MEDIA HERITAGE

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L'evoluzione è deriva, devianza, creazione,
ed è interruzioni, perturbazioni, crisi.

– Edgar Morin

La collana, orientata sulle scienze dei media e sui settori della produzione culturale, dell'heritage, delle arti e dell'educazione, pubblica agili monografie, opere collettive, manuali e guide su temi e argomenti interessanti per *audiences* specializzate o per la promozione di beni e territori. L'obiettivo è di dare spazio a linee di ricerca e strumenti convergenti, nell'alveo comune delle attività di "terza missione" delle università e delle risposte da individuare ai processi e ai conflitti dell'epoca digitale. L'orientamento programmaticamente interdisciplinare dei fondatori ne assicura l'apertura a studiosi ed esperti di aree diverse.

Raffaele Vacca

Bonding Across Nations

The social capital of diversity, brokerage and closure in transnational migrant networks

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Chapter I

Introduction: A social network approach to transnational migration

The first thing Shenal did as he arrived in Colombo, Sri Lanka after a 3-hour drive from his home village, was call his friend Chaminda's brother to meet in one hour at the usual bar by the train station. Shenal had been waiting for months to see his posh white car with its new DVD player installed in the rear. Both Shenal and Chaminda lived in Milan, Italy, and both were from Sri Lanka. Shenal had moved to Italy some twelve years earlier from a village near Kuliyapitiya, in the Sri Lankan North Western province. Chaminda was from Galle, in the Southern Province, and had arrived to Milan through Germany only two years before. Shenal and Chaminda had met the first time through common friends at a public park by the central station of Milan, the day after Chaminda and his family arrived from Germany by train. After just one week from Chaminda's arrival, Shenal found a house for him, his wife and their 8-years-old son, thanks to older Sri Lankan friends of Shenal's in Milan. A couple of weeks later, he introduced Chaminda's wife, Samali, to an old Italian lady he used to work for: the lady hired Samali, and she also offered to teach Italian to her child twice a week.

Three months later, Shenal and Chaminda were sitting in a Chinese pizzeria in Milan when Shenal mentioned the forty lakhs rupees (around 25 thousand euros) he had saved and how he was thinking about what to do with it. Chaminda told his friend about his brother Kamantha: he was living in Galle and knew about a South Korean manager who had just moved to Sri Lanka and was looking for a personal driver. The driver had to come with his

own car, and his task was to drive the manager between the company's offices in the Island, for five days a week. No more than one month later, Shenal had bought a beautiful white Nissan sedan from acquaintances near Colombo. After the car had been blessed in the traditional ceremony by a Buddhist monk in Kuliyapitiya, Chaminda's brother started to work as a driver for the South Korean manager. Shenal was receiving a percentage on Kamantha's pay every month; and he was already fancying the days when he would have settled back in Kuliyapitiya, in a few years, perhaps with three or four new white cars and his own personal driving business.

The relationships, exchanges and conversations between Shenal, Chaminda and Kamantha are just an example of the many transnational networks that shape the lives of Sri Lankan immigrants in Milan. Sri Lankans in Italy speak daily with family and friends in the Island or in the Sri Lankan diaspora in Europe, Asia and Australia. Sri Lankan mothers in Milan see their children, husbands talk to their wives, sisters comfort their brothers, in daily Whatsapp or Skype calls between housing projects in Milan and rural villages in inland Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan mothers in Milan sometimes decide to temporarily leave Italy after the birth of their child, and go back to Sri Lanka to return to Milan after a few months: they won't be able to work in Italy in the first months after childbirth, and raising a child in Milan is much more expensive than in their hometowns. Besides, they want their children to grow up in Sri Lanka, learn the language and eat the right food in a familiar context, at least in the very first months and years of their lives. The monthly savings of Sri Lankan janitors, bartenders, domestic workers, restaurant cooks, warehouse workers, are sent every month from Italy to Sri Lanka, through formal or informal money transfers: this is money that supports families, buys houses, or starts new businesses in the Island. Small transnational businesses are constantly launched between Italy and Sri Lanka: fishing boats, small bus companies, taxis or bars are operated in Sri Lanka by family members, friends or acquaintances, while their Sri Lankan owners or co-owners live and work in Milan.

