1. Introduction to Handbook on Transnationalism

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INTRODUCTION

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, the proposition that a wide range of social, cultural, economic and political phenomena emerge and operate across national borders seems decidedly axiomatic. Notwithstanding the ongoing power exercised by nation-states, the strictures of border control and the impact of resurgent nationalism, global society is characterised by diverse and uneven flows and connections that underpin interdependence across borders. Since the 1990s, the recognition of transnationalism, a marker for people-led cross-border connections and activities particularly associated with migration (Al-Ali et al. 2001; Basch et al. 1994), has been critical in establishing the character, extent and contours of such connectivities. More than just an empirical observation, however, transnationalism has also altered the way in which researchers conceive of key features of social life. A transnational ‘lens’ has challenged the predominance of methodologically nationalist analyses (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), questioned the presumed linearity of migratory processes and migrant identity and cultural formation (Glick Schiller et al. 1992), and drawn attention to relations between places at a range of scales and across multiple territories (Smith 2001).

Transnationalism has, however, also become rather wonted as a term and concept over the last three decades while also being subject to substantial critique. The term is sometimes simply deployed as a replacement for international, multinational or global and thus can lack precision either as a signifier for certain observable phenomena or as a referent to a particular theoretical approach. For some time, researchers have questioned whether the notion of transnationalism has analytical purchase because of its broad employment, particularly in migration studies, at times running the ‘risk of becoming an empty conceptual vessel’ (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, p. 4). Furthermore, the overriding emphasis on connectivity in studies of transnationalism, or indeed within the deployment of transnationalism as a theoretical frame, has sometimes obscured the significance of place and locality, and the way in which cross-border activities and connections are always facilitated, configured and impeded by states, institutions and social formations of various kinds. Studies of transnationalism are at their strongest when place is foregrounded and when the tension between fluidity and friction in cross-border lives, practices and institutions is prioritised.
In curating this *Handbook of Transnationalism* and writing this introduction, we have sought to highlight the uneven connections and emplacements that characterise transnationalism. We also place emphasis on recognising the diversity of ways in which transnationalism is employed in research while paying particular attention to the potential for accounts of transnationalism to intersect with and give shape to broader empirical and theoretical discussions. Given their predominance in transnationalism studies, migration and migrant lives inform a significant component of the material gathered here, in relation to different forms of migration and their transnational dimensions as well as the networks and circulations that emerge through migrant activities. Transnationalism has much more variety than this though, emerging in state and organisational practices, activism, urban transformation, higher education, popular culture and religion, to name a few. There is also variety in the conceptual concerns that are raised in relation to transnationalism and in particular the way in which different geographies or scales are involved, the temporality of transnationalism, connections to life course, and the articulation of affect and emotion across borders.

In order to situate the diverse accounts of transnationalism in this handbook, we first trace the lineage and critique of transnationalism as a concept and an approach from its emergence in the 1990s. We then provide an overview of the chapters in the handbook under four main themes: conceptualising transnationalism, varieties of transnationalism, transnational migrations, and transnational networks and circulations. The account of transnationalism in this handbook is therefore intended to reflect the voluminous and far-ranging literature in transnational studies. In closing, we reflect on the implications for transnationalism in a world profoundly changed by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Written in 2020, this handbook emerged against the backdrop of the developing pandemic, which led to a completely unprecedented and unexpected closure of borders and suspension of travel around the world. As we discuss in the final last section, the pandemic and government responses that have impeded mobility raise some significant questions about the future of migration in particular. They also, however, highlight how embedded transnational practices and lives have become around the world and as such draw attention to the importance of transnationalism as a theoretical and analytical lens for social scientists and others grappling with a range of phenomena.

**TRANSNATIONALISM IN PERSPECTIVE**

Transnationalism is an overarching scholarly signifier for a bundle of concepts – transnationality, transnationalisation, transmigrant, transnational fields/spaces – that emphasise transversal dimensions of cross-border practices, lives and connections. The usage of these terms has grown enormously since the early 1990s, when the term ‘transnational’ featured in fewer than 100 publications a year, to a situation where large tracts of the arts, humanities and especially the social sciences now make regular reference to transnational phenomena (featuring in nearly 3,500 publications
Although our account of transnationalism in this handbook, and that of a majority of chapter authors, emerges from migration-related research, it should be noted that there are other lineages to this term that shape its contemporary usage. There has been, for example, important scholarship on transnational corporations (Sauvant 2008; Yeung 1997), accounts of international relations and transnational state practices (Babic et al. 2020; Ougaard 2018) and transnational law (Graubart 2004; Heyvaert 2017), amongst others. While important, the background and current debates in these areas are beyond the scope of this introduction. Instead we focus here on the way in which notions of transnationalism took shape in new approaches to migration, placing particular emphasis on its emergence in the 1990s, followed by a period of debate and critiques, before the increasing normalisation of transnational terminology and the development of new conceptual directions.

The emergence of transnationalism as a key concept in migration studies occurred at a time of increasing focus on globalisation in the social sciences as well as shifting disciplinary boundaries. For migration scholars, new analyses of global capitalist systems and in particular of interlinked cultural and economic globalisation (e.g. Appadurai 1991) raised questions about how migrants, as key mobile subjects, might be contributing to ground-up processes beyond national territories (Rouse 1991). Concomitantly, for migration researchers and anthropologists in particular (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), recognition of globalisation shifted the focus of research away from distinct accounts of migrant sending and receiving societies to the lived experiences of migrants across territories. In highlighting the problems of the ‘assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, p. 7) it became apparent that accounts of international migration as a linear, distinct undertaking followed by conclusive processes of settlement or return were not empirically accurate or theoretically tenable (Rouse 1991). In retrospect, many scholars have noted that ‘migration has never been a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multicultural salad bowl’ (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, p. 130). However, it was only at the beginning of the 1990s that this presumption started to be prominently challenged (Nowicka 2020).

The popularisation of transnationalism as a term and its introduction into the lexicon of migration studies is often credited to anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc. Their landmark 1994 text *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* set the agenda for an enduring shift in migration scholarship. Drawing on comparative ethnographic research among Caribbean and Filipino populations in New York, Basch et al. (1994) demonstrated the need for migration studies to take a wider view of the field of action that migrants inhabit while recognising the flexible and fluid identities emergent in migration and cross-border connections. Their account thus problematised the dichotomy between ‘immigrant’ as an individual who moves wholesale from one country to the next and a ‘migrant’ who is transient and thus not connected to places of temporary life away from home. The emphasis on transnationalism demonstrated that migrants commonly traverse both of these subject positions, not least because of the ways in which different kinds of migrations
are articulated through social and economic relations that cross borders between countries of origin and destination. This insight gave impetus to a rethinking of international migration in at least two ways: first, it drew attention to the wider field of action that migrants inhabit beyond the container of the nation-state; and second, it foregrounded the multiple forms of identification in relation to ethnicity, class and nationalism that migrant subjects potentially embrace (Collins 2009).

