"We are all Transnationals now": The Relevance of Transnationality for Understanding Social Inequalities

Faist, Thomas

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

Thomas Faist*

“We are all Transnationals now”:

The Relevance of Transnationality for Understanding Social Inequalities

COMCAD Arbeitspapiere - Working Papers
General Editor: Thomas Faist
No. 122, 2014

* Faculty of Sociology
Comments welcome to: Thomas. Faist@uni-bielefeld.de

CENTER ON MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

2014

Faist, Thomas: "We are all Transnationals now": The Relevance of Transnationality for Understanding Social Inequalities, Bielefeld: COMCAD, 2014

General Editor: Thomas Faist; Working Papers – Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development; 122)

University of Bielefeld
Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD)
Postfach 100131
D-33501 Bielefeld
Homepage: http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/tdrc/ag_comcad/

Abstract

This analysis departs from discussions on inequalities and cross-border mobility in the discussions on globalization and cosmopolitanism. One position argues that the most important factor determining the position in the hierarchies of inequality nowadays is opportunities for cross-border interaction and mobility. Those who take the counter-position hold that patterns of inequality in general and career patterns in labour markets in particular still tend to be organized mainly nationally or locally and not globally. In contrast to these two positions, the argument here is that cross-border transactions need to be captured more clearly, going beyond the global-local binary in the debate. One may usefully start from the concept of transnationality, that is, the continuum of ties individuals, groups, or organizations entertain across the borders of nation-states, ranging from thin to dense. This study addresses the question whether transnational ties are strategies of migrants to improve their social position and those of significant others in the countries of origin or other countries of settlement, or whether transnational ties constitute a social mobility trap.

Keywords: social inequality, migration, mobility, transnationality, globalization

"We are all Transnationals now": The Relevance of Transnationality for Understanding Social Inequalities

1. From Global vs. National to Transnational

A spate of recent scholarship in globalization studies has made far-reaching claims regarding the importance of cross-border interactions for social positioning and thus for social inequalities. In the words of Ulrich Beck, '[…] the most important factor determining the position in the hierarchies of inequality of the global age […] is opportunities for cross-border interaction and mobility' (Beck 2008: 21). In many cases, the global is even juxtaposed with the national and the local; and the latter two are often used interchangeably. The local/national then denotes an unfavourable position in a system of inequalities in that '[…] local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation' (Bauman 1998: 2f.). The global-local binary is thus used to attribute life chances and social positions on different scales, connected to the claim that this is a relatively new development brought about in the course of globalization over the past few decades. Here, social inequalities refer to the disparities of opportunity to wield resources, status, and power, all of which emerge from regular and differentiated distribution and access to scarce yet desirable resources via power differentials (Tilly 1998).

However, empirical research on this and related phenomena finds that patterns of inequality in general and career patterns in labour markets in particular still tend to be organized mainly nationally or locally and not globally (Goldthorpe 2002). For example, years of research on top managers of multinational companies in France, the UK, Germany, and the US suggest that even the positions at the highest decision-making echelons are still organized mainly nationally, that is, following nationally-bound career paths. Education and training were normally carried out in the country of the company's headquarters (Hartmann 2007). In light of this finding, the claim of the existence and importance of coherent cross-border social positions seems to be premature. Empirical research on educational and occupational careers has not supported the identification of any relatively cohesive social positionings that extend beyond borders. By implication, moreover, the very geographical mobility of certain catego-

ries of "global elite," such as highly mobile professionals and managers, may even limit their opportunities for developing the consciousness of a transnational class.[1]

While this latter stream of research is highly critical of claims advanced about the importance of cross-border interaction and mobility, this does not suggest that transnational spill-overs are to be dismissed. Instead, those cross-border transactions need to be captured more clearly, going beyond the global-local binary in the debate. Moreover, we need to cast the net wider and go beyond a small albeit influential managerial elite. It should also be noted that the very fact that a transnational class may be in the making does not mean that national or local affiliations and ways of living and production are becoming obsolete (Carroll 2010: 1). In any case, there are three arguments indicating that the global-local binary does not suffice to capture the importance of cross-border transactions, processes, and structures for generating and reproducing social inequalities. First, the fact that social mobility patterns are (still) organized mainly along national lines does not imply that cross-border interactions do not play a role. It may mean that social groups, such as networks of businesspersons or natural scientists working in laboratories, linked across borders may indeed cooperate transnationally but that these transactions have not concatenated and evolved into a common group or even class consciousness. Second, by implication, there may be clusters of social positions that do not correspond to the idea of class. Strikingly, the literature on social stratification and inequalities often has no connection with the literature on cross-border social formations, such as diasporas, transnational communities, or epistemic communities, or migrant and migration networks. Differences or heterogeneities between individual or collective actors which are relevant for social inequalities may run along lines other than class, for instance, ethnicity, gender, religion, or legal status. Third, and most important, the literature making claims about the importance of the global and the local frequently lacks an analysis of actual cross-border transactions of persons, groups, and organizations. For example, it is rare that factors such as years of education, training spent abroad, or social contacts across borders are included in standard analyzes of social structure and social inequalities.

While the literature on cross-border social structures, the transnational (capitalist) class, and the various criticisms thereof lack a sophisticated understanding of cross-border ties, the

[1] In terms of collective agents and the potential for collective action, there have even been claims for the existence of a "transnational class" (Sklair 2001). This concept implies that a dominant group of capital owners, professionals, and managers has emerged which transcends the borders of national states, has begun to develop a consciousness of its own, and is controlling political and economic processes across the borders of states on a world scale.

transnational perspective – sometimes erroneously called "transnationalism," as if it were an ideology – suffers from an overly simplistic understanding of social inequalities. The transnational literature is quite limited in this respect because it often conflates transnationality as a marker of difference or heterogeneity with the outcome. For instance, transnational ties are portrayed as "globalization from below," that is, migrants and their significant others eking out a living in a globalized economy through mobility strategies (Rees 2009). Thus researchers devoted to a transnational optic sometimes tout cross-border ties as a resource in itself. This constitutes an unwarranted short circuit because transnationality can have quite diverse outcomes: in certain circumstances, transnational transactions could be a conduit for the transfer of much needed positive resources for people in immigration and emigration countries – for example, financial remittances. For migrants in immigration countries, these may be used to obtain legal documents, or for those left behind in emigration countries, tuition to pay for children's schooling. In situations of international migration, however, financial remittances may also serve to establish new dependencies and exacerbate existing social inequalities between and within countries (Guarnizo 2003). Remittance-dependent economies might avoid much needed structural reforms as money transfers from abroad create space for the inaction of governments which should otherwise be responsible for balancing current account deficits.

