

**Frames and Transformations in  
Transnational Studies**

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### I

Transnational studies do not constitute an academic discipline by any conventional standards. Perhaps they will one day. For the moment, however, they are a field to which many disciplines contribute and, of older ones, anthropology, history, geography, international relations and sociology seem to me most germane.

Social psychology, international economics, and a wide range from comparative linguistics to literature and media studies grouped under the label of cultural studies, can also claim to make major contributions. To name but a few!

So a moment's consideration suffices to make it obvious that the field vastly exceeds anyone's specialist competence. Some of us will correspondingly turn away with relief, others will take it as an invitation to do transnational studies within their own established paradigm regardless of others; braver or brasher spirits will enjoy freedom from any disciplinary constraint.

Perhaps the last is the most enticing, but I have to admit to being a paid up member of the sociological profession and within it we can't practice 'transnational studies' with that careless rapture if only because the very idea challenges much of what has been a standard disciplinary outlook for sociologists. The transnational forces us to take a fresh look at some of the elementary concepts and rules of method we have observed for generations.

For a start we don't, despite Anthony Smith's sterling efforts, yet recognise anything called national, let alone transnational studies. Sociologists study society and then incidentally treat national names like Britain, America, Germany as referring to societies, ignoring the inconvenient fact that they don't actually even refer to nation-states. Alternatively for all practical purposes they treat the citizens of a nation-state as constituting a society, or even more crudely a nation, and then see ethnic relations as a derivative problem area.

Either way the idea of transnational studies shakes a lot of assumptions. The hoary old topic, individual and society, which still dominates textbooks must do a timeshare with society/society relations if particular societies can no longer rely on keeping individuals in tight embrace for ever. The critique of the over-socialized model of man from a Freudian standpoint, for long a staple theme for undergraduate essays, needs to be paralleled, if not replaced altogether, by deconstruction of the nationalized version of the individual.

Within sociology these amount to paradigm shifts. We even might go further and suggest epochal shift. But here we must be cautious. In The Global Age (1996) I have promoted the idea of epochal shift as a necessary intellectual resource for understanding the present and as a counterweight to the inevitabilism which disfigures much of globalization theory.

But I also emphasized that transnational relations as such cannot be regarded even as modern, whether early or late, and certainly not peculiar to a new Global Age. What we need to do indeed is to distance ourselves from a time-frame which views the nation-state as the normal, abiding state of society and the transnational as something new and derived from globalization. These necessary recasts of sociological theory, which are prompted by contemporary concerns, point as much to the retrieval of pre- and non-modern society as to a new world order.

A developed theory of transnational studies has the potential to immunise the social sciences and much of the humanities from the overweening hold which the nation-state has exerted on academic programmes everywhere. In that sense I doubt very much that sociology is alone in finding them a challenge to dominant frames of thought and for that reason I am encouraged to look for fellow-sufferers in other disciplines.

In other words, my concern in this paper is for the challenges which transnational studies pose to any discipline which may have once taken the national as an unexamined premise in its theories and methods. It seem to me that there are generic issues here where we need to consult and confer across boundaries, not just of nations, but of disciplines too.

## II

At the outset we need to bear in mind that the idea of the transnational came into prominent use first in the study of international relations in the context of the growth of international organizations and particularly relations between non-governmental bodies. The reason it did was clearly linked to this historical context. 'Trans-' was different from 'inter-', in the same way as relations between citizens of different nation-states are different from relations between governments and their representatives. In transnational relations boundaries are being crossed, rather than maintained or negotiated by state representatives.

The specific connotations of this terminological shift ought to be seen against the background of the historical reception of the idea of the international, used by Jeremy Bentham in 1780 as a new word to refer to the law of nations and which took a dramatic turn with its adoption by the International Working Men's Association in 1864. That turned it into a forked-tongue term ever after.

On the one hand it developed as a term for interstate or intergovernmental relations. On the other hand it acquired a new subversiveness as the recognition of nationalist ideals. Marx's 'International' was firmly based in the representation of nations. Consequently in the United States, a nation-state based on the assimilation of nations, the term 'international' has never recovered Bentham's sense of the law of nations as between nation-states. It has been tainted as unpatriotic and perhaps will be forever more.

The counterpart which by opposition reinforced this outlook in the United States was the stance of the Soviet Union where 'international' retained the meaning of 'between nations' throughout its existence. 'International' was therefore never 'cosmopolitan' and the Soviets used the idea of international to reinforce the national idea, as opposed to interstate relations.

Inside the Soviet Union it was used as a denial of the obvious Russian domination of the other nations. Outside it helped support national liberation movements. The Soviets thought it was to their political advantage, but ultimately of course it rebounded with dire consequences. The nationalities which they had tended with some care, became a fissiparous force contributing to the collapse of the Union.

This ambiguity of 'international' carries over into transnational studies to this day. Transnational relations may either be relations between national or ethnic groups which cross state boundaries or they may refer to the epigenesis of relations of a non-ethnic nature which cross state boundaries, which may be either of a state or a non-state kind.