In migration studies, Basch et al.’s (1994) arguments and broader discussions of transnationalism were particularly influential in developing new accounts of the ways in which migrant lives and relations take shape across borders. As Glick Schiller (2018, p. 201) reflected more than two decades later, studies of transnationalism have led to a ‘rich descriptive literature on transnational families, hometown association, transnational politics and long-distance nationalism, status, multiple types of organizations, gender, remittance economies, religions, social security and diasporic identities’. A particularly important theme that emerged through this early work was an emphasis on gender and the way in which transnationalism also comes to reshape women’s and men’s identities and participation in householding (Giles 1997; Mahler 1999; Suzuki 2000; Yeoh and Willis 1999). Notions of ‘transnational motherhood’ (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, p. 550), for example, highlighted that transnational lives are not only about crossing borders but rather also constituted as ‘circuits of affection, caring, and financial support that transcend national borders’. Early insights into transnationalism also highlighted the wider impacts of migration in sending-country communities, not only financial remittances but also the cultural diffusion and change enabled through social remittances, ‘the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities’ (Levitt 1998, p. 926). Another dimension of earlier transnationalism studies were accounts that drew attention to how migration, displacement, cultural change and connection created scope for hybrid identities, often framed as resistant to or at least subverting essentialised notions of culture and identity such as those associated with nationalism (Kaplan 1996; Hannerz 1996). Technology was another important feature of early accounts of transnationalism, with faster and more affordable air transportation alongside information technologies such as email, phone and fax providing a foundation for the establishment of transnational interactions as part of daily activities (Mountz and Wright 1996). By the turn of the twenty-first century, a special issue on ‘transnational migration’ published by the International Migration Review signified ‘the importance and growing acceptance of a transnational perspective among migration scholars’, while acknowledging the continuing critique and the need for further work (Levitt et al. 2003, p. 565).

There was thus something of a celebratory tone about these early accounts of transnationalism. These accounts demonstrated the agency of migrants as transnational actors, often highlighting how transnationalism seemingly operated against the repressive forces of nation-states and global capitalism. While understandable from a political perspective, criticisms also emerged, especially from the late 1990s that questioned both the extent of transnationalism as a set of phenomena as well as the emancipatory conclusions that some scholars had drawn. Of particular note, it was
asserted that the term transnationalism had become all too popular, being deployed without analytical clarity in relation to migration and migrant lives. As Portes et al. (1999, p. 219) put it in a seminal article, ‘if all or most things that immigrants do are defined as “transnationalism”, then none is because the term becomes synonymous with the total set of experiences of this population’. Their proposal was that researchers need to more clearly define the specific occupations and activities that were significant in transnational life and place much more emphasis on their frequency and endurance (see also Guarnizo and Smith 1998). Another concern related to the way in which some accounts of transnationalism had prioritised abstracted, dematerialised flows that privileged hybridity and the emancipatory potential of transnationalism while not accounting for concrete changes in people’s lives, or power relations involved in uneven access to mobility (Mitchell 1997; Ong and Nonini 1997). Lastly, and particularly poignantly for migration researchers, early studies of transnationalism often appeared to jettison a focus on the nation and state actors while privileging ‘bottom-up’ insights into cross-border lives and identities. Instead, the relationship between State/Nation/Transnation (Yeoh and Willis 2004) is crucial as transnationalism leads to reconfigurations, but not the eradication, of the role of nation-states in migration and cross-border lives. For all the talk of fluidity and porosity, nation-states still effectively govern who can legally enter national space, often through carefully calibrated immigration policies to manage differential incorporation of migrant groups into nation-states (Castles 2004). Scholars arguing for the continued importance of the nation-state saw this as a key feature of ‘transnationalism’ that distinguishes the term from the more deterritorialised concept of ‘globalisation’ (Willis et al. 2004). More broadly, notions of freedom and flexibility implicit in transnationalism must also be interrogated alongside the frictional effects of prevailing migration regimes and differential access to capital.

One of the consequences of these critiques has been a greater focus on refining the conceptual understandings of the character and extent of transnationalism. For scholars like Portes et al. (1999; see also Portes 2001), the measurability of transnationalism was particularly important, a stance that led them to propose defining ‘the individual and his/her support networks as the proper unit of analysis’ while confining the term to refer to ‘occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders’ (Portes et al. 1999, pp. 219–20). Agreeing that it is the scale of intensity and simultaneity of cross-border activities that distinguished the ‘transnational’ from other related phenomena, Vertovec (1999, p. 448) nevertheless advocated leveraging on the term’s ‘multi-vocality’ in proposing a conceptual catalogue to bring order to a broad spectrum of transnational processes: social morphology; type of consciousness; mode of cultural production; avenue of capital; site of political engagement; and (re)construction of place. Meanwhile, Faist (2000) offered a different typology of transnationalism based on spatial-temporal variations in the degree of simultaneous embeddedness and the strength of transnational social ties: (a) dispersion and assimilation (weak embeddedness, short-lived ties); (b) transnational exchange and reciprocity (strong embeddedness, short-lived
ties); (c) transnational networks (weak embeddedness, long-lived ties); and (d) transnational communities (strong embeddedness, enduring ties).

In the formative times at the dawn of the twenty-first century, interest in conceptualising the ‘transnational’ continued to expand its reach. Scholars who were critical of focusing primarily on migrant practices called for moving the locus of attention to transnational social spaces, formations and fields. Faist (1998, p. 217), for example, called for attention to be trained on ‘transnational social spaces’ which are constituted by ‘the various forms of resources or capital of spatially mobile and immobile persons, on the one hand, and the regulations imposed by nation-states and various other opportunities and constraints, on the other’. Building on this interest in the mechanisms behind institutional change and social transformation, Faist (2010, p. 1673) proposed understanding ‘transnational social formations’ as ‘located in between the life-world of personal interactions … and the functional systems of differentiated spheres, such as the economy, polity, law, science and religion’. For Faist, transnational studies as an ‘ecumenical field’ needs to leave ‘conceptual and methodological space for both top-down/outside-inside views’ (2010, p. 1682).

Also concerned with deepening transnationalism studies beyond the focus on the individual migrant, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) offered a transnational social field approach that unhinges notions of society from the boundaries of a single nation-state, and instead foregrounded the significance of multiple interlocking sets of social relationships that are not coterminous with state boundaries. As a domain of practice in which unequally positioned social agents may act, compete, collaborate or exchange ideas and resources across borders, the concept of a transnational social field challenges the ‘neat divisions of connection into local, national, transnational, and global’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, p. 1010). As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, p. 1010) go on to explain, ‘In one sense, all are local in that near and distant connections penetrate the daily lives of individuals lived within a locale. But within this locale, a person may participate in personal networks or receive ideas and information that connect them to others in a nation-state, across the borders of a nation-state, or globally, without ever having migrated.’ The approach hence brings migrants, their family members, and non-migrants into the same social field; at the same time, a distinction is made between more practical ‘ways of being’ where individuals are embedded within a field without identifying with what it represents, and meaning-laden ‘ways of belonging’ where individuals engage in social relations and practices with the awareness of what kind of identity action signifies.

