http://dir.yahoo.com/Education/Higher_Education/Colleges_and_Universities/By_Region/Countries/Saint_

migration between nation-states, I therefore suggest doing ethnographic research on people's movements, the fields of social relations and cultural values that these movements engender and the kinds of places (nation-states and others) that are constructed in the process. In the remainder of this paper, I will discuss what "transnationalism" may look like if viewed from the perspective of this sort of research.

Doing Research in Family Networks

In recent years I have studied three different family networks originating in the Caribbean islands of respectively Jamaica, Dominica and Nevis that, through various migratory moves, have become scattered in various parts of North America, Europe and the Caribbean. These family networks have been my extended field site, and in the course of four years I did approximately six months of field work, travelling to family members in Jamaica, Dominica and Nevis, Barbados, the British and the American Virgin Islands, California, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Nova Scotia and England. In this research in an extended field site I spent anywhere from 1-2 hours to as much as a week with 150 family members, visiting them in their homes or at work, going out with them to restaurants, parties, church, talking with them informally and doing interviews with them. Whereas I had known the family of Nevisian background for many years, I knew very little about the family networks of Jamaican and Dominican background and was a total stranger to family members when I began the research. As I moved within the family network, however, visiting some persons several times, I became well acquainted with the families and came to know a great deal about individual family members, even before I met them. I soon developed the feeling of

Kitts_and_Nevis/)

moving within an actual field site, where interviews and participant observation, in quite disparate places, shed light on an extensive field of social relations and cultural values of significance to persons living far from one another and under rather different social and economic circumstances.

Life story interviews³ comprised the most basic research method. They were useful because they offer both a very concrete research tool and the sort of data that may generate insights into the social fields that are of importance in situations of mobility. At a very general level, a life story entails an accounting of an individual's movements through life – geographical as well as social, economic or cultural – in such a way that it portrays a sense of coherence reflective of the narrator's sense of self. Life stories, in other words, are constructed along a fine line between movement and change, continuity and identification. They are constructions, because coherent narratives must be created out of the welter of occurrences and relationships that characterize most lives. They are also cultural constructions, because they tend to conform to established conventions concerning what sort of a life is credible and socially acceptable. Life stories are, of course, also personal, because they reflect individuals' particular cultural understanding of themselves and the lives they have lived. By eliciting life stories from people, I therefore obtained data on the life courses that people had lived, including the moves that these life courses may have entailed. I also gained insights into the socio-cultural order that the narrators established in their life stories, and their own particular understanding of themselves in this order. Life story interviews therefore offer a useful tool of investigation when doing research in extended

³For literature on the life story method, see Langness and Frank 1981; Bruner 1987; Linde 1993; Peacock and Holland 1993.

field sites that exist by virtue of their being given purpose and meaning by those who choose to identify with them.

Different socio-cultural orders emerged from the life story interviews reflecting the varying social, economic and cultural background of the families in the Caribbean, the different migration destinations where they had settled, and the particular life courses of individual family members. The Jamaican family is of mixed British, Portuguese and African origin and derives from a Jamaican provincial capital, where it had made a living in business related activities. Particularly from the 1940s to the 1960s family members migrated to Great Britain and the United States, where they found work mostly in the business or service sector. Today, one of the oldest generation of eight siblings, a returnee from the United States, lives in Jamaica with his wife, along with their two sons and their families. They are the only members of the extended family left in Jamaica. The Dominican family is of mixed French and African background and comes from a small parish capital where it was involved in education and store keeping. The oldest generation of eleven siblings left Dominica during the 1950s and 1960s, moving to Great Britain, Canada and the United States. Many of them received advanced education and had careers in the professions. When I did fieldwork in Dominica seven had returned to Dominica, and a few of their children had settled in Dominica. The Nevisian family is predominantly of African descent and originates in a village of small farmers and fishermen established in the 1930s by former plantation workers when land became available for purchase upon the cessation of sugar production. All but one in a sibling group of ten migrated from Nevis in the early 1960s, leaving for Great Britain, the American and British Virgin Islands as well as the Dutch Antilles. The family, however, maintained a strong family home in the village, and many children in the following generation grew up with their grandparents in this home, having been left behind

or returned to Nevis by migrant parents. Most family members have performed semi-skilled or unskilled work abroad, and three of them have returned to settle in Nevis, two others are hoping to do so. Despite the varying backgrounds of the family networks and their broad range of migration experiences, there are a number of salient themes in the life stories related by the different family members that shed light on this more private, inter-personal socio-cultural dimension of transnational migration.⁴

