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TRANSNATIONAL SPACE: TERRITORY, MOBILITY AND TECHNOLOGY

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In this paper we argue for a more explicitly geographical insight into the currently dominant theme of transnationalism in studies of contemporary international migration. Although space is not the exclusive concern of geographers, the latter have a more intense engagement with space and its many attendant notions – distance, borders, geometries and spatialities of mobility, power etc. – than other social-science disciplines. The rise in interest in the transnational activities of international migrants in the 1990s coincided with the ‘spatial turn’ across the social sciences which popularised a flexible, liquid notion of space. Transnational activities provided the ideal empirical support for those wishing to contest firmly territorialised notions of states and power, and a range of spatial metaphors became popular in association with migration. Over the last decade geographers have built on established critiques of spatial metaphors to try to counter notions of free-floating transnational spaces, without artificially pinning them down. This paper reviews this expanding literature with the aim of locating important sites of state control of transnational activities and identifying a ‘power geometry’ of transnational space. These sites of control are conceptualised through Harvey’s grid of spatial practices and illustrated with examples from our research around the Mediterranean. We select three essential elements of such a power geometry: territory, mobility and technology – each of which is related to both space and the borders that separate space into territories of residence, confinement, crossing, and control.

Keywords: migration, transnationalism, space, power geometry, Mediterranean
Introduction

In June 1990 an extraordinary event happened in Tirana, capital of Albania, still then under communist rule. Thousands of people scaled the walls of the Western European embassy compounds in the city centre: a first symbolic ‘migration’ onto foreign sovereign territory after more than four decades of confinement under the harshest regime of the communist Eastern bloc. With the local police seemingly powerless to stop these events, the previously closed borders of Albania were beginning to be prized open. The ‘embassy migrants’ were given asylum in various European countries, with Germany taking the largest number. Later that year and into the next, tens of thousands of Albanians, mainly young and middle-aged men, streamed on foot across the southern border into Greece, using secret mountain paths that had been unused for decades. In March 1991 came the well-documented boat exodus: 26,000 Albanians commandeered ships berthed in Albanian ports and sailed them across to southern Italy. Pictures of these impossibly overcrowded ships docking at Brindisi and Bari, looking like gigantic human beehives, have become part of the iconography of late-twentieth-century migration (King and Mai 2008: 1, 68).

We pick up the story of post-1990 Albania migration later in this paper. For now we want to make two further introductory points. The first is to highlight the significance of the power of borders over people’s lives. The Albanian border that was so heavily reinforced and militarised by the hardline regime of Enver Hoxha cut through ethnically and linguistically Albanian territories on all sides, part of erstwhile ‘Greater Albania’. 1 Although this border ran through remote mountainous terrain for the most part, often following the high watershed line, trading and even kinship contacts across the border had been in operation for generations. These personal and economic links were brutally severed by the construction of the fortified frontier – a high electrified fence with frequent sentry posts and constant border surveillance by patrol guards with vicious dogs. The border was both a forbidding physical reality and carried heavy symbolism, shutting off any form of contact (except in the imaginative realm) with the outside world. People were not allowed to talk about life on the other side of the border and were discouraged even from looking across the border, let alone waving or shouting at distant figures, who might actually be their relatives.

The second point is to affirm the relevance of geography, and of space, in research on migration and transnationalism. Our paper, then, is also a manifesto for reinscribing geography into the study of the movement of people across borders and their subsequent trans-border lives. We make this point with a sense of frustration. Despite human geographers’ pioneering role in the theorisation and empirical study of migration, there seems to be a
collective amnesia amongst the rest of the social sciences about geographers’ fundamental contributions, both past and present (King 2012). Three recent examples of this. The first edition of Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield’s important edited book *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines* (Brettell and Hollifield 2000) had individual chapters on the history, demography, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics and legal aspects of migration, but no chapter on geography. Second example: at the recent (August 2012) Annual IMISCOE Conference in Amsterdam, there was a plenary panel on the impact of the ‘mobilities paradigm’ (Hannam et al. 2006; Urry 2007) on the study of migration and transnationalism. The panel had representatives for history, sociology, politics, anthropology and economics; but again no speaker from geography. And thirdly, the announcement of the upcoming NORFACE Conference on ‘Migration: Global Development, New Frontiers’, to be held in London in April 2013, contains the following call for papers: ‘We welcome scholars from economics, sociology, psychology, demography, anthropology, development studies and other disciplines with an interest in migration studies, to submit innovative papers and posters on any aspect related to migration’.

Our purpose in this paper is not to review geography’s historical role in the development of migration theory (this is done in another paper – King 2012). Rather, we wish to engage directly with the phenomenon of ‘transnational space’. In other words, we bring a geographical and spatial optic to the currently dominant transnational paradigm in research and writing on international migration, and focus particularly on the changing meaning and reconfiguration of international frontiers. We develop an analysis that links transnational space with several other fundamental geographic concepts, such as distance, borders, and the power geometries of inequality.

Attention to the sustained, cross-border activities of international migrants originated in the early 1990s (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). At about the same time, the ‘spatial turn’ across the social sciences marked a re-awakening of interest in spatial phenomena. The spatial turn was associated with the argument that the social sciences had developed from, and had substantially reinforced, a conception of space as absolute, fixed, territorially anchored and neatly divided into mutually exclusive nation-states (Gregory and Urry 1985). Early proponents of transnational studies were also interested in ‘thinking space’ differently, beyond the container view of the territorial state (Basch et al. 1994). This became both an empirical project, relating to the observed cross-border activities of international migrants, and a theoretical one to which the transgressive, marginalised position of the migrant was harnessed – a perspective encapsulated by the phrase ‘globalisation from
below’ (Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Unsurprisingly therefore, early work on migrant transnationalism was steeped in spatial ideas and metaphors. Space has remained central to transnational studies, but it is predominantly the liquid, uncontained, non-material and essentially deterritorialised idea of space that was being (re)discovered as transnational studies became established. It is our central argument in this paper that, despite a growing challenge, significantly from within geography, this enduring vision of space above, below or beyond the state has important implications for the conceptualisation of transnational activities, particularly as sites for control.