The key difference or heterogeneity here is transnationality, namely, whether or not, and if so to what extent, individual and/or collective agents are characterized by cross-border transactions. This concept can provide a starting point into how such cross-border ties work and into the different kinds of transactions across borders, such as education abroad, professional experience abroad, or interlocking directorates in business companies. In short, the term "transnational" has to be disaggregated into various types of activities (financial, political, social, and cultural) and clearly defined in order to be of use for inquiry into its relevance for social inequalities. Transnationality is thus context-dependent and is not to be connoted with positive or negative meanings *a priori*. The concept of transnationality suggests that – in addition to the better known and analyzed heterogeneities such as age, gender, social class, ethnicity, legal status, sexual orientation – the very fact of being involved in cross-border transactions of some kind may be of relevance as one of the analytical starting or vantage points for the production of social inequalities. Transnationality as a term is used here from the observing social scientist's perspective capturing cross-border transactions of agents, be they persons, groups, or organizations.

The intention of this analysis is mainly conceptual and typological, with the empirical material serving the purpose of illustrating the conceptual suggestions made here. The first section of

this sketch explores key terms such as mobility and, above all, transnationality. The second section discusses in more detail how to conceptualize the relationship between heterogeneities and inequalities. The combination of transnationality with varieties of social, economic, and cultural capital as proxies for unequal social positions helps to determine the social position of persons with respect to life-chances and thus inequalities. This effort results in a preliminary typology of social positions in cross-border spaces. The third section discusses a crucial research frontier arising from the issue of simultaneity. The evaluation of inequality in a transnational social space poses the particular problem of which frame of reference is chosen by the researcher and the persons researched – (inter)national, global, or another one altogether.

2. Mobility and Transnationality

The term transnational refers to cross-border processes, which sometimes involve spatial mobility of persons and transcend national states and their regulations in some respects, while having to deal with them in others. More specifically, here “transnational means" (a) trans-local, that is, connecting localities across borders of states and, by implication, also (b) trans-state, that is, across the borders of nominally sovereign states. Thus transnational does not mean *trans-national*, that is, across nations as ethnic collectives, since trans-national in this sense would theoretically also apply to relations between nations within one state. In contrast, the term *global* refers to truly world-spanning social processes and horizons within the framework of a single world, or specific subsystems thereof, such as the global economy.

Transnationality constitutes a marker of difference, referred to here as heterogeneity. Taking transnationality into account is important because mobility research in general and migration research in particular often focuses primarily on ethnicity as a boundary line. Heterogeneities (Blau 1977: 77), such as transnationality, are at the very origin of the process of the creation of inequalities themselves. Inequalities here refer to categorizations of heterogeneities which lead to regularly unequal access to resources, status (recognition of roles associated with heterogeneities), and power (decision-making, agenda setting, and the shaping of belief systems). Although heterogeneities are not devoid of inequality, it is helpful to distinguish analytically between the two concepts. As such, transnationality signals difference. And difference or heterogeneity is not the same as inequality. Think of peasant communities between which there are not necessarily great differences of wealth (Chase 1980), but inequalities may arise if repeated transactions across the boundaries of categories of persons regularly result in advantages for one side. By implication, difference or heterogeneity only results in inequali-

ties if such transactions reproduce a rather stable and enduring boundary between categories. Hence, the term "categorical inequality" (Massey 2007) is appropriate, meaning that processes of binary categorizations, such as migrant[2]-non-migrant, black-white, men-women, young-old, etc., are involved which yield benefits systematically to those on one side of the boundary.[3] Ultimately, the transnationality-inequalities nexus needs to be captured as multiple and recurrent feedback loops.

In approaching the issue of transnationality and social inequalities – namely, categorizations of heterogeneities involving transnationality which are stable and regular over a certain period of time – it is useful to start with categorizations found in public debates and in the academic literature. A common one in mass media and even academic analyzes is the dichotomous distinction between highly skilled mobile persons and professionals from a particular country moving abroad on the one hand, and labour migrants and irregular migrants on the other. While the latter are frequently considered migrants in OECD countries and are responded to in terms of social problems, the former are not labelled as such and are frequently cast in terms of economic competitiveness (Faist and Ulbricht 2013). The highly skilled are considered to be in a "win-win-win" situation which benefits migrants, emigration, and immigration states alike by increasing wealth and efficiency (GCIM 2005). Labour migrants who practise transnationality, however, are often thought to be involved in social, residential, and occupational segregation, a form of ethnic self-isolation. In their case, transnationality is thought to be synonymous with deficits in language, education, and employment. In other words, with respect to those perceived as migrants transnationality is seen as a mobility trap (Wiley 1967). What is striking in such accounts is that they focus in a dichotomous way on the "elite" and the "marginalized." At the very least, they exclude the "middle" social positions in between (Smith 2000).

The central conceptual proposition here is that transnationality is a particularly important heterogeneity with respect to cross-border transactions and their consequences for inequalities. To situate transnationality, it is useful to begin by distinguishing between general processes of cross-border transactions (transnationalization), cross-border structures spanning the bor-

[2] There is no universally agreed-upon definition of the term migrant. Often, the term connotes persons who stay abroad for more than one year, an understanding which is in line with the UN definition (UN 1998: 18). Yet there are other forms of mobility, for example, international students, seasonal workers, posted or seconded workers, or expatriates – some of which involve periods abroad of less than a year. Here, both the concepts of "migrant" and "mobile person" are used.

[3] The processes by which categorical inequalities are produced are beyond the scope of this analysis and involve a social mechanism based account.

ders of several national states (transnational social spaces), and the extent of cross-border transactions of agents (transnationality).[4] Transnational social spaces comprise combinations of ties and their substance, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations located in two or more states. The ties and positions in transnational spaces must thereby be understood not as static, but as dynamic processes. Depending on the degree of formalization of transnational ties, three ideal-type forms of transnational spaces can be distinguished. These are: reciprocity in transnational kinship groups, exchange in transnational circuits, and solidarity in transnational communities (Faist 2000: 199 ff.).

