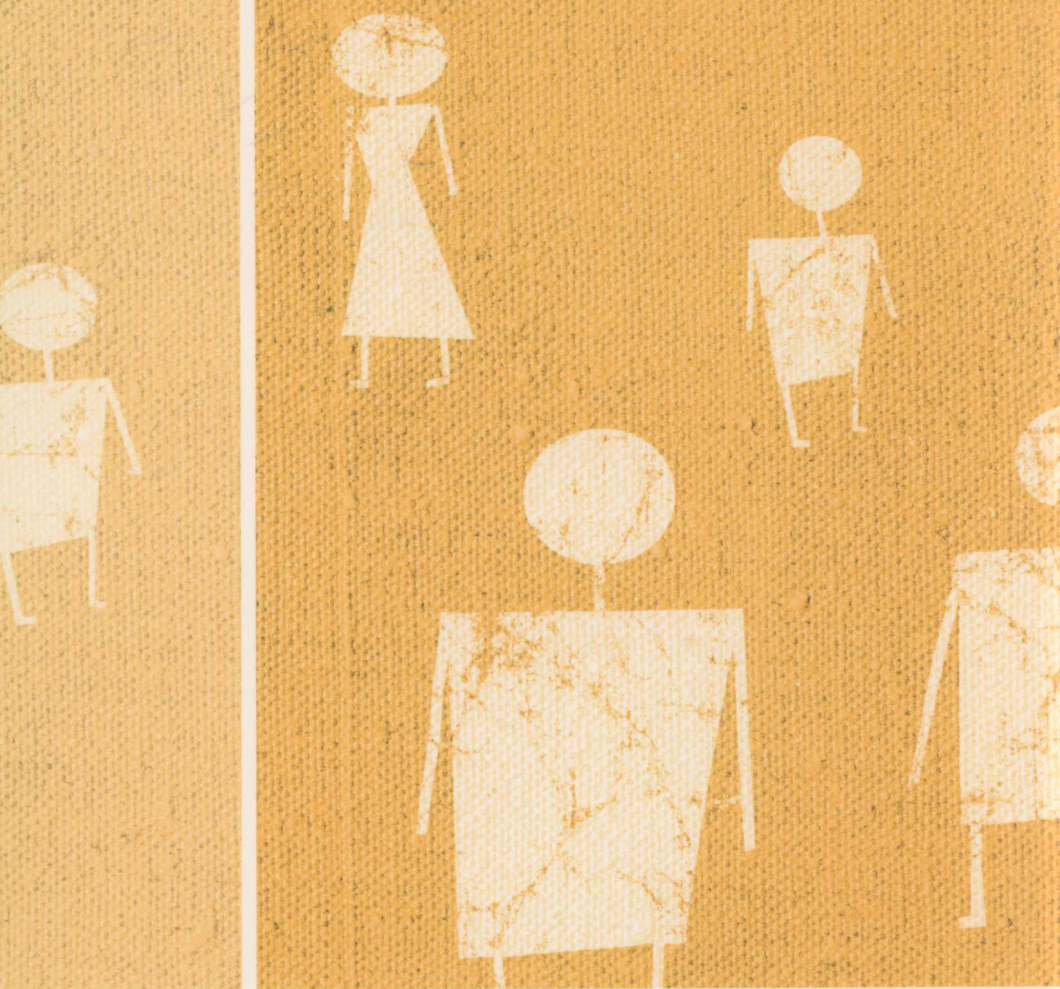


ORGANIZING the Transnational



Labour, Politics, and Social Change

Edited by Luin Goldring and Sailaja Krishnamurti

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*Edited by Luin Goldring and
Sailaja Krishnamurti*

**Organizing the Transnational:
Labour, Politics, and Social Change**



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Introduction: Contextualizing Transnationalism in Canada

Luin Goldring and Sailaja Krishnamurti

It has become a cliché to note that we live in an increasingly interconnected world. What happens in a Canadian metropolis such as Toronto or Montreal, or in smaller cities such as Sudbury, Moncton, or Prince George, is likely to have repercussions in a wide array of countries: from Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, and China to Sudan, Somalia, and Ghana; from Haiti, Guyana, and Jamaica to Colombia, El Salvador, and Peru; or from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to Poland, Portugal, and England. Similarly, what happens "over there" can have a strong impact on people and communities in Canada.