'Trans-' then differs from 'inter-' as much as leaping across a boundary fence from passing through a border checkpoint. The difficulties arise from their origin in the historically specific discourse of nation states.

I don't think it is worth trying to legislate on these distinctions. We tend to handle them effectively or not according to context. Instead on this occasion, I will advantage of addressing the opening seminar in the Transnational Communities programme by attending to things even more elementary than usage, namely to ask just what we are trying to uphold in using 'national', 'international' and 'transnational' as classificatory devices at all. There is a range of key conceptual issues here, often concealed by the fact that it is their contemporary political and economic salience which has put transnational studies on the academic agenda.

The first such issue is timeframe. We are after all being encouraged to consider transnational relations at this time because of a public and official concern for transformations in the world which appear to shake cherished assumptions, including the durability of the nation-state.

Now from a standpoint in recent discourse theory, or indeed in an older theory of ideology, if the nation-state's future is in question so also are its self-accounts, its narratives and even its profounder underpinnings in academic theories. This suggests that whenever a contemporary institutional frame becomes unstable we ought also to distance ourselves from, if not reject outright, the domain assumptions of the immediately preceding period.

For me then the question marks over the future of the nation state require us to distance ourselves from modernity too. This can lead to a variety of outcomes. One is to jettison the modern in favour of the postmodern and allow free play to the imagination, or chaos as some would see it. Or we might seek to develop new concepts and fresh terminology to mirror changes of our time. But the images they convey would be just as ephemeral as changes they report. A third

possibility, and this is the one preferred here, is to return to re-appraisal at a more fundamental level and against longer and wider experience than even modernity acknowledged. We may then have a chance to appreciate what is new, what is old and what even may be universal in the current condition of our times.

### III

International and transnational are variants on 'national'. What belongs or does not belong to the nation is a key classificatory device in both public and private narrative. The inventory of nations is the cast list for the drama of our time. As such these subjects are embedded in discourse and natural language and do not belong to science as such. We owe it above all to linguistics for making us take seriously the production of our topics in everyday language. Nation is not a technical term, although we may make it do service for us in different ways.

The peculiar place of the nation in natural language is highlighted by the fact that we can't refer to it unambiguously except as a plurality of people. The signs 'Germany', 'Britain' or 'America' may connote territory, government, people or just a football team (though not with Britain or America). Only when we talk of 'Germany, that is the Germans' do we clearly refer to a nation but even then we have no standard rule to follow. 'Americans' and 'the British' are not a nation in the sense that the Germans might now be, but then we can't be sure what the sense of 'the Germans' as a nation is until we spell out something more. This may or may not be what the Germans understand by a nation and which could well be different from what non-Germans might understand. This is a problem which besets even world class scholars. Norbert Elias' (1996) essays on the Germans use 'Germany' and 'the Germans' interchangeably with often misleading consequences.

Now sociologists can and often do develop standard criteria for determining what is and what is not a nation. Notoriously this does not lead to agreement between them but at least thenceforward they can, each severally, proceed to use names consistently. But, for that very reason, their usage will not correspond to everyday discourse. Consistently employed terms depart from, rather than express the actuality which is irremediably ambiguous. The sign 'England' is a floating signifier in natural speech and no amount of experimentation with English society, culture or social structure will control it.

It would be a mistake to imagine that this condition is modern, or postmodern. The paradigmatic case has to be Herodotus' (1954: 108-9) discussion of what made an Egyptian. The point is that it is impossible to provide an account of the nation without reference back to an entity called Egypt or Athens or England or Russia. This is even true for migratory or nomadic peoples who will bear a collective name which is more than the sum of the people, even if it does not allude to territory.

These collective names endure often over centuries. They are attached to persons when they are born, but they refer to more than just people. Human beings bear them and inhabit them. We can talk of the relations of the English to England without them being identical. English history is more than just the story of the English people, it is also the story of England.

The current emphasis in the study of nations is to treat their existence as a problem of 'national identity' (e.g. Smith 1991). This raises a whole range of interesting issues, but to my mind is limited by its origin in social psychological considerations of the development of self-identity in relation to attachment to collectivities. The implicit frame is the self/society relation and the idea of identity takes us back and forth between collective and individual identity as if their interaction is sufficient to explain the development of each.

To my mind the question of the identification of individuals with a nation and the contribution this may make to their selfhood and identity is a quite distinct issue from the presence in public discourse of the sign for the collective entity with which nations are associated. In other words the historical narrative which tells the story of changing relations between nations, as did Herodotus, is in principle no more resolvable into sociology or psychology than it is into an analysis of inter-governmental relations. We are dealing here with the actuality of the human drama where the main characters strut the stage with human qualities, but without a human shape.

The impossibility of reading any text of the public affairs of our time which does not reference these national subjects persuades me that we have not advanced in our narrative methods since the classic histories. This was certainly the view of Arnold Toynbee who, in a trenchant passage, made historical writing dependent on the perpetuation of myth and declared that it made no more sense to write the history of France than of the history of Marianne or the Gallic cock (Toynbee 1935: 443). These were emblems for fictional characters.