With respect to transnationality, three characteristics must be noted: (1) Though it often refers to geographical mobility, this is not a sufficient condition for transnationality. (2) It lies on a continuum from low to dense. (3) It includes various dimensions, such as personal relations, financial transactions, identification, and socio-cultural practices.

(1) *Spatial Mobility*

Any sustained analysis of transnationality has to deal with mobility, which is a strategically important subject of research with regard to social inequalities.[5] We need to be aware that cross-border ties are not restricted to physically mobile agents, that is, only to migrants/mobile persons and their often relatively immobile significant others, mostly families. We may also encounter, more generally, geographically immobile persons who engage in cross-border transactions (Mau 2010). And for (relatively) immobile persons it may make a crucial difference whether or not they have ties with geographically mobile persons who have migrated either inside the state or across borders – for example, for remittances but also for knowledge of migration opportunities.

In addition, social and geographical mobility are intrinsically connected in that the latter is often a means to advance the former. It is evident that geographical mobility, frequently but not exclusively across borders, is a form of addressing social inequalities. In a way, migration is 'the oldest action against poverty' (Galbraith 1979: 64). It is thus possible to distinguish between those who seize opportunities such as geographical mobility across the borders of

[4] For a detailed discussion of the concepts transnationalization and transnational social spaces, see Faist et al. (2013), Chapter 1.

[5] Ideally, geographical mobility implies two extensions beyond the conventional migration literature. We need to enlarge the scope from migrants to geographically mobile persons, including immobility–mobility as a continuum. Thus, this continuum includes settled migrants on the one end, and short-term visitors and tourists on the other. Here, geographical mobility will be restricted to migration.

states to improve their social position, and those who stay put and relatively immobile. Thus sedentary persons are also implicated. We often find mobile and immobile persons in one and the same group. Take families as an example. Sometimes a single family member engages in short- or long-distance migration, internally or cross-border, while the others remain in the place of origin. The migrant may or may not be joined later by other members of the family, relatives, friends, or acquaintances. Whether a person within such a group is engaging in migration or is relatively immobile usually has significant implications for his or her social position within the family. Migration may entail changes in the household division of labour, control over material resources, and availability of social and emotional support. Moreover, while mobility usually brings additional resources, it also incurs costs for the kinship group in that the migrant no longer fulfils certain roles, for example, in situ child rearing or caring for elderly relatives. In a nutshell, mobility is implicated in the creation of both benefits and costs which are unequally distributed in the respective collectives.

It is then important to know whether geographical mobility is generally a step toward upward social mobility. While many migration studies answer this question affirmatively (Goldin et al. 2011), this is by no means a foregone conclusion when we take into account that quite a few international migrants return "home" over the course of time or engage in onward migration. While mobility such as return migration may be an expression of goals achieved, it could also be a consequence of failing to fulfil the dream of better life chances. A similar consideration would apply to mobile persons who remain in the country of immigration. Settlement does not necessarily mean successful realization of better life chances but could also be an expression of lack of alternatives and thus a step toward socio-economic, cultural, and political marginalization.

Another question is how exactly geographical mobility across borders relates to paths of mobility that do not involve crossing borders. An obvious case in point is mobility internal to states, in which the numbers of people involved are far greater than the absolute number of international migrants. For example, it is often noted that the number of internal migrants in China alone is higher than the global figure for international migrants. Other, non-geographical forms of mobility could include social mobility through social and political struggles, for example, groups pushing for a political redistribution of resources. Here, we enter the terrain of social movements. Historically, the labour movement has been instrumental in changing the very institutions of the state. Reciprocal or solidary relations could lead migrants to engage in cross-border practices, for example, by remitting money or changing political practices.

Yet geographical or spatial mobility is not a necessary prerequisite for engaging in transnational transactions although the two are often associated. For example, exchanging professional information across borders does not necessitate spatial mobility. Therefore, the net needs to be cast wider, a task for which the concept of transnationality is suited.

(2) *Transnationality as a continuum*

Transnationality can usefully be conceived of not as a dichotomous characteristic but as a variable that ranges from low to dense. To use an interval scale is to escape from the dichotomizing use of transnational vs. national and to systematically map transnationality for diverse groups.

(3) *Transnationality as domain-specific*

Depending on the questions asked, various dimensions need to be considered to capture transnationality; these may include items such as cross-border financial exchanges, personal relationships, transnational identification and cultural practice in domains such as politics, labour market, health, or education. In most of the studies conducted so far, transnationality has not been sufficiently disaggregated to take account of the fact that the realms of labour, education, politics, religion etc. work according to their own logic and may involve very different kinds of transnationality. What is more, persons may be transnational to varying degrees in each of these domains.

In sum, we need to specify what needs to be operationalized and measured in order to chart inequalities across borders. The heuristic value of the concept of transnationality is that it takes seriously the insight that we need to operationalize cross-border transactions systematically instead of adding potential implications for inequalities to some distant *deus ex machina* called globalization.

3. A Transnational Perspective on Heterogeneities and Inequalities

A transnational perspective on cross-border inequalities does not necessarily take a fixed unit of reference as a starting point but looks at a number of different ones, that is, taking into account various scales, depending on the question to be answered (Faist and Nergiz 2012, Faist 2012). This perspective is distinct from national, international, and global approaches.

First, the national perspective is primarily concerned with inequalities between citizens or between citizens and non-citizens (the latter often migrants) within a single state and, by im-

plication, with comparisons between national states, as in comparative cultural, economic, and political analysis. Given that inequality is most often discussed in public spheres which are predominantly nationally bounded and that inequality is relative in that the standard of comparison is by individual in a particular socio-political community (and not those in faraway countries), it is – at first sight – not surprising that most work is done on this scale.

Second, there is an international perspective that examines inequalities between states, for example, comparing median per capita income between different states or using other, more sophisticated sets of indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI) which looks at income, child mortality, and education. There are various forms of international comparisons, including some that take into account population size and some that do not. International comparisons figure prominently in all debates taking place in international organizations in the United Nations system and are used by organizations such as the World Bank or the United Nations Development Program to measure disparities between countries and world regions (UNDP 2005).