i. Migrating for better opportunities

When migration is studied from the point of view of a receiving country, this can lead to the impression that migrants leave their country of origin in order to relocate permanently in a migration destination. In the immigrant countries of North America, this view has been underlined by a strong (though contested) national ideology about the nation as a welcoming home for foreigners hungry for food and freedom, as reflected in Emma Lazarus' sonnet "The New Colossus", inscribed on the American Statue of Liberty National Monument. According to Russell King (King forthcoming), this ideology for many years prevented migration scholars from acknowledging the 10 million European immigrants who decided to return to their country of origin between 1870 and 1940. In some European countries, where there has been little tradition of immigration, and hence no tradition of welcoming migrants, immigrants have rather been viewed as a threat to the old customs and traditions rooted in the soil of the nation. Here national ideologies have rather led to xenophobic complaints about the droves of immigrants who come to take advantage of, and undermine, the receiving societies. There has therefore been a tendency for researchers to conceptualize

⁴The following discussion draws on Olwig 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001a, 2001b.

migrants as "foreign workers" only temporarily present in the nation-state, and it is only in the last couple of decades that integration of immigrants has figured as an important research topic (see, for example, Schwartz 1990). The perception of migrants as persons who travel to settle permanently in another country has been supported, to a certain extent, by migration scholars' analyses of the push-pull factors believed to induce migratory moves. These studies thus give the impression that migrants stay put unless pushed out of their place of origin because of extraordinarily difficult conditions, or pulled away by attractive opportunities abroad. When examining migration from the point of view of the life stories related by members of the family networks quite another picture emerges.

In the life stories that the oldest generation of siblings⁵ in the three family networks related to me movements figured as important life events. This is to be expected given the fact that many of them had traveled to far-away and unknown places, leaving their close family and friends behind. Migration to a different country, however, was not necessarily experienced as the most significant moves in the lives of the family members. Very few family members, in fact, described themselves as migrants who had moved to settle abroad. Virtually all of the siblings described having left in order to achieve some goal, expecting that they would return as soon as they had succeeded at this. These goals varied. Most members of the Nevisian family emphasized that they left to earn enough money to acquire a house, to establish a business of their own and to help family members left behind. Members of the Dominican and Jamaican family generally stated that education was a primary motivation for moving, although some family members stated the desire to accumulate funds that would provide the basis for a more satisfactory life in the place of origin. It was a

common theme in the life stories of all family members, however, that travel to another place, in order to take advantage of social and economic opportunities not available locally, was natural when one reached a certain age. It was quite simply necessary in order to progress in life, given the limited opportunities available locally. For members of the Dominican and Jamaica families, moving abroad was a must if they were to pursue the family ideal of obtaining higher education. Migration, in other words, was not expected to involve permanent displacement from a place of birth with the intent to become a citizen in a new country such as Great Britain, the United States or Canada. It was rather an integral aspect of growing up and becoming a respectable person in the local community. This does not mean that all family members returned to settle in their place of origin. When I carried out interviews in the family networks, only slightly more than a third, most of them belonging to the Dominican and Nevisian families, had actually returned. Some of the family members who had not returned stated that they had settled permanently abroad, whereas others emphasized that they were still hoping to return. Individuals' plans clearly had changed in the light of experiences abroad. It is difficult to capture such changeability with terms such as "emigrant", "immigrant" or "transmigrant," that have movement between places, rather than movement through life as a frame of reference.

The close association between migration and coming of age means that young people moved to places where they found attractive social and economic opportunities at the time they were ready to leave home, and where they were legally and economically able to travel. This is reflected in the patterns of dispersal of the family members. Young people traveled to Great Britain from Jamaica, Dominica and Nevis in the period from the 1940s to the early

⁵ There were 29 persons in this generation. By the time I did my research, three had died.

1960s; they went to Canada from Jamaica and Dominica during the 1950s and 1960s; they went to the American Virgin Islands from Nevis during the 1950s and 1960s, to the British Virgin Islands and St. Martin from Nevis during the 1970s and 1980s, and to United States from Dominica and Jamaica from the 1940s to the 1980s. This pattern of movement means that individuals ended up in different countries, or continents, depending on the legal restrictions on immigration obtaining in various countries when they were ready to move, the possibility of wage employment and educational opportunities in various countries, and their own educational background and access to financial resources.