It is then tempting to follow Toynbee's lead and regard the presence of the nation as an issue for semiology or narrative analysis exclusively. But we should be cautious here and we should remember the well worn dictum of W.I. Thomas 'If men define situations as real then they are real in their consequences'. Fiction or not, 'France' inspired the revolution of 1789 and ravaged Europe. France became an army.

We should not exclude the real effects which may be signified by 'France'. The inventory of national entities in our public discourse cannot be written off as fiction even if the narrative devices in which the story is told are shared equally by history and fiction. For the moment then I propose to retain the ontological ambiguity of these main characters in the historical narrative and call them national collectivities. They are more than just people, they always also have some or all of territory, images, emblems, governments, teams, pasts, food, fashion and Gods in principle any amount more. They exist in the actuality of everyday life.

This semiological skirmish may arouse the suspicion that my intention is to write off social scientific accounts of the national and hence the transnational as doomed positivism. That is not the case. The fact that I have not yet deployed concepts of society, state and culture is not from any anti-positivistic squeamishness, but precisely because their use raises new issues which will take us into the core problems of transnational studies. But to gain that distance from the ephemeral quality of current changes we have to grasp the importance of the distinction between the phenomenological actuality of these national collectivities, with their mythical durable

essences and phantasmagoric appearances, the very characters of history, and, on the other hand, the analytic constructs of real and/or logical connections which are the artefacts of social and cultural scientists.

#### IV

Let us now for the moment bracket out the ambiguity of the national collectivity and shift from history to science. We thus disregard the nuanced meanings of national and focus on the stable elements of transnational discourse. As an initial formulation let us say that there are only three: the unit; boundaries around units; ties between units. Units exist in abstract space and ties and boundaries are both means and conditions of their movements. For the moment we leave out of consideration the questions of the meaning of relative proximity in space and also of the relative strength of ties.

Units have the capacity of forming ties with other units. They then *become compound* units, enjoying that same capacity as simple units, though the simpler units regularly retain their original capacity, which carries with it the profound circumstance that they can detach themselves from, and re-attach themselves to the compound units. Simpler units may belong to more than one larger unit and larger units may have sub-units in common and, therefore overlap in space.

The elements of discourse can be set out in formal notation; alternatively and perhaps most accessibly we can plot them graphically in visual space. (Fig 1)

So far, apart from its social property, that is the capacity to form ties, no other qualities of the units have been mentioned. The formal properties of this frame do not depend on the qualities of the units. But there is a lot to say about it irrespective of unit qualities. For instance we can expect changes in the unit with the most sub-units to have more repercussions for other units than changes in any one simple unit. We can expect the unit with the most ties to be more important for determining the direction of units tied to it than they have for it.

The formal properties are of course simply what we reference in the language of 'intra-', 'inter-' and 'trans-', and they suggest that we are concerned with something very elementary indeed. The examples in our diagram of what we refer to as 'trans' are of two kinds: ties across boundaries, and overlapping boundaries. Neither strike one as unusual conditions allowing our initial premises.

Now the units in our diagram could be anything: molecules, musical instruments, or mice. But whichever we introduce a range of distinctive substantive considerations will arise depending on the unit characteristics. In fact I propose that human couples are the simplest unit. (This makes the individual/society unit, often referred to simply as 'the individual' a special case of the couple.)

Then compound units are social entities which range from families to tribes, communities, castes, classes, organizations and nations. All these units are at one time or another called societies too and I have no objection to this everyday usage. It draws attention to the universal and repetitive features of processes of social construction and reconstruction, formation and transformation over the whole range of human experience of society.

Early decisions in this kind of framing can of course have profound repercussions on the whole of the subsequent analysis. At this point the most important feature to which attention should be drawn is that the nation is regarded as a compound, not a simple unit.

The diagram is called Primordial Society because there is no evidence that there is a period of human history to which it is not applicable, including the present. In other words my suggestion is that there are some elementary and non-trivial features which have abiding relevance in any analysis of human society.

## V

If these considerations are persuasive we then have to attend to the surprising way in which the transnational has come into vogue. This seminar would not have taken place without this new interest and yet on my account the conditions for its presence are so universal in human society that it should never have been off the agenda. So we need to review the factors which could to the denial of the 'trans-' relation. That means we have to consider just what peculiarities the national brings to the social unit and to do that we need to attend to the qualities of the human social unit.

Primary social units rely on other primary social units to reproduce themselves, or, put another way, human reproduction depends on relations between primary social units. This may sound paradoxical since we began with the couple as our primary unit. But the couple always presupposes the prior existence of other couples with which it is or has been in definite relations. The combination of rules of exogamy and the incest taboo more than just reinforce the social nature of reproduction. Sometimes we tend to limit considerations of reproduction to sex and gender relations, but those rules ensure that additionally new relations between primary social units are always being reconstituted on a periodic basis. The fact that in evolutionary terms this underwrites the unicity of the species and maximises the diversity of the gene pool is only incidental to our concerns here.