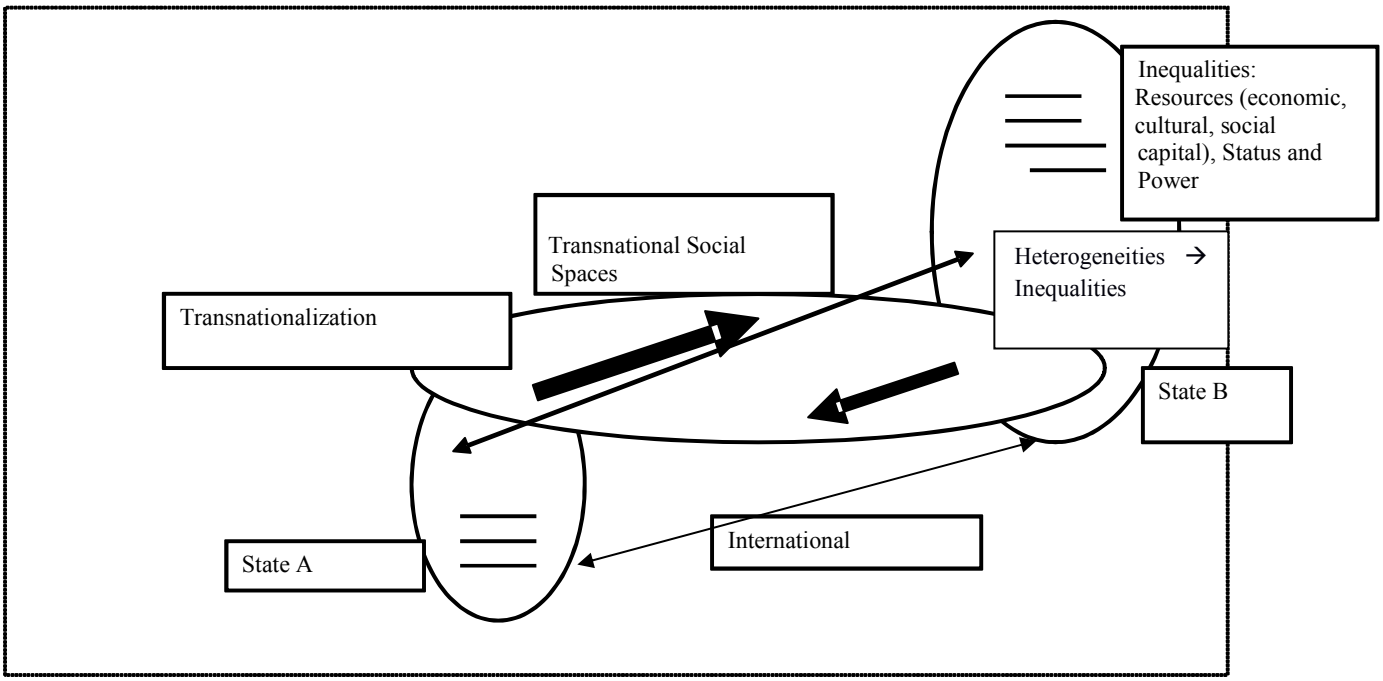
Third, there is a global perspective which takes individuals across the world as the unit of comparison and is not bound by national borders. For analysis on this level household data are required (Milanovic 2005). While this perspective constitutes an advance over the first two, it needs to be supplemented by a view which looks at the interstices of various geographical units.

Fourth, there is the perspective privileged here, namely, a transnational approach to inequalities. It deals with inequalities in the context of cross-border transactions of groups, persons, and organizations. The units of analysis and of reference are empirical matters. These units could be family or kinship networks, village or professional communities – in short, any kind of social formation transcending the borders of national states. This approach is appropriate because cross-border transactions may take place on different levels, such as the family, friendship cliques, business networks, local communities, or organizations, and it is by the very practices themselves that agents constitute these scales in the first place. This approach is appropriate because cross-border transactions may take place on different levels, such as the family, friendship cliques, business networks, local communities, or organizations, and it is by the very practices themselves that agents constitute these scales in the first place.

As Figure 1 indicates, inequalities and the perceptions of inequalities regarding resources and status could relate to regions of emigration or to regions of immigration or to both. Here inequality is thought to be unbounded: while borders between states and above all bounda-

ries of membership are of crucial importance for the life chances of a person, social, economic, political, and cultural borders and boundaries are not coterminous. For example, the social life worlds of transnationally active persons span several states and extend to various locales in these states. It is to be expected that the standards of comparison differ between regions, such as national states, and locales of emigration and immigration. In addition, standards of comparison could also be internal to social formations spanning the borders of national states. For instance, the points of reference could be internal to transnational village communities, and villagers may compare themselves primarily with fellow villagers. It is an empirical question whether and to what extent this would be the case. What is certain, however, is that comparisons regarding inequalities among the persons themselves are always relative viz. relational, and that comparisons are not normally made between persons in categories considered remote (e.g. a labour migrant and an executive in a transnational corporation) but within those considered similar (e.g. migrants in one region and migrants from a similar region; Panning 1983).

***Figure 1*: Transnational Social Spaces**



N.B.: For reasons of presentation, transnational transactions are restricted to two states in the above figure. Of course, the networks could also extend across several state borders.

In a nutshell, Figure 1 suggests that there are not only relations between states that are relevant but also relations that do not involve state agents primarily, although states may actively seek to regulate and shape such relations. One crucial issue arising in such a context is how

agents relate the frames of reference, for example, notions of inequality in one state to those in another, or even genuine transnational standards to be found across several or even many states. In other words, the task of conceptual and empirical analysis is to determine the horizon which agents, the researched and researchers alike, use to evaluate social position in inequality hierarchies. Such a horizon may or may not encompass more than one state.