As the literature on transnationalism grew exponentially as the twenty-first century progressed, scholars became less concerned with defining and delimiting the scope of transnationalism and instead drew on transnationalism as an analytical framework or ‘optic’ that can be applied to a widening range of spaces (e.g. public space, political space, the home and spaces of return), networks (e.g. business, family and friendship networks) and actors (e.g. elite, middling and capital-poor subjects) operating within and across national borders (Collins 2009). A quarter of a century after its initial efflorescence, transnationalism studies have moved considerably from the earlier preoccupation, particularly in the US-centric literature, on immigrant
ties within homeland-host society relationships to a much broader conception of social ties including transnational connections forged by businesses, the media, politics, religion, family, kinship and all manner of social experience (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Tan et al. 2018). Used extensively in migration studies in particular, transnationalism has become something of a shorthand, underpinning research in multiple domains including the growing significance of migrant remittances in migration-and-development discourses, studies on dual, multiple and flexible citizenship and sense of belonging, and transnational parenthood, care chains and the social reproduction of the family, to name a few. In turn, the expanding corpus of transnationalism studies has also helped to refine our understanding of the term by distinguishing between various types of transnational linkages (e.g. familial, socio-cultural, economic and political); specifying distinct levels of transnationalism (e.g. above/below, or micro, meso and macro levels); and identifying multiple transnational actors (e.g. individuals, families, communities and organisations) (Tan et al. 2018).

In recent years, as the ‘transnational’ gains currency in the lexicon of migration studies and related fields of research, it has also given impetus to new directions for research. While some scholars fear that the concept is at risk of degenerating into an empty ‘catch-all’ term in a field that is ‘descriptive’ and ‘context-dependent’ (Dahinden, 2017, p. 1475, citing Pries 2008 and Waldinger 2015), others regard the transnational optic as a paradigmatic shift heralding new theoretical and methodological approaches that have made a fundamental difference to the way social processes are understood. In their review of 60 influential papers, Tan et al. (2018, p. 13) concluded that despite important lacunae, ‘the influence of transnationalism [on development studies] has been profound, stimulating an innovative body of work on changing migration patterns, the linkages between diaspora and their homelands, and the impact of these linkages on development’. Focusing on social theory, Dahinden (2017, p. 1482) argued that applying a transnational perspective means ‘adopting an explicitly de-nationalized epistemological stance [i.e. new frames outside ‘national containers’] and concomitant methodologies [e.g. mobile methods, multi-sited approaches] in order to investigate and theorize cross-border social phenomena by non-state actors’. While transnationalism studies have explicitly focused on non-state actors in writing against or beyond the state, Collyer and King (2015) highlighted the need to bring the transnational practices of the state back into the fold in geopolitical analysis through giving weight to the extra-territorial reach of state power in controlling transnational activities. The ‘transnational spatialities of state power’ can work in multiple ways, securing borders against migrants-in-transit through ‘detention, deportation and deterrence’ on the one hand, while binding emigrants to their home countries by granting extra-territorial citizenship rights on the other (Ehrkamp, 2020, p. 1206).

Debates on transnationalism have also spawned creative synergy with a range of other emerging concepts. In their introduction to a special issue of Identities, de Jong and Dannecker (2018, p. 494) shift attention from internal navel-gazing to examining the productive rapprochement between transnationalism and like-minded
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concepts such as ‘borders’, ‘translocality’, ‘precarity’, ‘queer’, ‘moralities’, ‘the state’, and ‘brokerage’ to offer to novel frameworks for analysing ‘the complexity and the interconnectedness of social life on a global scale’. Similarly, Tedeschi et al.’s (2020) review of highly cited recent papers suggests that the transnationalism optic has considerable mileage in engaging disparate fields of study including telecommunications, return migration, the body and the law. The focus on the flexibility and diversity of migratory trajectories that is germane to transnationalism research has also provided fertile ground for the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Cresswell 2006; Hannam et al. 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). The insistence on going beyond ‘the nation as container’ while foregrounding the dynamism and unequal power of transnational fields coheres with the new paradigm’s push against a sedentarist bias to reveal the politics of (im)mobility. Lines of continuity can be traced between transnationalism’s emphasis on eschewing methodological nationalism and insisting on migrants’ affinities with multiple territories on the one hand, and the mobilities approach’s focus on understanding migration itself as a socio-political practice that ‘(re)composes societies, including national ones’ (Lin and Gleiss 2018, p. 142) on the other. While migration from a mobilities framework is more multidirectional and diverse than simply transnational, both approaches – the more mature field of transnationalism studies and the newer ‘mobilities turn’ – created space for interrogating the power of discourses, practices and infrastructures that both facilitate as well as hinder, halt and prohibit movement (Blunt 2007; Sheller 2011). As Sheller (2017) argues, through challenging the idea of space as a container for social processes, the new mobilities paradigm grew out of and extended a range of theorisations of space across local, national, transnational and global scales.

SECTION OVERVIEW

Part I: Conceptualising Transnationalism

In Part I of this handbook, we focus on the conceptualisation of transnationalism, as an observable set of phenomena and as an analytical approach to grappling with social reality.

Appropriately, we begin in Chapter 2 with David Featherstone’s account of transnationalism and translocalism before and during nation formation. With a view to the historical emergence of national states, and the countercurrents of working and subaltern social movements, Featherstone demonstrates that much of what is named transnationalism actually operates through situated translocal connections, ‘placed relations through which transborder processes are generated’. The chapter elaborates on these claims through an historical account of national and international workers; movements wherein notions of race, coloniality and imperial connections of extraction, settlement, slavery and indenture took on different contours depending on varying relations to place. Such an account troubles narratives of worker movements emanating outwards from imperial Britain, highlighting in the context of mari-
time work how ships and dockyards were sites of struggle over coloniality, where through practices such as ‘smuggling anti-colonial literature, which was prohibited by colonial regimes, seafarers shaped internationalist political trajectories which had significant impacts on anti-colonial struggles’. This argument resonates with earlier critiques of methodological nationalism in scholarship on transnationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) but also challenges the persistence of ‘methodological statism’ (Mongia 2019), the view that the control of migration by states is long-standing and non-contentious and that migrant transnationalism responds to these national structures. Featherstone, by contrast, shows how translocal relations can be fundamental to the formation of the nation itself, in this case the anti-colonial struggles that involved migrants ‘both making sense of and challenging exclusionary constructions of Britishness’.

In Chapter 3, Biao Xiang takes these questions about the circumstances under which transnationalism emerges and has significance in another direction through the development of a multi-scalar analytical framework. Building on the general consensus around the extent and novelty of transnationalism, Xiang zooms in on the specific conditions under which transnationalism can actually be said to alter or shape social realities. Drawing attention to scale as units of coordination (such as a nation, supply chain, or hometown association) makes it possible to distinguish between transnationalism as social relations and connections writ large and transnational connections that have wider significance because they ‘generate additional capacity for the actors involved’. In thinking through a multi-scalar framework focused on coordination, Xiang proposes that each scale has two dimensions – a scope that might extend from local through to transnational and a type, either taxonomical (defined by bureaucratic hierarchies) or emergent (created by actors from below). Transnational scales are ordinarily emergent but they do intersect in critical ways with taxonomical scales; indeed Featherstone’s account of anti-colonial struggles in disrupting empire and the emergence of nations demonstrates how different scales can be closely intertwined and interdependent. To give shape to this multi-scalar framework, Xiang offers the case of the various relations involved in and emergent from Yiwu, a town in south-east China that has become a significant centre for wholesale commodity sales and trade. What he observes is that there is unevenness in the extent to which transnational connections achieve scalar coordination (notably trade but not religious practice), that scalar coordination can be traced to basic institutions such as family as well as local and national government activities, and that transnational flows are not necessarily against the nation-state; trade can enhance national initiatives while religion can be seen as a counterpoint to the nation. Such an account shifts the emphasis from defining what is or is not transnational to attend to how different connections matter not just as practices but for their longer-term transformative potential.