This is simply a reformulation of the axiom of the social nature of the human animal. In Marx's terms this is a feature of species being and it is reasonable (as he did) to link this with the other side of reproduction, the maintenance of bodily health and strength, which arguably is equally dependent on care and reciprocity of support, not just within but between primary social units. The relation between co-operation and mutual aid on the one hand and the division of labour and exchange on the other is contentious, and in the recent past inflammatory.

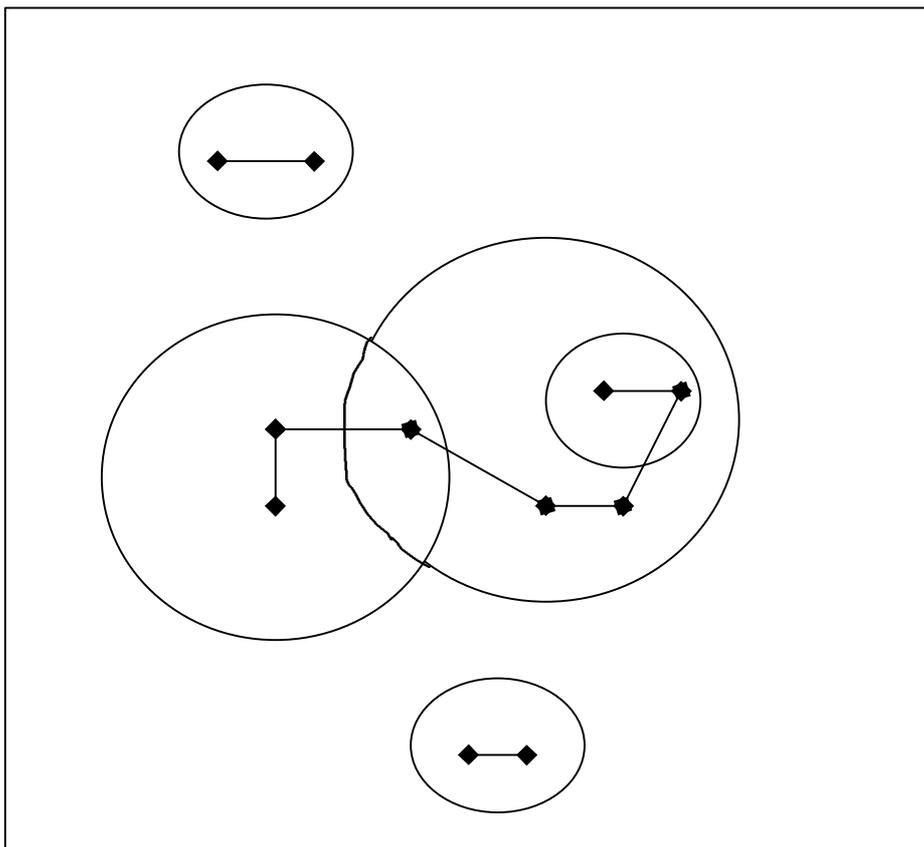
Since Marx and anthropologists and sociologists after him have recognised that the division of labour within the household unit and in gender relations is well-nigh universal there seems no reason to suppose that it is not also primordial in relations between primary units too. In other words we have no reason to suppose that segmentation which Durkheim argued was an early developmental stage in society had any priority over the division of labour, at least not where children are in the care of exogamous social units.

It is not relevant at this point to answer the question of the origin of commodity exchange, but we do need to bear it in mind as a specific kind of tie which clarifies some of the limits in other kinds of exchange and in social relations generally. In all other kinds the question of boundaries arises at an early stage.

Up to now the question of boundaries has been left unexplored. The only features of sociality to be listed have been ones which could account for an ever expanding network of ties. Yet boundaries are equally primordial. So how do they arise?

In fact the answer to this problem is already suggested in our recognition of the counterfactual nature of a world of ever expanding sociality. Indeed the boundaries between social units are not only constitutive of them, they equally also depend on sociality. We can appreciate this better by drawing on the concept of closure and using in particular Max Weber's contrast between open and closed social relationships.

Figure 1, Primordial Society



In the closed relationship sociality is expressed through exclusive reciprocity, the paradigmatic case being the sexually exclusive relationship. In the open relationship any number of extra parties may participate provided they can meet the same terms and conditions as the others.

Weber instanced markets as typically open, though he didn't go so far as to argue that a closed market was a contradiction in terms. Indeed the development of so-called internal markets in contemporary organizations is precisely an example of such closure. Only organizational members participate.

I should say that it was at this point that Weber apologized for gratuitous tediousness in labouring the obvious, but argued that it was the obvious which needed analysis (Weber 1968: 1, 44). In point of fact the usual examples of polar types of closure, namely sexual relations and the market, illustrate the far from trivial point which is that pure forms are self-contradictory. If we speak of a relation based purely on sexuality then its closure to others becomes only a contingent fact and difficult to sustain over time. Open markets based in trust are not open to those we don't trust. Closure then is always relative.

