

TRANSNATIONALISM

Steven Vertovec

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

7

CONCLUSION

INTERCONNECTED MIGRANTS IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD

Although not the most rigorous mode of social scientific investigation, observing what happens around sport can be a good way to gauge certain views, understandings and trends in society. A nice example, when they won the 1998 World Cup and ever since, is the French national football team. Comprising players from (or sons of immigrants from) Guadeloupe, Algeria, Senegal, the Congo, French Guiana and elsewhere, the team has been widely considered as an exemplar of contemporary, culturally diverse French society (see for instance J.W. Anderson 2006). During the 2008 European Championships, players on many national football teams were born elsewhere – making the phenomenon now a rather matter-of-fact occurrence reflecting ‘a continent shaped by migration’ and hailed as ‘European cosmopolitanism on display’ (Hawley 2008a). Transformative examples of transnationalism were on display, too. For example, many Germans empathized with Lukas Podolski, a Polish-born player on the German team who scored two goals to beat Poland: afterwards, Podolski spoke of his ‘torn heart’ and reluctance to celebrate victory over a country to which he still feels closely connected. German-Turks also struggled with such a ‘Podolski feeling’ when Turkey

faced Germany in the semi-finals (Zaimoglu 2008). Prior to the match, in Turkish neighbourhoods like Kreuzberg in Berlin,

alongside the Turkish flag in many of the windows and on many of the cars, a German one is also flying. ... many loyalties in Kreuzberg and other Turkish communities across Germany are genuinely split. Now, it seems almost as though Kreuzberg at least would like to use this game to put to rest integration concerns. "This game is the best of both worlds!" yells vegetable seller Riza Isler, who was born in Turkey but who has lived in Germany most of his life. "No matter who wins, I will have a team to support in the finals!"

(Hawley 2008b)

Perhaps most notably, even populist tabloid newspapers in Germany tended to respect the divided sympathies of Podolski and the German-Turks.

This development marks a departure from earlier attitudes toward divided sentiments, national sport and attitudes toward migrants and ethnic minorities. In 1990 the senior Conservative Party politician Norman Tebbit famously proposed the 'cricket test'. The loyalty and belonging of immigrants and their descendants could be judged, Tebbit suggested, according to which side they cheer for during international cricket matches (e.g. the West Indies versus England or Pakistan versus England). Sixteen years later, British writer Darcus Howe (2006) observed how, as opposed to when he migrated from Trinidad a generation ago, migrants today benefit from the revolution in communication, placing them

in immediate contact with the countries from which we came. A phone card costs £3, and for that price we can speak to the West Indies, Ghana, Pakistan and India for 50 minutes. The internet binds us in a way that was not possible in the past. No longer can we be shaken by allegations condemning our loyalties to those sporting teams which originate from our past.

Therefore, Howe concluded, 'Tebbit's test did not survive the passage of time and is now truly dead'.

Across Britain there is now, arguably, greater acknowledgement – tolerance? – of minorities' transnational connections as exemplified through sports. In fact – and most clearly overturning the 'cricket test'

perspective – multiple sporting loyalty was portrayed as a significant British strength within the successful London bid to host the 2012 Olympics: the campaign's official website proclaimed that '[i]n 2012, our multicultural diversity will mean every competing nation in the Games will find local supporters as enthusiastic as back home' (www.london2012.org).

Such observations do not amount to profound social analysis, but they do provide a window onto everyday manifestations of change. Of course these instances do not suggest the end of racism or xenophobia, either, but point at least to a growing and ever-more routinized recognition of people's multiple attachments. They seem to demonstrate that migration-driven diversity and ongoing transnational ties are, for a broad span of the non-migrant population, now coming to be regarded as unsurprising or nothing special, commonplace and unquestioned – in many contexts, expected. They are contemporary facts gradually more known and accepted by many, though still – to be sure – raising deep concerns for some (not least nationalists and politicians on the right). Growing multi-dimensional diversity, increasing social complexity and migrant transnationalism are being broadly acknowledged as ordinary, or at least unavoidable, facets of contemporary, globalized society. This ordinariness attests to a considerable transformation, as described in Chapter 1: that is, a set of incremental, mutually conditioning changes leading to something far-reaching on both macro and micro scales.