Through their regulation of border controls and access to membership, national states exert a particularly important influence in reproducing social inequalities which determine cross-border social and geographical mobility patterns. Transnational social spaces are often marked by stark social inequalities, since international migration frequently occurs between regions of unequal economic development, as is evident, for example, in South-North migration flows. Two sets of institutions are of importance in this regard. First, there are migration (admission) policies and citizenship policies. Migration policies in particular, together with trade policies, have for decades acted as powerful instruments to uphold socio-economic differences between the world's regions. According to standard economic theory, free mobility of labour would result in an equalization of the factors of production, in this case increasing wages in emigration countries and decreasing wages in immigration countries (Hamilton and Whaley 1984). In addition, barriers to citizenship and denizenship (permanent status) largely determine the set of rights available to persons crossing borders. The extent to which individuals may move across borders and thus entertain transnational ties, or the degree to which they are able to engage simultaneously in the economic and political activities of two regions, is shaped not only by immigration states but also by emigration countries through policies of citizenship, including dual citizenship, repatriation, external voting, special political representation for emigrants, special economic incentives, e.g. investment, taxation, return and re-integration programs, visa regulations, and welfare benefits. Second, national state institutions – but also more local institutions on other scales, especially in federal political systems – such as labour policies, wage-setting institutions, as well as institutions in fields shaping life chances, such as education, childcare, and health, affect mobile and non-mobile persons alike (diPrete 2007).

Mobility in transnational social spaces is thus an integral part of macro-structures of inequalities. For instance, with respect to income there is evidence that low inequality in rich countries is achieved by using state resources and policies to exclude, limit, or control competition via migration and/or trade from low-wage workers, and through this process, low inequality in one region may be directly associated with high inequality in another. Nonetheless, there is also evidence that even in this context persons and groups moving in transnational social spaces can achieve some sort of social mobility.

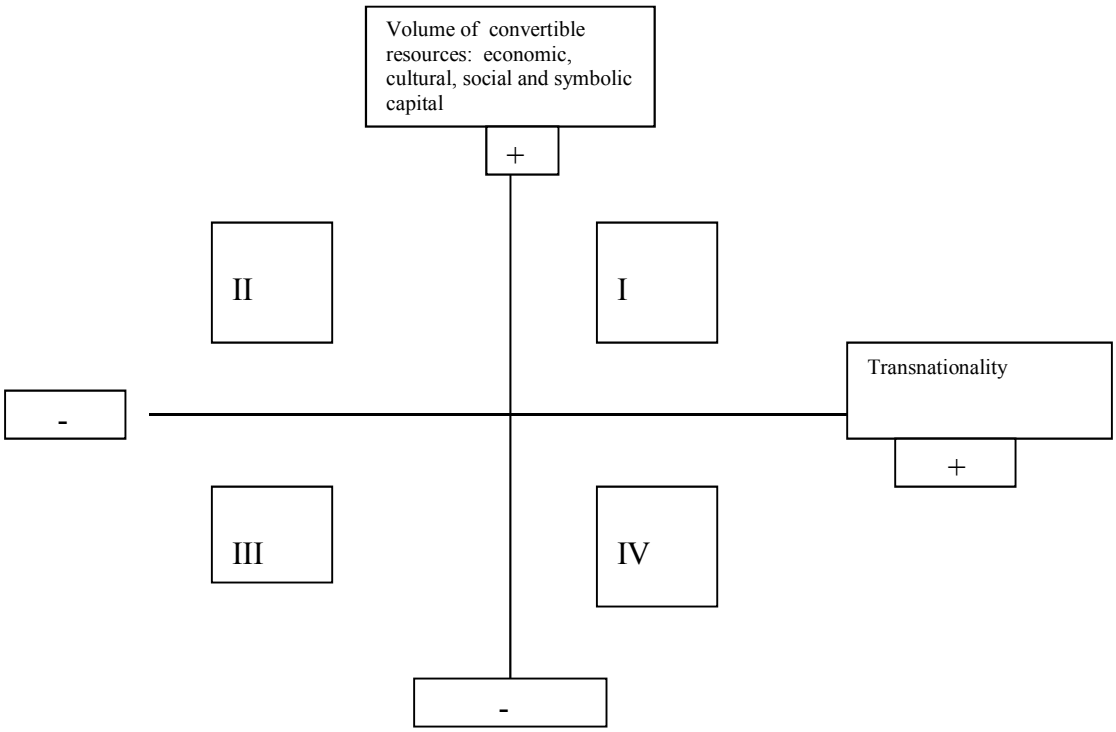
4. Transnationality and Social Inequalities: A Preliminary Typology

When it comes to transnationality, we have to distinguish between two forms of inequality dimensions. The necessary focus of inquiry is the nexus between resources and transnationality in order to understand how power is (re)produced.[6] Transnationality can be conceptualized as consisting of various social practices, and resources can be distinguished along the lines of economic, cultural, and social capital (on capital: Bourdieu 1983) (Figure 2). By looking at the combination of transnationality and various forms of capital we can situate persons in the webs of inequalities in a very preliminary way. It is important to point out that Figure 2 uses both transnationality and forms of capital as abstracted indices. The purpose is to span a conceptual space associating transnationality and capital endowments. It is not to argue that the quadrants I to IV constitute clear-cut categories of persons, such as highly skilled (I), socially integrated with little or no transnationality (II), marginalized without (III) or with (IV) high degrees of transnationality. Instead, in the end, the intersections of both axes have to be conceived of as a continuum of possible social positions.

As to capital, the basic idea is that agents usually dispose over different types of resources. If such resources are convertible, for example, economic into cultural resources, we speak of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 99). In other words, the convertibility into other forms of capital – economic, social, cultural respectively – distinguishes capital from mere resources and thus interlinks different forms of capital.

[6] The focus on resources leaves out for the moment two important additional dimensions of inequality: First, it occludes status, that is, the recognition of roles distributed along heterogeneities such as occupation, gender, religion, and also citizenship as status. Second, power is not dealt with systematically. Ralf Dahrendorf (1967) famously addressed the perennial problem of the origins of inequality (Rousseau 1754) by focusing on power and authority. Power can be considered as crucial for making categorizations – for instance, along the lines of transnationality – and drawing boundaries between categories of persons, and also as the precondition for categorical inequalities.

