Conceptualizing Transnational Engagements: A Structure and Agency Perspective on (Hometown) Transnationalism[1]

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This paper unfolds a conceptual framework of migrants' transnational engagements. It combines three elements: a concept of social agent apprehended in its plurality of roles and social embedding; the Habermas theory of communicative action accounting for the communicative dimension of transnational engagements; a concept of social institution explaining the role of migrant organizations in framing transnational activities. This framework is applied to the analysis of cross border engagements of Moroccan, Algerian and Indian hometown organizations in the development of their respective sending areas.

Transnationalism is a multifaceted reality. Transnational networks irrigate North and West Africa with merchants and goods, provide funding to orphanages in Punjab, Mali, Vietnam, and Morocco, accommodate social spaces for Korean flight attendants in Dubai, link Veracruz workers with New York state farmers and Chinese spouses to Korean farmers, introduce Brazilian soap operas on Angolese TV channels, support the creation of nation states in Eastern Europe, etc. Much has been said about the embedding of such social formations into the wider context of neoliberal globalization, the role played by modern technologies, and the (dis) connection with traditional integration models of immigrants. And yet,

the mechanisms that explain why people choose to devote time, money, and energy to maintain long distance relations and practices remain, at best, unpacked – in fact, unknown. No wonder. In the face of such diverse engagements, any attempt to uncover a common ground seems doomed to fail. The emergence of transnational socialities is usually explained in macro-structural terms. The phenomenon is either seen as the grassroots facet of neoliberal globalization, or an emergent social entity re-welded by new technologies. The explanation of transnational behaviors rests on a critique of assimilationist models: migrants go transnational with a view to circumvent their underclass position in the destination (Piore, 1979; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Goldring, 1998).

This study explores a new pathway by engaging with general social theory on the one hand, and migration studies on the other. Moving away from context-based explanations, this article seeks to capture the social mechanics of transnational engagement. Its aim is to outline a theoretical model of transnational engagements that dwells on a structure and agency (S/A) framework. This approach builds on a variety of influences: the role-set theory, Habermas' understanding of communicative rationality and Heidegger's concept of Dasein. It revisits Latour's actor network theory and opens avenues for bridging migration and transnational studies. This approach does not only acknowledge the pluri-dimensionality of human agency but also argues that the plurality of structural embedding of agents is at the very source of their agential capacities.

The study draws on an empirical research on the development practices of hometown organizations among three immigrant groups: Algerian and Moroccan Berbers in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and Indian Punjabis in the United Kingdom (U.K.). This study does not address the capacity of hometown organizations to achieve and manage long distance initiatives but seeks theoretically to explain the motives of their engagement. Altogether, over 100 semi-structured interviews have been carried out, first during a doctoral study on Moroccan transnationalism (1999–2003; Lacroix, 2005, 2009), and second during postdoctoral study between 2005 and 2010 based on a comparison of the three groups (Lacroix, 2012b, 2013). Interviews were made with leaders and members of hometown organizations in Birmingham, London, Coventry, Brussels, Almere, Amsterdam, Paris, France, and the Northern suburbs of Paris (Clichy, Gennevilliers, Saint Denis…), Perpignan, and Poitiers. Field visits were made in Punjab and Southern Morocco during which I observed

development projects and interviewed members of village associations. The sampling was mostly made through snowballing with a view to follow the organizational networks across regional and national borders. Complementary interviews were made with NGO representatives, major migrant associations, and local and national authorities.

The first part of this article makes the case for a reformulated S/A approach to transnationalism. It reviews extant approaches to transnational engagement and the use of S/A perspective in migration studies. The second part of the article unfolds the analytical framework: emergent transnational practices are framed as the result of the multiple embeddings of migrants in their host and origin places; the communicative dimension of their engagement underpins the convergence or divergence of collective behaviors; hometown organizations as a form of migrant social institutions provide a framework for the production and reproduction of transnational engagement that enables the communicative dynamics of actors' rationality. In the concluding section, I argue that this approach offers a ground for bridging the two largely separate fields of migration and transnational studies.

TOWARD A STRUCTURE AND AGENCY APPROACH TO TRANSNATIONALISM

Recent evidence questions the theoretical grounding of the transnational paradigm. Endorsing a more quantitative stance, recent research shows that only a small proportion of migrants engage in regular transnational practices (Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller, 2002; Waldinger, 2008). Among those who do, their engagement is not necessarily incompatible with an assimilation trajectory into the host society (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2003; Snel, Engbersen, and Leerkes, 2006; Mazzucato, 2008; Schans, 2009). One wonders what remains of the heuristic value of this paradigm if it does not propose an alternative to integration as a general framework of understanding post migration processes? For Faist (2010), Glick Schiller (2010), and Boccagni (2011), the paradigm's legitimacy can be preserved if a rapprochement is made between transnational and globalization studies. In doing so, these authors reproduce another postulate of the transnationalist paradigm: transnationalism is conceived as the symptom of a new era, a social trend that draws postindustrial societies into postmodernity. However, this view has also been questioned by historians who have highlighted the long-standing existence of cross-border

behaviors, practices, and policies (Waldinger, 2006; Green and Weil, 2007). There is something in transnationalism that is not context-dependent and that remains to be captured. The reproduction of long distance ties is a universal tendency that has taken different shape throughout times, just like migration itself.

A recent body of research in migration studies uses S/A theory to give a better account of human agency in migration systems. S/A theory is a generic label that includes the different theories modeling social action in relation with their structural context: practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998), structuration (Giddens, 1984), and morphogenetics (Archer, 1995). These theories all take routinized practices as the locus of the social and structures as the outcome of collective practices (Reckwitz, 2002). It is my contention that S/A theory can provide a common ground on which a rapprochement between transnational and migration studies can be made. Indeed, evidence shows that transnational engagements of actors are affected by the initial conditions of migration. Conversely, immigrant transnationalism constitutes a feedback effect that impacts current migration trends. Both dynamics are intimately intertwined.

However, extant approaches remain ill-fitted for the analysis of transnational phenomena. Forged for the study of human activities in "classical" society-bonded contexts, they fail to take into account the agential implications of specific positioning of migrants, namely their inscription and socialization in a plurality of social fields. Indeed, migration de-multiplies the social embeddings of actors and makes their roles and spaces more complex. Migration disrupts the scales of actors' social spaces at the local, plurinational, and even global levels. In that sense, transnationalism offers a borderline case to test and improve S/A theory. At the same time, drawing transnational studies toward general social theories would offer the possibility to seize the normality of everyday transnationalism (Boccagni, 2010). Both sides, it is also argued, have much to gain from a cross-fertilizing dialogue.