There is a growing literature within geography contesting the immaterial view of space in transnational studies (Blunt 2007). Although interest in transnational activities originated in work in economics on the development of corporations (Keohane and Nye 1970), the field has subsequently become more focused on the cross-border activities of international migrants, including implications for the non-mobile. Geographical ideas of the ongoing significance of locality (Ley 2004), the complexity of space (Jackson et al. 2004) and the social construction of scale (Featherstone et al. 2007) are becoming well established in transnational studies, and increasingly influential beyond geography (eg. Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009). Geographers have also balanced the initial ‘structure-light’ focus of transnational studies on individual experience (Bailey 2001) with an attention to the operation of power within transnational spaces, relating particularly to control functions of states through differential impacts on legal status (Bailey et al. 2002), or to the contrasting positions of mobile men and women (Silvey 2006), but also to structures of control such as transnational capital (Crang et al. 2003).

This paper responds to characterisations of the ‘retarded’ development of transnational studies (Glick Schiller 2005) which ‘takes for granted what needs to be explained’ (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004: 1178) in its failure to take account of control processes (Chivallon 2004). It does so by reviewing and building on important, indeed canonical geographical research which already goes some way to responding to these criticisms. In particular, we incorporate classic work by Harvey (1989, 2006) on the multidimensionality of space, together with Massey’s (1993) ‘power geometry’ relating space to power and control, in order to construct a framework for the analysis of uneven power relations in transnational space. The paper first reviews the developing field of transnational spatial studies. We then turn to a variety of examples drawn from our own work around the Mediterranean to develop an analytical synthesis structured around territory, mobility and technology – three elements that we consider essential to the operationalisation of the power geometry of borders and of transnational space. We select the Mediterranean not only because our research, both singly and together, has
been mainly in this region but also because this maritime basin has always been a major theatre of fluctuating border regimes and crossings – at times a unifying, connecting space for human mobility; at other times, especially in recent years, a barrier (King 1998; Ribas-Mateos 2005).

**Transnational Space**

Space is no longer the privileged domain of geographers (if it ever was), though geographers have long advocated a complex and multi-faceted view of space (eg. Soja 1989; Watts 1992) that is not always shared with other disciplines. Space as it appears in much of the transnational studies literature is an essentially metaphorical idea and is explicitly described as such by one of its key theorists, the sociologist Thomas Faist (2000: 15). There is an established critique in geography of the use of spatial metaphors (Harvey 1989). This critique is not targeted at anything inherently problematic about metaphors themselves, but at the consequences of their employment, which may disguise more complex or contested spatial realities. They are problematic, according to Smith and Katz (1993: 75), ‘in so far as they presume that space is not’. In two brilliant articles published in 1997, Katharyne Mitchell built on these geographical arguments around ‘grounding’ metaphorical space in order to critique the free-floating spatial notions of transnational studies, calling for geography to be brought ‘back in’ to transnational debates (1997a). And in place of the ‘hype of hybridity’ associated with diaspora studies she questioned the nature of ‘the actual physical spaces in which these boundaries are crossed and erased’ (1997b: 537).

Following Mitchell, there have been substantial advances in locating and placing transnational processes; given the relative paucity of geographical work in transnational studies a decade ago, the geographical body of literature in this field is now impressive. The degree to which geographers share a common interest, concern and perspective on the use of space in this field is also striking. Since Mitchell’s call to bring geography back in, there have been at least eight themed special issues of journals on transnationalism or diaspora edited by geographers (Ni Laoire 2003; Yeoh et al. 2003; Smith and Bailey 2004; Conradson and Latham 2005; Silvey and Olsen 2006; Featherstone et al. 2007; King and Christou 2011), an influential edited volume (Jackson et al. 2004) and a growing number of articles, far too numerous to individually cite here, all with a spatial theme.

Generalising from this fast-growing body of geographical literature, we identify five significant contributions that a geographic perspective has made to the field of transnational scholarship. These contributions are not discrete one from the other but are very much interlinked. First, geographers have introduced greater complexity to transnational space. This relates to
its morphology, particularly evidence of the ‘geographic imperative’ (Ley 2004; Ley and Waters 2004), but it goes beyond this by highlighting the multi-dimensionality of transnational space, which cannot be reduced to metaphorical representations alone (Jackson et al. 2004).

Second, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of *place* and *locality* (Featherstone et al. 2007: 384-5) or, to coin a more recent term, ‘translocality’ (Brickell and Datta 2011). Translocality can be conceptualised as an expression of the local-to-local relations that constitute the reality of most transmigrants’ transnational lives. According to Brickell and Datta (2011: 3), translocality takes an ‘agency-oriented’ approach to transnational migrant experiences, recognising the ‘spatial registers of affiliation that are part of migrants’ everyday embodied experiences’ and ‘challenging the deterritorialized notions of transnationalism which focused largely on social networks and economic exchanges’.

Third, this space is *actively constructed*. The tremendous impact of *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1991) on spatial debates has not been widely felt in transnational studies (Bailey et al. 2002; Kivisto 2003), though the broader notion of transnational space as socially constructed has been used to acknowledge the agency of migrants (Voigt-Graf 2004). Fourth, and related to this, is the more recent notion of the *social production of scale* (Marston 2000) which Featherstone at al. (2007) build on and where geographical work (eg. Brenner 1999; Swyngedouw 1992a, 1997) is increasingly influential in disrupting hierarchies of scale and creating links between localities and global processes (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009).

Finally, a sensitivity to the *operation of power* within geographical systems is well established, particularly in the engagement of feminist geographers with transnational studies (Silvey 2006). Though the importance of other structural forces, particularly state migration controls (Bailey et al. 2002), is widely recognised, there is no established analytical basis for examining the role of states in transnational space. This is a widely acknowledged gap in transnational studies (Glick Schiller 2005) and can be explained by the definition of transnational space ‘against the state’ from the early 1990s onwards.

