



**From Network to Class?
Towards a more complex Conception of
Connection and Sociability**

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DIIS Working Paper 2009:31

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DIIS WORKING PAPER 2009:31

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Cover Design: Carsten Schiøler
Layout: Allan Lind Jørgensen
Printed in Denmark by Vesterkopi AS

ISBN: 978-87-7605-361-1

Price: DKK 25.00 (VAT included)
DIIS publications can be downloaded
free of charge from www.diis.dk

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The first workshop dealt with theoretical and methodological aspects of network/chain-analysis. The second workshop looked into the ways in which informal processes have been ignored, controlled and regulated by states and other public authorities. The third workshop, which was a combined network workshop and PhD seminar, explored conceptualisations of the relationship between informal economic processes/networks and fields of politics.

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ABSTRACT

The notion of networks is frequently used by social science scholars in order to explain various forms of social and economic linkages. In this paper, I question why it is that we have replaced older notions of sociality such as culture, community, or group with network, and what are the analytical gains if any. Building upon recent ethnographic fieldwork conducted with foreign African businessmen and women employed in Johannesburg's tertiary sector multinational corporate, I will argue that the network approach is too narrow a way for conceiving the linkages and connections between individuals; the processes and institutional channels that connect individuals may not be so apparent and "mappable" but rather much more diffuse and context-based.

INTRODUCTION

As transnational liberalism has come to characterise the contemporary global political economy, the formation and strategy of global connections and sociability is an axis of much contemporary critical sociological and political economy literature. In this regard, the notion of networks is frequently used by scholars in order to explain various forms of social and economic linkages. Throughout the social sciences, the network metaphor is being applied to bring organisational form and understanding to sociability: we have citizen networks, economic networks, migrant networks, corporate networks, elite networks, terrorist networks, formal and informal networks, and the list goes on. The concept has become embedded in social thought and imagery, and the network form of organisation is often taken as an a priori assumption, especially when considering the connectivity of economic actors in the contemporary context of globalised, neoliberal capitalism.

The network paradigm is persuasive as it has allowed social scientists to refocus analysis away from hierarchical structures in order to emphasise flows and connections beyond the boundaries of local places, markets or communities. In identifying networks, attention can be placed more systematically on the relationships and ties shared between actors rather than attempting to explain social connectivity through the attributes of individuals. In this regard, the increased attention to networks of association provided a welcome change to the characterisation of the organisational form of social life. Furthermore, the organisation of economic practices, previously attributed to the mysterious workings of the market's 'black box', could be un-

derstood through the notion of the more apparent 'network'. The pervasive use of the network approach for the study of economic actions has allowed the concept to evolve from a metaphorical description of patterns of informal ties to a persistent account of how economic connectivity is generated.

Given the current enthusiasm for conceiving social connection as a schematic map of 'nodes and ties', it behoves us to consider the implications of this vision, rather than simply make use of this approach in an uncritical manner. There is potentially a tendency to see all social and economic relationships as networks. As convincing as the network notion can be, it must not be considered a natural structure for organising contemporary social and economic relationships. A systematic adherence to the concept necessarily causes other existing forms of social and economic connectivity to be overlooked. For instance, the network paradigm does not discern who is, and who is not, networked; nor does it allow us to locate and study the processes, individuals and events that do not conform to the network pattern. It does not explain the content of the connections - it describes a situation. Networks are therefore not an explanatory device but a descriptive notion providing only limited forms of knowledge.

In this paper I argue that social connection is a highly complex phenomenon which is much more context-driven than that which is suggested by positing the existence of networks. In line with Robert Cox's (1987) thesis on the emergence of a global class structure, I seek to challenge the concept by suggesting that the diffuse nature of sociability in the transnational (neo)-liberal economic context is best un-

derstood through broader notions of connectivity than that which can be provided by the network concept. More specifically, in line with Leslie Sklair's (2001) notion of a transnational capitalist class (TCC), I will structure this critique by considering the notion of class as a non-networked form of sociability among transnational capitalist actors today.