In Chapter 4, Sergei Shubin shifts attention to the relationship between transnationalism and time. While notions of instantaneity and simultaneity (Portes et al. 1999; Glick Schiller et al. 1995) have been a central part of the claims to novelty in accounts of transnationalism, Shubin argues that this emphasis on the present and connectivity belies the complexity of temporal relations involved in cross-border
movements and lives. Indeed, the claim to connectivity that was at the heart of some early assertions of transnationalism, and especially those that placed significant emphasis on communication technologies, present a problematic ‘flat temporality identified primarily with the domain of action and utility’. In effect, claims of simultaneity across borders imply potential for a complete time-space compression that disregards the disruptive dimensions of migration and transnational life. Shubin develops an alternative account of transnationalism and time that draws on the work of the philosopher Maurice Blanchot to emphasise the ways in which transnational life is: fragmented because of the disruption involved in mobility and connectivity; characterised by liminal or in-between temporalities rather than fully formed senses of time; and asynchronous and anonymous time that emphasises non-coincidence and surprise over predictability and progression of transnational relations. The greater attention to time in this chapter lays important conceptual groundwork that can reveal the labour involved in achieving connectivity, the friction and constraints that people encounter in transnational life and the politics of waiting and forgetting that haunt questions of memory and relationships across borders.

Questions of time and transnationalism also bear heavily on matters of life course and the experiences of transnational ageing that are addressed by Vincent Horn in Chapter 5. As Horn notes, much of the early scholarship on transnationalism placed emphasis on the cross-border lives of younger migrants, seeking labouring opportunities, building families and maintaining relationships and communities transnationally. A focus on transnational ageing relates partly to the extension of these transnational experiences across the life course but it also involves later life migrations and the involvement of older people in families that are separated through the migration of children, siblings or other relatives and community members. In this respect, and echoing important arguments about variability in transnationalism made later by Carling (Chapter 7), Horn reminds us that transnational ageing can emerge as both a putatively voluntary phenomenon (to the extent of being a life style choice in some cases) as well as ‘the undesired consequence of spatially ruptured social formations (involuntary)’. Older people living transnational lives have to negotiate a range of legal, cultural and social differences and often do so in the context of differentiated and shifting expectations about life course and intergenerational relations. As Horn reminds us, however, it is critical that scholars do not position older people only as passive actors struggling with such complexity – indeed, ageing parents and grandparents, especially women, have been critical facilitators and enablers of transnational family arrangements. The study of transnational ageing also then engages an important connection between transnationalism and older people’s lives more generally, highlighting the need to question assumptions about sedentarism in later life and recognising how expectations around ageing and family life are subject to change through migration.

Affect and emotion have been critical undercurrents in the study of transnationalism but as Raelene Wilding and Loretta Baldassar highlight in Chapter 6 it is only recently that feelings have been addressed more explicitly by researchers. The obscureness of emotions is perhaps surprising given how much important literature
on families there has been in studies of transnationalism, which clearly imply questions of intimacy across distance, as well as belonging, home and displacement that hinge on how people feel about places they traverse and people they connect with. To draw out what they call ‘an alternative history of transnationalism’, Wilding and Baldassar engage more explicitly with theories of affect and emotion and highlight some of the insights that can emerge through a focus on hope, love and guilt, emotions that have been particularly salient in understanding transnational family life. Their account demonstrates that these emotions play a fundamental role in transnational relationships: guilt in the rupture of transnational family and reworked gender roles but also love and hope tied to feelings of longing that sustain relationships across time and distance. While their discussion is specific to parenting, partnering and aged care, Wilding and Baldassar’s account demonstrates how important it is for researchers to pay explicit attention to emotions and affect, not only as outcomes of transnational life but as forces that motivate and shape the very possibility of moving and living across borders.

In the last chapter in Part I, Jørgen Carling (Chapter 7) returns to questions about the extent and durability of transnational ties by focusing on how connections are prevalent in different contexts and their substance in terms of actually facilitating transnational practices. For Carling, it remains important to delimit exactly what is meant by transnationalism in order to address the question how researchers can ‘best understand the ways in which transnationalism varies across space and changes over time’. The argument that Carling develops is distinct from earlier critiques of transnationalism’s limits (cf. Portes et al. 1999 most notably) in that he seeks to shift away from only measuring migrants’ contributions to cross-border relations and practices. He proposes instead the notion of ‘reciprocal agency’ that highlights the importance of transnational connections involving people on both sides of borders, and indeed we might extend to a range of intermediary actors as well (Lindquist 2017). By focusing on remittances, Carling makes a strong analytical case for showing how transnationalism does or does not sustain under particular circumstances – the impact of different kinds of migratory patterns (settlement, temporary or circular), policy settings that shape the possibility for remittances and the continued salience of different kinds of family relationships. Rather than a necessary and stable outcome of migration, or always equal in their substantive impacts, Carling’s account thus highlights the need for more analytical precision and empirical depth in understanding the existence of transnationalism.

Part II: Varieties of Transnationalism

One of the characteristics of recent scholarship on transnationalism is an increasing diversification of the subjects and spaces involved in cross-border lives, activities and circulations. In Part II we thus turn attention to some of this variety, traversing state practices, homemaking, organisations, activism, families, youth, urbanism, education, popular culture and religion. We begin Part II with Gerasimos Tsourapas’ account of transnational state practices and authoritarian politics. Through his focus
on ‘transnational authoritarianism’, Tsourapas sets out to rework the territorially bound concept of authoritarianism that is commonly deployed in scholarship within political science and international relations. Instead, he observes a wide range of practices through which authoritarian regimes stretch out across their borders in managing emigration exit, maximising economic benefits and minimising perceived political and security risk, particularly through silencing the voices of citizens abroad. In doing so, the chapter identifies how states’ transnational engagements also involve broader alignments and coordination with non-state and multilateral organisations as well as being facilitated by new technologies for cross-border surveillance.

Shifting from this focus on the authoritarian reach of ‘home’ nation-states, in Chapter 9 Paolo Boccagni addresses the social dimensions of home, as a place, set of relationships and infrastructure for migration. As Boccagni observes, the focus on transnationalism has particular significance for notions and experiences of home, disrupting the commonsensical view of home as a singular, relatively fixed place. Transnationalism instead speaks to multiple senses of home and connection, and the circulation of people, objects and feelings across space in the practices of creating and sustaining home. Home also articulates at multiple scales in transnationalism – places for living and family, the home country amongst emigrants and diaspora, and established through transnational householding. This account is particularly insightful for the way in which he accounts for the naming of home, the feeling of being at home, the making of homes and the emplacing of homes, transnationally. Boccagni concludes his account in ways that resonate with the earlier accounts of time (Shubin) and space (Xiang) in relation to homemaking, noting that migrant homemaking involves both transnational undertakings connecting places, while also transtemporal work of recreating past memories and expressions to create meaningful places of attachment.

Ludger Pries and Rafael Bohlen address transnational organisations in Chapter 10. In contrast to accounts of transnationalism as sets of practices, identities and cultural affiliations, Pries and Bohlen highlight that organisations ‘are defined by more or less explicit structures and boundaries’ and thus highlight one avenue for researchers to engage in meso-level analysis of transnationalism. Their chapter addresses both profit and non-profit organisations, demonstrating how multinational companies play critical roles in structuring economies, global trade and value chains, and labour markets, while non-profit organisations such as hometown associations can be critical in connecting life worlds across borders, serving as political channels, and facilitating and creating migrant community and senses of belonging. The focus on transnational organisations hence provides an important account of the different kinds of actors involved in linking places, economies and societies as well as creating opportunities for the migration studies dimensions of transnationalism to attend to broader structures and systems involved in constituting and facilitating cross-border activities.