How do we understand the interconnectedness of people and localities around the globe? Most of us are aware that macrolevel processes and institutions such as international trade, international relations, and multilateral trade agreements are somehow responsible for orchestrating many of the economic, political, and cultural connections between countries, regions, organizations, and communities around the world. Many of us are also aware that technology plays an important role in helping people to stay in touch with people whom they do not see on a regular basis and that the media also help people to keep up with news and trends "back home." Globalization is a term we often use to describe this collection of processes, although we may have only a general idea of what the word means. What is becoming increasingly clear to more people, including activists, politicians, and social scientists, is the fact that international migration, and the personal and institutional networks and practices that people forge as they move, settle, and perhaps move again, is also deeply implicated in the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of how people and places are interconnected across space and time.

In Canada, we see evidence of these migrant-led or migrant-related connections or transnational engagements in news reports covering a wide range of events and processes. They include fundraising for natural disasters that affect immigrants' homelands; immigrant or native-born Canadians returning

to a personal or ancestral homeland to take on political office; the rising popularity of "foreign" films or musical genres associated with particular immigrant or so-called ethnic communities; the periodic arrival of religious leaders who travel to minister to groups in the multilocal diaspora; the earnings that workers send home; political campaigns that include stops in Canadian cities by aspiring candidates running for office outside Canada; or visits by foreign political authorities who, in addition to meeting with their official counterparts in Canada, make time to meet with members of their expatriate communities.

Canadian academics in a number of disciplines have taken up the conceptual challenge of analyzing newcomers both as immigrants and refugees intent upon settling and as people with varying intensities and kinds of ties to their homelands¹ and other regions outside Canada.² This is a relatively recent shift, compared to a longer history of scholarship on transnationalism and diasporas in other immigrant receiving countries, such as the United States. In Canada, there is certainly an established body of research on migration, immigrants, and subsequent generations. Much of the early work was framed in the language of ethnic studies or ethnic and race relations, adopted paradigms of assimilation or cultural pluralism, and focused on the assimilation or integration of newcomers into Canadian society.³ After changes in immigration policy, citizenship legislation, and settlement policies during the 1970s, Canadian immigration patterns shifted from a narrow and racist policy-driven concentration on European source countries to include a wider range of source regions and countries.⁴

The entrance of *new* newcomers, a majority of whom would come to fall under the Canadian label "visible minorities," expanded the coverage of ethnic studies to include non-European ethnicities. As part of the promotion of Canadian multiculturalism, ethnic customs and practices were certainly deemed worthy of study. However, the immigrant experience continued to be studied within the Canadian context and generally did not include "home" other than as a site of history, origin of cultural practices, or nostalgia. The language of race, antiracism, racialization, and diaspora studies came later still, as more scholars from racialized and diasporic groups, particularly South Asian and Caribbean, entered academia. This necessarily sketchy outline of migration and immigrant studies provides the context for situating the relatively recent entrance of transnational studies, diaspora studies, and cultural studies in Canadian work on migrants, refugees, immigrants, and their children.

This collection is intended as a contribution to the emerging body of empirically based and theoretical scholarship on transnationalism and diasporas in Canada. The volume has several features that make it unique in the current Canadian context. First, it attempts to articulate a cultural

politics of transnationalism rather than focus separately on economic, political, or social aspects of transnationalism. Second, the concentration on Asian and Latin American migrants in Canada adds depth as well as breadth, as the literature on Latin American transnationalism is scarce compared with that on immigrants from Asia (and other parts of the world). Third, the chapters cover a wide array of institutions, institutional actors, and forms of mobilization that contribute to shaping transnational engagements and spaces. This goes beyond the literature's focus on migrants and states as key actors and institutions shaping transnational spaces. Fourth, and perhaps most uniquely, the book presents a diverse set of perspectives by including work by activists from the immigrant advocacy and NGO sectors as well as academics.