I begin with a discussion of different approaches to the use of the networks in various social science disciplines. While explaining why this notion became such a convenient metaphor, a logical methodological tool and an enduring paradigm for explaining patterns of social connectivity and economic action today, I explicitly challenge the suitability of this approach for understanding transnational economic action. I will suggest that the main theses put forward by authors such as Cox (1987), Gill (1990), Sklair (2001), Carroll and Fennema (2004), Van der Pijl (1984, 1989, 1998) and Robinson (2004), offer a step in the right direction by presenting conceptual evidence that TCCs are a characteristic institutional form of transnational practices in the global capitalist system. Building on recent ethnographic fieldwork conducted with foreign African businessmen and women employed in Johannesburg's tertiary sector multinational corporations (MNCs) between 2002 and 2004, I will provide an illustrative example of how the content of transnational capitalist relations are best understood by exploring connections that exist outside the network paradigm. I conclude with a broader discussion on social connection and sociability as a direct challenge to the recent pervasive (mis)use of the network concept.

ON THE Pervasiveness OF THE NETWORK LOGIC

Anchored in sociological and organisational theory,¹ networks are viewed as a schematic logic; a way of governing social relations among actors. The concept of networks offers a means to locate forms of social connectivity: certain things (nodes) are connected (tied) to each other. It is a particular type of social connection; one that relates to an explicitly collective form of organisation, and that potentially involves the (latent or explicit) instrumentalisation of some sort of resource, whether tangible or intangible. Whitten and Wolfe (1974) offer a concise definition: a network represents 'a relevant series of linkages existing between individuals which may form a basis for the mobilization of people for specific purposes under specific conditions'. Social networks are considered an orderly means of mapping relationships and connections between actors. More importantly, the emergence of this paradigm has influenced how scholars have come to understand and characterise social connectivity where, unlike attribute- or group- based perspectives, social network analysis takes as its point of departure the premise that social life is created by social relations between individuals and the patterns formed by these.

Networks are frequently referred to in order to describe a variety of processes such as crime, immigration, business, trade, and production. Early uses of the network notion can be traced back to Manchester School anthropologists such as Barnes (1954) or Bott (1957), who used the term to denote ties that

¹ See most notably the work of Harrison White (1988, 1992, 2002), Mark Granovetter (1973, 1992), and Berry Wellman (1979, 1983) as examples.

cut across kinship links, the traditional form of connection predominantly considered at the time within the discipline. The network perspective provided a way for anthropologists to move away from the study of traditional societies and consider the complex sets of local relationships that did not conform to the kinship order. Central to these processes was the capacity of individuals to make choices – a focus that later became formalised as social action theory – and research therefore concentrated on individual action, and the analysis of the way that the different relationships of social actors produced structural form, rather than focussing on structural form itself or social structure and patterns of action (Barth 1966).

The network approach, however, came into its own in the study of economic action by scholars seeking alternative explanations to classical paradigms of economic theory. Institutional sociologists such as Granovetter (1983, 1992), Powell (1990, 2001), Powell and Smith-Doerr (1994) and DiMaggio (1994), for example, contributed to an understanding of the social dimensions implicit in economic action by exploring how social agents were embedded in institutions, thereby extending the study of economic relations and processes beyond the dominant paradigm in microeconomics, a model that saw economic behaviour through the lens of rational choice theory, whereby economic action was undertaken by utility-maximising individuals. The questionable validity of the utility-maximisation assumption aside, rational choice approaches to understanding economic action and their emphasis on markets clearly underestimated the importance of sociality on the organisation of economic action, which the network notion highlighted very well.

The network approach thus easily accommodated the diverse nature of social connec-

tions while allowing the researcher to maintain a micro-level perspective; the launching point of inquiry could be as particular as the individual person. On an empirical level, network analysis presented a convenient framework for the study of social connections while at the same time offering the possibility for opening up the boundaries for social inquiry. It allowed researchers to overcome the constraint geographical distance brings to the study of social and economic relationships so that social scientists could transcend discredited notions of bounded cultures and places. In other words, the paradigm provided a means for scholars to trace the personal links of an individual and examine interpersonal activities while transcending enduring groups and institutions, even beyond the confines of locality as well. In contrast to the deterministic cultural (over-socialised) accounts of social connectivity, the network paradigm afforded a place for human agency. Similarly, in contrast to individualist, atomised (under-socialised) approaches to understanding economic action, it provided structure and constraint.