Building in part on this focus on organisations as transnational actors, Michele Ford turns attention to the politics of transnational activism in Chapter 11. As Ford demonstrates, transnational activism, underpinned by various networks, movements...
and coalitions, has become a significant feature of cross-border political activity. Certainly, and echoing Featherstone’s opening chapter, Ford reminds us that cross-border activism is not new, but the affordability of travel and the coordinating and communicating potential of the internet have created scope for a much wider range of activist connections and collaborations. The account presented here recognises considerable variability in activism, however, wherein scale of operation and target might range from challenging global trade agreements to single corporations or local government activity, while activist movements also operate within different opportunity structures, not least influenced by access to resources and more or less constraining national and transnational contexts. In other words, while transnational activism obviously occurs across borders it is also often grounded in place and subject to different constraints and opportunities that emerge therein.

Research on families and householding practices has been a cornerstone of the study of transnationalism since the 1990s. In Chapter 12, Yeoh, Lam and Huang discuss research in Asia on the formation of transnational families, a seemingly oxymoronic phrase given the common assumption of proximity and situatedness in social science understandings of the family. As they argue in the chapter, the transnational optic has upended these assumptions such that “the scalar relationship between “family” and “nation-state” can now be reversed as “nations” can now be folded into the “family”, while “family” can now be stretched across national borders”. As in other chapters in Part II, a key theme in this account of transnational family formation and maintenance is the way in which such relations vary, reflecting the need to maintain some connections over others, because of the impacts of national policy frameworks and their role in shaping migrant lives, and the uneven access that family members have to communication technologies. Yeoh, Lam and Huang also demonstrate that transnational families are sites for considerable contestation and change – in terms of gender identities and relations, the double-edged effects of communication technologies that can sustain intimacy but also generate new forms of surveillance and control, and the way in which remittances support but also bring challenges for migrants subject to expectations and multiple demands. Given the greater viability of maintaining family relationships transnationally today, these insights also bear on the much wider questions of gender roles, familial ties and obligations, intimacy and care and, fundamentally, what constitutes the family.

Valentina Mazzucato and Joan van Geel focus on the experiences of young people growing up in transnational social fields in Chapter 13. Migration affects children and young people in different ways, when they are migrants themselves or with their families, as the second generation of migrant parents and for those who stay at home when parents migrate. The authors note that research on young people and migration has unevenly employed the notion of transnationalism. Research on second generation migrants for example tends to remain focused on the lives of young people in the countries their parents moved to rather than addressing their potential onward mobilities. Studies on left-behind children, by contrast, often draw attention to the circulation of care and feelings of children in relation to their migrant parents, situating them within but largely subject to transnational social fields. Drawing on the mobilities
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turn, Mazzucato and van Geel suggest that it is the last group, mobile young people, where there is a need for greater research attention. The focus on young people’s own mobilities highlights them as active agents in shaping transnational social fields and migration trajectories rather than only in terms of parental moves.

In Chapter 14, Arnisson Ortega and Evangeline Katigbak explore the urban dimensions of transnationalism, highlighting how various kinds of transnational connections and circulations play a role in transforming urban areas. They draw in particular on Smith’s (2001) notion of ‘transnational urbanism’, a term which brings together questions of globalisation and urban place and in doing so ‘disrupts the treatment of cities as discrete and bounded territories constituted by settlements and neighborhoods and instead offers a dynamic accounting of flows and mobilities that sustain urban life’. They demonstrate the significance of transnational flows to urbanisation through specific focus on the Philippines and three sites that epitomise the significance of transnational relations – gated transnational suburbs, island tourist hubs generated through transnational interracial relationships and transnational mansions. These spaces show how different kinds of transnational connections come together in making urban places – especially diasporic remittances and investment, real estate development focused on these potential investments, and the meaning making tied to constructing housing reminiscent of places of migration. In this respect, Ortega and Katigbak are able to demonstrate how various kinds of transnationalisms, national and local loyalties, familial expectations, and idealised migrant aspirations and emotions about place, come to shape the processes of urbanisation.

Johanna Waters and Maggi Leung also consider the multiple forms of connections and mobilities that shape transnationalism through their account of transnational higher education in Chapter 15. In this chapter they bring together both the study of student mobility and a focus on the transnational operation of higher education institutions themselves. While not all literature on international student mobility deploys a transnational framework, Waters and Leung show clearly how international students engage in transnationalism through consumption and identity practices, post-graduation employment and social reproduction, and the significance of transnational networks to student mobilities. Flipping perspectives, Waters and Leung then consider educational institutions that operate across borders. As they note, scholarship on transnational institutions rarely engages with notions of transnationalism but several key features of research highlight important connections: the significance of cross-border commercial arrangements and flows; knowledge production across postcolonial and neocolonial contexts; and the assurance of quality in transnational operations. In concluding, Waters and Leung note that curiously these literatures on transnational higher education have remained relatively separate, suggesting that there is significant potential for new knowledge at the intersection of institutional and student mobility from a transnational perspective.

Transnationalism is also embedded in expressions and circulations of popular culture, as Youna Kim discusses in her account of transnational popular culture in Chapter 16. Technological and political economic developments have been particularly significant in the transnationalisation of popular culture. The deregulation of
industries of media culture since the 1980s alongside the growth in satellite and cable television and subsequently online networks have created the conditions for a wide range of media forms to move almost seamlessly around the globe. Initially conceived by media scholars as indicative of processes of Westernisation, transnational popular culture is now recognised as much more diverse with multiple emergent centres generating media content that is taken up in a range of different geographical contexts and with unique possibilities for culture and identity formation. Not least amongst these is the way in which transnational popular culture facilitates belonging amongst migrants who are now much more easily able to consume, reproduce and even contribute to ‘home’ country popular culture across borders. Kim examines these shifting landscapes of transnational popular culture through a focus on the Korean Wave of popular culture. Since the early 2000s, Korean popular culture has had a significant boom in production and distribution, initially in Asia but subsequently across the globe. Facilitated by marketisation, digital fan cultures and soft power, the Korean Wave demonstrates how contemporary transnational popular culture can lead to growing significance for postcolonial and peripheral cultural forms, creating conditions for new hybridised expressions of self, identity, nation and transnation.