Figure 2: Transnationality and Capital



Capital, and this is crucial from a transnational perspective, is usually not simply transferred as a whole in an unchanged way from one country to another. Consider, for example, the observation that persons who are mobile across borders may have outstanding amounts of institutionalized cultural capital, even credentials which need to be validated cross-nationally (e.g. equivalency confirmation) in order to allow the owner to use it. However, migrants often are disappointed by their slow career progression. One way to approach this problem is to abandon a simplistic goodness of fit approach to capital transfer. A goodness of fit approach would assume that migrants bring with them a package of cultural, social, and economic resources that may or may not fit with the culture, economy, society, and status system of the country of residence as distinct from the state of origin. Such a view is very prominent in what are called human capital approaches which posit that, for example, 'different ethnic groups possess identifiable characteristics, encompassing cultural values, practices, and social networks that were formed in the homeland and transplanted with minor modifications by immigrants in the new land and there transmitted and perpetuated from generation to generation' (Zhou 2005: 134). Such a goodness of fit view would be problematic for at least two reasons. First, it assumes that group boundaries can be assigned in a straightforward manner. Instead, intra-group differentiations need to be taken into account, so as not to reify national identity as the key organizing category for creating cultural, social, economic, and

symbolic capital(s). Ethnicity or nationality should not be the sole or necessarily the main criterion of categorizing mobile persons. Second, such an approach would assign social positions without exploring the process through which resources are made convertible, i.e. how they constitute capital. Instead, it is more fruitful to view the various sorts of capital as treasure chests which can be employed to various degrees.

As to the resources available to agents, the total volume of capital needs to be disaggregated and related to transnationality. Three forms of capital are expected to be of particular relevance for the overall resources and thus for social positioning: economic capital, above all, income and wealth; cultural capital in its incorporated form, for example, degrees from educational institutions and occupational status; and social capital, in particular access to resources of other agents in one's network and – from the point of view of groups – networks of reciprocity and trust. Ideally, one could then look both at inequalities in the life-world and at every field of practice separately – for instance, education, labour market, politics, and health – since the hierarchy of the importance of the types of capital may be field-specific. The volume of various forms of capital, either individually or jointly, can be considered as useful proxies for the social position(ing) of persons and groups, and thus a helpful way to conceptualize social inequalities.

Though cognizant of all the different aspects of transnationality and of various forms of capital, it may nonetheless, as an initial step, make sense to think about potential combinations of capital and transnationality along the four cells indicated in Figure 2. This will give us a preliminary, albeit static and very provisional, idea of how transnationality and types of capital may cluster to denote certain constellations of opportunities for participation. A fourfold distinction emerges:

In field I, characterized by high degrees of transnationality and the volume of capital, we expect to see the winners of globalization, such as the mobile, highly skilled professionals, managers, and entrepreneurs. The "middle class" mobility of skilled workers in the European Union – a growing phenomenon – could also be included (Verwiebe 2008). In field II, the combination of relatively high resources and low degrees of transnationality, we expect to find those who are geographically relatively immobile but (still) hold high volumes of various forms of capital. It is an empirical question whether transnational ties matter for their positioning, and if so, to what extent persons and groups in this category experience relative downward social mobility as a result of an absence of transnational ties. In field III, it could well be that we find those truly excluded from one or various fields, such as inhabitants of slum dwellings who do not have access to the welfare state or political rights. They are normally multiply excluded. These despondent persons would also not have the means to be geo-

graphically mobile over long distances, not to speak of cross-border or even intercontinental transactions. These persons are the truly destitute, and we would expect them to constitute a higher share of the population in "developing" or transition countries than in OECD countries. In field IV, we could imagine persons who have cross-border ties but not a high capital volume of the social, cultural, and economic sorts. Labour migrants with regular status could be among those. Here, the differentiations of kinds of capital mentioned above could be extremely important. Labour migrants could be low on institutional cultural capital – especially considering the frequent devaluation of their educational and occupational credentials in immigration countries – and have somewhat higher economic capital but could compensate for some of these deficiencies with high degrees of social capital, as evidenced by family networks across borders in which relatives in various countries are involved in child rearing. It is thus questionable whether persons in field IV constitute only those who live segregated lives, that is, lives separate from, for instance, immigrant societies. If that were true, then transnationality would simply be coterminous with social segregation (Esser 2003). By looking at the relationship of transnationality to various forms of capital – social, economic, and political – we may, however, gain a different insight. At the opposite pole of marginalization, we need to consider that various types of capital – most obviously economic capital – have different valences in different states. For example, it could be that Turkish migrants would be unable to muster the financial means to set up a hotel in Germany but could do so in Turkey. Opportunities to partake are consequently determined not only by the volume of different forms of capital but the context in which they can be used.

Thus, to conceptualize the relationship between transnationality as heterogeneity and resources as indicated by various forms of capital is to go beyond comparisons of migrants vs. non-migrants and allow for comparisons of mobility vs. non-mobility. The distinctive criterion is therefore not migrant vs. non-migrant, but having or lacking transnational ties, that is, fields I and IV vs. fields II and III. This is so because persons engaged in short-term mobility and relatively immobile persons could also partake in transnational transactions. Note that this fourfold distinction expands the universe of possibilities usually discussed in migrant integration research. In the latter, fields II and III are the main focus; with fields I and IV marginal phenomena.

5. Transnational Inequalities: Horizons for Comparison

In all considerations of cross-border inequalities from a transnational perspective, the overarching issue of simultaneity arises. Transnationality is characterized by the potential for simultaneous membership in different countries and in groups and organizations located in these states. Simultaneity also applies to the evaluation of one's social position and windows of opportunity. The social position is then placed in a comparative cross-border frame. On the one hand, we would expect that many migrants interpret the prospects for upward mobility comparatively, with prospects perceived to be, on balance, most often better in the immigration country or countries of onward migration. There is therefore a straightforward comparison of life chances and future prospects between the immigration and emigration countries. On the other hand, a person's social position in the immigration country may not be the primary factor in her understanding of the positional effects of migration and transnational practices. Such effects on the prospects for those left behind in the emigration countries may also be significant. For example, cross-border engagement has been represented in the language of religious pilgrimage and passion in the Philippines – a necessary sacrifice for the benefit of others (Aguilar 1999).

Yet in both of these cases, how (and where) one's social position is objectively assessed (for example, by researchers using predefined criteria) may not be the way in which assessments of social position are constructed by other social actors, namely those researched. This difference may arise for two reasons. First, when migrants compare social positions in a transnational frame, they do not simply compare the position in one hierarchy with the position in another. Rather, mobile persons may also consider the prospect for mobility within that hierarchy, either across a career or across generations, to be a major factor. Second, the social positioning can subjectively refer to the person, to the wider familial network, or to an even higher aggregate such as the village or professional community or a nation: while cross-border migrants themselves may be degraded in social positional terms, the outcome for those left behind might be upward mobility in terms of income and consumption patterns.