A focus on the network allows for an analysis that can be highly grounded and centred on the individual actor, while at the same time addressing notions of fluidity and mobility. As ‘globalisation’ has emerged as a common buzzword in the contemporary era, social relationships have come to be seen as spanning what were initially considered locally disconnected worlds. In particular, research on the nature of social relations within the broader spheres of modern urban space – where the relationships that link different actors cannot easily be restricted to one social group, activity or setting – present social scientists with important theoretical and methodological challenges. Social connections straddle a variety of activities, institutions, events, iden-

tities, groups and spaces. Thus in the “age of globalisation” and transnationalism, scholars have increasingly characterised transnational social connectivity through the notion of the network (Castells 2000).

In particular, the ability of actors to thrive in the contemporary transnational capitalist economy is explained by their access to, and their involvement in, economic networks, be they formal or informal. The network is considered to be fundamental to proper forms of organisation of economic action and to sound economic practice and development. Networks for economic relations are thus often promoted because they are seen as a source of social capital which can facilitate economic efficiency and growth. Within what is considered to be the informal economy, networks are seen to maintain alternative forms of regulating activities that operate outside the framework of the market (or the state). Advocates of the network paradigm see economic action as determined by the operations of networks, not markets, and through relationships of trust, not competition. They are thus considered to represent more multilateral forms of social governance than either markets or hierarchies.

At the same time, the pervasiveness of the concept of ‘network’ has led to networks being seen as a given, rather than as structures whose existence needs to be questioned in the first place. Networks do not form spontaneously; new relationships are grafted onto old ones, or they exist side by side. Not all network forms are derived for the same purpose or evince the same approach to organisation. Networks involve a complex intermingling of co-operation, competition and power. The network, then, is a practice that does not operate outside of the experience of everyday life. In this regard, we need to consider why the network formed in the first

place. Yet an understanding of the construction or deconstruction of social relations into networks is rarely explicit in contemporary research concerning networks. Without such an understanding of the formation process of networks, however, meaningful action disappears and all we are left with is a pasteurized and de-symbolised web of strategically acting agents. The imposition of a schematic organisation of connections does not explain the nature of the social, political, or economic forces that influence the formation and maintenance of the links being considered in this approach. Furthermore, we must question the validity of using the network approach in the first place and consider that contemporary social links assume different forms so that we do not limit our understanding of sociality to the network paradigm.

How does the network paradigm help or hinder our understanding of the nature and organisation of contemporary social connectivity? I contend that the pervasive use of networks not only weakens the nature of the paradigm itself but also obscures other forms of social organisation that still prevail. The two-dimensional representation of ‘nodes and ties’ does not acknowledge other forms of collective organisation such as markets, cultures, collectives, communes, peer groups, families, cults, clans, firms, cohorts or committees, nor does it address issues of collective identity. What used to be easily referred to as relations within a ‘culture’, ‘community’, ‘class’, or ‘group’, is now indiscriminately being called a network. In other words, the network paradigm can in fact limit our understanding of sociality by neglecting the plurality of social connections and privileging the patterns of links between actors over consideration of the context within which such connections are taking place. The next section focuses specifically on the analysis of

networks and alternative approaches for understanding sociality in the context of contemporary, global (neoliberalised) economic activities.

SOCIAL CONNECTION IN A CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM: THE RISE OF A TRANSNATIONAL CLASS

Networks implicitly privilege the centrality of the individual rather than the collective. They illustrate connectivity and do not in any way elucidate the actual nature of the relationships they map. The main difficulty is that the notion does not differentiate between networks and other forms of organisation (they are all networks). They are actor oriented and constituted around projects which reflect the particular agendas of their constituent parts. This undermines the extent to which linkages in today's global (neo) liberal economy are context-driven. My point is that the network notion in many ways obscures other possible productive forms of sociability by over-privileging certain 'nodes and ties'. The identification of networks among transnational economic actors is in itself superfluous as networks exist everywhere. Yet what research questions can be answered by looking at networks and what questions cannot? Or asked differently, what realities does the predominance of the network organizational form potentially mask when studying social connectivity today? What empirical evidence do we derive and what claims can be made about the organisation and social make-up of global processes if we systematically adopt this somewhat convenient notion when looking at transnational economic actors? A focus on networks as objects of analysis does not contribute to an understanding of how

transnational economic processes take place or evolve. More importantly, such a focus obscures the linkages that may be located "outside" the binary structure of nodes and ties, when actors are seen as either "in" or "out" of the network.