The S/A approach should be adapted to provide an analytical tool that navigates between different levels of the transnational condition of migrancy. This framework builds upon Habermas' theory of communicative action and a renewed version of the role set theory. This study expands on previous work that delineates the key elements characterizing the S/A theory (Lacroix, 2012a): (1) a concept of agent defined as reflexive actors; (2) a concept of social structures addressed in their material

and immaterial dimensions; and (3) a reciprocal relation between social structure and agentic behaviors' of actors.[2]

In this study, I retain these key elements but further unpack the S/A relation by focusing on three specific moments: *emergence* of innovative behaviors that lead to social change; *convergence*, which is to say the adoption of emerging behaviors by a sizable number of people, large enough to, in turn, affect societal structuration OR *divergence* displayed by those who do not adopt collective norms or courses of action. With this in mind, I propose a structure/agency perspective that combines three elements:

- A reformulated version of the role-set theory (Merton, 1957; Mead 1967; Lahire, 1998; Corcuff, 1999), which defines agents' reflexivity and emergence in the context of social complexity. Actors, in this case, international migrants, are conceived as composite agents enmeshed in a complex role-set, and beyond that, in an array of societal arenas;
- the Habermassian theory of *communicative action* accounting for agency and convergence: the communicative dimension of actors' behaviors is what enable them to move beyond the plural and (potentially) contradictory nature of their social condition;
- the Habermassian approach to the formation of societies will be complemented by a novel conception of *social institution.* This concept is key to linking up agents' practices and structural elaboration processes. In this framework, social institutions are not a mere outcome of hidden norms, or an extension of agentic capacities, but places in which the deliberation process of communicative action is possible.

This theoretical framework will be applied to unravel the mechanics of hometown transnationalism. From the 1990s onward, one observes a growing commitment of hometown organizations to the development of the place of origin of the migrant membership. These hometown groups

[2]The different approaches differ in their vocabulary and the way they articulate these different elements. For example, Giddens' structuration theory encapsulates the idea of reciprocity in the notion of *duality* of social structures: the latter are both the outcome and medium of human actions. The concept of social structure is broken down into, on the one hand, its material facet – financial, human (network configuration, skills, etc.), natural and technical *resources* – and social constructed *rules.* Those are "techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices" (Giddens, 1984:21) that include moral rules or culturally embedded techniques.

originate from a wide array of origin countries: Berbers from southern Morocco, sub-Saharan people from the Valley of the Senegal River, Mexicans from Zacatecas, Guanajato or Michoacan, Punjabis from India, Guinean emigrants, etc. These long-distance development initiatives, also called "collective remittances," are not new, and historians have long documented the philanthropic activities of village fellows abroad (Moya, 2005). However, the literature points out an unprecedented surge of this type of engagement during the last 20 years (Zabin and Radaban, 1998; Orozco, 2000; Lacroix, 2013). This dynamic is typically an issue of "emergence" (a new behavior appearing in different settings) and of "convergence" (the aggregation of behaviors of a sizable number of actors, large enough to affect their structural context). Accounting for such a parallelism requires an adequate understanding of macro- and micro-level dynamics: the cultural foundations of hometown networks explaining collaborative endeavors, the policy and economic contexts favoring local development initiatives, etc. The structure/agency approach, designed to address the reciprocal effects of actors' behaviors and their structural context, is extremely well-suited to this analysis of migrant organizations, remittances, and development.

"Hometown Transnationalism" Among North African and Indian Immigrants to Europe

The three groups investigated are archetypical examples of colonial and postcolonial immigrant groups. The migrations of Moroccan Berbers from Southern Morocco, Algerian Kabyles, and Indian Punjabis were first framed by colonial authorities prior to the Second World War: these ethnic and religious (for Sikh Punjabis) minorities were targets of colonial administrations' divide-and-rule strategies. Their migration gained momentum after the war owing to the need for an unskilled workforce in Europe. These groups formed the majority of immigrant flows coming from North Africa and India until the 1960s, when the surge of labor immigration went along with a diffusion of the emigration dynamics to the rest of these countries. These groups are concentrated in the main industrial areas: on the one hand, in the U.K. – Greater London, the Midlands, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool, and on the other hand, in Northern France, in addition to Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles.

The chain migration that characterized the mobility of these three groups during this period was conducive to the clustering of village groups in the arrival setting and to the subsequent creation of community institutions coined as hometown organizations. These organizations were initially created to support the arrival and settlement of newcomers. However, they also played a cultural and political role.

Indeed, these three migrant groups originate from three cultural minorities in North Africa and India: the Berbers on the one hand and the Sikhs on the other. After independence, these minority groups had to negotiate their incorporation into newly formed nation-states. This led to open conflicts with state authorities: in the early fifties in Morocco, in 1981 and 2001 the so-called "Berber Springs" in Algeria, and in 1984 the Punjab conflict. During the conflict period and throughout the eighties, the overseas organizations (and hometown organizations in particular) became a crucible for political contestation and cultural production.

These migrant organizations found a new "raison d'être" from the nineties onward with their growing implication into collective remittances. For example, a survey in 477 villages of the Punjab shows NRI (non-resident Indian) transfers into religious and social development projects amounted to $4.5 million. Places of worship, schools, and hospitals absorb the largest shares of these monies (Dusenbery and Tatla, 2009:111, 131). Beyond their similar initial migratory conditions, these three groups display radically different forms and intensities of transnational engagement. Indian Punjabis can rely on large internal resources linked to their successful economic integration. Moroccans do not enjoy the same level of economic capacity but they may count on long-standing, dense, and embedded organizational networks to attract external funding. Algerian Kabyles, in contrast, display a lower level of transnationalism. Like Moroccans, they cannot count on important internal resources, and the decade long civil war in Algeria heavily disrupted their organizational networks (*see* Lacroix, 2013).

Common Approaches to Transnational Engagements

Three sets of (partial) explanation can be distinguished: transnationalism as a duty, as an exit, or as an outlet. The first set has to do with the relations between migrants and their origin societies. Economists are more interested in a specific (but widespread) form of transnationalism: remittances (Taylor, 1999; Vargas-Silva and Ruiz, 2009). For proponents of the New Economics

of Labor Migration, transnationalism is grounded in a pre-migratory household strategy in reaction to adverse economic conditions (e.g., lack of credit access, insufficiency of local sources of income). A member of a household is sent abroad with the duty to provide complementary revenue. Remittances, and the transnational relationships that come with it, stand at the core of the migration project. Economics being what it is, this literature is exclusively interested in financial aspects of transnationalism. Carling (2008) displaces this focus from the terrain of economic strategies to the one of moral economy. Carling identifies three types of asymmetries that inform the transnational relationships between migrants and non-migrants: moral, resource, and imaginary. The departure and physical distance of migrants induces a moral debt vis-à-vis those who stayed (Hage, 2002). In the eyes of non-migrants, the socialization in the destination country is a source of moral and cultural corruption. The gift giving relationship between migrants and non-migrants takes the form of the "repayment of communality" hiding an actual dependency toward migration monies. Through remittances and frequent gifts, migrants reassert their membership to the community lest they are accused of egoistic ingratitude (Carling, 2008:1459).

The second type of explanation focuses on the host country context. In this regard, transnationalism appears as a form of exit, a way out of an underclass position in which migrants are confined (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994). Their transnational engagements provide migrants with the psychological, financial, and social resources that enable them to challenge the subordinating model of incorporation proposed by receiving nation states. Exit transnationalism foresees a proportional relationship between cross-border engagement and discrimination, and, conversely, a reverse relationship between transnationalism and incorporation. Much recent work dismisses the latter part of this assertion. Transnationalism, in any domain of social life, is not weakened by integration (Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002; Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller, 2002; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2003; Snel, Engbersen, and Leerkes, 2006; Mazzucato, 2008; Schans, 2009; Cela, Fokkema, and Ambrosetti, 2013). The same appears true for hometown transnationalism (Lacroix, 2013). However, it seems that some form of exit transnationalism is observed among children of immigrants that face discrimination (Beauchemin, Hamel, and Simon, 2010).