The notion of closure is highly significant for our analysis because it emphasizes that we do not need to introduce non-social factors in accounting for boundaries between social units. We are then capable of making a significant simplification to our initial presuppositions. For you may have noticed in Figure 1 that boundaries are unmotivated in the original scheme, unattached to our units. They surround the units in a void, but have no properties of their own. Moreover as they stand they appear to be permeable at will, which would seem to be self-contradictory.

It is therefore very tempting at this point to introduce substantive considerations for our boundaries just as we did for our units. So physical territory, walls and frontiers arise in our imaginations. It is unnecessary to introduce the natural environment in this analysis because the boundaries inhabit the relations, and are derivatives of closure.

To show this we need to go a little further than Weber and explain the difference between reciprocity and obligation on the one hand and exchange and trust on the other. The former is the basis of closure. Reciprocity is the principle of one good turn deserves another. It establishes a temporary imbalance of service in a relation in return for the expectation of later compensation and it relies on shared knowledge of who is under these mutual obligations. You know who to turn to and they ought to help. Moreover the reciprocal obligation is never extinguished by the performance; time-lapse brings durability and ever closer union is part of the dynamic of closed relationships.

Exchange is quite different. It is based in trust, that the contents of the exchange are what they purport to be and that the other side is not trying to cheat. Exchange is intrinsically open since it does not rely on the qualities of the parties, only of what is exchanged, and it is extinguished as a relationship in the moment of exchange. Since anyone can be a party to exchange it potentially extends as far as humanity in general. The human experience, including the anthropological, is that this is understood on a worldwide basis. It does not depend on common culture, descent, or linguistic community. Wherever we go we seek to activate this potential, disappointments regardless.

Among the most important types of reciprocity is the provision of mutual aid and security in the maintenance of the boundaries of social units. Given the durable nature of reciprocity it is in the

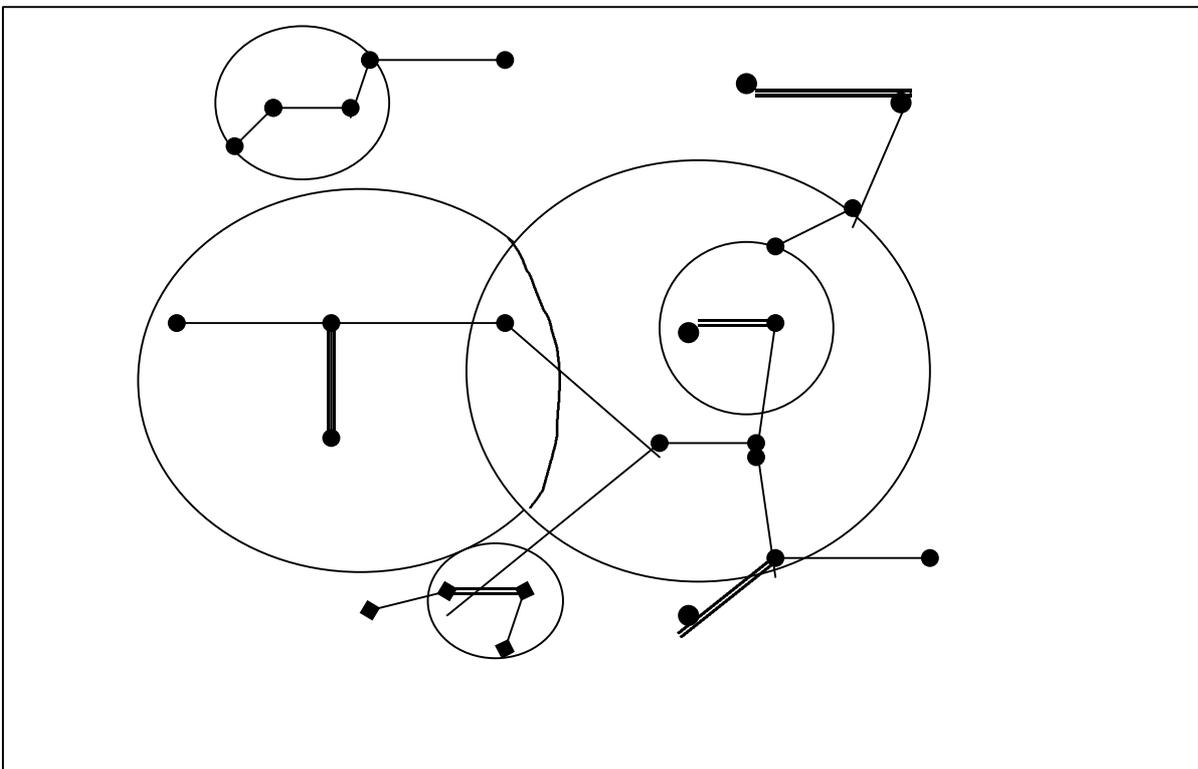
interest of each party to come to the aid of the other should the chance to render future services be threatened. Mutual security pacts are not the origins of social units but they do reinforce boundaries which have already been established and thus facilitate the maintenance of secondary units.

An important feature of mutual security pacts is that they are likely to be inversely related to exogamy and we can see why rather easily. It will be in the interests of parties to the reciprocity involved in marriage to ensure that third parties do not disrupt the new relation. The core security unit is endogamous.