Like cultural expressions, religion has a longstanding relationship with migration wherein population movements have for centuries been a process that has underpinned the spread and of religious practices and organisations around the world. Dominic Pasura examines this relationship in Chapter 17, highlighting religion’s role in shaping migration and the lived experiences of migrants alongside the way in which religious traditions and practices are themselves transformed through the effects of movement, displacement and migration. As Pasura notes, much of the already established literature on religion in the social sciences has had an overemphasis on Christianity and in particular Protestantism, wherein narratives of secularisation have dominated accounts in contrast to accounts of otherness and tradition in the ongoingness of religion in other parts of the world. Centring the relationship between migration and religion in exploring religions more broadly in a globalising world, Pasura asks two questions: How are religious beliefs, institutions and practices transported and transplanted across borders? What is the analytical value of a transnational optic in studying religion on the move? His account highlights significant overlaps and intersections between transnational religions such as the Catholic church and diasporic religions expressed and maintained through communities of people dispersed in multiple locales. Pasura also discusses how religions are adapted to place through the lived experiences and practices of migrants, the transnationalism that sustains ongoing connections to religions elsewhere and the specific sites of encounter within which religious practices intersect with what is already in place. As Pasura concludes, taking a transnational optic opens up understandings of religion beyond traditional institutionalised accounts, both in terms of what counts as religious practices and the ways in which they can be transformed through migration and the lives of migrants.
Part III: Transnational Migrations

Part III of the handbook focuses more specifically on conceptualisations of transnational migration across different mobility patterns and migration categories. The chapters in this section attest to the durability of transnationalism as a productive approach in exploring different facets of international migration, from the study of temporary labour migration, to international student migration, marriage migration, return migration and migrant remittances.

In Chapter 18, Matt Withers and Nicola Piper’s account of transnationalism and temporary labour migration highlights the need to shift the analytic focus from ‘agentic’ migrant transnationalism to foregrounding the importance of state power and transnational brokerage networks in managing migration, employment and welfare regimes. In particular, they direct attention to temporary labour migration regimes, and argue that the structures and institutions that regulate the legality and temporality of migrant entries have induced a ‘temporality-precarity nexus’. They situate the discussion of temporary migration regimes within the context of prominent guest worker regimes in Asia and the Gulf states as an example of how capital-driven, brokered migration schemes and a resultant commodification of migrant labour as disposable low-cost input often confine temporary migrant workers to risk-laden and vulnerable livelihoods. The optimism of migration-and-development discourses readily co-opted the assumptions of agentic transnationalism, while downplaying the overlapping forms of discrimination and disempowerment that temporary migrant workers face within highly restrictive labour migration regimes predicated on profit-driven recruitment agencies and intermediaries. As non-citizen workers accorded ‘temporary’ status, these migrant workers invariably experience constraints on length of stay and employment mobility, and have diminished access to social protection, family migration and pathways to longer-term residency. As Withers and Piper note, under conditions where ‘settlement is unattainable, family accompaniment impossible, return visits financially impractical … cross-border activities collapse into a “thin” transnationalism chiefly constituted by distance communication and remittances’. In other words, built-in conditions of temporariness and precarity limit migrants’ capacity to engage in the full suite of sustained cross-border practices. Instead, the temporary migrant worker is ironically locked into unending circuits of transnational money, material goods, care and emotion in order to sustain the social reproduction of family life across borders, but denied the liminal freedoms of simultaneous identity that settled migrant communities may leverage, or the flexibility of choice that capital-rich transnational elites enjoy (Yeoh, 2015). Withers and Piper conclude the chapter by proposing that in order to create a ‘thicker’, more liveable, transnationalism for temporary migrant workers, transnational networks of labour activism and cross-institutional alliances need to be strengthened in order to build a dynamic stratum for facilitating ‘transnational labour citizenship’ as an alternative rights-based approach to migration management.

Turning attention to internationally mobile students, Gracia Liu-Farrer (Chapter 19) highlights three prominent types of international students that have featured
in the literature since the late 1980s: globe-trotting university students, early study abroad students, and student-workers. With the expansion and diversification of international education globally, international student mobilities have become a significant transnational force, even as internationally mobile students’ trajectories appear increasingly fluid, sometimes circular, sometimes stepwise, and at other times multinational. Liu-Farrer argues that international education has been adopted by a diverse array of stakeholders – national, regional and local governments, educational institutions, employers, families and individual students – with different motivations, ranging from cultivating regional identity, importing labour, internationalising education systems, producing revenues and financing schools, to accumulating cultural capital and credentials, and fostering personal growth and freedom. In this light, a bi-focal perspective limited to ‘to-and-fro’ movements between source and destination countries is no longer adequate in studying international student mobilities. Instead, applying a ‘thicker’ transnationalism lens (to use Withers and Piper’s language of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ transnationalisms) should train attention on the cross-border ties that individuals, organisations and institutions foster and maintain across an interconnected and competitive transnational field with distinct hierarchies. Importantly, Liu-Farrer draws attention to the significant role of an education-migration industry that produces and perpetuates cross-border student mobility, not only by actively searching for students and facilitating the process of migration, but also by shaping students’ decision-making. The rise of a profit-driven and predatory international education regime introduces additional precarity and uncertainty for international students navigating the education-migration nexus.

In Chapter 20, Juan Zhang gives weight to the gendered contours of transnationalism by focusing on the intimate geopolitics and gender dynamics that propel and animate transnational marriage migration in the broader Asian context. Zhang highlights Jongwilaiwan and Thompson’s (2013) notion of the ‘transnational patriarchal bargain’ where citizen husbands ‘parley citizenship rights into patriarchal privileges’ within marriage, while migrant wives renegotiate a ‘moral sense of self’ within their marital families by fashioning themselves as caring wives and dutiful daughters-in-law. At the same time, migrant wives continue to enact transnational identities as filial daughters and generous patrons to their natal families and home communities. Zhang locates transnational patriarchy within a particular transnational disciplinary regime predicated on heteropatriarchal norms and geopolitical inequalities across borders. By regulating the private and intimate domains of transnational migration, such a regime of power produces frictional effects on women’s bodies, not only within home spaces where they are compelled to conform to the cultural scripts of the host society, but also in the public domain in relation to their access to citizenship rights. Underpinned by the uneven terrain of transnational geopolitics, Zhang shows that the ‘cartographies of desire’ (Constable 2005) reflected in transnational marriage migration are hemmed in by ‘friction as interrupted mobilities’, stemming from ‘immigration barriers, divergent cultural norms, body politics and incompatible visions of family life’. In arguing that friction is also associated with transformative
possibilities, Zhang’s analysis connects transnationalism to the politics of (im)mobility in the reworking of the global intimate and its relationalities.

Also situating their analysis at the productive interface between transnationalism approaches and the mobilities paradigm, Anastasia Christou and Brenda S.A. Yeoh interrogate the linkages between return, return migration and transnational mobilities in Chapter 21. They argue that recent scholarship that has drawn from a cross-fertilisation between the two approaches has unsettled ‘the hard dichotomy between migration and return’. The conceptual distinction between ‘migration’ and ‘return migration’ has blurred considerably, as movements become multiple, multidirectional and provisional, while identity takes on complex, simultaneous, ambivalent or elastic qualities. Instead, the term ‘transnational return mobilities’ (adapted from King and Christou’s 2011 ‘return mobilities’) facilitates the stretching of the meaning of a specific migratory move ‘across time, space and generations’, thereby affording a more flexible conceptual terrain while retaining the transnational and homecoming elements. This recoding as transnational return mobilities is helpful in opening up ample room to explore a wide range of related concerns, from the mythologising of return as a cohesive force for diasporic communities, the allure (and illusion) of ancestral tourism and homeland visits, home-host dynamics and ‘reverse transnationalism’, and alienation in the homeland and transnational identity politics, to the gendered and generational dimensions of reintegration into the family and community.