The third type of explanation (transnationalism as an outlet) links transnationalism to the relative position of immigrants in their host and origin areas. A first instance is provided by Roberts, Frank, and Lozano-Ascencio (1999) who argue that the relative situation of the job market in

both countries informs the type of migration that links them. When the job availability is relatively high in both contexts, migratory movements are more likely to be temporary. When job availability in the host setting is significantly better, this fuels permanent migration – and return migration if the reverse is true. With this in mind, Roberts *et al.* argue that transnational mobility happens when both contexts offer poor employment perspectives. A second instance is given by Goldring (1998). Goldring notes the sheer contrast of consumption behaviors and housing at both ends of the migratory lifestyle. She argues that transmigrants compensate for their underclass condition in the receiving area while they enjoy a privileged status in their place of origin (an idea also found in Piore (1979)). In this regard, transnationalism is an outlet that makes the sustaining of social and economic frustrations bearable.

Each of these explanations remain partial. They all relate to a specific form of migration, namely South to North labor migration and do not account for other types of transnationalism that move beyond the primary linkages maintained with the origin community such as long distance nationalism, religious transnationalism, etc. In addition, these explanations generally point to the positive role of sending communities and to the negative role of receiving contexts and in part draw on a reverse push–pull type of thinking according to which the behavior of actors is predetermined by the social conditions in which they live. Despite these limitations, these explanations also identify a large array of factors that matter, from the economic and social conditions that precede migration, to the situation of immigrants long after they have settled in the destination. Understanding transnational engagements demand that we consider the migration process in its widest sense and how it unfolds over time, from the steps that precede migration to its consequences in the arrival settings over several generations. This calls for a better integration of transnational and migration theories. In the section below, the focus is turned on two divergent but complementary trends in current research.

Recent Trends in Migration and Transnational Studies: Accounting for Migrants' Agency in Transnational Assemblages

It seems that recent research on immigrant transnationalism has deserted the problem of actors' engagement. Current theoretical efforts focus on

the functioning of transnational social fields and their embedding into wider neoliberal globalization dynamics. A recent strand of research casting a bridge between transnational theory and actor network theory, is, in this regard, a case in point. Central to the transnationalist literature, the concept of transnational social field is defined by Levitt and Glick Schiller as "sets of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanges and transformed" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1009). The notion of field, as opposed to that of community, moves away from a pre-defined identity-bounded unit of analysis. Transnational social fields are delimited by spatially embedded relations (networks) rather than culturally embedded ones (habitus). The concept of transnational social field thereby puts the emphasis on the fluidity and openness of social relations. A migrant-centered perspective of transnationalism, reinforced by an anti-statist stance that characterized postmodern anthropology of mobility, tended to depict transnational social fields as self-contained, "ungrounded," and "deterritorialized" social formations. This anti-statism explains why the role of assimilation, state policies, and interstate relations in the shaping of pluri-territorial socialities, has long been underestimated. From the early 2000s onward, a new body of research renewed the transnationalist literature by highlighting the importance of the spatial and temporal inscription of transnational phenomena: the past instances of transnationalism (Lucassen, Feldman, and Oltmer, 2006; Waldinger, 2006; Green and Weil, 2007), the place taken by the host context (with a specific focus on the role of cities), the importance of non-migrant actors and migrant organizations (Portes, Escobar, and Walton Radford, 2005; Lacroix, 2011; Pries and Sezgin, 2012), the implications of integration dynamics, and the impacts of state policies in the shaping of transnational fields, etc. Actors of different types and scales that do not necessarily move nor migrate increasingly populated the transnational scholarship.

Against this backdrop, scholars in search of an overarching theoretical framework accounting for this diversity introduced the concept of *assemblage* (DeLanda, 2006; Ong and Collier, 2008). This concept comes from science studies and is associated with Latour's actor network theory (Latour, 2005; Martin, 2005; Law, 2009). This approach was originally articulated to highlight the strong continuum that exists between a diversity of actors (scientists, technicians, lawyers, funding bodies, etc.) and material and immaterial entities (equipment, money, scientific paradigm, flows of ideas) that intervene in the process of scientific production. Actor

network theory rejects the modern idea that knowledge is the outcome of a duality between a mental "cogito" that comes to grip with a separate physical "res extensa." On the contrary, the actor network theory postulates that social action is supported by an intimate interrelation between actors, objects, and ideas. The term assemblage is used to characterize the assembling/disassembling of contingent but tangled practices/groups/dynamics (McFarlane, 2009). Assemblages are configurations made of disparate elements that cohere for a given period. They are characterized by both spatial and temporal trajectories. In the transnational literature, an assemblage points to the ideological (discursive relationships, systems of belief, political or religious mindset, etc.) and material (new technologies, transports, natural elements, physical laws, etc.) aspects that support and are supported by transnational social fields (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009; Legg, 2010; Datta, 2013; Levitt and Rajaram, 2013). The concept of assemblage also points to the important role of states and other non-migrant organizations such as religious bodies, multinational companies, and political parties that intervene in the shaping of cross-border social formations. Transnational scholars are primarily concerned by the spatial deployment of transnational processes. The scholarship insists on the multidimensional, fluid, poly-scalar nature of transnational (translocal) processes (Featherstone, Phillips, and Waters, 2007; Legg, 2009; Brenner, 2011).

In contrast, little is said about the temporality of transnational practices. There is no theoretical attempt to rely on the assemblage theory to explain how transnational social formations come to being, evolve, and dismantle.[3] Arguably, the time factor is crucial to the consolidation of cross-border social formations. Likewise, the various theories regarding the drivers of transnational engagements have not been reassessed in light of the inputs of assemblage. Such an approach, Law asserts, is "descriptive rather than foundational" (2009:141). It focuses on *how* material/immaterial relations assemble rather than on *why*. It focuses on the logics of durability that stabilize a given configuration, rather than on the mechanics of rationality that spur emergent practices. In this regard, I fear that the followers of Gaia so eager to build up an egalitarian vision of the world

[3]This contrasts with the efforts made by migration theorists to grapple with the *longue durée* of migration cycles (see below).

between the human and the non-human, jettison the ontological specificities of human beings.[4] In this respect, the distance between assemblage and structuralist theory can be very proximate. While the former seeks a structural feature within agents, the latter uncovers agentic features in structures. But the result remains the same: a world in which humans and non-humans are tied in a chain of functional relations. The actor network theory leaves open the space occupied by human beings, their agency, and moreover the questions of innovation and reproduction, or, in other words, the question of liberty. In my view, leaving this space solely to rational actor theory and its avatars is not, for either heuristic or for political reasons, a smart move. My intent is to respond to this caveat by outlining a S/A approach that would cast a bridge between the pluralistic visions of role-set and assemblage theory.