It has particularly been increased mobility, combined with the various forms of globalization-as-interconnectedness, that has led to the significant societal transformations described in this book. Such transformations are just as consequential in the developing 'South' as in the developed 'North', in 'the West' and in 'the East'. As Peter Koehn and James Rosenau (2002: 132) put it, 'the mobility upheaval has brought about the worldwide distribution of transnationally proficient migrants'. Politicians and policy-makers have certainly realized the global growth of migration and the enhanced abilities of migrants to maintain transnational connections (see IOM 2005). In his 2006 Report to the General Assembly, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan emphasized the importance of recognizing how migrants can 'maintain transnational lives' (UN 2006: 5). He pointed out that,

No longer do those who emigrate separate themselves as thoroughly as they once did from the families and communities they leave behind. ...

Owing to the communications and transportation revolution, today's international migrants are, more than ever before, a dynamic human link between cultures, economies and societies. Penny-a-minute phone cards keep migrants in close touch with family and friends at home, and just a few seconds are needed for the global financial system to transmit their earnings to remote corners of the developing world, where they buy food, clothing, shelter, pay for education or health care, and can relieve debt. The Internet and satellite technology allow a constant exchange of news and information between migrants and their home countries. Affordable airfares permit more frequent trips home, easing the way for a more fluid back-and-forth pattern of mobility.

(ibid.: 6, 7)

Annan's comments underscore the growing recognition of the ways in which patterns of contemporary international migration, impacts on migrant origin and destination contexts, and experiences of migrants themselves are inherently interwoven with other processes of increasing global interconnectedness.

The Report of the Global Commission on International Migration, which Kofi Annan established in 2003, was entitled *Migration in an Interconnected World* (GCIM 2005). The Commission made a strong call to comprehend current migration dynamics against the backdrop of processes of globalization through which societies and economies are increasingly integrated and interdependent, particularly through new technologies enabling the rapid transfer of information, capital, goods and services. It stressed how migration and its emergent practices of transnationalism are both fostered by and contribute to such processes. Such an understanding of migrant transnationalism has in fact come to the fore not only in social scientific approaches to migration but also among a range of national and international policymakers, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Not only has transnationalism wrought transformations in practices, public understanding and policy development, but the nature of migration itself has been transformed in many if not most contexts. This has been particularly through processes in which migrants make use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Drawing on the work of Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) concerning ICTs, information flows and the networked society, Adela Ros and her colleagues (2007: 6) underline the point that '[c]ontemporary international migration is embedded in the dynamics of the information society, following

common patterns and interconnected dynamics. Without the existence of the information society, contemporary migration patterns would look totally different.' Further, they suggest that

current international migration is the inevitable result of the interconnection processes generated by the communication and information flows. Information and communication networks are stimulating and bringing about changes in the trends and meanings of the movement of people around the world. Without the intensity of the interconnections it is difficult to imagine migratory movements like the current ones, in terms of both the countries of origin and host countries.

(ibid.: 7–8)

Throughout this book such uses and their effects have been highlighted, particularly the role of cheap phone calls and their fundamental part in maintaining social networks (especially families). ICTs are also instrumental within other key migrant transnational formations too, such as political parties and movements, homeland outreach programmes and policies, diasporic marketing and business practices, remittance activities and hometown associations. Here, clearly, an interconnected world has enabled migrants themselves to better connect for a variety of purposes. Subsequently, such gradual manifestations produce knock-on effects, usually entailing further changes within or across social, cultural, economic, political and religious domains.

Overall, the connection between migrant transnational practices and modes of transformation suggested in this book reflect the progression of changes suggested by Alejandro Portes (2001a: 191):

Once migrant colonies become well established abroad, a flow of *transnational* economic and informational resources starts, ranging from occasional remittances to the emergence of a class of full-time transnational entrepreneurs. The cumulative effects of these dynamics come to the attention of national governments who reorient their *international* activities through embassies, consulates, and missions to recapture the loyalty of their expatriates and guide their investments and political mobilizations. The increased volume of demand created by migrant remittances and investments in their home countries support, in turn, the further expansion of the market for multinationals and encourage local firms to go abroad themselves, establishing branches in areas of immigrant concentration. [emphasis in original]

Each set of changes entails small-scale and everyday practices of individuals and groups. Incrementally and cumulatively, these practices may generate far-reaching modes of transformation affecting migrants, their families and communities in places of origin, wider populations surrounding transnational networks, and entire societies permeated by migrant transnationalism.