In short the boundaries between social units are precisely contained in the relative exclusivity of the ties between the members. To reflect this we need to elaborate our original diagram. (Figure 2).

Exclusion and inclusion are then equally based in social relations and I think this is important to stress at a time when social exclusion is held in some way to be negative. While we may appreciate tactical reasons behind the contemporary rhetoric involved in the use of the idea of social exclusion the phenomena to which it is attached are much more properly designated expropriation and exploitation. Arguably it is precisely inclusion in British society which leads to the plight of the impoverished housing estate. Social exclusion as such is a universal feature of human society and hardly to be remedied, which brings us to the question of the social units called nations.

Figure 2 Open and closed social relations



For the moment let us call any endogamous social unit to which membership is accorded at birth and which mounts a degree of autonomous independent collective security, a people. Other names which might seem appropriate are ethnic group, or as Smith would prefer 'ethnie', or indeed nation. All of these have the advantage of not being territorially tied, which encourages us to seek the specifics of the nation state without reference to territory. Please note this 'advantage' is analytical, helping us to explore elsewhere the interplay of territoriality and social relations in the formation of nation-states.

The task at the moment is to identify the sociological specifics of the nation state without departing from the classificatory method we have adopted hitherto which is to examine simply social units and their relations. We can define state simply enough as the enforcement of a collective activity. Qualifying this by nation introduces the criterion of membership accorded at birth. But then there seems no property which distinguishes the nation state from any other people.

If we can't look to its properties for distinguishing characteristics we need then to look to the relations of the nation state to other peoples. Here three features are evident which are prominent in the discourse of the nation state, they are sovereignty, legitimacy, and recognition. These are susceptible to precise sociological rendering for they define precisely the social relations of nation-states as social units in relation to other social units. Sovereignty means there is no unit of which the nation state is a sub-unit; legitimacy that every sub-unit acknowledges the superior jurisdiction of the nation-state, and recognition that each nation-state depends on other nation states acknowledging its equality with them.

Max Weber (1968: 11, 385-98) who is well known for having stressed the importance of the nation state for modernity is not so well known for the equal stress he laid on the correspondingly confusing language of nationhood, community and ethnicity in relation to the nation-state. His comments remain the most elaborate attempt to clarify a systematic basis for a specifically sociological account of modernity, even though he was hampered by a reluctance to acknowledge the reality of social relations.

What, following on from him, we can stress is that the difficulties we have in our descriptions of relations between social units arise because of a new level of complexity introduced by the emergence of nation-states. The older world of peoples is not suppressed by the nation-state, only reordered so that new distinctions emerge. The distinction between nation and ethnic group for instance is warranted by and emerges with their differing relations to nation-states.

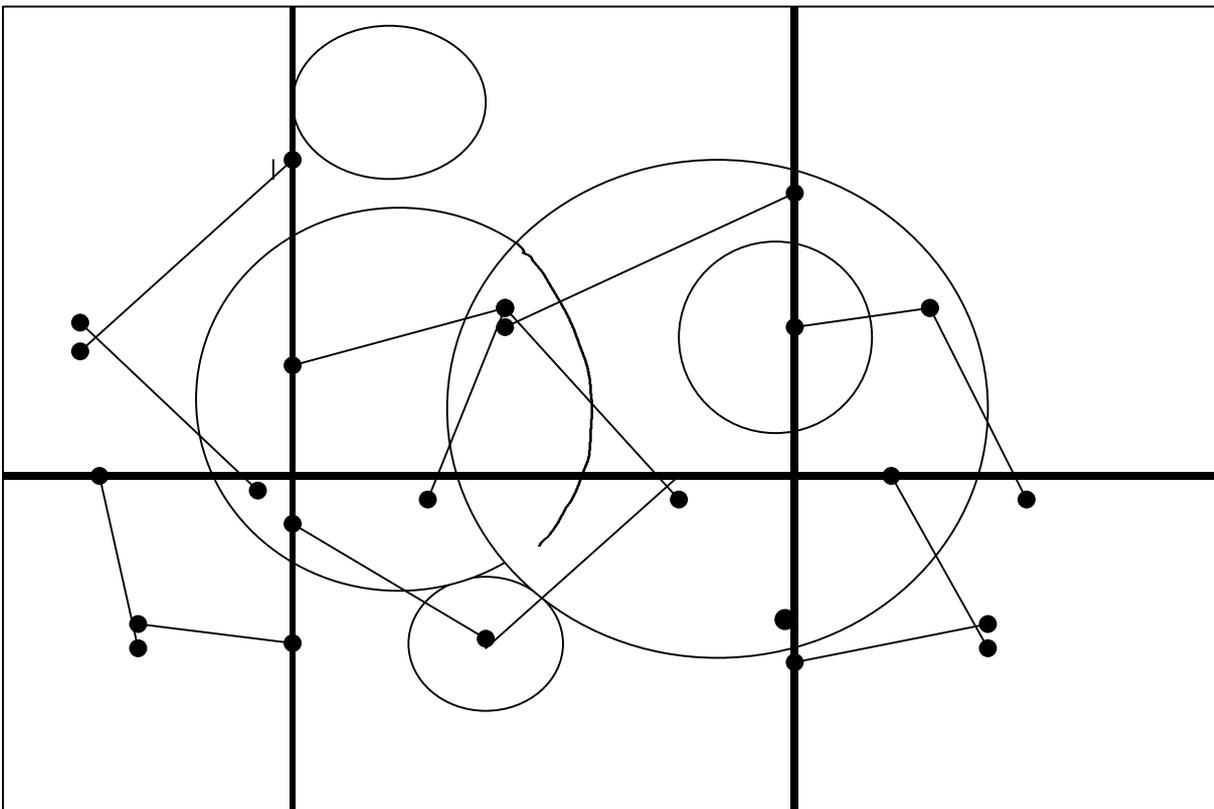
The nation is the social unit composed of people assigned to it at birth which could potentially be a nation state, whereas in the case of ethnicity we are dealing with a shared identity which in relation to the nation state is politically neutral. The Russian in Russia is citizen of a nation state; in Estonia is a Russian national, in Armenia is an ethnic Russian. The language of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity is deployed then not in relation to the properties of social units or individual people but purely as part of a relational frame, which is why, when that frame is changed, we talk of social transformation.