Migration theorists have increasingly sought to incorporate S/A approaches in extant models. This tendency is part of a broader effort to reassess the place of actors' agency in network and system theories of migration processes. Morawska's study of Polish immigration to Germany, in this regard (Morawska, 2001), draws on Giddens' structuration theory to analyze the constitution of petty trade and labor networks despite the restrictive policies enforced by the destination country in the 1990s. Morawska argues that the structuration theory complements existing migration theories in two ways: first by interrelating micro and macro-level processes into one single framework; second, by showing how immigrant agency affects the different elements of material and immaterial migration structures over time. For example, she shows how pioneer migrants in the 1970s and 1980s relied on specific trading and circulation skills developed during the communist period to cross the German border. The experience of pioneers adapted these culturally embedded schemes to their new context, which, in turn, facilitated the arrival of new immigrants in the nineties. In particular, the structuration theory amends Massey's cumulative causation by shedding light on aspects otherwise not addressed: the migration skills of migrants, their capacity to react to policy reforms, etc. (2001:62). Goss and Lindquist

[4]Latour (2012) talks about multiple ontologies, which is to say a multiplicity of universes each endowed with a specific ontological trajectory. However, if Latour identifies and describes the modes of being of a number of objects (such as material, technical, ideational, fictional, etc.), he does not include human beings that sit alongside them, but rather (as far as I may say) as beings that stand at the crossroads of these objects and welcome them in their ontological vacuity.

(1995) also import the structuration theory to build an integrative model that account for the micro and macrolevel forces of migration. Interestingly, their work brings to the fore a different aspect of the structuration theory, namely the concept of institution. This meso-level entity, it is argued, provides the possibility to articulate the different levels of analysis. Following Giddens, they define a migrant institution as "a complex articulation of individuals, associations and organizations, which extend the social action of and interaction between these agents and agencies across time and space" (Goss and Lindquist, 1995:319). Drawing on the case of Filipino migration, the authors outline the contours and evolution of a migrant institution framing migration pattern through a routinized set of rules and resources. The routinization of social practices is institutionalized through the constitution of a web of formal and informal organizations, networks of knowledgeable actors, associations, businesses. This process not only ensures the reproduction of migratory flows but also adapts to shifting mutations in national policy and global economic contexts. The latest attempt to make use of the S/A approach challenges the implicit conception of migration systems as "fully formed entities" with no account of their formation or demise (Bakewell, De Haas, and Kubal, 2011). This argument is developed from the perspective of pioneer migrants. It is argued that their capacity to become bridgeheads for new incoming flows depends on the morphology of their social context (or social capital). High levels of social capital are more likely to lead to the take-off and sustenance of migration processes. Conversely, exclusionary social capital explains why migration trends remain confined to translocal or community based networks.

The use of the S/A theory by these different authors discussed above is motivated by different reasons. Morawska introduces social aspects that are overlooked by existing models: the cultural skills developed by migrants and their capacity to react to state policies. Goss and Lindquist draw on the S/A approach to have a better grip on macro, meso and microlevel dimensions of migration phenomena. Bakewell *et al.* introduce the same approach to uncover the temporal dimension of migration systems. Although these authors are primarily addressing the weaknesses of existing migration theories, this overview raises points that can be transposed in the transnationalist debate. As shown above, the need to better grasp the temporality of transnational social field, the articulation of their different dimensions and scales can be addressed by combining such an approach with the S/A perspective.

But this overview also highlights two weaknesses of S/A theory. In the first place, current approaches tend to reinforce a bias that traverses migration theories in general: migration theorists fundamentally consider migrants as migrants, and only address the role they play in the maintaining of migration/transnational networks. But migrants endorse a multiplicity of identification and roles: parents, workers, political actors, social activists, sports fan, etc. Migration and settlement always induce a process of bipolarization of life experiences between host and origin contexts, and thereby a multiplication of identity referentials. Current theories do not account for the pluralization of social roles and the bearing they can have on migration/transnational processes. This leaning is not likely to be corrected with dominant S/A approaches. The latter have been forged for the study of social processes in "standard" societies. The conceptual frameworks conflate cultural structures incorporated by actors and social belonging. The concept of habitus, in particular, firmly embeds actors within homogeneous social groups. Primarily forged for the study of the Algerian agrarian society, the Bourdieusian concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) is conceived as a set of dispositions incorporated at a young age that are not (or only marginally) subject to change (for a discussion of these concepts, *see* Lahire, 1998:38–50). In addition, migration theorists tend to consider the subjective skills, moral norms, and objective social and material other types of resources as a ready-to-hand toolkit. What is too often neglected is the fact that these dispositions are context dependent. Their mobilization is a communicative process that implies the participation and validation by other actors, be they migrants or nonmigrants. The situated dimension of actors' agency becomes salient when attention is paid to the plurality of contexts in which migrants are embedded.

Acknowledging the plurality of roles endorsed by actors problematizes the questions of interest formation, the shift from individual to collective interest and, more generally, of action coordination. This problem is central insofar as individuals do not weigh individually on structures. The appearance of isolated behaviors has no social meaning until this behavior is adopted by a number of people large enough to affect social structures. Envisaging migrants strictly within the confines of their migrancy spares the trouble of explaining how migrants must articulate their cross-border relations and activities with other domains of their lives, and how their multipolarity affects the relations and functioning of the group at destination and origin. In fact, the plurality perspective questions the very

definition of a social group as defined by the S/A approach, which is to say as an aggregate of material configuration, immaterial norms and meanings, and individual agents. When agents are plural and when distinct structural orders conflate, it becomes difficult to define the limits of social groupings.

To respond to these challenges, I define below a version of the S/A approach that would be tailored for the study of postmigration phenomena. I outline three basic components: a conception of the plural social agent, a description of the mechanics of convergence based on Habermas' communicative theory, and a definition of social institutions that provide a methodological and logical ground for understanding how groups maintain beyond the multiplicity of actors' embedding.

OUTLINE OF A STRUCTURE/AGENCY PERSPECTIVE ON HOMETOWN TRANSNATIONALISM

Plural Man's Reflexivity: The Composite Being of Social Agents

As argued above, existing S/A approaches are ill fitted for analyzing postmigration processes that span several social fields. Being forged for the study of social processes in self-contained societies, they do not incorporate the central postmigratory condition of migrants, namely the multiplicity of identity referentials.

The S/A approach developed in this paper dwells on a specific ontological conception of the social actor in line with an existentialist perspective, "the plural man". I characterize this ontology of the social actor as follows. First, humans are to *found their being* (Sartre, 1943): they are to take a stand on their own being (Heidegger, 2008: chapter 2), a stand where they need to constantly reassert their existentiality through their daily behaviors as gendered, political, or economic actors. Second, this existentiality is plural, ambiguous, and multipolar. The term "plural man" is borrowed from the French sociologist Bernard Lahire (1998), but it refers to a line of thought that dates from Merton (1957), Mead 1967; Dahrendorf (1968), Deleuze and Guattari (1980), and more recently, Nancy (1996). From this perspective, social actors cannot be conceived as unitary entities. Individuals possess multiple facets, roles and identity levels. This is all the more so for migrants who have to manage their social positions at destination and origin. They are socialized in a variety of contexts, learning the codes and norms of each of them. They are immersed in

their multiple structural embeddings, and are thus to cope with an array of expectations and obligations. It requires a great deal of courage, diplomacy, compromise, or submission to articulate a coherent identity. Third, humans regulate their relations to the world (including other humans) through a web of meanings that reflect this interior ambivalence (Smelser, 1998). This mode of interaction ensures the continuity and correspondence between social structures and identity configuration. In this regard, subjective meanings and objective structures are co-produced. Understanding the world implies understanding the meaning of the world, which further implies understanding oneself within this world, and conversely at the same time. This non-Cartesian perspective moves away from the structuralist and deterministic conception encapsulated in role theory: objects and subjects, structures and agents, although ontologically distinct, maintain a reciprocal relationship of co-production.