Migrants did not just move as individuals, but just as significantly as members of a family network, and they were therefore not merely moving to various destinations, but also within family networks. Once established in a migration destination, family members encouraged other relatives to join them and helped them move and become settled in the new place. This meant that certain migration destination became of particular importance in particular family networks. The Jamaican family thus became concentrated in New York City, the Dominican family in Toronto and the Nevisian family in the American and British Virgin Islands. It may therefore be argued that once a few relatives had established themselves in a particular place, others migrated there not just to explore opportunities in this migration destination, but to join family members and be with them. Three sisters in the Dominican family thus decided to move to Toronto, after migration experiences in other countries, because one sister living there encouraged them to come. Later, several nephews and nieces opted to study at a university in the Toronto area because of the large number of relatives living there.

Furthermore, I did not interview one person who was mentally handicapped.

These movements show that family members do not necessarily stay in the first migration destination, but often engage in a series of movements of varying scale. The families of Dominican and Jamaican background, who were of middle class background, were especially mobile, and made a broad range of trans- and intranational moves. Transnational moves, after the initial outmigration from place of birth, went from Great Britain to the United States, Canada, Dominica and Nevis, from Canada to the United States and Dominica, from the United States to Canada, Jamaica, Dominica and Great Britain, and from the American Virgin Islands to the British Virgin Islands and Nevis. Family members also engaged in extensive movements within the receiving societies. These moves were a natural aspect of the family members' social mobility and involved moving to better neighborhoods, leaving home for college, relocating in accordance with career opportunities, joining family living elsewhere and retiring in other places. During the 1960s, four of the eight Jamaican siblings lived in New York City with their families, and New York was clearly a vital stronghold in the dispersed family network. When I interviewed family members during the late 1990s, only one family member remained in New York, and she was on the verge of moving to Nova Scotia. Though transnational migration abroad had constituted an important turning point in life for the oldest generation of siblings, this move clearly was not the only one undertaken. Indeed, I shall argue that from a social and cultural point of view, transnational moves did not necessarily constitute the most momentous turning point in the family members' lives.

ii. Moving within or between Socio-Cultural Spheres

Studies of transnational migration focus, by definition, on the act of moving from one country to another and the implications of this move for the people and the countries

involved. This may easily give the impression that a nation-state constitutes a normal framework of life and represents a relatively uniform socio-cultural entity that only changes when one crosses the political border that demarcates this entity. It is well known, of course, that nation-states do not coincide with specific, well-defined socio-cultural entities, even though nationalist ideology may present nation-states this way (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992; Handler 1985). Most nation-states display a great deal of internal cultural complexity, often reflecting the presence of socio-cultural systems that are not confined to particular political entities, as students of globalization and transnationalism, have shown (Hannerz 1992, 1996; Appadurai 1996).

Most of the siblings in the Nevisian family left directly from their parental home, located in a small, rather isolated African-Caribbean village, and for them migrating therefore involved their first major experience of the wider world outside the local community. When the oldest son went to England he had no legal difficulty entering the country since he was traveling within the British empire as constituted at this time. Due to his limited exposure to British culture and society in his home village, he experienced a profound feeling of alienation when he reached his destination, Oxford, where he joined his future wife's sister. His black skin, Nevisian dialect and African-Caribbean ways made him quite aware that he was one of few Blacks in the area at the time. Within a short time he moved to Chapel Town in Leeds, a West Indian neighborhood of the city where many of his school mates from Nevis had migrated. In this way, he partially returned to the Caribbean, socio-culturally speaking, and it was apparent that the Caribbean community in Leeds had comprised a central framework of his every-day life in Great Britain. His siblings who moved to the American Virgin Islands, on the other hand, experienced a great deal of legal difficulty, having entered a foreign territory on temporary visas and they were forced to

accept underpaid wage employment from employers who exploited their insecure position. They also encountered a fair amount of hostility on the part of the American Virgin Islanders, who felt threatened by the competition on the labor market of the large number of immigrants entering the territory. The Nevisians felt quite at home, however, with the social relations and cultural values that permeated the local Caribbean society of the American Virgin Islands. They came to regard themselves as part of this society when they finally succeeded in acquiring permanent residency.