We draw on all five of these advances in this paper. Below, in the remainder of this first main section of the paper, we first examine definitional issues in transnational and diaspora studies. The succeeding sub-section considers the spatial literature as it relates to transnationalism. The final sub-section draws on Harvey’s spatial analysis to identify four distinct literatures which must be brought together for a complete account of transnational space.
Definitions of transnational space

Transnational spaces, like the related notion of diaspora spaces (Brah 1996), are everywhere. It is probably too simplistic to consider diaspora space to be a type of transnational space (Dahlman 2004), though given the tremendous breadth with which both terms are used, often with no meaningful distinction, it seems futile to insist on employing them as clearly differentiated and separate analytical terms. They are distinct, particularly in their historical ontology, but they have come to be increasingly used as overlapping, almost coterminous, concepts. Dispersal and a prior history of international migration are the factors common to the array of definitions available and both ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnational community’ are now used as labels for virtually any identifiable group that claims to be or may be viewed as dispersed. Yet if everything and everywhere is equally transnational, nothing and nowhere is, and the most widely cited insight of geography, that place matters, has no bearing on transnational space. This clearly cannot be the case, but unfortunately the alternative is equally problematic. The terms ‘transnational community’ and ‘diaspora’ necessarily depend on definitions of group membership, so greater specificity requires exclusive criteria, leading to critiques of essentialism, particularly when these criteria attempt to delimit populations defined by ethno-national origin (Anthias 1998). The dependence of ‘transnational communities’ or ‘diaspora’ on primordial understandings of ethnicity, or on nationally defined groups, undermines the liberating notion of transnationalism itself, and some have called for the terms to be abandoned entirely (Glick Schiller 2005).

Self-identification offers one way out of the difficulties of defining transnationalism or diaspora. It is common for international migrants to find comfort and entertainment amongst co-nationals and to use ethno-national labels to describe or advertise institutionalised activities. Self-identification has its limits, however. First, it is not immune from outside labelling influences which, pace ‘reactive ethnicity’ (Portes and Rumbaud 1996), can produce a kind of reactive diaspora or transnational community. Second, it does not completely avoid the essentialist critique since it can lead to a form of auto-essentialism which King and Christou (2010), for instance, note in their study of the ‘return’ of the Greek diaspora to its national homeland. To counter this, Brubaker argues that criteria of group membership should be abandoned entirely: ‘we should think of diaspora not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity, but rather as an idiom, a stance, a claim. We should think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis’ (2005: 12). Similarly, Sokefeld (2006) argues that diasporas should be seen as types of social movements, where defining the boundary of the group is part of the ongoing negotiated process of framing debates.
The focus on particular transnational spaces appears to offer a way of operationalising Brubaker’s argument. In contrast to transnational communities, transnational spaces are defined by the activities which go on there, covering a whole variety of practices with a ‘transnational’ element: for instance, the ‘transnational space of youth dances’ (Ragland 2003), ‘transnational ritual space’ (Salih 2002; Roberts 2004), ‘transnational public space’ (Bowen 2004), ‘transnational corporate space’ (Leggett 2005), ‘transnational’ (Lipschultz 2000) or ‘diasporic’ (Mavroudi 2008) ‘political space’, or, probably the most widely used, ‘transnational social space’ (Faist 2000; Pries 2001a).

In this case, there are no defined criteria for group membership; space is available to those involved in the requisite activities. Anyone can do it. Jackson et al. view transnational space along these lines: ‘Our use of the term encompasses all of those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers.’ They go on to say that individuals may occupy transnational space ‘for a moment [...] or for a lifetime’ (2004: 3). They follow Avtar Brah (1996) in their concern to avoid an exclusive focus on migrants and thus to overcome a ‘minority/majority’ discourse. Elsewhere, the same group of authors state their aim to ‘avoid “fixing” transnational space into overly simplistic and concrete forms’ (Crang et al. 2003: 441). The ‘transnational field’ has been central to work that Glick Schiller has been involved in since the early 1990s, and she now argues that it offers the only alternative to an essentialist focus on defined groups (Glick Schiller 2005). Defining transnational fields ‘not as spatial metaphors but as systems of social relations composed of networks of networks’ embedded in power relations (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009: 180) joins a geographical interest in the materiality of transnational spaces.

These are important considerations. Conceptualising transnationalism as a ‘claim’, as Brubaker does, or broadening transnational space to the point where it is potentially all-encompassing, present neat, anti-essentialist solutions to the maximalist/minimalist problem of definitions. There are two remaining problems which need to be overcome for these understandings to be useful in identifying transnational space as a site of control. First, it must be spatially more restricted. Brah refers to ‘the diaspora space called England’ (1996: 209) and Golbert similarly suggests that ‘Ukraine may be perceived as a transnational space’ (2001: 726); we are reminded of Kearney’s argument that the US border zone may extend from ‘deep in Mexico to Canada’ (1991: 62). Taken at face value, these statements leave the spatiality of state authority unquestioned.

Second, it must be recognised that differentiation may be imposed as well as self-selected. Focusing only on the element of choice, the ‘claim’ or
the ‘engagement’ in transnational space inevitably glosses over the coercive power of the transnational or diasporic label to discipline or control when externally imposed. Difference is still frequently interpreted as other, foreign or impure. If diaspora can be a flag, it can also be a prison (Silvey and Olsen 2006); the experience of being in transnational space ‘for a moment’ is very different to being there for a lifetime. If transnational space is to be understood as a structure of control as well as of liberation, this needs to be accounted for.

One solution is to identify key sites of transnational processes, which may then be analysed as locales of contestation and control. This may follow from the identification of key actors; according to Mountz and Wright transnational space is ‘the medium through which migrants organize their lives’ (1996: 415). This definition has the virtue of simplicity, though definitions of transnational space including non-migrant actors are now common (Conradson and Latham 2005) and, following Crang et al. (2003), we may wish to avoid the specific sine qua non inclusion of migrants altogether. Faist’s definition is probably the most widely quoted: the ‘transboundary expansion of social spaces’ involves ‘processes that signify a transformation in the spatial organisation of social and symbolic relations’ (2004: 3). Such processes do not occur independently of the places themselves. Rather, place and process are mutually constituted: ‘by spatialities we mean the diverse ongoing connections and networks that bind different parts of the world together and that are constituted through (and in fact constitute) particular sites and places’ (Featherstone et al. 2007: 382-4). We now turn to the nature of these sites.