The notion of "class" is often used to describe major divisions in society based on economic relations or modes of production. Classes are thus identified in terms of one's position in those processes and in reference to differences in the amount of wealth, power and prestige derived from the respective position maintained in the division of labour. In recent years, academic interest in the notion has declined with increased skepticism about the persistence of class as a meaningful category in the social sciences, and in the context of global economic processes there is even more skepticism about its application beyond the nation-state. This is where the recent work on TCC formation is of value. While renewing interest in the notion of "class" and building upon its defining features in terms of ownership and control of the means of production and economic interests, scholars such as Sklair (2000, 2001) postulate that a transnational capitalist class is emerging that is not located in or identified with a particular country, but rather is identified with the global capitalist system. The point, however, is not only to locate and conceptualize processes of class formation outside state-centrist terms, but also to question if those who are associated with these new means of production share a common social situation and unite to pursue common interests. In other words, is there the development of a TCC-consciousness; the process of a "class in itself" moving in the direction of a "class for itself" – a collective agent that changes history rather than simply being a victim of the historical process?

In recent years, scholars and analysts of the world economy have considered and debated the emergence of a transnational class as a form of social organisation in the context of globalisation. The fundamental premise underlying this debate is that processes of class formation are associated with new means of production and processes of accumulation that are increasingly decentralised and global. This literature postulates the emergence of a set of top globalizing managers, bureaucrats, politicians, professionals and merchants who share common interests that are no longer constrained by geographical location. The origin of this debate can be traced back several decades to the work of Richard Barnett and Ronald Mueller (1974) as well as that of Stephen Hymer, who argued as early as 1979 that in the long term, the owners and managers of MNCs will constitute a powerful social class with global reach. More recent literature on transnational class formation presents hypotheses such as the emergence of alliance capitalism (Gerlach 1992; Dunning 1997) or network capitalism (Castells 2000), or the formation of a TCC (Sklair 2001; Robinson and Harris 2000). While authors such as Nollert (2005) or Beaverstock et al. (2002) present valid criticism of these efforts for their lack of empirical findings² and neglect of potential actors who do not conform to theoretical definitions, this literature nevertheless offers a step in the right direction by postulating a possible consequence of the transnationalisation of production processes to be the emergence of a TCC which transforms into a class-for-itself.

The existence of a possible TCC-for-itself has been widely questioned throughout

this literature and the affirmation of TCC formation has been stalled by limited empirical research data. For authors such as Carroll and Fennema, where extensive data analysis has been conducted, conclusions suggest only that a nascent TCC is emerging and the authors are cautious about drawing firm conclusions about the existence of a TCC. Furthermore, Carroll offers important warnings in making “abstract, polarized characterizations – as in *either* national *or* transnational capitalist class; *either* an American hegemon bent on world domination *or* a Washington that acts at the behest of the transnational capitalist class, *either* inter-imperialist rivalry *or* the united rule of global capital (even though it may be) certainly the case that capitalism’s globalisation creates an objective basis for capitalist class unity” (Carroll 2008:22).

While I appreciate the value inherent within the TCC hypotheses, in light of my main critique of social networks as being too narrow a concept, I do have a concern that the TCC literature is itself largely focused on networks. Many scholars attempt to postulate the formation of a transnational class by examining such patterns of connectivity as interlocking directorates or policy groups by means of social network analysis. These affiliation networks are expected to constitute a global upper class that extends beyond national boundaries. Having said this, the TCC proposes a valuable alternative form of conceptualising sociality for transnational economic processes because it poses interesting questions concerning the nature of production today and its influence on social structures. Yet it is its focus on networks which limits its theoretical strength and undervalues any empirical support that may be presented in favour of the emergence of a TCC. One can always identify a

² Carroll and Carson (2003) and Carroll and Fennema (2002) offer the only principal studies that empirically addresses the questions of TCC formation and focus on policy groups and corporate interlocks.

social network whose members share and pursue common political interests, but the existence of such a network cannot verify the existence of a TCC. Network analysis alone cannot prove whether its members share a common identity and engage in politics, nor does the existence of the network say anything about inter-corporate control or construction of a transitional business community. Mapping networks of transnational actors says nothing of the ways power is attained, reproduced or refused in interactions, or whether they influence the political decision-making process.