Unlike the Nevisian family, the Dominican and the Jamaican families had been quite exposed to European culture and society when they migrated. The Dominican family members whose father was a local school teacher and who grew up in an English speaking home in a French Creole speaking village, were, to a great extent, the representatives of the British colonial order in the village. Still, some of them described their move to attend secondary school, at eleven-twelve years of age, as a difficult one, because this brought them out of the local village, where their family had a secure position, to the capital Roseau where they were "poor country cousins", unfamiliar with the ways of the British colonial capital. They adjusted, however, and most of them did extremely well in school, and this opened the door for further education abroad. Having successfully completed secondary school, they described their moves for higher education in Great Britain, North America as well as the larger Caribbean islands, in terms of a natural broadening of their educational and personal horizons, although this involved some personal adjustment to social and cultural conditions abroad. Members of the Jamaican family also saw migration as an extension of their life in the Caribbean. They described their Caribbean background as one strongly colored by their having grown up in a Jamaican colonial town steeped in British ways. Several of the children received their secondary education at well known Jamaican boarding

schools known for their English educational system. The two youngest daughters attended an Anglican boarding school, taught almost exclusively by British teachers, that functioned as a finishing school at the same time as it offered a rigorous academic program. They had been subjected to strict rules and curfews, and the older of the two described boys as belonging to "another world." One of the girls noted that moving to Great Britain, to study nursing in London, meant little change in the regimented English female life she had learned at the boarding school, and she joked: "When I came here in the 1950's it was very easy to fit in, because I lived at a hospital, and we had to be in a 10 p.m.!" When she finally did experience the other world of men, she married a person from Sri Lanka, another subject of the British colonial empire living in London.

For the members of the Jamaican and Dominican families who moved to North America, the situation was rather more complex. As persons of middle class background they shared the same general socio-cultural values of middle class North American society, however, as persons of mixed racial background, they tended to be grouped with the Black American population that was placed in the lower end of the racial hierarchy. These family members did not necessarily identify with Black people as such, having grown up in societies with a different race and class structure. The Jamaican family, for example, settled in what was originally a White, middle class area of New York. The family's later whole-sale movement out of the city can be interpreted partly as an attempt by the family to disassociate itself from the large Black population of lower class background – many recent immigrants from the Caribbean – that was now moving into this area. For members of this family it was painful not to be accepted as middle class Americans. One person thus stated that he felt that he could only be accepted as a Black person in the United States as long as he remained a foreigner, and he eventually opted to return to Jamaica (Olwig 2001a; see also

Waters 1999b). In Canada, on the other hand, family members encountered an official multi-cultural policy where a person from a "visible minority" was expected to fit into a particular slot in the ethnic structure of the society. This meant being pigeon holed as a Black Caribbean, and often as a Black Jamaican, the largest and best known Caribbean group in Canada, which tends to occupy the bottom position in the ethnic hierarchy of Canadian society. For those who did not particularly identify with Black Caribbean culture, this meant being exoticized in relation to the European-oriented middle class cultural background that they shared with many White Canadians.

iii. The Socio-cultural Construction of Place

Transnational theory points to the ways in which socio-cultural activities associated with the country of origin may be used as platforms for the assertion of a particular status and identity in the receiving society. Studies of socio-cultural aspects of transnationalism, as noted, therefore have tended to focus on aspects of identification and belonging that are identified with particular nation-states. Yet it is apparent that most of the family members in the first generation of migrants left before their place of origin had become an independent nation-state. They had grown up on islands where British colonial culture was associated with high status in society and taught that they belonged to the British empire, and they therefore had little notion of national identity rooted in an autonomous Caribbean country. When their islands of origin became independent from British rule, they, and their descendents born abroad, therefore did not automatically develop a national identity in relation to the nation-states that emerged with political independence. Instead, they identified with their Caribbean place of origin through the family network that provided for them their most concrete and immediate tie to the Caribbean. Their sense of Caribbean

identity, in other words, was mediated by the family network and depended on notions of Caribbeanness that this network maintained through family interrelations, family reunions, stories about the family's past in the Caribbean and visits to the family's Caribbean place of origin. The three family networks that I studied developed quite different ideas of their Caribbean identity, and I shall argue that only the family network of Dominican background developed an identity that was grounded in an idea of belonging to an independent Caribbean nation-state.