Out of this complexity, actors build up their individuality by forging and asserting a stand on their own existentiality in the world. In the face of complex reality, actors build up a narrative about their own being (Ricoeur, 2003). This segmentation of the being can also be a source of suffering and alienation when the individuals are confronted with identity referentials that cannot be reconciled. Conflicts arise when simultaneously being the child of one's parents and the spouse of one's partner, a believer and a member of a materialist party, a factory worker and a basketball player, an African or Asian immigrant facing postcolonial logics, or poor in a society that promotes wealth. The sociologist Merton points directly to this issue when he shows that criminality in Chicago between the two world wars stems from the contradiction between the subjective "ideal" of the American family head (which associates masculinity with economic affluence) and the objective conditions of economic and job scarcity (Merton, 1938). The same analysis could apply to labor immigrants shared between the expectations of their kins back home and their duties of parents in the receiving society (see below). Yet later work suggests the multiplication of roles and social belongings bolster a sense of uniqueness among actors (Corcuff, 1999:162–163). The range of possible combinations sustains the feeling of one's own specificity. Individuality stems from complexity. At the same time, the greater possibility of bargaining between different social positions produces a sense of autonomy. By and large, this segmentation is the roots of both alienation and liberation. It is therefore the source of our fundamentally political *nature*. In this sense, women are not less

plural than men. The history of their emancipation is the story of the legitimation of their plurality. However, women have even less room to maneuver between conflicting roles, given the difficulty of delegating their traditional position of motherhood. Studies on migrant women working in the care sector in Western countries illustrate this (McGregor, 2007; Fresnoza-Flot, 2008; Romero, 2012).

Agency emerges from the necessity to take action in a composite world and to build up an identity despite often-contradictory roles. Emergence,[5] in this sense, can be seen as the innovative accommodation of conflicting obligations. The literature provides a long series of analytical tools to address the individual's range of possible behaviors. In times of peace or crisis, people can voice, exit, or be loyal (Hirschman, 1970), protest or accommodate (Myrdal, Sterner, and Rose, 1962), turn to past experience or project themselves into the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). By and large, they can exhibit a whole range of behaviors taken from their daily life: lying, convincing, coercing, deterring, etc. But, whatever the degree of innovation in their behavior, actors are never cut off from the culturally embedded interpretation of the world they share with their counterparts. Agency is always directed by social structures.

The transnational engagements of migrant organizations are best understood as a form of agency resulting from the plural embedding of their members. The three cases of Moroccan, Algerian, and Indian hometown organizations in France and the U.K. considered in the empirical component of this project illustrate this perspective. The migration of these three groups is characterized by their community orientation. The choice to migrate is taken in a complex social framework that bears the mark of heavy collective control. Their migration project is a combination of personal and collective considerations. Future migrants are themselves in search of self-fulfillment, improvement of their economic or training

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[5]Emergence is a term usually associated with Critical Realist philosophy (Collier, 1994). This school of thought is a post-Cartesian philosophy that posits a rigorous distinction between object/subject (or structure/agents human and non-human). In this framework, it designates the capacity of social structures to orient in a non-deterministic way human agency. Although the concept is tailored to preserve the subject/object distinction, it is often used by Latourian scholars (Bennett, 2005; Murray Li, 2007) and transposed in Assemblage theory (itself asserting a continuum between human and non-humans). In the theory of engagement developed in this paper, an aporical use of the term is avoided using the term in renewed sense, characterizing not a property of social structures but a characteristic of agency.

conditions, etc. But their endeavor is framed by their place and role within the village community. They are also members of a household that expect to gain from the departure of their kin, and of the village community that expects compliance with community obligations and social order. Migrants are expected to show the success of their personal endeavor, to meet the economic needs of their relatives abroad by sending money, and to show their allegiance to the political order of the village. To exist as a migrant in their own eyes and in the eyes of their relatives back home, those who leave have to behave in accordance with this triple expectation. They follow the migration routes delineated by those who went before them, join the expatriated village community, and participate in hometown activities in the place of arrival. The hometown group creates a space of intimacy by clustering in the same urban settings. The case of Kabyles in Paris is, in this regard, exemplary. Several researchers have attempted to map the distribution of immigrants in the city in accordance with their origin. For example, the Ighil Ali from the municipality of Akbou are to be found in the 14th, 13th, and 10th arrondissement (Direche-Slimani, 1997:46), the Ait Fliqs in the 17th and 15th (Khellil, 1979:111). Migrants' sense of belonging to the community of origin commands the sending of money, gifts, and news to the family in the place of departure. Transnational connections with the homeland are therefore not to be restricted to a livelihood strategy, but derive from their mode of multipolar existence within distinct social spaces.

However, as time goes by, the presence of migrants in the arrival setting widens the field of their existence. The socialization of migrants in their place of work is conducive to the formation of a working-class ethos, especially among those who become unionists or political activists. Over the years, the divergent socio-professional trajectories of migrants have diversified their class identities. The economic crisis of the 1980s encouraged a number of migrants to create their own jobs and become entrepreneurs. Finally, family reunification and the arrival of children affect migrants' status. Migrants, themselves once children in an origin-society household, become parents of children who are part of the host society. Social mobility and the need for larger housing lead newly formed households to move to new neighborhoods. This entails the spatial and social dispersal of hometown groups over several cities and, sometimes, several countries. Clustered hometown groups become dispersed hometown networks. In parallel, the schooling of children leads to the weaving of new relations with local authorities, and within the neighborhood. The process

entails the appearance of new responsibilities. As Mohamed, a factory worker, unionist and hometown leader from Gennevilliers reports: "You have roots in the [origin] country and you have built up roots here, [because] children are here, they grew up here, and they have French nationality"[6] (Interview, Gennevilliers, 2000). As a consequence, integration and the subsequent surge of new personal identities challenge this village identity. The one-time community of villagers becomes a disparate collection of people sharing little more than a common origin.

Within the framework of the plural man, migration appears as a multidimensional act and migrants as actors torn between different social statuses. This highlights the social complexity of migration and the paradoxes actors must face. These diverging dynamics set the background for migratory behaviors in general and collective remittances in particular. In the following section, we will see how this situation affects the transnational orientation of hometowners.