Clearly since the nation state is the superordinate social unit its breakdown is quite properly called a social transformation, rather than change, development. As Robin Cohen (1997: 191) points out we don't, as some have done, have to equate social transformation with the magic appearance of diaspora when the Soviet Union collapses. The relations of the earlier subordinate units are not left as they were, there is a general shift, since the particular configuration of their relations had been determined by the superordinate unit, the completely misnamed nation-state.

We are used to talking about the creation of the nation by the nation-states, meaning by that normally its self-creation, but effectively what it simultaneously creates are nations without states, which before nation-states would have been simply peoples. Only in a frame which includes nation-states are peoples divested of power and left to aspire for it as nations.

In this respect, if nations emerge contemporaneously with nation-states, the original transnational unit is the sovereign state itself, which does not have a national basis, but aspires to it and challenges other social units equally so to aspire. It sits astride the peoples who are then mobilised as nations. In other words, vis-à-vis nations, states always sit transversally unless exceptionally the nation happens to coincide with the state. The oddity on this account then is not the transnational but the international, meaning the relations between states as collective social units.

Figure 3 The Nation-State system



The diagram illustrates the complexity of the Nation-State system, showing how the relationships between states and nations are intertwined and difficult to disentangle. It highlights the challenge of determining what is cross-national to what, given the overlapping nature of these entities.

It shows further that the idea of the international derives from the assumption that the only ties between nation states are those at the level of the nation-state as a totality.

This whole argument has depended on stripping the nation-state of any other connotations than as a social unit in relations with other social units. It has divested it above all of cultural and territorial meaning, and indeed of a biological basis, birth being merely a route to membership in this analysis rather than a natural event.

But the actuality of any social unit is that it is also embedded in a set of ideal and material/natural relations. Managers and workers work for firms in factories, which are buildings, and are engaged in the production process where ideas are realised as commodities. The firm, or the laboratory, or the university or the church or the country, are complex sets of relations, simultaneously social, material and ideal which in their actuality are more than just social. Bruno Latour (1993: 10-12) calls them hybrids or networks. I will call them human collectivities, privileging the human for so long as we believe that our presence in them is intrinsic and not just incidental to their operations.

It is these collectivities which are named when we talk of America, Britain and Germany as opposed to the nation states of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany. It is these which permit us to talk of American, British and German culture, films, way of life, landscape or character, and who can doubt that in their actuality there are intimate connections between the American dream, the frontier, the Grand Canyon, Hollywood, Coca Cola, handguns, Christianity and capital and if these stride through history and dominate events of our time as 'America' how many people apart from social scientists, and then not all of them, protest that the connection, however close, is not inevitable, but contingent, dependent on historical conjunctions.

The collectivities to which we give names like these are not cities, nor firms, nor nations, though they may aspire to be nations, nor even nation-states though most governments would dearly like it to be the case. Many would call them societies, but that word is best reserved for the social unit which belongs to the collectivity's name, that is American society, which is not America, for to it we would have to add territory and culture and state at a minimum.

These collectivities are of course also transnational in several senses, they contain nations and they spread across nations. As entities in the imagination their territories become homelands which believers may never visit, as lived experience they may land anywhere in the world. They may materialise as aircraft or concerts, as software or banknotes, as clothing or food, and where a few persons, at a minimum two or three, are gathered together in their name there we find community.

The history of the nation state in the Modern Age was of an attempt to take charge of these collectivities and to harness them to state aims, in particular to dominate other states. Those in control of states sought to realise domination over others through mobilizing and controlling subject populations, through ideology, economic control, applied science and territorial expansion. What has been called the modern project had the nation-state as its agency seeking

control over its own national collectivity, and all its component collectivities and associated social units. Effectively it sought then to define the transnational as the deviant, even the subversive case, rather than the normal. The modern project's aim was to create the gapless jigsaw of the world map, which permitted nothing to reside outside nor to cross national territory.