**Spatial binaries and triads**

The widespread classification of space in binary terms (objective/subjective, material/metaphorical, absolute/relative, real/imagined) provides a key set of dialectics that continues to structure spatial debates. In the past (and for some geographers, still today), geography devoted most attention to the firmly positivist understanding of absolute, objective, material, or ‘real’ space (Watts 1992; Soja and Hooper 1993). A similar trend can be observed in studies of migration where common classifications have also been structured around binary understandings of the international migration process in relation to states – sending/receiving, home/host, emigration/immigration – and migrant profiles – forced/voluntary, internal/international, refugee/economic migrant, permanent/temporary (King 2002).

Triadic characterisations of space have typically developed against such binaries; the symbolism of Soja’s (1989; 1996) or Bhabha’s (1994) ‘thirdspace’ is a direct result of reaction against troubling identity binaries,
rather than a comment on spatial analysis itself. Soja and Hooper build on bell hooks’ (1990) political objections to identity binaries, extending them to spatial analysis: ‘the distinctions between real and imaginary spaces and places, between spatial metaphors and materialised geographies, dissolve emphatically into what might be described as a “thirdspace” of political choice, containing more than simple combinations of the original dualities’ (Soja and Hooper 1993: 192). Bhabha (1994) too identifies ‘thirdspace’ as a space of hybridity, that is always in-between and often deliberately marginalised. In this reading, ‘thirdspace’ is a principled political objection to previously available binaries expressed in spatial terms.

The connections to transnationalism are clear. Transnationalism, conceived as deterritorialised ‘between states’, is a rejection of the spatial binaries of ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ states; a ‘claim’ that migrants do not need to make a choice. It fits well with the hybrid, marginalised notions of Bhabha or hooks, providing a degree of empirical grounding for the theoretical zeitgeist of the 1990s. Transnationalism was ‘the social space of postmodernism’ (Rouse 1991), post-empire, ‘post-national’ (Kearney 1991: 51) and post-Euclidian, involving ‘a shift from two-dimensional Euclidean space with its centres and peripheries and sharp boundaries to a multidimensional global space with unbounded, often discontinuous and interpenetrating sub-spaces’ (Kearney 1995: 549).

The empirical demands of contacting research participants in particular locations required the identification of at least some material reality to this ‘space of postmodernism’. Some argued that the conception of ‘thirdspace’ was not compatible with empirical fieldwork. The sociologist Ludger Pries, one of the most prolific writers on transnational space, specifically rejected the triadic approach as it ‘puts migrants in the air’ (2001a: 21). He returned to a duality, derived from Luhmann’s World Society Theory (Luhmann 1982, 1987), between ‘geographic’ and ‘social’ space, where ‘geographic’ stands for absolute space and ‘social space’ is essentially social structure. In Pries’ view, classical conceptions of social behaviour saw each social space occupying ‘precisely one geographically specific space’ (1999: 4). Transnational space is derived from the ‘decoupling’ of these social and geographic spaces so that social space can expand over ‘several and distinct geographic spaces’ (2001b: 57). Although Pries quotes Gregory and Urry’s (1985) criticism of Luhmann’s separation of the spatial from the social, he offers no counter-argument in its defence (Pries 1999: 18). Pries’ ‘decoupling’ of ‘geographic’ space from social structures imagines ‘geographic’ space as remaining static while evolving social structures flow over it; a fundamentally un-geographic conception of space which denies the ongoing social-spatial relationship, particularly the mutually constituted nature of social relations and place (Massey 1994).
Other approaches to transnationalism have made productive use of the triadic elaboration. Jackson et al. consider transnational space as ‘not just the material geographies of labour migration or the trading in transnational goods and services but also the symbolic and imaginary geographies through which we attempt to make sense of our increasingly transnational world’ (2004: 3, emphasis in original). The material, symbolic and imaginary aspects of transnational space could be considered as relating directly to the influential triad ‘identities, borders, orders’ (Albert et al. 2001) as a summary of the essential aspects of transnational relations. The title of Ong and Nonini’s book *Ungrounded Empires* effectively captures their deterritorialised argument, but they go on to identify the overseas Chinese as a ‘third culture’ (1997: 9), distinct both from those societies in which they live and from the Chinese in China. Vertovec (1999) has also demonstrated the power and popularity of triads, drawing on Sheffer’s (1986) conceptualisation of diaspora to identify three important locational ties of international migrants: places of residence, myths of homeland and imaginations of diasporic communities.

The popularity of triadic structures of explanation within transnational and diaspora studies arises from the inadequacy of binary opposites to reflect the necessary complexity of developing relations ‘beyond’ a simple state division. This relates back to a well-established current in triadic spatial analysis, which Harvey (2006) traces to Cassirer (1944), though the most famous is undoubtedly Lefebvre’s *Production of Space* (1991). Lefebvre’s treatise is full of triadic divisions, including the widely-cited distinction between ‘material space’, ‘representational space’ and ‘spaces of representation’, which finds its way into Jackson et al.’s (2004) call for attention to material, symbolic and imaginative spaces. Support for a range of contradictory opinions can be found amongst Lefebvre’s sometimes impenetrable arguments but one of the clearest lines running through the book is a critique of ‘absolute’ space, a result of capitalist expansion, for which the goal is ‘homogenisation’ (eg 1991: 341), in contrast to the more complex geography of spaces produced in and through human activity.

Harvey is amongst the most enthusiastic interpreters of Lefebvre. Towards the end of *The Condition of Postmodernity* he sets out a ‘grid’ of spatial practices, strongly influenced by Lefebvre (Harvey 1989: 220-1). Harvey’s grid is considered an overly schematic representation of Lefebvre’s fertile ambiguity by some (see Unwin 2000), but as a summary of the complexity and totality of spatial relations it is unmatched in its clarity of presentation. The three rows on the grid are taken directly from Lefebvre’s triadic division of space (experience, perception, imagination) and the four columns are Harvey’s contribution to a more detailed analysis of these three forms: accessibility/distanciation; appropriation and use of space; domination and
control of space; and production of space. This three-by-four grid provides a basis for further investigation into practices of grounding and disaggregating transnational space.6

**Grounding and disaggregating transnational space**

Our aim in this paper is to identify key sites of transnational strategies in order to conceptualise the ways in which control practices impinge on transnational space. One impact of control practices is to homogenise recently produced spaces of transnational interaction (the ‘harmonised’ EU policy approach or the gradual colonisation of areas of out-migration by Western Union, for example). In contrast to homogeneous, abstract space, there is a vibrant literature which considers the differentiation of transnational spaces (Blunt 2007), to which we now turn. Our approach, following Massey (2005), is that **spatialising is politicising.** By grounding metaphorical ideas it becomes easier to conceptualise them as locations of discipline or disaggregated power relations; they become sites in a transnational ‘power geometry’ (Massey 1993), which may also be – in fact inevitably is – gendered (Mahler and Pessar 2001).