Alejandro Portes and József Böröcz (1989) use the term "context of reception" to describe the wide array of policies and institutions that shape the incorporation of newcomers.⁵ This volume contributes to conceptual discussions about transnationalism and diasporas in the Canadian context of reception in several ways. First, the book broadens discussions of citizenship and legal status and their relationship to transnational engagements. Current discussions concerning social exclusion and transnationalism that include attention to legal status rarely consider the case of temporary workers.⁶ Second, the collection does not make assumptions about whether transnational identities and practices are widely prevalent, desirable, or to be celebrated. Rather, we include work that raises critical questions about transnational engagements from a variety of perspectives, including those of immigrant advocates, activists, academics, and others. Third, the volume contributes to comparative discussions regarding the role of different contexts of reception in shaping transnational engagements. This is accomplished, for example, in a chapter that examines one group (Salvadorans) in more than one context. More generally, the chapters offer material for subsequent comparative analyses.

We hope that attention to the Canadian context and the specificity of Canadian policies will contribute to Canadian discussions and policy making in the areas of immigration policy, immigrant settlement, and the relationship between incorporation and homeland ties. Finally, we hope to contribute to dialogue between communities (immigrant, ethnic, national, and transnational communities), activists, scholars, and policy makers in Canada.

This introduction proceeds with a section that provides a discussion of terminology and background on the literatures on migrant transnationalism and diasporas. The last section situates the key contributions made by the volume's authors in the context of questions and debates found in the literature on political and sociocultural transnational engagements.

Transnationalism as a Field of Study and Conceptual Approach

Social scientists and theorists use terms such as transnational social fields, transmigrants, transnational communities, diasporas, transnational citizenship, transnationalism from below, diaspora politics, and long-distance nationalism to describe multisited social networks, practices, organizations, and communities that span national borders. Related terms, such as deterritorialized nation-states and transnationalism from above, point to nation-state responses to im/migrant and civil society transnational engagements.⁷ These terms cut across disciplinary boundaries and genres; many of them have been taken up in literature, activist discourse, popular writing, government documents, policy papers put out by international financial institutions, and so forth. The terms invoke identities, belongings, memberships, networks, forms of social organization, social processes, and state policies aimed at citizens, all of which, rather than being contained by national borders, spread out beyond national boundaries and territories. Such processes may originate with migrant organizations, federal governments, local governments, parties, or other institutional actors. Regardless of their origin, they generate responses and tend to become multiscalar, multisited, multidirectional, and transnational.

The concepts of diaspora on the one hand, and transnationalism and transnational communities on the other, have distinct origins and trajectories but are now converging. In the contemporary context, use of the term *diaspora* has centred on the humanities, cultural studies, and political science, while the term *transnationalism* first gained currency among anthropologists and sociologists before spreading to other disciplines. Contemporary usage finds them used almost interchangeably, in a wide range of disciplines, fields, and settings. A brief sketch of the different origins and convergence of the concepts is in order. Diaspora is the older term (Tölölyan 1991; Cohen 1997; Van Hear 1998). Some have argued for a narrow application of the term to "victim diasporas" – people displaced and then dispersed from a real or putative homeland, through ethnic or religious persecution or conflict – but it has come to be used for other "scatterings" of people. Typologies of diasporas include, but are not limited to, groups that originated in or were formed by trade, slavery, indentured labour, colonialism, and political exile (Cohen 1997).

Other theorists have rejected such typologies and use diaspora as a broad theoretical lens to focus on migration, culture, and identity (Safran 1991). As a result, diaspora now refers to collectivities of people living in multiple national contexts who identify as having a common history or identity based on language, ethnicity, racialization, and/or religion. Thus, we now hear references to the Caribbean, African, Indian, Philippine, Hindu, Muslim, Chinese, South Asian, Kurdish, Tamil, Mayan, and Mexican diasporas as well as the classical Jewish and Armenian diasporas. In some cases, diasporic

identities are framed as hybrid, creolized, or in other ways “mixed,” the product of movements and exchanges between peoples. In other cases, the concept retains a primordialist connotation, although the ethnicity in question may have become a panethnicity. The term usually applies to multiple generations, so that people may identify with a particular diaspora without having active ties to a homeland. Furthermore, people may identify as members of a particular diaspora and live lives firmly rooted in and confined to a single nation-state.