In the final chapter of Part III, Anju Paul (Chapter 22) introduces the concept of ‘multinational migrations’ as a way to move beyond the more traditional binational framing of transnationality that tends to limit transnational connections to those between a single origin and single destination. In recognising that migrants often move multiple times across international borders over the course of their migratory lifetimes, ‘multinational migrations’ provides an umbrella term for the proliferation of terms in recent migration scholarship to accommodate migration patterns encompassing multiple moves, such as onward, secondary, stepwise, serial, triangular, twice, step-down and cross-wise. Paul offers different ways of defining multinational migrations, such as foregrounding the directionality of migration sequences (whether migration is upward, downward, lateral, circular or multidirectional) or by focusing on intentionality (whether migration is strategic or organic). She argues that the sheer variety of multinational migrations has resulted in new forms of transnational ties, but this has largely remained an understudied area. In offering a way forward, Paul distinguishes between three types of transnational ties that go beyond the traditional origin-destination pairing: transnational dyads that connect two destination countries; transnational triangles that trace linkages among two destinations and the origin country; and transnational webs featuring ties that connect multiple members of a single family or other tightly-knit social units to three or more countries, even if they have not all lived in all of the countries in the web. She concludes that by giving attention to the ‘mimetic and normative pressures embedded within multinational networks of pre-migrants and existing migrants’, the transnational optic as applied to migration can be rendered ‘truly multinational’.
Part IV: Transnational Networks and Circulations

Part IV of the handbook builds on the discussion in Part III on multiple forms of transnational migrations by engaging more specifically with the various networks and circulations that emerge as a result of transnational migrant activities. In turn, these different facets of transnational networks – remittances, virtual communication, care, businesses and lifestyles – are integral to understanding the complex flows and circuits that undergird and sustain transnational migrations and mobilities.

In Chapter 23, Marta Bivand Erdal discusses the flow of remittances, the single transnational practice that has attracted the most scholarly and policy attention. She focuses on the multiple forms of remittances as an integral part of migrant transnationalism, as well as a central tenet of the migration-development nexus. She notes that remittances are often treated as a form of ‘bottom-up’ development finance that surpasses foreign direct investments and development aid in many developing countries. At the same time, remittance behaviour is often far removed from national development strategies, as most migrants regard remittances as private transfers motivated by interpersonal linkages, and embedded in familial networks of obligations, expectations and emotion. In this light, Erdal argues that remittances are always – albeit in differing ways – more than ‘the money migrants send back home’ and instead, they need to be understood as economic exchanges and relationships across borders that are ‘inevitably social by nature’, and which have flow-on effects on the wider community beyond the household.

Turning to another arena which has attracted considerable scholarly attention, Jolynna Sinanan and Heather Horst (Chapter 24) discuss communication practices as a key part of transnational networks, highlighting in particular the role that rapidly changing communication technologies play in shaping migrant experiences of family and other social networks. Prior to the ubiquity of digital media, traditional modes of communication such as sending letters and audio cassette recordings did not provide real-time contact or a sense of co-presence. With the spread of smartphones and social media platforms, digital communication has enabled new forms of mediated co-presence where ‘always-on’ awareness of distant others is made possible. While these technologically enabled forms of connectedness have facilitated ‘digital togetherness’ (Marino 2015) and feelings of proximity for family and friends across transnational space, they have also created ‘polymedia environments’ (Madianou and Miller 2013) that require constant management of social relationships in navigating both the online and offline worlds. As Sinanan and Horst write, ‘multiple complexities of ambivalent feelings, shifts in obligation and future orientations that are part of migrant experiences are now widely recognised as being inextricable from digital media practices’. Beyond transnational family and friendship networks, communication technologies are also implicated in transnational social movements and migrants’ political engagement in different ways, from channelling political discussion, emotional expression and media representation, to mobilising collective action across territories.
Linked to but not synonymous with communication practices, the role of care and how it circulates in sustaining transnational lives takes centre-stage in Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding’s (Chapter 25) contribution. Understanding care as intrinsically relational, involving both caregiver and care recipient and embedded in networks of relationships, the authors highlight the importance of gender, generation, ethnicity and socio-cultural norms in shaping transnational care relationships. The feminisation of international labour markets and the care-chain migration of women as lowly paid global care workers have further entrenched retrogressive gender norms in the transnational context. The under-valueisation of migrant women’s care work is further compounded by diminished rights and recognition under restrictive migration regimes that govern what is often considered low-skilled ‘women’s work’. Baldassar and Wilding introduce the concept of ‘care circulation’ in order to account for the circulation of care across transnational families and global households that must navigate multiple legal, regulatory, policy, social and cultural contexts. The term gives weight to the ‘the reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of care’ within broader networks (Baldassar and Merla 2014, p. 22) that not only fluctuates over the life course but is also shaped by inequitable processes encountered in crossing institutional regimes. Forwarding the notion of ‘digital kinning’, the authors also challenge the normative understanding of caregiving as synonymous with physical co-presence; instead, they argue that the circulation of care increasingly relies on a polymedia environment that creates both the opportunity and obligation for ongoing communication and support within the transnational family network. A care circulation approach complements and extends the notion of care chains in the global labour market by going beyond a care-deficit/care-surplus analysis; and instead highlighting a broader set of care practices involving a wider network of care actors, including those who move and those who stay behind.

In Chapter 26, Jacob Thomas and Min Zhou turn attention to the role of transnational linkages in immigrant businesses within and beyond ethnic enclaves. While traditional scholarship on ethnic entrepreneurship has largely focused on immigrant businesses and self-employment as an adaptive strategy to overcome marketplace disadvantages and blocked mobility associated with minority status in host societies, the adoption of a transnational perspective has invigorated the research in new ways. The conceptual shift from ‘immigrant’ to ‘transnational’ foregrounds how these entrepreneurs develop their businesses by ‘connect[ing] to two or more social environments across national borders [while] actively seek[ing] opportunities in transnational spaces’. By leveraging on bilingual proficiency, cultural knowledge, family ties and co-ethnic networks, transnational entrepreneurs gain access to ‘important resources of social capital that open up additional opportunities for entrepreneurial pursuit unavailable in the host society’. They are also better placed to build their enterprises by bridging ‘structural holes’ and forging connections where there are few existing ties compared to their native counterparts or co-ethnics without such access. Thomas and Zhou also note that counterintuitively, transnational entrepreneurs are ‘more settlers than sojourners in the migrant-receiving country’, as putting down roots contributes to strengthening their economic base in the host society.
While transnational linkages are variable among ethnic entrepreneurs, the authors argue that where these are strong, cross-border entrepreneurial activity contributes positively to ethnic capital accumulation, diasporic community building and the social mobility of co-ethnic group members.