We briefly consider four distinct recent literatures which have been applied to transnationalism; each corresponds to a different column in Harvey’s table (1989: 220-1) and so may be analysed through Lefebvre’s triadic conception of spatial experience, perception and imagination. The first is ‘mapping’ transnational spaces, associated with an interest in migration and development. This corresponds to Harvey’s first column: ‘accessibility/distanciation’. Second, research into migration and home draws out many of the themes Harvey groups under the ‘appropriation/use of space’. Third, transnational interpretations of citizenship relates to Harvey’s ‘domination of space’. Finally, cyber-geographies of transnationalism, which cover practices of internet use amongst migrant groups but also more metaphorical approaches through ideas of the ‘transnational imaginary’, relates to the final column of Harvey’s table, the ‘production of space’. We consider each of these in turn.

By ‘mapping’ we refer not to the common metaphorical use of the term (such as Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora*) but to various attempts to chart the physical locations of particular dispersed groups and the links between them. At its most basic this activity, like any mapping, originates in the impetus to control; such information may be valuable for a number of reasons. In 2003, the Moroccan government conducted a large-scale mapping exercise of Moroccans abroad as part of a broader migration and development programme (Foundation Hassan II and IOM 2003), and this case is not unusual. Academic treatments have experimented to a much greater degree with cartographic techniques. Carling’s ‘geography of
transnational social fields’ (2003) in the Cape Verde archipelago develops Hägerstrand’s time-geography in its presentations of the dynamic nature of transnational relations. Voigt-Graf’s (2004) ‘transnational geography’ of Punjabis, Kannadigas and Indo-Fijians experiments with a similarly dynamic mapping involving a shifting pattern of ‘cultural hearths’ and ‘diasporic nodes’. Walton-Roberts (2004a) links transnational geographies to the development activities of Indian migrants in Canada. Like others (eg. King et al. 2006), she also analyses the gendered nature of migrant development networks (Walton-Roberts 2004b). Development is an important motivating factor for states to mobilise or ‘build’ diaspora communities (De Haas 2006; Faist 2008), a process which bears some similarity to nation building except that it takes place in a transnational setting and poses a challenge for states to discipline populations extra-territorially.

The construction of ‘home’ is typically an important part of this process and relates to the second ‘appropriation/use of space’. The more than 2 million Moroccans who return to Morocco each summer are greeted by government-sponsored banners proclaiming ‘Bienvenue chez vous!’ (in a twist of postcolonial irony, most banners are in French). Transnationalism has become an important element in a more critical geographical literature on home (Blunt 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Walsh (2006) investigates practices of ‘transnational homing’ through an analysis of material objects selected by British expatriate households in Dubai. Her imaginative way of materialising abstract spatial ideas develops Tolia-Kelly’s interest in displays of visual culture in the homes of British Asian women (2004).

Researchers in this area are aware of the profoundly political connections between homes as dwellings of individuals or families and the importance of home or ‘homeland’ in a national imaginary (Blunt 1999). The use of the adjective ‘domestic’ to refer both to activities within the home and to policies at the state level, suggests the tensions created by the idea of transnational domesticity. Such topics lead to related literatures on domestic work/workers (eg. Anderson 2000), ‘hometown associations’ (Caglar 2006) and homeland politics which illustrate the importance of an understanding of ‘scale jumping’ (Swyngedouw 1992b) through which migrants become an active link in the politicisation of sites of homes. The controversy over David Blunkett’s 2002 call for ‘immigrants’ to the UK speak English ‘at home’ is another example.

From a relatively marginal topic in the early 1990s, the geographical literature on citizenship has expanded enormously over the last decade or so, particularly since Painter and Philo’s (1995) influential statement on ‘spaces of citizenship’. This research has broadened the notion of citizenship from the strictly formal, legal membership of a state-based community to include local civic activism (Preston et al. 2006) and ‘transnational citizenship’ (Leitner
and Ehrkamp 2006) and is analogous to the spatial practices identified by Harvey under the label ‘domination of space’. Citizenship is typically used as a site for investigation of transnational practices, particularly ways in which power relations inherent in the relationship between citizens and institutions may be disaggregated in terms of gendered impacts (Preston et al. 2006). Ehrkamp and Leitner (2003) consider ways in which Turkish migrants in Germany combine local attachments and transnational engagement through both material and metaphorical practices of citizenship. International migrants who naturalise as citizens are in a relatively privileged position in transnational space, particularly if they are able to keep their original citizenship. Those without citizenship fall at various points on a continuum of ‘civic stratification’ (Kofman 2002), from those with quasi-citizenship status to those lacking all documentation who are increasingly subject to radical forms of exclusion. Legal status is an important factor in determining access and movement in transnational space (Bailey et al. 2002), but lack of legal status is not necessarily a barrier to that movement. Research into overland journeys to Europe, widely known as ‘transit migration’, has problematised the passage from origin to destination, opening up a material form of transnational or transit space which has become a high priority for control regimes (Collyer 2007).

The final body of literature we identify is research into the cyber-geographies of transnationalism, which fits the characteristics of Harvey’s final column: ‘production of space’. There is growing interest in the uses which international migrants make of information and communication technologies (Borkert and Cingolani 2009). Cyberspace was initially seen as something of a blank canvas, but there are now several examples of ways in which, even in this context, locality is imposed. We observe differing control practices in states hosting particular sites influencing content and style (Collyer 2003), or in the large number of sites targeted at specific ethno-national groups (Brouwer 2006). In an investigation of websites catering to expatriate Indians, Adams and Ghose (2003) refer to this environment as ‘bridgespace’. There are also signs of the reintroduction of binary divisions of space, imposing real/virtual or online/offline to discuss the important relationships between the two (Bos and Van den Nell 2006).