The TCC hypothesis in principle allows for a strong conceptual approach to understanding linkages in a transnational context. Following Sklair's outlook, which sees class formation as determined by changes in the mode of production and capital accumulation, one can address important questions about the nature of power among transnational actors, the development of mutual trust, their potential to monitor or even exercise control over private enterprise or public institutions or the hegemonic role of this group, and how a common identity may shape the members' behaviour. While there is certainly a need for empirical evidence to support and complement this author's theoretical outlook, scholars on TCC formation should question the analytical value of the network approach in this endeavour. Researchers of transnational processes should take emphasis away from the patterns of networks, which will simply result in a schematic map of connections void of much analytical meaning, and rather consider social connectivity in a transnational context to be more diffuse and context-driven, and thus see the TCC as a non-networked form of sociality based on shared, lived experience.

THE FORMATION OF A TRANSNATIONAL CAPITALIST ELITE IN JOHANNESBURG

In previous work (Bourgouin 2007) I present an anthropological analysis of African transnational capitalists living and working in the economic hub of Johannesburg and frame their formation as a new elite at a time of transition. While it is the rise of a new elite which is the focus of theoretical attention in this work – and hence the nature of the authority and influence maintained by transnational capitalists – the research also acknowledges the particularities of their position in a division of labour at a particular historical conjuncture and thus offers an illustrative empirical example to support my argument that social connections are more contextually embedded and diffuse than the network paradigm allows for. In this section, I thus seek to build upon the theoretical discussion presented above while referring to this research to inform an understanding of the nature of social connectivity in the contemporary globalised and neoliberal context through the notion of class and TCC formation in particular.

This paper was based primarily on ethnographic research with a set of individuals who best personify the processes of change to Johannesburg's economic life in post-apartheid South Africa: what Sklair would refer to as the corporate faction of a larger forming TCC. In other words this group of informants comprised those individuals whose professions were oriented towards the functioning of productive apparatuses and accumulation circuits which operate in a single global market (Robinson 2004). The individuals that I interviewed were all educated in the same Anglo-American university system and business schools, shared a common frame of reference

and were constituted by similar ambitions, professional trajectories and lifestyles. They had similar profiles: they were the sons and daughters of Africa's current or former political and military elite, and they had launched their careers in the world of transnational capitalism. In collecting life-histories I traced their professional trajectories, which had taken them from their native African countries to Europe and/or North America, and at times Asia and the Middle East. The majority were recruited directly by an external agent on behalf of foreign and local MNCs based in Johannesburg between 1998 and 2002 and each had relocated under the explicit belief that such a move would contribute to their professional advancement. More importantly, each held a prominent position within a tertiary sector firm or financial institution and maintained influence in decisions regarding large investment and private equity flows into Sub-Saharan Africa.

A brief profile description of a key informant, K., an energetic and highly ambitious 36-year-old investment banker from Ghana, immediately reveals the characteristics informing the choice of informants for this research. Born in Accra, K.'s father was involved in national politics and his mother was a primary school teacher. He was educated in Boston before he took his first job as a financial analyst on Wall Street. He moved to London two years later where he worked with an investment consulting firm for 18 months. However, he told me that he "didn't spend much time there at all" for he was "mostly traveling between Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, Manila, Vienna, and Warsaw". In 1996 at the age of 31, he earned his MBA from a prominent business school, returned to the United States and began working with a New York-based bank in its emerging markets business in India, Mexico, Russia and Singapore as a

Global Emerging Markets Management Associate. By then he owned a large apartment on the upper west-side, worked every day of the week and never took a vacation, but every so often enjoyed meeting his friends in New York's trendiest nightclubs. In 1998, K. was promoted to the head of the bank's risk analysis unit for Indonesia. He left the bank after being recruited by another American financial institution and moved to Johannesburg in 2000, accepting a position as director of African investment initiatives.