In the final chapter in Part IV of the handbook, Sin Yee Koh (Chapter 27) trains the analytical lens on the transnational networks, spaces and lifestyles of the upper echelons of society. Concerned with the structures of differentiation that separate elites from non-elites, Koh argues that access to transnational resources and opportunities provides one of the key mechanisms through which elites not only enhance their already privileged status, but also transfer and reproduce their elite status across generations. Under the influence of the globalisation thesis that rose to prominence in the late twentieth century, scholarly interest in transnational elites had initially focused on corporate/business elites and globe-trotting expatriates, and more generally, the transnational capitalist class who ‘operate across state borders to further the interests of global capital’ (Sklair 2001, p. 295). The turn of the twenty-first century saw a resurgence of interest in wealthy elites, evocatively referred to as ‘the super-rich’, ‘high net worth individuals’ and ‘the one per cent’. A more recent development since the 2010s has shifted interest to the global middle class, and in particular, their strategic cultural capital accumulation through transnational mobility. Across these different conceptualisations of elite status, Koh signals the importance of exclusive elite spaces in reinforcing the distinctions between elites and non-elites, a process that is exacerbated by the elites’ ability and relative ease in partaking of transnational lifestyles. In particular, she highlights the role of educational and schooling networks, as well as social clubs and gated residential enclaves, in creating shared affiliation and socialised experiences of privilege and entitlement. She also points to the significance of elite clubs at the international level – such as the World Economic Forum and the Group of Thirty (G-30) – in consolidating and extending transnational networked power, as seen in members’ influence on business and political decision-making, oftentimes indirectly and behind closed doors. For Koh, elite transnational networks are not just spun by the seemingly effortless, exceptional personal mobility of the rich and powerful, they also underpin their ability to move their capital transnationally to maximise gains and reduce potential devaluation if their capital were kept immobile. Transnational networks are hence integral to elite lifestyles, while also contributing to the reproduction and legitimation of elite status.

TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE (POST-)PANDEMIC WORLD

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. (Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities)
This handbook was conceived in a time before COVID-19 entered popular and scholarly vocabulary. It took fragile form and made uneven progress in the throes of the pandemic, reaching completion after many struggles against disruptions, delays, despair and disease on the part of 36 scholars far-flung across the world, in 15 countries and 8 time zones. The pandemic made all of us intensely aware of how inextricably interconnected our fates and fortunes are in these best and worst of times, and as we encounter the immensity of human wisdom and foolishness, belief and incredulity, light and darkness, hope and despair. The volume is, in the end, a testament to both the friability and enduring strength of transnationalism as a world-spanning idea as well as an everyday human practice.

In his recent think piece, Alan Gamlen (2020) suggests that the ‘age of migration’ may now be coming to an end. For some time to come, devastated economies and unprecedented high rates of high unemployment will be less dependent on migrant workers to fill seasonal and skill shortages in the labour force in a reversal of a decades-long trend (Gamlen 2020, p. 3). The uncertainties of pandemic resurgence, the tightening grip of economic nationalism, and the rise of a ‘tsunami of hate and xenophobia’ against migrants (in the words of the UN Secretary General, Guterres, 2021) signal a halt to globalisation and mark a reversal of migration trends. As Kysel and Thomas (2020, p. 349) note, state responses to the pandemic have ‘eschewed multilateralism’, ‘ignored well-established human rights obligations’ and are ‘poised to deploy a range of new border management technologies and even more assertively manage migration in the name of “health proofing” borders’.

Yet, even prior to the pandemic, scholars of transnationalism and ‘immobility regimes’—as accounted in many chapters in this volume—have observed that ‘not being able to move can be as much a driver of transnational life as mobility itself’ (Baldassar and Wilding, Chapter 25 in this volume). As an optic, transnationalism actually highlights the ways in which connectivity and mobility have become deeply embedded dimensions of global society and the relations between places across international borders. In this light, we bring this introductory chapter to a close with three observations.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly not upended transnational migration and mobility for all. As Lin and Yeoh (2021) conclude, ‘the COVID-19 pandemic relies not just on a virus, but also human organization to unleash its virulence’. In many countries, the management and control of national borders are predicated on economistic logics coupled with ‘graduated ideas of (non)citizenship’ that seek to ‘preserv[e] the lucrative flows of kinetic classes as far as possible, while marginalizing cheap migrant workers who later became vectors of disease in their overcrowded dormitories’ (Lin and Yeoh 2021, p. 108). While temporary migrant workers confront increasing risks and restrictions—often in both sending and receiving states, and upon return (Withers and Piper, Chapter 18 in this volume; Christou and Yeoh, Chapter 21 in this volume)—the transnationally mobile ‘super-wealthy’ (Koh, Chapter 27 in this volume) continue to be able to move money offshore, reap enormous profits, live privileged but insulated lifestyles, and constantly change their residency to safer havens to escape contagion (Letzing 2020). Adopting a mobility
justice approach, Heller (2021) argues that the excessive mobility of the privileged through air travel has been a major factor in spreading the virus, while inequitable access to vaccines and the introduction of COVID-19 vaccine passports are likely to perpetuate global travel inequity (Asi 2021).

Second, while the pandemic interrupted all manner of embodied movements and may do so for some time to come, pre-existing transnational ties, networks and circulations anchored by the family, community, institutions and cultural organisations all serve as powerful infrastructures for generating and sustaining mobility and making transnational connections a likely ongoing characteristic of the world. While the pandemic has restricted bodily mobility and forms of travel, there is a concomitant rise in the way families have turned to communication technologies to conduct their working lives and caring online (Baldassar and Wilding, Chapter 25 in this volume; Yeoh, Lam and Huang, Chapter 12 in this volume). Beyond the family realm, another important arena where digital infrastructures are playing an amplified role can be seen in the remaking of international higher education (Waters and Leung, Chapter 15 in this volume). Even as the rapid digitalisation of universities around the world in response to the pandemic has the tendency to ‘accelerate their further commercialization and privatization’, Sidhu et al. (2021, p. 314) urge the need to foreground embodied and experiential dimensions of learning and to address broader issues of justice and equity. The role of digital infrastructures and media technologies has thus become critical in governing the way people care, communicate, live, work, study, mobilise and project identity across borders, raising important new issues around ‘digital citizenship’ (Sinanan and Horst, Chapter 24 in this volume).

Third, despite deepening concerns about the violence and inequality of transnational mobility regimes under pandemic conditions, there have also been calls for reform. The UN Secretary-General’s urgent call to ‘reimagine human mobility for the benefit of all’ is not only in line with the question of rights for all but pragmatically based on the view that in the post-pandemic era that ‘no one is safe unless everyone is safe’ (UN Sustainable Development Group 2020a, p. 3). For example, the pandemic has not just revealed the in-built precarity of the temporary migration regime for transient migrant workers, but laid bare the unsustainability of migrant temporariness and back-and-forth mobility as the underlying principle for sustaining economic growth and labour markets for migrant-receiving nation-states (Yeoh 2020). Also identifying grounds for optimism, scholars of international migration law have argued that civil society and activist movements can offer ‘a potential site for building a politics of interdependence’ which centre ‘a universal baseline of rights for migrants’ as a means to temper an absolutist view of sovereignty (Kysel and Thomas, 2020, pp. 352–3). In a time of prolonged uncertainty, sending and receiving states may be motivated to work together to find new ways to effect ‘transnational labour citizenship’ characterised by the portability of benefits and services and the enforcement of baseline labour rights (Withers and Piper, Chapter 18 in this volume). As we struggle to make sense of the conundrum that ‘the worst of times’ is also ‘the best of times’, the crisis has forced us to confront a choice that cannot be compromised – ‘go back to the world we knew before or deal decisively with those issues
that make us all unnecessarily vulnerable to this and future crises’ (UN Sustainable Development Group 2020b, p. 22).

NOTES

1. The Oxford English Dictionary dates the first occurrence of the term ‘transnational’ to around 1920, when it was used in an economics text to describe Europe after the First World War as characterised by an ‘international or more correctly transnational economy’ (Faist 2010).

2. These figures relate to the number of documents indexed in Scopus that include the word ‘transnational’ in any part of the article. See https://www.scopus.com/search/form.uri?display=basic.

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