This literature encompasses other non-material references to transnational space, such as the ‘transnational imaginary’ (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996). This identifies ways in which individuals form images of distant places: perhaps places they have never seen and may like to visit, perhaps an imaginary of a place they know, or once knew well. Though these images may have little relation to the ways in which they would experience these places if they were to actually visit them, this does not mean they are
entirely constructed. Indeed, they may also be subject to the same gradually
developing awareness of the material spatial grounding of many of their
essential elements, as suggested by research into cyber-geographies.

There is obviously far more beneath the surface we have skimmed
of these four areas of substantial and ongoing research: distributions of
international migrants and exchanges between them; politics and practices
of home as examples of ‘jumping scales’ in transnational space; citizenship
as a link between the individual and broader structures of discipline; and
cyber-geographies as a way of grounding the flatter spatial metaphors of
transnationalism. They are constituents of a more complete picture of a
transnational ‘power geometry’, grounding transnational spaces and allowing
us to identify the nature of control mechanisms which they are subject to. In
order to relate these practices to each other and back to Harvey’s spatial grid,
we turn to a more recent formulation of this grid (Harvey 2006) in which the
four columns are replaced by Harvey’s own spatial triad of absolute, relative
and relational spaces, with Lefebvre’s original triad remaining (Table 1).

This is a further simplification of Harvey’s model, though he advocates
its use to grasp spatial relationships in a variety of contexts and suggests that
others take it up. He goes on to apply it to a Marxian analysis of capitalist
relations (2006: 146), and although both his own and Lefebvre’s analysis
are derived from a Marxian conception of social relations, the framework is
intended to be applicable to other uses. For our purposes, this representation
allows us to relate the concerns of the authors we have considered in this
section and to identify areas which we have so far overlooked, while avoiding
an unnecessary ‘fixing’ of transnational space (Crang et al. 2003).

Our placing of particular research themes is perhaps contestable and it
may be appropriate for some subjects to stretch across more than one box,
but the breadth and variety of transnational space are clearly apparent. It is
noticeable that, despite efforts in recent years to ‘materialise’ transnational
space, most literature reviewed is located in the bottom-right sections of our
grid, with rather less in the upper-left. The themes of that part of the grid
– residential segregation or border controls – are not ‘unusual’ topics for
geographic research, but, unlike themes falling in other boxes of the grid, they
are rarely connected with transnationalism, though such structures are clearly
influential in governing the ways in which international migrants are able to
engage in transnational processes. Our image of transnational space, and
therefore the areas which are studied as transnational, retain a significant non-
material bias. We do not wish to prioritise any area of this grid – transnational
space is best viewed as a totality – but it may be useful in directing efforts
in directions which remain under-explored. Our aim now is to draw these
diverse literatures together into a single comparative framework.
In the previous section we reviewed particular definitions of transnationalism and diaspora, ways of looking at space, and four key areas of research which highlight the dynamic spatialities of transnationalism. We now consider ways of combining these various perspectives, using our own spatial triad synthesised from this literature: territory, mobility, technology. This covers what we judge to be the three essential aspects of a power geometry of transnational space. Each aspect may be seen as analogous to, though not direct replacements for, Harvey’s absolute, relative and relational spaces; and as in Table 1, we consider each to have aspects of Lefebvre’s material space (experience), representations of space (perception, symbolism) and spaces of representation (imagination, emotion).

Territory, mobility and technology provide specific direction and focus to our concern with control techniques and contestation processes in and

Table 1: The spatial ‘grid’ of transnational space, adapted from Harvey (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Space (experience)</th>
<th>Absolute Space</th>
<th>Relative Space</th>
<th>Relational Space (Time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private property; residential segregation</td>
<td>Border controls</td>
<td>‘Transit migration’; transnationalisation of the border (Hyndman and Mountz 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaces of Representation (imagination, emotion)</td>
<td>Attachment to place; ‘cultural hearths’ and ‘nodes’ (Voigt Graf 2004)</td>
<td>‘Diaspora space’ (Brah 1996); ‘transnational homing’ (Walsh 2006)</td>
<td>‘Transnational imaginary’; ‘diasporic national identities’ (Mavroudi 2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of transnational space, without fixing transnational space into a static, two-dimensional simplification. Each element of the triad directs attention to particular areas and allows us to retain the important disaggregation of space in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality and legal residency status while also remaining attentive to wider structures of control. In this instance we are most concerned with state control as an important gap which has been widely noted in the literature, though this framework may be useful in conceptualising broader structures of control, such as neoliberalism, which has substantial connections with transnational space (Mitchell 2004; Ong 2006). Examples from our own empirical research around the Mediterranean illustrate the relevance of this triad and the interlinked nature of the three elements.

**Territory**

This first element of the triad draws attention to material realities and related processes: the way material space is divided in terms of control, ownership and access (material space), ‘mappings’ of transnationally dispersed groups, political representation of international migrants, institutionalised activities, organisations, migrants’ rights groups and other NGOs (representations of space) and the meanings associated with particular places, attachment to place, or homesickness (spaces of representation).

The Moroccan community in Gibraltar is amongst the most excluded of legally resident migrant groups anywhere in Europe. The 2001 census recorded just under 1,000 Moroccan nationals resident in Gibraltar. In research conducted in 2004 it was found that 80 of 100 Moroccans interviewed had been resident in Gibraltar for more than 25 years yet only one had permanent residency rights (Collyer 2004). Since the bulk of Gibraltar’s housing stock is public and reserved for Gibraltarians or legal permanent residents, the vast majority of Moroccans are restricted to the limited private rental market or a single government workers’ hostel (ICTUR 2009). Such housing is spatially concentrated in the most dilapidated buildings in the centre of town, where conditions are extremely overcrowded and very poor quality. This publicly enforced segregation of Moroccans into the worst housing was exacerbated by other public controls on Moroccans’ spatial practices. Although the majority of Moroccans in Gibraltar are married, over 90 per cent live alone. Since they are extended no right of family reunification, their spouses and children must remain in Morocco; yet possibilities of travelling there are limited.