In terms of understanding the social organisation of transnational business professionals such as K., it goes without saying that the social and professional links informants maintained could be traced to various cities and financial institutions around the world. As I met potential informants, collected their life histories, observed them in business meetings, discussed with them their careers and current business activities and accompanied them to nightclubs and parties, I could very soon set out an organisational schema of their interactions with others. Informants maintained connections and relationships – i.e. ties – with others – i.e. nodes – such as friends, colleagues, clients, acquaintances, enemies, former classmates, family members, business partners and so on, throughout MNCs in Johannesburg and other "global cities". Thus in conducting this research I could identify networks of financial capitalism (Fennema and Schijf 1979), global city networks (Sassen 1998, 2000), corporate directorate interlocks (Carroll and Fennema 2002), and informal relations (Roy 1954). Using a network approach could have allowed me to trace the transnationality of African businessmen and women in Johannesburg. It would also have showed that Johannesburg, just as any other large metropolis today, is interconnected with other cities through myriad firms and finan-

cial institutions. In other words it could have provided a well structured and orderly map of economic processes that would have reminded us that the economy is not asocial, that processes are determined outside the rubric of the market, and that trust dictates a lot of business operation.

The network logic, however, as discussed above, could provide only a limited description of existing connections; it did not explain the nature of social connectivity of someone like K. Network analysis could not in any way explain *why* certain connections between individuals and institutions were taking place; it only described an existing situation. This approach could thus facilitate the investigation of economic processes through the creation of a map of economic connections between individuals or institutions, but it did not provide an understanding of how transnational capitalist actors operated with others in the business world. The acknowledgement and study of networks could not provide an adequate understanding of how these actors, who were specifically recruited by Johannesburg-based MNCs, operated as a group of business professionals in the city, nor did it explain why they were there in the first place. More to the point, there were important social connections that existed outside such an organisational map. Be it their use of city space, their social practices, their enigmatic lifestyles or their relationships to South African or other foreign business professionals, these practices revealed important aspects of the social, cultural and political nature of Johannesburg's capitalist economy. In other words what connected these individuals could not be put into a schematic form or network map. The links between them were much more context-based and diffuse, yet were fundamental for understanding their emergence as a new elite and possibility of forming part of a TCC. Con-

nections are broader than what the network paradigm allows for and are influenced by ideas of shared experience and collective belonging – a shared set of characteristics that allowed them to recognise each other without necessarily knowing each other, a sense of superiority and elite status, as well as their relationship to productive processes.

In other words, social connections can be found outside the schematic structure of the network, and their formation is based upon a shared understanding of collective belonging that is deeply influenced by broader social, political and economic context. Certainly, this is something that came out very strongly in interviews with informants such as K., which revealed the importance of institutional strategies, the political climate of the times, the nature of the business cycle and the world economy and the regulatory framework, as well as individual and collective identification, when engaging in both professional and social connections. Informants built a sense of individual and collective belonging as a member of a transnational capitalist elite by positioning themselves in a hierarchy within a transnational division of labour. In describing their career trajectories, there was a shared understanding of why they were in Johannesburg, how they got there and what their professional goals were. These flows were not unimpeded representations of globalisation facilitated through networks, but deliberate and strategic, and not only represented shared purpose, but also lifestyle. As such, it became clear that the practices of these transnational capitalists were influenced by the ideologies promoted by certain political elites and the policies they set, and more importantly, that the processes of individual and collective identification are inextricably linked to the subjective geographies of transnational capitalism and the persistence of prevailing neoliberal ideologies

in the organisation of transnational capitalist activities in MNCs at the turn of the century, and in this case, in post-apartheid South Africa in general.

My research thus illustrated how the network notion is quite constricting to the study of sociality in a transnational context as it tends to institutionalise a mechanical link between 'nodes' and leaves less room for understanding broader social processes that are located outside the boundaries of the network. In this regard, the concept of class, as a much more complex mode of social organisation, allows for an approach to understanding sociality as something which is complex and diffuse. For it is not because a tie cannot connect two nodes that there is not an influence between them. Moreover, in the context of transnationalism, we can see new social and cultural structures arising out of economic relations, or modes of production. These are not explained through the mechanical connections present among a set of individuals whose professional lives are embedded in new means of production associated with globalisation. Whether, why and how a transnational "class in itself" or even a TCC forms are not questions that can be answered simply by acknowledging the global nature of the business activities they perform. In other words, the existence of a TCC cannot be argued for by merely pointing to the connectivity of primary actors in international business; instead, what should be studied is processes in the world economy, changing ideologies and transforming political systems, as well as how these allow a set of individuals to come to see themselves as part of a group of transnational capitalists with shared life experience, shared purpose and a sense of collective belonging. Thus the possible formation of a TCC must be considered as a non-networked form of

sociality which is based on shared lived experience and identity.