In their life stories, relatives in the Jamaican family network emphasized their background in a colonial British town, where the family had obtained a position of respect as a family of mixed European and African descent making a living from business related activities. The family had, at least initially, been comfortable economically speaking, but with the decline of the sugar industry in the area, the economic basis of the family crumbled. Still several of the siblings attended prestigious secondary schools in Jamaica and the family hoped that the first son to migrate to the United States would become educated as a medical doctor, one of the most prestigious occupations in middle class Jamaican society. He opted, instead, for a career in a large American corporation and most family members ended up settling abroad. When Jamaica became independent after most of the family members had left the island, the old British colonial culture, and the racial hierarchy that went with it, lost ground, and Jamaica developed a national identity oriented toward Black, African-Caribbean culture. This meant that this family, in essence, had lost its formal cultural and social foundation in Jamaica, and the Jamaican family identity that was portrayed in many of the life stories was one that emphasized the family's respectable past in colonial Jamaica which was quite different from the, to them, rather foreign racial and socio-cultural orientation of the independent nation-state. This sense of alienation was amplified by the experience of

some of the phenotypically white second or third generation members of the family network who, during visits to Jamaica, had been told by local Black people that they were not real Jamaicans. Many family members therefore had limited personal contact with Jamaica, and their sense of Jamaicanness primarily belonged within the realm of family relations and was not asserted in the form of a more public ethnic, or cultural, identity. Some of the phenotypically black family members who had been born in the United States, however, identified with a more generalized Jamaican, or Africa-Caribbean, identity associated with music and the arts, for example, and demarcated themselves in this way as different from American Blacks. They did not, however, belong to any Jamaican, or Caribbean, organizations.

Like the Jamaican family, most of the siblings in the oldest generation of the Nevisian family to migrate, left a British dependency and experienced the establishment of the autonomous country of St. Kitts-Nevis in 1983 while they were abroad. This was a positive development for the family members in the American Islands because the immigration quota of independent nation-states in the Western hemisphere was considerably higher than that of British dependencies, and they therefore were able to obtain permanent American immigrant visas. The family members were quite skeptical about the political union with St. Kitts, however, and found it difficult to identify with this national construction (see also Olwig 1993). Furthermore, it was apparent in the life story interviews that family members did not identify with Nevis as such, but rather with the particular village from which they derived in Nevis. More specifically, they identified with the family home in the village that they had helped to maintain and improve through remittances.

The Nevisian family members visited their home as often as possible, and this was where several of the siblings' children had been reared. This dispersed family network thus

developed a Nevisian identity grounded in the family home in the village community. When I interviewed family members, this home had ceased to function as an extended household, actively involving the social and economic support of absent family members, due to the death of the siblings' parents who had been a focal point of socio-economic relations in the family network. Some of the family members therefore were moving toward more public forms of Nevisian identity associated with Nevisian organizations abroad. These organizations were not affiliated with the nation-state of St. Kitts-Nevis as such, but rather with more local units of identification such as the village where the family members had grown up. One of the family members had thus become active in an organization, formed by Nevisians from her village living in the American Virgin Islands to raise funds to improve the local village school they had attended.

When Dominica became independent in 1978, several family members had completed their education abroad and had returned to Dominica where they were working in their professions. The family, therefore, had become well established in the island society, and it came to play a central role in the newly independent nation-state in the years to come. This high profile of the family in Dominica became an important aspect of the family's identity and defined, to a great extent, the way in which many family members abroad identified with the Caribbean. Second and third generation family members born abroad were thus quite aware of the family's prominence in Dominica and knew that this had been based on family members' educational achievements and dedicated service to the country. Among family members abroad, the family's place of origin in the Caribbean was therefore closely identified with the establishment of a new nation-state where the family had distinguished itself. It may therefore be argued that family members abroad had developed a transnational identity, in the sense that they identified with the independent nation of Dominica, the place of origin

of this family network. This identity, however, was highly mediated by their belonging to this particular family, and no family members in the second or third generation born abroad were active in Dominican associations abroad, nor did they identify themselves as Dominicans. Rather they identified with this particular family that gave them a source of pride and a feeling of distinction in North America and Great Britain where Black people tended to be associated with the lower segments of the population. This family's transnational identity, in other words, was a rather a private one based on family relations. A few younger family members rebelled, however, against the emphasis upon education and moral respectability, rejecting the pressure for individual achievement and value judgements that this involved. Some of them had, instead, developed an interest in Black, "diasporic" culture and participated in Black cultural events.

Conclusion

The form of research developed in this study amongst three family networks has provided insight into particular forms of extended socio-cultural systems known to be of significance to many migrants. It suggests that there is a need for broader, more exploratory studies of the socio-cultural aspects of migration that focus on movement as an aspect of individuals' life paths in the course of pursuing given livelihoods; investigate the political, economic, social and cultural systems in relation to which migrants move, and elucidate migrants' socio-cultural constructions of places of belonging. Such studies would by no means cover all aspects of the fields of social relations and cultural values that may be of significance to migrants. They would, however, contribute to the development of new frameworks of study, where the contextual and perspectival complexity of migration may be examined in greater depth.

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