The limited access to their Moroccan homeland is all the more frustrating given its geographical proximity: on a clear day they can see the Moroccan mainland across the Gibraltar Strait. But there is only an infrequent boat service from Gibraltar to Tangier. Instead regular services link Morocco with
the nearby Spanish port of Algeciras, a twenty-minute, one-euro bus ride for those with the correct documents to cross into Spain. Yet to reach Algeciras, Moroccans require a Schengen visa, for which they must go in person to the Spanish embassy in London. The necessary trip to London also requires a UK visa, since virtually none of the Moroccan workers are naturalised residents of Gibraltar, even after 30 or more years of work in the garrison economy. It is common for these workers to go several months without seeing their families whilst they wait for the direct, but infrequent boat link.

The highly confined spatial behaviour of Moroccans in Gibraltar has broader implications affecting the imaginations of other Gibraltarian residents. The concentration of Moroccans in tenements just behind the main street of town, the fact that many live alone and the terrible conditions of their homes means that many prefer to sit out chatting in the evening in one of the small squares along the main street. The regular, visible presence of groups of Moroccans in the centre of town leads many Gibraltarians to over-estimate the size of the Moroccan population at well beyond the 4 per cent of the population indicated in the census. Members of the Government of Gibraltar have even suggested that the census is a mistake and that many Moroccans did not complete it (though there is no evidence for this), justifying the continued restrictions on the small community of Moroccan residents as necessary to preserve the culture and character of Gibraltar and the lifestyle of Gibraltarians. This indicates the important link between migration, nationalism and geopolitical imaginations, and is perhaps a broader analogy for the treatment of many migrant groups in Europe. A further explanation for the situation of Moroccans in Gibraltar may be found in the delicate geopolitical context of the sovereign status of Gibraltar itself. This explains both the exclusion of Gibraltar from the Schengen zone and the reluctance of the Moroccan government (usually an outspoken critic of any poor treatment of ‘its’ emigrants) to intervene politically for fear of upsetting strategic relations with either Spain or the UK.

**Mobility**

The mobility element of our triad is most obviously concerned with the variety of ways developed in order to control mobile individuals. This includes the architecture of border controls at the physical border and development of fast-track practices of spatial exclusion at border sites (material space), the increasingly removed practices of pre-border controls, such as visas, and post-border controls, which includes certain aspects of citizenship (representations of space), and finally particular geographies of home and ‘transnational homing’ (Walsh 2006) but also racism and forms of exclusion based on imagined origins (spaces of representation).
We now take the reader back to Albania and contrast the sharp difference in access to mobility before and after the opening up of the country twenty years ago. Prior to 1990 emigration or attempted escape abroad were regarded as acts of treason punishable by long imprisonment or even execution. The border was controlled by a wide restricted zone culminating in a two-metre high electric fence manned by guards with a shoot-on-sight policy. Internal mobility too was tightly constrained by the regime, with the population tied to a spatial economy of state farms, rural cooperatives, industrial complexes and labour camps (Hall 1994). Against this history of immobility it is no wonder that Albanians ‘exploded’ out of their country in 1991, across the mountainous border into Greece or the Otranto Channel to Italy. By 2010 reliable estimates suggest that there are 1.4 million Albanians living abroad, including 600,000 in Greece and 400,000 in Italy (World Bank 2011: 54). This figure compares with the Albanian population resident in Albania – 3 million. Such a scale of migration – equivalent to one in three Albanians – makes Albanian migration the most dramatic, proportionately, of any in Europe over these years.

The dismantling of the militarised frontier on the Albanian side did not, however, mean that Albanians have been freely able to migrate to the ‘near West’ of Greece and Italy. Denied access to visas and permits, most entered as undocumented migrants. As long as they remained in an irregular position, their mobility was restricted. They had to evade Greek or Italian police, and could not return home for fear of not being able to re-enter Greece or Italy. Over the years the Greek border controls have become more stringent, as have the Italian coastguard patrols of the Otranto Strait. In return for EU aid and the carrot of eventual EU membership, the Albanian authorities have also enforced greater control over departures.8

The human costs of this legally fragile emigration process are substantial; uncounted numbers have drowned offshore or frozen to death. As long as they lack legal residency, and as long as the Greek and Italian consulates in Albania refuse to grant visitor visas to their relatives, or put expensive and bureaucratic obstacles in the way, Albanians abroad remain cut off from their relatives at home. Hence, for example, middle-aged and elderly parents of emigrants are unable to see their sons and daughters for years on end, and some have never seen their grandchildren born abroad (King and Vullnetari 2006).

Meanwhile, the reception contexts of Greece and Italy have presented, at various times, spaces of welcome, exclusion and, eventually, grudging acceptance. The initial arrivals in early 1991 were greeted with enthusiasm and curiosity – as Adriatic or Balkan brothers and sisters (cf. Zinn 1996) stepping out of the yoke of their immobile communist past. Very soon, however, the welcome turned sour. Both in Greece and Italy, Albanians came
to define the ‘immigration problem’; but in reality ‘the problem’ was the way they were scapegoated for the social, economic and political problems internal to these host societies. In Greece, with its highly ethno-nationalistic self-identity based on Greek ancestry, the Greek language and Greek Orthodox religion, ‘the Albanian’ came to represent the ultimate non-Greek, communist, Muslim ‘Other’. Whilst in Italy, less nationalistic but desperately aspiring to be an advanced European country at a time of national self-doubt (the Albanians’ arrival coincided with the collapse of 45 years of corrupt Christian Democrat hegemony), Albanian immigrants were, again, vilified as the threatening ‘other within’. Albania was seen as a place of chaos and political and moral backwardness; and Albanians as rough, uncivilised and violent, prone to crime and prostitution (Mai 2003).

Yet, despite the construction of Albanian migration as illegal and desperate, and the building up of social and psychological borders in the form of powerful negative stereotypes, the migrants themselves have overcome these barriers and settled into their common Adriatic and Balkan transnational space. Programmes of regularisation started in Italy and Greece in the late 1990s have enabled them to stabilise their presence and achieve family reunification. Quick to learn Greek or Italian, flexible about their own religious and national identity, and willing to adapt to the labour market opportunities on offer, they have integrated fast and progressed economically (King and Mai 2009), at least until the recent economic crisis.