Arnold Toynbee argued that every civilization sought to create a whole world in its own image and that was its thrust and dynamic. But what happens when it succeeds? His civilizations in his terms had all failed without achieving that end. In the case of the West what already loomed for him was the possible penalty of success. This is the theme of my book The Global Age where I argue that the Modern Project has effectively ground to a halt because it has confronted globality in all its forms.

## VIII

It is impossible in the contemporary context to analyse the concept of transnationalism without examining globalization but the previous account should make it clear that there is no intrinsic connection between them. The transnational exists in the context of relations across national units, whether in the shape of nation-states or not. We can therefore treat the encounter between globalization and transnationalism as a contingent historical event and not in the nature or meaning of either. This means that research into their relations can go on in many different ways without waiting for a codification of a conceptual frame common to them both - which is fortunate because if we waited for consensus on that before we undertook our ethnographies, case-studies and surveys we would not be doing a Transnational Communities research programme.

But we should not take the other solution and defer the conceptual work indefinitely, nor wait upon the outcome of our empirical work before we start theorising. After all while there is no conceptual reason to associate the transnational and the global it is the case that globalization has awoken the nation-state's interest in transnationalism and even led it to treat it as a new phenomenon.

Conceptually the discussion of globalization is not further advanced than that of transnationalism. Both areas are still largely inchoate. As is well known the simplest, even simple-minded, but therefore ideologically most powerful association of the two is the case of economic globalization. At bottom this may amount to no more than appreciating that trade crosses boundaries, which may be reinforced by acknowledging the presence of Karl Marx, less often Adam Smith. But both Marxists and neo-liberals are happy enough to regard the expansion of world-trade as globalization. It reaffirms a collusive world-view, shared by old Lefts and old Rights.

However it is not in economics that globalization has made advances as a concept. In spite of the efforts of the OECD to promote the idea it appears to inhabit nothing other than the residual area of institutions for economists and does not penetrate the higher reaches of theory. This of course is ample excuse for those who refuse to accept the primacy of economic determination to view globalization as a political or cultural process or even more broadly as social transformation.

In practice much of the analysis of cultural globalization in particular has concentrated on communication across boundaries and time-place compression, third cultures and hybridity. These concepts are all equally part of a multi-cultural discourse which can be located within a conceptual frame for transnational studies without allusion to globalization at all. In other words there is no more reason to employ globalization as a concept here than there is in the discussion of free trade.

My argument in The Global Age is that the very salience of the idea of globalization in the contemporary world is not the outcome of the emergence of transnational relations but a consequence of the termination of the modern project as it confronts the reality of the limits of the globe and on the further expansion of the nation-state system. These are the immanent but unrecognised limits to the Modern Project itself, the consequences of which were never appreciated since the modern depended on a dynamic of unceasing expansion. In other words the confrontation both in scholarship and in ideology which globalization promotes is not between the transnational and the global but between the global and the modern.

The circuit then through which the global surges runs through all collectivities which are organised around the idea of claiming a relation with the world as a whole, from national collectivities down to small firms and individuals and then back again. If we think of this as it affects relations between social units then every level of organization is affected, not just the national, and if this is the case then globalization involves not so much a question of an extension or restriction of transnational relations, but a change in the nature of social relations in general at all levels and in particular in the position of the nation-state. The question of how far we can verify this or subject this to empirical test is a major question for social and cultural scientists today. It is the kind of change which for which the term 'epochal' seems appropriate to me. In the case of transnational studies it raises the question of the persistence and salience of nations as such.

## IX

My main concern in this paper has been to highlight the issues involved in defining conceptual frames relevant to transnational studies over periods of profound historical change, in the present as well as the past. It may help at the end briefly to identify the pivots around which the analysis has revolved. They are at least:

1. The distinction between the real (effective) and the actual (phenomenological)
2. The primary social unit of analysis as the couple
3. The multiplicity of relations between human beings
4. The unlimited human potential for the formation of secondary social units through multiplying relations.
5. 'Trans-', 'inter-' and 'intra-' as logical relations
6. The equal priority of closure (exclusion) and openness (inclusion) in the formation of social units
7. Transformation as an issue in the re-ordering of the super- and subordination of social units
8. The dependence of social units on reproduction
9. The independent realities of the social, the ideal and the material

10. The actuality of collectivities as distinct from the reality of social units
11. The lodging of collectivities in narrative and discourse
12. National collectivities as the characters in historical narrative
13. The contingent and specific character of the discourse of the modern nation state
14. The dependence of the contemporary problematic of the transnational on the trajectory of the nation-state

There are certainly more, even in the above account. Complete enumeration is in principle impossible. Their relations are complex, but they don't stand or fall together. Since any one of these pivots for analysis is contestable, not to speak of any suppressed or neglected premises, it is obvious that conceptual work of this kind is bound to be long, arduous, often without obvious immediate returns. We would need however better excuses than those for its neglect.

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