Transnational networks in sending communities and in the diaspora are a central source of material help, emotional support, and economic strategies for Sri Lankan households in Milan. On the other hand, having an extensive network of co-national immigrants in Italy, and a network of Italian natives, may be at least as important to both find help and give help to friends, as shown by the way Chaminda found accommodation, his wife got a job, and his son began to learn Italian.

During my first approaches to Sri Lankans, in both Milan and the Island's rural villages, everything suggested that the most dynamic and successful immigrants were those who managed to "surf" with confidence on this constant flow of relationships and exchanges within and across borders; those who were able to maintain good relations in Italy, Sri Lanka and countries of the diaspora, and to locate the right resource at the right time in the right piece of their network. Transnational and national personal networks seemed to be essential to migrants' adaptation in the host society: there seemed to be a *network effect* on immigrant incorporation or assimilation, which could enhance as well as constrain individual actions and outcomes. More than anything, bridging, reconciling, balancing diversities within one's network, bringing together people from different nationalities, or from different countries of residence, appeared to be a key advantage in Sri Lankans' trajectories of adaptation to Italian society.

1.1. Immigrant transnationalism and assimilation

Since at least the late 1980s, social scientists have been very aware that immigrants' lives and fates are fundamentally shaped not only by social relationships in the host society, but also by continuing social, economic, political, and cultural relations in the sending country. Immigrant *transnationalism* has been a major are of migration studies over the last thirty years, especially since research on the cross-border practices and relationships of early 1990s Caribbean and Filipino immigrants in the Unites States showed that contemporary "transmigrants" form families,

conduct economic transactions, do politics and develop identities across national borders (Basch et al., 1994). Transnationalism studies have since investigated the relationship between transnational involvement and immigrant adaptation to host societies, and have sometimes depicted the transnationalism of contemporary migrants as a new and successful form of immigrant incorporation, *in contrast to* assimilation.

Since the very first attempts to define migrant transnationalism, cross-border social networks have been central to the concept. In one of the first publications that introduced the notion of transnationalism and established its significance in migration studies, Basch and colleagues (1994) defined it as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded *social relations* that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p. 8, italics added). As many and diverse as they may be, the different definitions of migrant transnationalism that followed in the years, always imply the existence of cross-border social networks, whereby international migrants are simultaneously embedded in more than one society and nation-state (Molina et al., 2015). Still, in spite of the inherently *relational* definition of transnationalism, the use of relational data and social network analysis in the study of this phenomenon has been limited, and research designs on transnational migration have typically focused on transnational *practices and behaviors*, rather than *relations*.

Transnational practices and behaviors may pertain to different domains: politics, economy, culture, religion, and more. In most research, migrant transnationalism is measured as the intensity or frequency of such activities as sending money remittances to sending communities, financing political organizations in the home country, participating in cultural or religious co-national associations; or by the strength of particular cultural traits and preferences, such as transnational ethnic identifications. Transnational activities and cultural preferences will not be the main focus of this book. Rather, the main novelty proposed here is the use of social network data to describe migrant transnationalism and study its consequences. In this study, being transnational

means having a transnational social network, with many connections in the home country or the international diaspora; and network variables are used as indexes of transnationalism. Social networks are operationalized as personal networks, that is, the set of social contacts of any kind (family, friends, and acquaintances) that the migrant currently has, and the connections between them.

Transnational networks are considered to capture the *structure*, rather than the *agency* of transnationalism. In other words, in this book transnationalism is conceived of as a set of structural conditions that shape other outcomes of migrant lives, rather than an array of individual, possibly rational, actions, decisions or choices. On the subject of the relationship between transnationalism and immigrant incorporation or assimilation, this implies a different model compared to existing studies, one that views transnationalism as an *independent* variable which affects immigrant incorporation.