Communicative Action: Connected Behaviors

Habermas, along with Theodor Adorno, Horkheimer, and, more recently, Axel Honneth, is one of the leading figures of the Frankfort School of social theory. His groundbreaking book *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984, 1987) is acknowledged by the International Sociological Association as one of the ten most influential works of sociology. Paradoxically, this theory holds a very minor place in migration-related studies in comparison to his work on public space, citizenship, and deliberative democracy. This is particularly true in the transnational scholarship in which the communicative approach has hardly been mentioned. Communicative action is usually understood as a form of speech act (Austin, 1962). I here expand on his work to argue that any form of action, not only verbal action, is to be understood within a communicational framework. The theory of communicative action is primarily a critique of the Weberian model of rationality, named "instrumental rationality," according to which action is intended to achieve personal ends with available means within the limits of a moral framework. Habermas argues that this model focuses on individuals and fails to explain the dynamics of action coordination, and beyond, the convergence of social behaviors. Habermas coined the term *communicative rationality* to identify

[6]Translated from French by the author.

the second level of rationality. This concept is posited on the idea that an action requires the mediation of an external observer to be acknowledged as rational. It cannot be purely assessed as an internal relation between personal ends and available means. Habermas defines communicative rationality as a mode of truth claim. In other words, acting is taking a stand on the world order and its functioning. He distinguishes three orders of reality, three "worlds": the objective/natural world, the intersubjective sphere delineated by meanings and norms, and the subjective representations that individuals build internally. From there, he identifies three possible forms of "truth claims": conformity with objective facts, normative and moral rightness, and subjective truthfulness. Communicative rationality is the relation to the world that people use to assert validity claims in order to achieve mutual understanding (Habermas, 1984:98–100). Communicative rationality makes actions meaningful to observers, and this meaningfulness makes them assessable as rational or irrational. Rationality appears as a coherent articulation between behavioral conduct and collective understanding of the world. Furthermore, because rationality is not the mere outcome of an internal relation between actors' subjectivity and the outside world but also requires the intervention of an external agent, acting is immediately embedded into an intersubjective framework of reference. Rationality is therefore relative to the position of the observer. For example, the spending of emigrants into conspicuous houses they only occupy a couple a month a year may be deemed rational for actors who are part of a competition for social recognition in the place of origin but not for external observers who may see it as a loss of financial resources. Communicative action is conducive to the production of a shared understanding of the world. Beyond this, it fosters the convergence of social behaviors.

   The lifeworld is defined by Habermas as an internal, subjective perception of the world, a ground, which renders possible the monitoring of rationality of people's behavior. People's lifeworld is subjective insofar as it incorporates personal memories, skills, and psychological leanings. But it also rests on a collective framework of reference, which encapsulates the social and natural order. The lifeworld is therefore a ground for transmitting and renewing cultural knowledge, inserting actors into the social hierarchy of the group, and shaping personal identities (Habermas, 1984:335–337). It is transmitted through education and imitation of other's doings, but also through practice itself. The notion of *lifeworld* establishes a bridge between "coping with" and "understanding" the

world, between subjective and intersubjective interpretations, between identity shaping and group formation, and between *emergence* and *convergence.*

But this framework of analysis also explains *divergence*, a course of action that differs from the general line and that may border on irrationality in the eyes of external observers. There is no deterministic relationship between the building of a lifeworld and convergence. A collective is always questioning the order of its reasons: as shown below, belonging to a collective of migrants does not necessarily involve a unilateral implication into hometown organizations. But convergence and divergence are to be seen as two sides of the same agential coin. These dynamics do not differ in their fundamental nature but of directionality: the centripetal movement of convergence is opposed to the centrifuge one of divergence. Individuals are tied to a multiplicity of social fields. A divergence in a given context can hide a convergence process in another. In such cases, divergence may have a structural efficiency. If the occurrence of a diverging behavior remained unrelated to any larger dynamics, it would only be an isolated, ec-*centric* event.

With this framework in mind, one can analyze the practices of migrants. Remittances in different forms can be understood as a type of communicative action. They can be regarded as a message through which migrants express a positioning with regard to both other migrants and non-migrants alike – a way of expressing their interpretation of the rights and duties attached to their role of migrant. As shown above, this role emerges at the crossroads of personal, family, and community expectations. Any form of remittances (the monies sent back home, the gifts given to relatives, and even personal projects such as the building of a house) is to be construed under this triple lens. The migrant house is emblematic; it is simultaneously an obvious sign of success, a warranty against life risks for the family and, when built in the place of origin, a sign of allegiance to the village. Remittances are communicative acts to meet expectations of observers, both in terms of material and symbolic expectations. In this regard, collective remittances are conceived as meaningful and rational actions for both senders and receivers. The comparative study of Kurien in three Keralese villages (Muslim, Christian and Hindu) shows that the relative weight of responsibility differs according to the cultural background of the sending setting. In the Muslim village, migrants spent large sums of money under the form of gifts to the poor, support to a local orphanage, and/or donations to the mosque. In Hindu

villages, individuals show off the success of their migration through conspicuous religious life cycle rituals and usurious lending. In Christian villages, emigrants invest in productive activities for the benefit of their close kin (Kurien, 2008).

As shown above, integration over time adds layers to migrants' identity. Their identification with the place of settlement and their new associated obligations undermine their "raison d'être" as a villager. The life experience and socialization of migrants in alternative social fields enriches their lifeworld with new references. But in turn, this multi-polarization challenges people's sense of belonging. In this context, the latter needs to be constantly re-asserted and/or re-invented. In hometown organizations, fellows stop attending meetings and paying fees. These "divergent behaviors" reveal a process of individuation that undermines hometown organizations' legitimacy, to which (the latter) must adapt or disappear.

In this context, the surge of engagement with long-distance development initiatives observed among hometown organizations is the result of this necessity to reassert "villageness". Collective remittances emerged as a response to the multi-polarization of personal roles. On the one hand, collective remittances became a rallying point to regenerate not only their commitment to the hometown organization but also their ties with the village of origin.[7] In effect, development projects are fully inscribed into the three-pronged role-set of hometowners (mark of personal fulfillment, compliance with family obligations, and allegiance to the village social hierarchy). On the other hand, they also bear the mark of their inscription into the society of arrival: through development practices, migrants become vectors of modernity and thereby of values and lifestyles associated with the place where they settled. For example, hometown organizations from Southern Morocco finance the electrification of their place of origin (Lacroix, 2005). The building of hospitals is a common project among Indian Punjabis (Dusenbery and Tatla, 2009; Lacroix, 2010). Likewise, the funding of sewage systems by U.S.-based Mexican hometown associations has been well-documented (Orozco, 2003; Fox, 2005;

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[7]Of course, this is not a rallying point for everybody. Any convergent dynamics generate divergence. Those who refuse to partake are often presented as selfish and individualistic (not to say "mad" or "alcoholics"). A Kabyle hometowner admitted to paying for the membership fees of his brother to hide his refusal to partake in community activities. But these outsiders are not necessarily people who have cut off with the place of origin. They prefer an intimate and family based transnationalism away from HTO's communitarian citizenship they regard as outdated.