In their agenda-setting book *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Post-colonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) defined transnational migration as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (6). While additional and more specific definitions have been developed (see below), the term *transnationalism* is generally used to describe people who feel that they belong to and/or organize their daily lives around more than one nation-state. Thus, in contrast to diaspora, transnational communities, transnationalism, and transnational living are terms that generally emphasize more tangible and contemporary connections between people in societies of destination and origin and perhaps transit. Recent work also emphasizes the importance of including nonmigrant members of transnational social spaces (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

The term *transnational communities* is used somewhat loosely to describe national as well as subnational collectivities. The term could refer to migrants from the same town, region, ethnic group, or country.⁸ The concept of transnational social spaces is more general and emphasizes identities, relationships, exchanges, practices, and institutions that arise in the process of transnational migration (Pries 1998; Faist 2000). Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) proposed a further distinction between *ways of belonging* transnationally and *ways of being* transnational in order to distinguish transnational identities (ways of belonging) from specific transnational practices (ways of being). They point out that people may feel a sense of transnational belonging without engaging in transnational practices and vice versa. This distinction becomes particularly important when we consider that mobility is not always possible, depending on constraints associated with social location (gender, class, racialization) (Pratt and Yeoh 2003), political affiliation, or the political situations in homeland regions – all factors that may make contact or return difficult for refugees, exiles, and others (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser 2001; Nolin 2006).

This discussion of terminology is not aimed at establishing clear boundaries between diasporas and things transnational. Rather, it draws attention to the potentially large overlap between the two terms. Diasporas may or may not have active transnational communities. For example, overseas

Chinese do not experience their diasporic identities in a uniform fashion, nor do they all feel that they belong to, or act as though they belong to, Chinese transnational communities. Similarly, Jews express their identities in diverse ways, and second- and third-generation black Canadians may share experiences of racialization but may or may not feel connected to transnational communities or social fields, and if they do, these may be rooted in different "home" lands. At the same time, active transnational communities from various origins may or may not have sufficient historical depth, geographical breadth, and ongoing production of identity and solidarity to warrant being called diasporas.

The chapters in this volume focus largely on "the transnational," although the language of both transnationalism and diaspora is used by the contributors. The authors examine a multiplicity of institutions and actors involved in shaping and organizing the transnational. Together they generate a set of analyses showing that a wide variety of actors and institutions organize transnational spaces; some social actors do so in the pursuit of livelihood, others work directly for social change, while others search out avenues for affirming identity and status. Institutional actors include states and organized migrants, but they also include international law, the media, NGOs, organized labour, and immigrant advocates. As such, the volume joins Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) call for a reconceptualization of society using the lens of transnational studies. This approach involves understanding society in general, and not only immigrants, as constituted by transnational engagements at various levels and scales. For the purpose of this volume, it involves framing the study of Canadian-based transnationalism beyond the study of im/migrants and states to include a broad set of networks, practices, policies, and institutions.

Situating Transnational Studies

The growing literature on migrant transnational engagement reflects several interrelated transformations, of which we highlight three. The first involves qualitative and quantitative changes in migrant practices; a second is related to changes in sending and receiving country policies that affect the membership or citizenship status of emigrants in the former and immigrant settlement in the latter; a third rests on conceptual shifts in the study of international migration and includes scholarship on transnationalism and diasporas. Of course, these three kinds of changes must be understood as taking place in the broader context of macrostructural changes commonly referred to as globalization, which includes but is not limited to changes in the role of nation-states, including their relationship to international financial institutions and multilateral organizations; the growth of supranational governance structures of various sorts (from the EU to the WTO); transformations in civil society responses (antiglobalization movements, transnational

advocacy networks, etc.); and sometimes unpredictable changes in the mobility of capital, the international organization of production, and patterns of circulation and consumption – not only of goods but also of images, identities, values, and practices.