In quantitative studies of transnationalism and incorporation, transnational behaviors, practices or preferences are typically treated as a dependent variable, to be modelled as a function of independent variables that describe the immigrant's degree of assimilation. (Guarnizo et al., 2003) exemplify this approach analyzing one of the most complete existing databases on transnational migration, the data from the "Comparative Immigrant Enterprise Project" on Latin American immigrants in the United States: they model transnational political involvement as dependent on measures of migrant social and economic assimilation in the US. This kind of research design has been adopted in studies on transnational migrants in Europe as well (e.g., Snel et al., 2006), and it has contributed groundbreaking insights on the association between migrant transnationalism and assimilation. On the other hand, this book views the problem from a different angle, in which the transnationalism of the social structure embedding the migrant, that is, social network transnationalism, is an *independent* variable that predicts assimilation outcomes.

The word "assimilation" has a controversial history in migration studies (Alba, Nee, 2003). The notion of transnationalism

was initially regarded by its proponents as an *alternative* to the assimilation perspective: immigrants did not necessarily tend or need to assimilate to the host society; many of them did perfectly well, even better than "assimilated" immigrants, by focusing and investing more in transnational relationships with communities of origin. The research reported in this book does not assume or imply that assimilation requires immigrants to sever their relationships with sending communities, the co-national diaspora, or fellow immigrants. Quite the contrary: a major conclusion of this research is that those relationships have a *positive* effect on assimilation. In other words, I do not think of assimilation as a one-way and unidimensional process in which the immigrant becomes closer and better integrated in the host culture and society to the extent that he relinquishes ties with the home country and society. And I do not assume that immigrants are better off the more they become involved in the receiving culture and society, and the more they distance themselves from the origin culture and society.

By assimilation, I mean a positive and successful *adaptation* of the immigrant to the society, economy and culture of the receiving country. Culture and economy are the two domains in which assimilation will be described and measured in this book. Cultural assimilation or adaptation will be also termed *acculturation*, following a terminology perhaps more popular in anthropology and cross-cultural psychology (Berry, 1997, Cabassa, 2003). Cultural assimilation will be measured using an acculturation rating scale drawn from the popular Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexicans Americans-II (Cuellar et al., 1995), which indexes the degree to which the immigrant accepts or shares cultural traits, tastes and values of the host society.

Economic assimilation or adaptation will also be termed *incorporation* in the labor market of the receiving country. I will consider immigrants who are employed in the host country and earn an income above the poverty line as successfully incorporated. Thus, data on employment status and income will be combined to operationalize economic assimilation.

1.2. Immigrant transnationalism and personal networks

As noted above, a major difference in this work, compared to existing research on transnationalism and assimilation, is the inversion of the causal relationship under study: transnationalism is treated as the independent variable influencing immigrant assimilation, which is regarded as the dependent outcome. Two main hypotheses justify this strategy. First, I make the hypothesis that social networks, rather than cross-border practices and behaviors, capture an empirically important aspect of migrant transnationalism, and that social network analysis offers powerful measures for this phenomenon. In other words, it is my hypothesis that the "structural" transnationalism of social networks is a significant, yet variable, phenomenon among international migrants.

Secondly, I make the hypothesis that *multiple* dimensions of network transnationalism influence immigrant assimilation. Different characteristics of transnational networks are simultaneously relevant to how immigrants adapt to host societies: only by treating them as multiple independent variables in statistical models, can they jointly be accounted for. The basic intuition here is that immigrants' adaptation strategies are influenced not merely by how many people the immigrant knows in the home country and the international diaspora, but also by whether and how these people know each other and know other contacts in the immigrant's network. In network terminology, *both* the composition *and* the structure of transnational networks matter. I will distinguish these two dimensions as the *degree* and the *type* of structural transnationalism: the former has to do with the *composition*, the latter with the *structure* of personal networks.