Although its focus for understanding the social and economic linkages among transnational capitalist actors is on the analysis of the importance of shared life experiences and broader contextual influences, my research on transnational capitalists also offers empirical evidence supporting the theoretical underpinnings of the TCC literature. It demonstrates how the linkages that form between transnational actors are at times "non-networked" and how the network approach provides no explanation of the particular form of organisation or connection between the informants themselves. Specifically, the network form of connectivity should not be taken as a starting point for theorising the formation of a TCC for it obscures the importance of shared life experience for collective identity and the building of a sense of social belonging. However, by focussing on processes of class formation, the understanding of sociability among transnational actors is thus expanded to include more contextual influences such as the changing subjective geographies of transnational capitalism, the increased interest in so-called emerging market economies and the persistence of neoliberal ideologies in the organisation of transnational capitalist activities at the turn of the century as the contextual framework anchoring the sociability of transnational capitalist actors.

CONCLUSION

In reviewing the rise of the network notion in various disciplines of the social sciences I posed the following question: Why is it that we have replaced older notions of sociality such as culture, community or group with network? What are the analytical gains, if

any? Networks are a mechanical and quantitative way of visualizing and understanding socio-economic processes and we must not simply assume that if we are studying processes and social connection we are necessarily concerned with a network. In adopting networks as a governing metaphor and organising principle, a lot is lost in social science research on economic action. I have tried to show through a concrete ethnographic example of transnational economic processes how there are other forms of social organisation more suited for understanding linkages between actors. By drawing on the example of transnational capitalist actors in Johannesburg, I illustrated how the network notion is but a descriptive label that is devoid of analytical value, and presented the linkages between these actors as taking a non-network form of connection that in some ways parallels Sklair's notion of a TCC. I explained how I discovered that it was not the flows of economic activity found within the network structures that were important, and discussed why a schematic map of connectivity did not elucidate the nature of their collective belonging, which was inevitably connected to broader systemic processes.

In other words, what I suggested was that the notion of class allows for a more pluralistic conception of connection and sociability. The network approach is clearly too narrow a way of conceiving the linkages and connections between individuals; the processes and institutional channels that connect individuals may not be so apparent and "mappable" but rather much more diffuse and context-based. The way the network paradigm is structured both theoretically and methodologically potentially obscures other processes that do not conform to this structure. In the case of the research example discussed in this paper, the network notion does not provide an object

of research that, if analysed, would provide an understanding of how the individuals that I associate with a transnational elite were connected to each other, nor does it allow for an analysis of how they function and operate in Johannesburg, nor of the influence that they wield over the local economic system. The connections that need to be analysed in order to understand transnational capitalist economic actors are not those that can be identified between various nodes, but those that result from the interplay between various dynamics occurring at the micro, meso and macro levels.

From an empirical point of view, networks of association must not be taken as an observer's reference or a given. Rather, as researchers, we need to find a way to critically differentiate between networks and other forms of connectivity so that 'everything' is not assimilated under the umbrella of 'networks'. In order for a differentiation to be made, we need to address the question of why networks have suddenly been considered so important. A network can always be found and it is often the most expedient way to structure empirical research. But to succumb to the pervasiveness of the network logic will reduce the potential richness of socio-economic research. It must not be made a generalised form of social organisation, especially in the context of geographically dispersed linkages such as those of transnational capitalism. The network concept itself should be an object of research, since it is of concern that the vision of a network may be hiding something else.

The study of networks forcibly looks at nodes that are related to each other – but there must be an overarching social logic by which networks work. In other words, the concept does not offer a way of understanding who or what is not located along any point on the network structure. The remedy for this pri-

macy of method over substance is to bring the content of ties, rather than merely the structure formed by these ties, back in. Social ties among organizations can be consequential, but not all of them need to be so. In this regard, process-oriented field-based research on network forms of governance can generate insight into how ties are created, why they are maintained, what resources flow across these linkages and with what consequences. For the study of transnational capitalist elites, however, it is not sufficient to posit the existence of connections and alliances. By focusing attention on “nodes and ties”, we lose any notion of what is located “beyond the network” but which influences its functioning. Ultimately, we need to see sociality as enmeshed in broader socio-political and economic realities.

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