Smith, 2006). These projects all contribute to align the villages' landscape and lifestyle with those of the arrival setting. Collective remittances are located at the crossroads of three mental universes, three lifeworlds: the one of migrants, the one of non-migrants in origin communities, and the one of non-migrants in receiving societies. Remittances are not a mere act of transfer but also an act of translation between different cultural orders. These projects are therefore a complex form of communicative action, which, beyond the material impact of the village, asserts the dual embedding of migrants. Collective remittances are an output of a dual positioning of migrants toward both the sending and settlement areas. What remains to be seen is the place of social and public institutions (and therefore of hometown organizations and state policies) within these processes.

The Role of Social Institutions in Structural Elaboration

Habermas' major theoretical accomplishment is to link the structures of society with the structures of rationality. As seen above, the communicative dimension of daily practices builds a shared understanding of the world, and therefore fosters social integration through the three forms of truth claims (objective conformity, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness). Henceforth, these three forms of relation to the world create three spheres of value: science, law, and art. The emergence of distinct spheres is the result of a specialization in the different ways of coping with reality (instrumental and communicative). Habermas thereby identifies first a process of specialization of societal fields. Economy and polity occupies a specific place in this process. Habermas draws from Parsons' concept of medium (Habermas, 1987:261) to account for their stratification. Instrumental rationality, he argues, has led to money being substituted for language in order to mediate interactions for the exchanges of goods. The economy thus became a distinct sphere of society. Likewise, the regulation of the pursuit of power through a power normative framework has been conducive to the emergence of a specialized polity. Habermas sees the emergence of economy, polity, science, and art as autonomous societal fields backed upon their specific set of rules, institutions, and socialities. Habermas thus provides a vision of society as an ensemble of heterogeneous and conflicting structural levels. In line with a system perspective, he claims that the stages of evolution from tribal to modern societies are "marked by the appearance of new systemic mechanisms and corresponding levels of complexity" (p. 154). In modern societies, where structural

specialization is at its height, the plural embedding of actors sets the stage for a high level of role-set contradictions. Modern societies are therefore the crucible of individualistic behaviors.

Beneath this partition of specialized societal arenas lies the level of everyday interpersonal interactions, in which instrumental and communicative rationalities coexist in people's practices. For Habermas, the communication flows between the levels of the interpersonal sphere and specialized structures are ensured by civil society. Media (including the internet), associations, and a whole range of intermediary bodies impede the formal disconnection between different areas of the society and ensure that the *res publica* does not fall into the exclusive hands of appointed experts. Habermas thus re-locates mid-range social institutions within the formation of social structures. Political parties, unions, associations, and media all contribute to produce this social glue. Civil society is a transmission belt, which prevents the misappropriation of public matters. Habermas thus renews the definition of civil society. His reasoning unfolds with regards to state bounded societies. But I assume it also applies to the emergence of transnational civil societies that follows suit the consolidation of cross-border social, legal, or economic structures and the internationalization of environmental issues. It is, however, true that the absence of genuine transnationalization of political institutions constrains the development of cross-border civil societies (Faist, 2000).

One can draw from this conception of civil society to reassess the concept of social institution.[8] It is my contention that social institutions in general, and not only those that are part of civil society, are to be seen as the grassroots matrix of social cohesion. Enterprises and families (including transnational businesses and families) also play a role in the reconciliation of contradictory interests and positions. I see social institutions as social entities wherein individuals strive collectively to solve the

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[8]This perspective contrasts with common conceptions of social institutions. A conservative conception defines them as entrenched practices (Giddens, 1984:17) that ensures the reproduction of a normative order (Bourdieu, 1977). A more recent line of thought conceives institutions as a social device meant to improve agentic capacities of actors. Put differently, they consider social institutions as agentic prostheses meant to enhance the spatial and temporal scope of the capacity to act. The account given by Goss and Lindquist is a case in point (Goss and Lindquist, 1995). In contrast, I conceive social institutions, neither through the norms they are supposed to reproduce nor through their instrumental functions, but as spaces of deliberation between actors that enable them to cope with the constraints of their wider context.

problems posed by structural contradictions. Social institutions are a framework of production and re-production for practices, and moreover, for a normative understanding of the lifeworld. The course of action chosen by individuals always takes shape with reference to a set of social institutions (families, enterprises, associations, etc.)

Social institutions provide the possibility for agents to assert the validity of their behaviors, and thereby, to renew/reproduce a shared understanding of the world and of themselves within the world. They bridge actors' behaviors with their immaterial collective and personal lifeworlds. Second, they enable actors and collectives to engage with other public and private institutions (voluntary groups, states, businesses, etc.). They connect the realm of daily interactions with the *longue durée* structural features of society. In this regard, social institutions constitute the missing link between coordinated individual actions and structural elaboration.

This conception can be applied to the case of migrant social institutions. I define migrant social institutions as the families, associations, and businesses that enable migrants to overcome the structural constraints posed by the migration process. Among these institutions, hometown organizations play a key role (Moya, 2005). In the case of North African and Punjabi organizations, one observes an evolution of their function over time. In the early days of migration, they eased the settlement of newcomers by providing information about job opportunities and accommodation. In the seventies and eighties, changes in both French and British policy restrictions put an end to the arrival of new immigrants. During this period, their role was to preserve the identity of villager in the place of arrival. They ensured that expatriates carried on fulfilling their duties as villagers and household members, and that members continued sending remittances to their parents and participating in collective events. For example, emigrants were still expected to participate in customary duties, such as the maintaining of public equipment (collective irrigation systems, religious buildings and festivals, etc.). But as they could not contribute their time or physical labor, migrants instead sent financial contributions. This form of participation in collective endeavors prefigured contemporary long-distance development projects. These organizations also provided a space of social gathering and support that fostered communicative dynamics. This changed again from the nineties onward, as hometown organizations became increasingly versed in collective remittances. Mobilization to benefit village communities remained

appealing enough to attract hometowners beyond their age, political, or status differences. As seen above, development projects are communicative acts that allow migrants to take a stand on their plural being. In this context, hometown organizations provided a space of deliberation where development projects were elaborated. In that regard, they played the role of a social institution in which members wove together the disjointed poles of their existence.

Finally, hometown organizations mediate the relations of the group with other institutional partners. In sending areas, the need for public equipment is the result of wider structural dynamics. This is the direct consequence of declining public investment in rural settings in the wake of structural adjustment policies. Local populations are left to take charge of the maintenance of public infrastructures, schools, and health equipment to offset the withdrawal of the state. Public–private partnerships and the "market citizenship" (Goldring, 2002) imposed by public authorities are part and parcel of the neoliberal credo that infuses new models of local governance in Southern countries. This shift of responsibilities from public institutions to local populations has been all the easier given that the areas benefiting from collective remittances are often areas that display a troubled historical relationship with the central state. As mentioned above, this is the case of the three areas studied in my personal research (Punjab, Kabylia, and the Moroccan Anti-Atlas), and in many other investigated areas (the Kayes region in Mali, Oaxaca in Mexico, etc.). These are areas populated with cultural or religious minorities, which have sometimes been in open conflict with the government. Another factor that has favored this shift is the multiplication of policies linking migration and development. This is true in Northern countries (codevelopment policies in France, Belgium, and southern Europe and migration and development schemes in the U.K. and the Netherlands), and in sending countries (the Programme d'Electrification Rurale Généralisée in Morocco, the NRI-1 programme of the government of Punjab, the Indian Development Foundation plan at the Federal level, the "Tres por Uno" scheme in Mexico; Iskander, 2010). Hometown organizations have amply benefited from this array of national and local schemes. Through her study of Mexican and Moroccan diasporic policies, Natasha Iskander shows that states collaborate with migrant organizations to fine-tune and implement these programs. The conjunction between migrants' identity issues and policy interests explains the surge in collective remittances from the nineties onward. Hometown

organizations are key actors in this dynamic. They are platforms connecting migrants' practices with immaterial (lifeworld) and material (private and public institutions) structures. They are spaces in which migrants strive to connect the different poles of their existence. They also are organizations that enable funding applications, decision-making, and project management.