Changes in Migrant Practices

The first set of changes rests on transformations in what Manuel Orozco describes as the five Ts of transnationalism: telecommunications, transportation, tourism, trade (especially for home-country goods consumed by immigrants), and money transfer mechanisms (2003, 2005). Changes in these sectors make it easier and cheaper for more people to be in touch with and maintain active relationships with individuals and institutions in personal or ancestral homelands (Vertovec 2004). They also facilitate transnational business activity, which may be an important economic strategy for im/migrants (Landolt 2001; Wong and Ng 2002; Portes, Haller, and Guarnizo 2002). Noting these changes does not imply any claim about the novelty of transnational engagements, as scholars have documented the historical depth of these processes (Foner 1997; Smith 2003b). Rather, it highlights that these processes have become more widespread, dense, and frequent, to the point of becoming institutionalized at various levels. It also means recognizing that one feature of the current context of globalization is that it is marked not only by the increasing mobility of capital and people but also by changes in the facility with which people develop and maintain social, economic, and political relationships across borders. Migrants at the turn of the twentieth century wrote letters home, and many migrated back to their countries of origin. However, letters and passengers took time to cross the ocean, as did news. The simultaneity of visual, audio, and text-based contact offered by contemporary technologies, and the speed of travel, are simply unprecedented.

Changes in State Policies

Largely in response to the changes just outlined, nation-states with high proportions of emigrants, immigrants, or both have instituted policies and regulations aimed at redefining membership in the nation. In the case of sending countries, particularly worker-exporting countries, there is a trend toward adopting double nationality and/or citizenship legislation, thus expanding membership in the nation beyond the territorial boundaries of the state (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Itzigsohn 2000). A growing number of countries allow their overseas citizens to vote in federal elections. The right to vote gives emigrants a concrete way of expressing ongoing attachment to their homeland. It also allows states to benefit from the expertise of the diaspora and perhaps an ongoing flow of remittances. The latter, of course, can contribute to the balance of payments.

In the case of destination countries, responses to immigration have been more mixed and contradictory. Most destination states have heightened border control (Heyman and Cunningham 2004). Some, such as the United States, have built fences, invested more in enforcement, and formally and informally militarized the border. Others, such as Canada, have made modest increases in enforcement while using immigration policy to exercise greater control and selectivity over "who gets in." In this way, Canada maintains relatively high immigration targets while in practice reducing the number of refugees and immigrants allowed to enter and increasing the number of temporary workers who are not considered immigrants or members of the nation (Simmons 1998; Sharma 2001).

Policies regarding citizenship, dual citizenship, the settlement of immigrants, and the management of cultural difference also vary in receiving countries (Castles and Miller 2003; Reitz 1998). Canada has relatively high naturalization rates and allows naturalized citizens to hold dual citizenship (i.e., to retain their prior citizenship). In contrast, the United States has been more suspicious of the dual loyalties of the foreign born. Legally, naturalized citizens are supposed to renounce their prior citizenship when they swear their new citizenship oath (Bloemraad 2005). Irene Bloemraad argues that Canadian openness to new citizens retaining dual citizenship, and other policies such as official multiculturalism, has actually facilitated their incorporation.

Canada has had official multiculturalism policies and programs in place since the 1970s. They have sought to affirm a certain amount of cultural difference while at the same time managing it by channelling it through approved avenues such as government support for panethnic and other immigrant organizations, cultural festivals, "heritage language" classes, and so forth. Multiculturalism has been critiqued from several perspectives, including the argument that it inhibits immigrant incorporation and instead ghettoizes immigrants based on ethnic or cultural groupings (Bissoondath 2002), the antiracist position that multiculturalism "can't end racism" (Philip 1992), feminist critiques of how state policies label, discipline, and limit the power of racialized women (Carty and Brand 1993), the argument that multiculturalism is more ideology than policy (Kallen 1995), and analyses that point to the way in which multiculturalism and diversity are used to market Canada and the Canadian workforce (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002).