Many forms of migrant transnationalism and their related modes of transformation are likely to widen, intensify and accelerate. The governments of migrant-sending and -receiving states will continue to address a range of migrant transnational practices with greater attention and policy intervention. Technological changes (especially the building and extension of ICT infrastructures in developing countries) will make it ever easier and cheaper to communicate and exchange resources, including remittances, across borders and at long-distance. Hometown associations and other such diasporic organizations have become institutionalized to a degree that they will likely be sustained, and probably enhanced, at least over the next several years. Individuals within post-migration second and subsequent generations will probably not maintain the everyday orientations and practices of their migrant forebears, but such parental orientations and practices are apt to have an enduring impression on the next generation's identities, interests and socio-cultural activities.

As is evident in the massive literature on globalization, an array of global transformations are currently underway due to a confluence of contemporary social, political, economic and technological processes. Migrant transnational practices are stimulated and fostered by many of these globalization processes. In turn, such transnational migrant practices accumulate to augment and perhaps amplify such transformational processes themselves.

In Chapter 1 it was pointed out that, just like globalization, transnationalism's constituent processes and outcomes are multiple and messy. This variegation will no doubt persist, even intensify. Transnational practices are enabled, limited and coloured by all kinds of disparities in power and resources. Across various groups and even within the same diaspora, there are haves and have-nots, the transnationally well-connected and less-connected. Often disconnection is due to illiteracy or poverty; simply the lack of a mobile phone can represent a major form of transnational exclusion (Ros *et al.* 2007). Uneven trends are likely to continue to characterize migrant transnationalism as migration and 'integration' patterns themselves develop, as technological changes take place, as government

policies arise and take effect, and as world events occur and send ripples through public perceptions and political economies. The variables are too many to predict future transnational trends, except to say that their everyday, normative nature will continue to manifest and become institutionalized.

One profound unknowable will be whether some, or many, nation-states will be sites for anti-globalization/anti-transnationalism backlash. Alongside debates around economic protectionism, this is already witnessed in limited ways through calls to tighten borders, limit citizenship, unravel multiculturalism and enforce migrants' assimilation. As suggested above, broad patterns of transformation entailing the gradual acknowledgement of increasing diversity, complexity and multiple attachments are already underway, and perhaps the forms of backlash are but last gasps of a bygone model of the nation-state. 'Events' – not least including major terrorist activity or worldwide economic crisis – might take place so as to turn limited instances of backlash into dominant approaches to world and country. Yet without such rash incidents, the direction of transformation seems to point toward maintained growth in mobility, socio-cultural diversification and global interconnectedness.

Migration and transnational practices certainly bring many kinds of diversity to migrant-receiving societies; in turn, they carry 'social remittances' and other reverse-cultural flows – of ideas, values and tastes, practices and material culture – back to the migrants' societies of origin. Since most transnational connections are actually translocal, or linking specific sites with specific sites – in the short run this often means a transnational maintenance of local cultural forms. However, as migrants adapt to their new settings and take up new habits, preferences, and orientations, as they inevitably do, we may witness the continued emergence or indeed domination of syncretic, 'lowest common denominator' cultural forms and values spanning communities 'at home' and 'abroad' (as already exist, for instance, between the USA and Dominican Republic, France and the Congo, England and Pakistan). Such forms may threaten global cultural diversity not by cultural homogenization – as many have feared with reference to globalization – but through a kind of cultural siphoning through which only those forms and values viable on both ends of the transnational connection remain.

Although such siphoning may be one further mode of transformation stimulated by transnationalism, it will almost certainly represent just one

possible trajectory. At the end of Chapter 6, five possible trajectories for specific religious traditions and groups were outlined: namely, remaining intact, homogenization, ecumenism, universalism and cosmopolitanism. These will likely also parallel the possible options or processes surrounding the cultural practices and identities of migrant transnational communities. It is noted in Chapter 3 that cosmopolitanism, represented by individuals' multiple cultural competences, seems to provide one of the most advantageous outcomes in terms of migrants' ability to position themselves in 'home' and 'host' contexts and 'participate effectively in activities that cut across two or more national boundaries' (Koehn and Rosenau 2002: 114).

A more cosmopolitan future is one possible outcome of the current global transformations described in this book. At present this seems a future toward which numerous processes of global interconnection – spearheaded, in many ways, by migrant transnational practices – are moving. However (as Chou En-Lai famously said of whether the French Revolution had had transformative effects), it is certainly 'too early to tell'.