Overall, the frame of reference for social positioning is shifted through transnational linkages and comparisons. Transnationality shifts the frame of reference for other heterogeneities and, ultimately, for inequalities. For instance, transnationality raises the question of which standards of comparison are used. Inequality in Germany might be evaluated by migrants in relation to Turkey as a whole, or in a comparative frame that takes into account certain elements of inequalities in both countries. Furthermore, inequalities might also be evaluated in relation to the Turkish immigrant population, a comparison that is not to be dismissed. Turkish immigrants in Germany, for example, could easily find similar experiences of social posi-

tioning. For many Turkish immigrants such a perspective may make it much less daunting to have to "start over." Peer groups can change their assessment of experienced inequality owing to the emergence of new standards in terms of, say, cross-border lifestyle and social relations (Shibutani and Kwan 1965: 510). A transnational approach is therefore of value also because it raises the question as to the frame of reference for making comparisons. This problem not only arises when analyzing the frames held by mobiles and non-mobiles but it also refers to the categories used by researchers. In South-North migration, for instance, there is frequently an incompatibility of categories: the "middle class" may mean very different lifestyle, consumption, status, and resource patterns in countries as diverse as, for example, Ghana and the Netherlands.

The perceptions of inequalities within and across the countries of emigration, immigration, and possibly countries of onward movement play an important role in the politics of inequality at the level of mobile agents. Agents tend to evaluate inequalities according to standards for equality. In other words, inequalities as such are without meaning. Their social importance derives from the meta-norm of equality (Hondrich 1984). Ironically, one of the most important means of exclusion and root causes of the reproduction of cross-border inequalities is national citizenship. In its inward-looking guise, it is a standard for equality for all members of a nationally-bounded society, in various realms – political, social (welfare) and economic, civil, and even cultural, as in claims for multicultural citizenship.

Transnationality as a heterogeneity thus meets national citizenship as a status-defined heterogeneity in manifold ways. For mobile persons who are engaged politically, it is important to unearth which standards of comparisons they use in political practices. There is initial evidence, for example, that politically active Filipino groups in Canada have tended to adopt a discourse that sees their positions in Canada as explicitly linked to the underdeveloped plight of the Philippines. Thus, the treatment of Filipinos in Canadian society is directly linked to the perception that the Philippines play a subordinate role in the global political-economic system. While mobilization around development issues in the Philippines is not widespread in the Filipino community, it is noteworthy that activists who advocate on issues concerning immigrant settlement in Canada are at pains to link these issues to an identity based on Third World status (Pratt and Yeoh 2003). The analysis of transnationality is therefore an important aspect in linking national citizenship to cross-border social inequalities.

After all, citizenship is a prime mechanism of social closure which implies that the value of resources depends on group membership. In short, the naturalization of national citizenship as an ascriptive heterogeneity – ascribed by legal means – is one of the clearest roots of categorizations resulting in inequalities. The chances of living a life free from destitution are

much higher in OECD countries. Importantly, viewed from a transnational perspective, national citizenship is a morally arbitrary heterogeneity, which is not rooted in merit, such as hard work, the right work ethic, and efficiency – although these are touted as factors for successful economic development and wealth. It is essential to remember this basic insight on the inequality-relevance of national citizenship because much of income inequality, for example, is on an inter-country scale. For instance, Milanovic (2005) calculated that income inequality between countries accounted for roughly two-thirds of overall world inequality in 1993. Although there is much debate about countervailing trends, this pattern has been remarkably stable over the past 200 years (Korzeniewicz and Moran 2009, Chapter 2).

In order to advance our understanding of transnationality and inequality beyond pure associations and correlations, we would need to look at the processes by which transnationality, in conjunction with other heterogeneities, is implicated in the (re)production of inequalities. Such a move is beyond the scope of this analysis, but would start from the groundwork laid here. Beyond the macro-political settings such as national citizenship it is essential to consider the specific transnational social spaces in which migrants (and other forms of mobile persons) are involved. It may indeed make a difference as to the kind of transnational social space in which cross-border transactions occur – within families, within circuits or networks, or within communities or organizations. These social entities are integrated through different social principles, such as reciprocity, exchange, or solidarity. What needs to be further specified is the different conditions under which processes of inequality production proceed, and the social mechanisms that are at work, starting from meta-mechanisms such as exploitation, opportunity hoarding, or social closure, etc.

6. Outlook: Unbounding Transnationality

Transnationality and inequality – to take up the leads by, among others, Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, and John Goldthorpe but to push them one step forward – constitute not only an issue to be debated in migration and geographical mobility studies but within a much broader scope and are thus relevant for all societal categories. It is therefore essential to bring in those (considered) immobile and consider transnationality as a potentially more widespread societal heterogeneity. After all, transnationality is not restricted to transactions arising from geographical mobility, whether short- or long-term. Therefore, it is not a concept that is restricted to migrants or other mobile categories only. It has arrived as a main heterogeneity at the core of societal affairs.

Ultimately, the issue of transnationality is an aspect of the transnational social question, that is, the perception of worldwide inequalities and injustices. In addition to mobility of persons it also refers to commodity chains and social movements. By thus expanding the initial conceptualization, transnationally oriented mobility research can link up with and contribute to other fields in sociology, for example educational, employment, and policy research, and to do so as a cross-disciplinary field. Last but not least, migration and mobility research (Yeates 2008) can be integrated conceptually into other areas dealing with cross-border exchanges, like social movements (Tarrow and della Porta 2005), advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), or religious communities (Levitt 2007). Transnationality is not only a potential attribute of heterogeneity among migrants and their families, but also affects other categories of individuals and groups in the context of transnational processes.