CONCLUSION: BRIDGING TRANSNATIONAL AND MIGRATION STUDIES

In this article, I have outlined the contours of a new approach to transnational engagement. This approach rests on the principle that the need for humans to take action is rooted in the lines of fractures that traverse actors' identities and their social environment. The "plural man" conception, associated with the Habermassian theory of communicative action, provides an ontological grounding to the S/A approach that discards economistic (rational actor theory) and structuralist (context driven) conceptions of agency. From this perspective, transnationalism is understood as a form of agency for migrants inserted simultaneously in multiple social spaces and structural universes. The emergence of transnational practices results from the effort to overcome the contradictions posed by their dual embedding. I have used this approach to disentangle the various micro-level and macro-level cultural, economic, and political dynamics which have been conducive to the surge of collective remittances in the 1990s. This phenomenon is the outcome of several parallel trends: the evolution of migrant communities as they integrate into the host society, the geopolitical background in sending areas, the transformation of local governance in the wake of structural adjustment policies, and the support provided by migration and development policies in Southern and Northern countries. These observations do not only apply to the three case studies investigated in this article but also to other migrant groups in the North America and Europe. A wealth of studies shows that collective remittances are the outcome of the dual embedding of their members at the local level (Daum, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2004; Grillo and Riccio, 2004; Smith, 2006). The analytical framework sheds light on the communicative dimension of this engagement: migrants have not chosen development as the lexical register to express the pluralization of their social insertion for random reasons. Contrary to other

forms of migrant practices in their place of origin (such as conspicuous consumption, or large spending in religious rituals), development can be deemed as "rational" for observers in both sending and receiving countries. This is particularly obvious among Moroccan organizations, which tend to include a large proportion of native French members. Development practices thereby build up an inclusive lifeworld that incorporate actors at destination and origin.

The present approach bridges the gap between post-migration studies focused on integration, diaspora and transnational processes, and migration studies focused on determinants and systems. It highlights the importance of the initial conditions in which emigration took place. Each type of migration tends to produce one or several specific forms of social institution. We have seen the example of hometown organizations that are themselves the outcome of rural labor migration. Likewise, political exile often gives rise to refugee organizations. High skilled labor migrants form professional organizations, while for female migrants, the role of transnational families appears to be central. In addition, the role of private organizations has been highlighted by research on the so-called migration industry (Garapich, 2008; Light, 2013). In turn, these different forms of social institutions that were initially meant to facilitate new immigration flows can shift their function and become key players in the integration of actors and the reproduction of cross-border ties (Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller, 2002; Grillo, 2008).

Acknowledging the migration and postmigration role of social institutions provides a possibility to better account for premigration dynamics in the making of transnational spaces, and for transnational dynamics fertilizing new migration trends. In this regard, three generic types of institutions have been identified, each tied to a specific societal field: the family, the enterprise, and the association. This list remains partial and invites further research. In particular, the question of whether the Internet can be a locus for new forms of (virtual) social institutions remains open. It is true that the internet has produced an interesting form of (immobile) transnationalism (Kuah-Pearce, 2008). Yet, it remains to be seen whether websites and online forums are truly either places of socialization or spaces for the dissemination of a new habitus that informs the lifeworld of actors and helps them to reassemble the fragmented parts of their selves. The same question can be posed for public spaces, such as bars that can become a rallying point for specific groups that do not fit into classical social frameworks (gay migrants are a case in point). This research hints

at ambiguous new structures of "quasi-social institutions." Beyond their instrumental function, much could be gained by addressing them as spaces of communicative interactions. This approach opens new avenues of investigation on the shaping of identities within the confines of migrant institutions, and their inscription into wider societal and inter-societal structural dynamics.

In migration studies, the S/A perspective offers an alternative to the dominant economistic framework for understanding migrants' decisions. In this way, emigrating is not the result of a rational calculation between current costs and expected gains but a total social (and communicational) act that engages actors in their economic, social and political existence. In addition, this framework enriches the cumulative causation perspective that remains overly focused on the cultural processes in the place of departure, overlooking identity processes (and integration) in the place of arrival. Finally, it complements network and S/A approaches to migration by accounting for the impacts of identity processes. Migration not only affects future migrants' capacity to act (e.g., by providing or depriving people from financial of informational resources) but it also transforms the migrants themselves through their socialization into new social spaces.

In transnational studies, this analytical framework complements the assemblage approach. As shown above, transnational theory combined with globalization and assemblage provides a window on how multidimensional cross-border social, material, and immaterial fields articulate, but remains silent on the micro-level drivers for actors' (dis-)engagements. A focus on the S/A relationship bridges the intrinsic multidimensionality of transnational assemblages on the one hand and the agential position of multipolar individuals on the other. However, the present perspective also differs in several key ways from current conceptions of transnationalism. In particular, it moves transnational theory out of the compound of globalization studies. Without denying their importance, it leaves aside traditional terms of reference in transnational studies: mobility, communication technologies, and the critique of methodological nationalism. In exchange, it foregrounds the importance of identity processes and social institutions. It grants more importance to the temporality of transnational processes (in line with recent research in transnational history) and focuses less on the spatiality of network configuration.

By sketching a more "embedded" theoretical framework, this theory of engagement provides an analytical perspective that complements recent works on the transnationalism and integration relationship. Transnational

theorists have tended to search for the determinants of transnational practices exclusively in the host country (job insecurity, discrimination, integration, etc.). I argue that transnationalism is an outcome of societal dynamics at both ends of the migration trajectory. This approach rests on an attempt to reassess migrants' self-understanding as complex and plural. Migrants do not identify solely as migrants; that is to say, individuals who rely on alternate statuses and personas, such as citizens, villagers, workers, sons (daughters), or fathers (mothers). As such, they must cope with the dynamics of the multiple social contexts in which they are embedded. Against the proponents of "reactive transnationalism" (Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002), it is my contention that transnationalism is not the result of a failure of integration, but the consequence of multiple insertion, or, one could say, of "hyper-integration."[9] Transnationalism is coterminous with the evolution of host and sending societies. When approached through the present framework, it provides a richer and more detailed account of the role of state policies and integration in transnational dynamics without reducing the transnational practices of actors to intra- and inter-state policies.

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[9]Hyper-integration is to integration what "hyper-text" is to say, a say that refers to and borrow from another text. Hyper-integration refers to a process of integration that cannot be understood without the actors' anchoring into another social context.

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