In the following chapters, the importance of "how people know each other", and specifically how people *with different characteristics* know each other, will be discussed under the heading of *cohesion versus segregation* in migrant networks. Here the relevant characteristics of social contacts are nationality and country of residence. By cohesion versus segregation, I mean the extent to which immigrant's personal contacts from different

nationalities, or in different countries, know each other and fall in the same network groups; or rather are unconnected and fall into separate groups. In the latter case, actor nationalities and countries of residence can be described as *segregated* in network structure, with the migrant *brokering* between them.

This idea establishes a link between the network analysis of migrant transnationalism and the popular sociological concept of structural brokerage, as it has been used in the social capital literature. Much research has documented the advantages of occupying a brokering position in social networks, one that bridges otherwise unconnected groups of actors, or spans "structural holes" in the seminal terminology introduced by Ronald Burt (1992). However, in other cases, a very different structural position has been shown to benefit individual actors, one that is embedded in the "closure" of a dense and tightly knit network, which was first identified as a source of social capital by James Coleman (1988).

Segregation of attributes in network structure means brokerage between actors with different attributes or characteristics: if countries or nationalities are segregated and unconnected in the structure of her network, the immigrant brokers between *different* countries and nationalities. In this book, existing arguments and evidence on brokerage versus closure as social capital will be recalled to discuss the relationship between attribute segregation in network structure and assimilation patterns. On the other hand, brokerage as conceived in this work is different from *purely structural* brokerage in the traditional sense, which means bridging unconnected network groups, regardless of the actor attributes in those groups. I will focus on *brokerage between differences*, that is, on a structural position in the network which gives the immigrant the opportunity to broker between actors *from different nationalities* or *in different countries of residence*: for example, between Italians and Sri Lankans in Italy; or between Sri Lankans in Italy and Sri Lankans in Sri Lanka. I am less interested in structural brokerage between actors with the same attributes, for example between unconnected groups of Italians in Italy, or different groups of Sri Lankans in Sri Lanka. Similarly, I

will focus on *diversity within closure*: rather than network closure and dense connections among any kind of actors, I will focus on those situations in which closure brings together, in the same cohesive subgroups of the network, people from different nationalities or in different countries of residence.

Diversity, cohesion and segregation in terms of the countries of residence of social contacts, which I call the "geographical" dimension, will be used to qualify fundamentally different degrees and types of immigrant transnationalism. While the level of geographical diversity may measure the *degree* of transnationalism, and differentiate between less and more transnational networks; cohesion and segregation may distinguish different *types* of transnationalism given the same degree, namely a situation of "transnational cohesion" versus one of "transnational brokerage". In the latter, the immigrant brokers between unconnected social contacts who live in different countries; in the former, the immigrant's contacts in different countries know each other in a dense and closed transnational personal network.

On the other hand, not only transnationalism, but social integration in the destination country will be considered a significant dimension in the description of migrant networks as well. Thus, besides the "geographical" dimension, a "national" dimension will also be taken into account, which refers to the nationality of social contacts rather than their country of residence. Diversity, cohesion and segregation in actor nationalities will be used to describe different degrees and types of migrant social integration in the host country. By social integration, I mean here what has been also called "structural assimilation" in sociological literature (Alba, Nee, 1997), that is, the immigrant's participation in families, friendships or other kinds of social relationships with native-born individuals in the host country. Diversity in the nationalities of social contacts may capture the degree of social integration; cohesion and segregation between nationalities may reveal different types of social integration, namely a "cohesive" versus a "brokering" type. Similarly to the distinction between "transnational brokerage" and "transnational cohesion", the "brokering" type of social integration characterizes those networks in which

the immigrant is the only connection (or one of very few ones) between contacts of different nationalities, particularly co-nationals and natives; while in the "cohesive" type of social integration, contacts of different nationalities tend to know each other in more dense personal networks.