The Netherlands and other northern European countries have implemented their own versions of multicultural policies, some quite different from the Canadian version (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001b). Other countries, such as the United States, have experienced long-standing tensions between ideologies of cultural pluralism (and related metaphors such as the cultural mosaic or the "salad bowl") and cultural assimilation and Anglo-conformity (Americanization or the melting pot). In countries characterized by emigration

and immigration, policies in these areas may be extremely contradictory, with active policies in one area, usually emigration, and absent or weak policies in the other. Italy, for example, went from the denial of immigrant settlement to a steep learning curve in terms of immigration policy, while Mexico continues largely to ignore its southern border while at the same time militarizing it in ways that contradict critiques raised about the US treatment of Mexicans at the northern border. Other cases may be less well known. For example, India is prominent in the literature as a country of emigration (see Bose in this volume). However, there are also immigrants from Bangladesh, Kashmir, and other nearby countries who lead precarious and marginal lives in India (Samaddar 1999; Sujata Ramachandran, e-mail, June 2005).

Conceptual Shifts in Migration, Immigration, Transnationalism, and Diaspora Studies

While empirical realities are changing in complex ways, the field of migration studies, and the related areas of immigrant and ethnic studies, have attempted to capture these changes through several conceptual shifts. First was a shift during the 1980s away from Marxist or neo-Marxist structural models as well as orthodox neoclassical economic models of international migration. The former approach was criticized for ignoring human agency, while the latter approach downplayed or disregarded history and political economy.

Second is the move away from seeing migrants as people who sever ties or simply lose contact with their homeland and toward recognizing the multiple and sometimes contradictory loyalties, identities, practices, and forms of belonging that people may have, whether they are migrants or nonmigrants, mobile or immobile members of transnational collectivities and arenas of engagement. This recognition of the "transnational" also draws on contributions from postmodern and postcolonial theories that not only questioned fixed and primordial ethnic and other identities but also opened up the possibility of recognizing cultural and other commonalities among postcolonial subjects in disparate geographical locations.

Third is a recasting of "ethnic" and "ethnic and racial" studies, as well as traditional area studies, into frameworks and language that recognize transnational and diasporic formations and identities and postcolonial legacies. In the United States, ethnic and racial studies moved first toward the study of specific national, ethnic or panethnic, and sometimes hyphenated groups (Native-American, African-American, Chicano, Boricua, Italian-Canadian, Latino, or Asian-American studies) and then to the more recent diasporic, transnational, and postcolonial framing of ethnic studies. However, tensions remain between advocates of broader versus narrower labels (e.g., Dominican studies versus Latin American and Latino studies). In Canada,

where British scholarly trends have been followed more closely, the shift was reflected in a move away from "Commonwealth studies" toward postcolonial and cultural studies during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This change also drew upon critiques of multiculturalism. Despite these differences, there is some convergence in that ethnicity is increasingly framed in relation to historical and diasporic processes and identities, current transnational connections, and attention to postcolonial legacies and racialization. This turn is reflected in the recent establishment at universities in Canada and around the world of departments and research centres devoted to diaspora and transnational studies.

Two Key Approaches

These empirical and conceptual changes lie at the root of the literature of migrant transnationalism and related work on diasporas. However, these literatures are not monolithic. In addition to disciplinary variation, there are differences in definitions employed, methodological approaches, conceptual and theoretical orientations, and findings. It is worth distinguishing two distinct "schools" within the field of transnational studies, mainly in North America.⁹ The first approach follows the lead of Basch and her colleagues in the analysis of transnational social fields, spaces, and flows (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). This approach has tended to be interpretive, qualitative, institutional, and often historical and comparative. Work in this tradition provides analyses of transnational collectivities at local (transnational villages) and national (transnational social formations) levels, generally through an interweaving of individual narratives with multisited transnational "case" studies developed through participant observations, interviews, and analyses of existing documents, including archival material. As Peggy Levitt and Ninna Nyberg-Sorensen (2004) note, the "transnational turn" in migration studies calls for shifting the focus of research away from sending or receiving contexts per se and toward an examination of the processes and networks used in structuring and maintaining transnational social spaces (2, 3). Focusing on transnational social fields and social spaces (Pries 1998; Faist 2000; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) and how they are constituted has the advantage of including migrants as well as nonmigrants and a wide array of institutions. Furthermore, it encourages grounded empirical research that attempts to recognize and analyze transnational engagements (rather than either ignoring or assuming them).

The second approach is exemplified by the work of Portes and his associates. They define transnationalism as occupations and activities that "require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation" (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999, 219), and