The study of inequalities in this wider transnational perspective has significant implications since it ultimately promises to deliver insights into the legitimation and de-legitimation of social inequalities. Cross-border transactions of individuals suggest that inequalities between countries become comparable, at least for mobile and immobile persons who are involved in cross-border ties. This is important because the national-state principle implies that they are not, especially through the institution of national citizenship where the social component is primarily tied to state-citizen ties, as in the idea of social citizenship (Marshall 1964). From this perspective it seems that each country or welfare regime has its distinct set of rights and regulations. While this claim is the basis for a flourishing research industry of comparative welfare state analysis, the concept of transnationality opens our horizon and will allow researchers to focus on how agents compare their situation across different states and regimes. Persons who espouse transnationality are thus perhaps among the practitioners of the norm of equality which is now the benchmark by which social inequalities are perceived in both public debates and academic analyzes. The question of the legitimacy of social inequalities is inextricably linked, albeit often indirectly and outside public spheres, to standards of equality which can be found in proclamations of social norms with a global reach.

References

AGUILAR, F. (1999) 'Ritual Passage and the Reconstruction of Selfhood in International Labour Migration', *Sojourn* 14, 1, 98-139.

BAUMAN, Z. (1998) *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press).

BECK, U. (2008) *Die Neuvermessung der Ungleichheit unter den Menschen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp).

BLAU, P. M. (1977) *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press).

BOURDIEU, P. (1983) 'Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital' in KRECKE, R. (ed.) *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (*Soziale Welt*, *Sonderheft 2*) (Göttingen: Otto Schwartz & Co.), 183-198.

BOURDIEU, P. and WACQUANT, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

CARROLL, W. K. (2010) *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the 21st Century* (London: Zed Books).

CHASE, I. D. (1980) 'Social Process and Hierarchy Formation in Small Groups', *American Sociological Review* 45, 6, 905-924.

DAHRENDORF, R. (1967) 'Über den Ursprung der Ungleichheit zwischen den Menschen' in *Pfade aus Utopia: Arbeiten zur Theorie und Methode der Soziologie* (München: R. Piper & Co.), 352-379.

DIPRETE, T. (2007) 'What has sociology to contribute to the study of inequality trends? A historical and comparative perspective', *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, 603-618.

ESSER, H. (2003) 'Ist das Konzept der Assimilation überholt?', *Geographische Revue* 2, 5-22.

FAIST, T. (2000) *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (New York: Oxford University Press).

FAIST, T. (2012) 'Toward a Transnational Methodology: Methods to Address Methodological Nationalism, Essentialism, and Positionality', *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 28, 1, 51-70.

FAIST, T. and NERGIZ, D. (2012) 'Concluding Remarks: Considering Contexts and Units of Analysis' in AMELINA, A.; NERGIZ, D.; FAIST, T. and GLICK SCHILLER, N. (ed.) *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies* (London: Routledge), 239-244.

FAIST, T.; FAUSER, M. and REISENAUER, E. (2013). *Transnational Migration* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

FAIST, T. and ULBRICHT, C. (2013). 'Doing National Identity through Transnationality: Categorizations and Mechanisms of Inequality in Integration Debates' in FONER, N. and SIMON, P. (ed.) *Fear and Anxiety over National Identity* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation (forthcoming)).

GALBRAITH, J.K. (1979) *The Nature of Mass Poverty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

GCIM (2005) *Migration in an interconnected world: New directions for action* (Geneva: Global Commission on International Migration).

GOLDIN, I.; CAMERON, G. and BALARAJAN, M. (2011) *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

GOLDTHORPE, J. (2002) 'Globalization and Social Class', *West European Politics* 25, 3, 1-28.

GUARNIZO, L. (2003) 'The Economics of Transnational Living', *International Migration Review* 37, 3, 666–699.

HAMILTON, B. and WHALEY, J. (1984) 'Efficiency and Distributional Implications of Global Restrictions on Labor Mobility', *Journal of Development Economics* 14, 1, 61-75.

HARTMANN, M. (2007) *Eliten und Macht in Europa. Ein internationaler Vergleich* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus).

HONDRICH, K. O. (1984) 'Der Wert der Gleichheit und der Bedeutungswandel der Ungleichheit', *Soziale Welt* 35, 3, 267-293.

KECK, M. E. and SIKKINK, K. (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

KORZENIEWICZ, R. P. And MORAN, T. P. (2009) *Unveiling Inequality: A World-Historical Perspective* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation).

LEVITT, P. (2007) *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press).

MARSHALL, T. H. (1964) [1950] *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

MASSEY, D. S. (2007) *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation).

MAU, S. (2010) *Social Transnationalism: Lifeworlds beyond the Nation State* **(**London: Routledge).

MILANOVIC, B. (2005) *Worlds Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

PANNING, W. H. (1983) 'Inequality, Social Comparison, and Relative Deprivation', *American Political Science Review* 77, 2, 323-329.

PRATT, G. and YEOH, B. (2003) 'Transnational (Counter) Topographies', *Gender, Place and Culture* 10, 2, 159-166.

REES, M. (ed.) (2009) 'Special Issue: The Costs of Transnational Migration', *Migration Letters* 6, 1.

ROUSSEAU, J. J. (2012) (orig. 1754) *A Discourse on a Subject proposed by the Academy of Dijon: What is the Origin of Inequality among Men, and is it Authorised by Natural Law?* http://www.constitution.org/jjr/ineq.htm, data accessed 15 March 2012.

SHIBUTANI, T. and KWAN, K. M. (1965) *Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Macmillan).

SKLAIR, L. (2001) *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Blackwell.)

SMITH, M. P. (2000) *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell).

TARROW, S. and DELLA PORTA, D. (ed.) (2005) *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).

TILLY, C. (1998) *Durable Inequalities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

UNITED NATIONS (1998) Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division: *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* (Statistical Papers Series M, No. 58, Rev. 1, New York: United Nations).

UNDP (2005) Human Development Report 2005. *International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World* (New York: United Nations Development Programme).

VERWIEBE, R. (2008) 'Migration to Germany: Is a middle class emerging among intra-European migrants?', *Migration Letters* 5, 1, 1-19.

WILEY, N. F. (1967) 'The Ethnic Mobility Trap and Stratification Theory', *Social Problems* 15, 2, 147-159.

YEATES, N. (2008) *Globalizing Care Economies and Migrant Workers: Explorations in Global Care Chains* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan).

ZHOU, M. (2005) 'Ethnicity as Social Capital: Community-based Institutions and Embedded Networks of Social Relations' in LOURY, G.; MODOOD, T. and TELES, S. M. (ED.) *Ethnicity, Social Mobility, and Public Policy: Comparing the US and Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 131-159.