1.3. Research hypotheses

To sum up, underlying this work are a number of hypotheses on the social networks of international migrants, and on their bearing on assimilation patterns. These hypotheses are stated here, and will be discussed in the book conclusions in light of the results presented in the following chapters.

Hypothesis 1. The network effect on assimilation.

Personal networks matter to immigrant assimilation, *independently and separately* from individual characteristics. In statistical models, personal network characteristics may be even stronger predictors of assimilation outcomes than traditional, individual variables used in migration studies.

Hypothesis 2. The effect of network composition: diversity is positively associated with assimilation.

The characteristics of immigrants' social contacts, that is, the composition of immigrants' networks, shape assimilation patterns. Specifically, I make the hypothesis that two attributes of social contacts significantly affect immigrant assimilation: nationality and country of residence. Thus, two hypotheses may be distinguished here:

Hypothesis 2.a. Compositional *diversity* positively affects assimilation.

Hypothesis 2.b. Both *geographical* and *national* diversity matter: knowing people both in different countries, and from diverse na-

tionalities, facilitates assimilation. As discussed above, "geographical" diversity of networks (contacts' countries of residence) can be thought of as a measure of transnationalism; while "national" diversity (contacts' nationalities) can be considered as a measure of social integration.

Hypothesis 3. The effect of network structure: brokerage is positively associated with assimilation.

The intuition is that not simply what type of contacts are in the immigrant's network, but also how these contacts know each other, affect assimilation patterns. "How actors know each other" is what network analysts call the structure of a social network, that is, the number and distribution of relations in the network. Network structure reveals much about the way one maintains relations in her network, uses them as a resources, and is constrained by them. In particular, different network structures imply that, given the same degree of diversity in her network, the immigrant can be a broker between differences, or rather she can be embedded in a dense community where people with different characteristics are closely connected to each other. Given the same degree of network transnationalism (diversity in actors' countries of residence), we may observe "transnational brokerage" or "transnational cohesion" in the network; given the same degree of network social integration (diversity in actors' nationalities), we may observe a "brokering" or a "cohesive" type of social integration. I make the hypothesis that having a brokering or a cohesive type of network transnationalism and social integration matters to assimilation outcomes. In particular, I expect that brokering between actors *from different nationalities*, or *in different countries of residence*, has positive effects on assimilation.

With respect to migrant transnationalism in particular, two additional hypotheses guide this work:

Hypothesis 4. The transnationalism of migrant social networks is an empirically significant phenomenon.

I make the hypothesis that a significant part of the immigrant population has transnational networks. Furthermore, there is a significant variation in network transnationalism among immigrants, thus network data offer effective measures of immigrant transnationalism.

Hypothesis 5. The *degree* and *type* of transnationalism affect assimilation outcomes.

I hypothesize that variations in transnationalism, as measured by social network metrics, are reflected in different outcomes of cultural and economic assimilation. There is substantial variation in both the *degree* and the *type* of transnationalism. In particular, as anticipated by Hypothesis 3, this means that the difference between "brokering" and "cohesive" transnational networks affects assimilation patterns.

1.4. Book outline

This introduction is followed by a chapter that presents the basic sociological concepts used in the book, namely social networks, social capital, immigrant assimilation, and transnationalism (Chapter 2). The background of these notions in the existing literature is discussed in its most relevant aspects to this study.

In Chapter 3 I examine the composition of immigrants' personal networks, that is, the distribution of the attributes of immigrants' social contacts. Nationality and country of residence are the most relevant attributes: the analysis is mostly concerned with where immigrants' contacts are from, and where they currently live. This chapter also deals with network structure, that is, the distribution of relations in the network: it studies the distribution of actor centrality in immigrant networks, and how that interacts with actor nationality and country of residence.

In Chapter 4, the analysis of network structure shifts from the actor- to the network level, describing how immigrant networks are structured into separate cohesive subgroups. The chapter ad-