**Technology**

The technology element of our triad covers the increasing use of biometrics and hi-tec border controls, such as thermal imaging and radar, but also the use of new technologies by migrants to navigate and communicate (material space), the style, content and use that is made of transnational media, including the internet and satellite television (representations of space), and finally the ‘transnational imaginary’ – how individuals form and maintain images of distant places, how those images are disciplined by states to develop traditions or foster loyalty, and the impacts such imaginings have on the range of other aspects of transnational space (spaces of representation).

In the brief example given below, our intention is to use ‘technology’ in a metaphorical sense as a type of space in which forms of control are nebulous and not necessarily open to obvious coercive influence: in this case, what it means to be Algerian.

In common with many colonised countries, Algerian independence activists from the 1920s onwards found greater freedom in France than under French occupation in Algeria. Speakers of Algeria’s Berber languages were over-represented amongst emigrants in France and the Movement
National Algerien (MNA), strongly supported by emigrants, championed a multi-ethnic vision of Algeria which recognised the importance of its pre-Islamic past. In Algeria itself the independence struggle was led by the Front de Liberation National (FLN) which emphasised the Arabo-Muslim character of the Algerian population. The brutal 1954-62 war, which ended with the independence of Algeria, was accompanied by an equally vicious covert conflict in France between the FLN and the MNA (Stora 1992). Following independence, the victorious FLN continued to regard the Algerian population in France with suspicion and instituted a complex monitoring system to limit their political activities.

The fall of the FLN state in 1989 encouraged a growth of Berber political activism, yet socio-economic conditions in the main majority Berber region of Kabylia barely improved. In 2001 political protests in Kabylia were brutally repressed by the national police force provoking much larger protests that rapidly developed transnationally across France and elsewhere (Collyer 2008). The official, French government-sponsored ‘Year of Algeria in France’ in 2003 offered the Algerian government an opportunity to draw a line under the conflict of the 1990s and present an internationally sanctioned version of what it meant to be Algerian. The active Berber arts scene was marginalised and Berber artists barely figured in the thousands of artistic events organised across France as the Algerian regime created an image of Algeria as a mono-ethnic country, at peace. The challenge of disciplining an activist population, which frequently questioned the regime’s legitimacy and yet operated beyond its territorial control, had initially confounded the Algerian government, which had been reduced to defending the image of individual generals in the French libel courts (Collyer 2006). The Year of Algeria provided the Algerian regime with the space to influence the Algerian ‘transnational imaginary’ along its own lines and effectively cemented its authority within Algeria and across the diaspora.

**Conclusion**

In illustrating this paper with vignettes from our own Mediterranean research, we have drawn on examples from Albania, Gibraltar and Algeria to think more carefully about the production and control of space across borders in the context of contemporary migration processes. For our conclusion we move to the eastern end of the Mediterranean. In the installation *The Road Map* (Multiplicity 2003), the artists’ collective Multiplicity present two journeys, starting, traversing and finishing at the same latitudes in Israel and the West Bank, one carried out by an Israeli, the other by a Palestinian. The installation includes video and maps of the two journeys, side-by-side. At times the journeys overlap, though they never intersect. The Israeli, able
to use elevated roadways avoiding checkpoints, took one hour five minutes. The Palestinian, obliged to pass through Israeli military controls, often on foot, took five hours twenty minutes. There is not a metaphor in sight (except maybe the title). The installation identifies the radically different experience and meaning of the same space for two individuals with different identity documents. It powerfully evokes the simple, everyday operation of state power to reinforce extreme inequality through the creation and manipulation of borders. At one level the example is perhaps banal, an illustration of a well-known situation of injustice to make an obvious point. Viewing the piece, the insight into meanings, uses and production of contrasting spaces is much more profound.

It is something of this effect that we aspire to in writing this paper. In the introduction to their special issue in Ethnic and Racial Studies, Yeoh et al. suggest that transnationalism ‘has every potential to reconfigure the way we think of key concepts underpinning contemporary social life’ (2003: 208). Space is one of the key concepts which transnationalism can alter. We have focused primarily on ways in which that space may be controlled by states, and that control has been largely of international migrants. Our analysis would undoubtedly benefit from expanding this focus to consider other aspects of transnational space and other structures of control. Along the way we have also demonstrated how the transnational-space perspective has powerful implications for contemporary border studies and allied issues of (im)mobility, citizenship, and in/exclusion. The activities of international migrants have also been profitably connected to other areas of transnational activity such as aid (Hyndman 2000) or commerce (Tarrius 1992). Finally, transnational space should be viewed, as Pred (1984) said of place, as a ‘historically contingent process’. Historical examples have produced some of the most innovative investigations of transnationalism (eg. Featherstone et al. 2007) and different aspects of our triad may well be subject to different interpretations at different times.
Notes

1. Beyond the present confines of the Republic of Albania lie considerable swathes of ‘ethnically Albanian’ territory and populations. To the north are the Albanians of southern Montenegro. To the north-east lies the predominantly Albanian Kosovo. To the east are the Albanian populations of eastern Macedonia. The southern Albanian border cuts through a historically contested zone of complex ethnicities, including ethnic Greeks in southern Albania and (erstwhile) Albanian speakers in northern Greece.

2. This was remedied in the second edition of the book: see Hardwick (2008).

3. IMISCOE: International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe.


5. Anthropologists Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar have put forward the conceptual framework of ‘gendered geographies of power’ to describe how gender-power relations are mobilised and either maintained, reinforced or transformed through transnational migration (Mahler and Pessar 2001; Pessar and Mahler 2003). See Vullnetari and King (2011) for a detailed empirical operationalisation of the ‘GGP’ framework, in their case applied to the flows and counterflows of migrants and remittances along the Albanian-Greek ‘migration and remittance corridor’.

6. We do not reproduce this grid diagram here as it is readily accessible in Harvey’s well-known text, and we present a modification of this schema later on in this paper.

7. For a concise review of Hägerstrand’s work on time-geography see King (2012: 141-2); also Pred (1977). Hägerstrand’s writings are rather scattered: for two accessible pieces see Hägerstrand (1975, 1982).

8. One symbolic and highly visible act of mobility control occurred in 2002 when the Albanian authorities burned all the smugglers’ high-powered dinghies in the harbour at Vlorë, the main point of departure for the night-time dashes across the Otranto Strait to Italy.
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