Cornish identities and migration: a multi-scalar approach

BERNARD DEACON AND SHARRON SCHWARTZ

Institute of Cornish Studies, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Exeter, Cornwall campus, Tremough, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9EZ, UK
B.W.Deacon@exeter.ac.uk
S.Schwartz@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract *In this article we argue that theories of transnationalism have value in exploring the historical context of migration and that historical contexts help to shape such theoretical conceptualizations. Historians of migration have now begun to engage more directly with the literature of transnationalism, focusing on the networks that linked settler and home communities. Here we add to this by examining a nineteenth-century migrant community from a British region through the lens of transnationalism, applying the concept to the case of the Cornish, whose economic specialization produced culturally distinct Cornish communities on the mining frontiers of North America, Australia and South Africa. In doing so, we bring together the issues of scale and time. We review the multiple levels of the Cornish transnational space of the late nineteenth century, which exhibited aspects of both core transnationalism and translocalism. This waned, but in the later twentieth century, a renewed interest in a transnational Cornish identity re-emerged, articulating with changing identity claims in Cornwall itself. To capture better the experience of the Cornish over these two very different phases of transnationalism we identify another subset of transnationalism – that of transregionalism.*

Keywords TRANSREGIONALISM, CORNISH DIASPORA, SCALE, IDENTITIES, CORNWALL

Anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, political scientists and economists have been keen to populate the multidisciplinary conceptual space of transnationalism (Vertovec 1999). In contrast, it has been claimed that historical perspectives are 'largely lost', with historians seemingly more reluctant to embrace the concept (Vertovec 2001), but the supposed reluctance of historians to adopt the conceptual framework of transnationalism is overstated. Comparative historians have had a long-standing interest in studies that cross the borders of nation-states. Indeed, there have been intermittent calls, particularly by American historians, for an explicit 'transnational history' that pays attention to themes that cut across national boundaries

(Thelen 1999; Tyrell 1991). Transnational history in this sense has a potentially huge agenda, exploring connections between places and movements across, over and through the nation and encompassing themes of internationalism, the growth of civil society, globalization and the networks of world culture (Iriye 2004). Such an approach spans a considerably greater conceptual distance than studying the networks binding actors, groups and structures across homelands and new lands, which is at the core of transnational studies. However, historians have hardly been remiss in addressing the substantive factors underpinning the formation of those networks, analysing issues such as migration trends, return migration and remittances in the past.

For the contemporary observer the revolutions in communications and transportation technologies that allow rapid exchanges and transactions are the necessary conditions of transnationalism. These innovations appear to restrict the concept to the intensity of flows – of capital, people and ideas – and the simultaneity of global connections associated with the globalization of the recent past. Yet the wave of migration that accompanied late twentieth-century transnationalism was preceded by the emigration of millions of Europeans in the nineteenth century, this human flow similarly lubricated by the technological revolutions of steamship and telegraph. From the second quarter of the nineteenth century migration was common; migrants moved between multiple sites and maintained links with home through economic remittances and social contacts (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Portes et al. (1999) admit that these circular labour flows could, in some circumstances, be seen as examples of transnationalism but nonetheless maintain that they were for the most part exceptional, neither normative nor common and not undergirded by regular, instantaneous communication. However, just as some researchers challenge the newness of globalization so others would include nineteenth-century labour migration as an example of transnationalism (see Foner 2000; Morawska 2001). Indeed, the classic definition of transnationalism put forward by Basch et al. (1994: 169) – 'multi-stranded social relations that link together … societies of origin and settlement' – can be applied to the migrations of the nineteenth century as well as those of the twenty-first.

This conclusion echoes recent work on nineteenth-century migration that focuses more tightly on transnational networks. For example, in the context of Scottish emigration Harper (2003) analyses the social and economic impacts of remittances, their relationship with chain migration and correspondence between migrants and their families at home and the way such transnational links varied by occupation (see also Harper 2005 and for an earlier account Moch 1992: 153–60). Moreover, Magee and Thompson (2006a and 2006b) conclude from a detailed econometric study of late nineteenth-century remittances that a 'continuing interplay between the global and the local' was an 'inescapable feature of all international population movements. Migrants, especially first generation migrants, tend to feel they belong to more than one society'. For Magee and Thompson, the 'remarkably persistent' social ties with the Old World were testimony to 'complex webs of association' that stretched across the British world and they define these webs woven around kinship and familial obligation explicitly as a 'transnational network'.

But transnationalism is rarely defined in this historical work. The term usually

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refers to those networked relations across space that link societies of origin and destination, relations produced and sustained by flows across national boundaries. Dense and active networks that operate regularly and ubiquitously across vast distances may produce a 'transnational space' where people routinely live their lives in two or more national societies (Portes et al. 1999). However, interactions across this 'transnational space' can vary in intensity. Levitt (2001a) therefore distinguishes between a core transnationalism, involving comprehensive and sustained links between societies of origin and destination, and an expanded transnationalism, in which migrants are more selective about the links, or only occasionally and sporadically participate in transnational networks. Homing in on this debate about the degree of network densities, Barkan (2004: 7) proposes the description of translocalism for less dense transnationalism. He defines translocalism as the situation where migrants still look to their homelands but in a less routine and intense way. Rather than one combined area of social action, there exist 'degrees of overlap', with selective or haphazard bonds, infrequent return visits and superficial ties. Translocal is here being used as a subset of the transnational category, relating to the frequency and strength of ties with communities of origin (see also Velayutham and Wise 2005).

However, using transnational and translocal in this way blurs the issue of scale implied by these terms and contributes to that indifference to spatial aspects that Caglar (2006) claims to detect in migration research. The term translocal carries other possible meanings in different contexts. One of the principal themes of the literature around transnationalism refers to the type of consciousness produced in 'transnational spaces'. Migrant communities are supposed to foster the consciousness of being part of an ethnic diaspora (Vertovec 1999) or even produce a deterritorialized nationalism (Gellner 1983). Applying the transnational/translocal distinction to the issue of identity affiliation implies contrasts in scales of identification; transnationalism implies a nationalist or sometimes post-nationalist consciousness. Proposing the latter, some argue that transnationalism, in crossing borders, also transcends nationalism (Glick Schiller 1997). In a similar vein, Levitt (2001b) submits that transnationalism can be a liberatory process, encouraging resistance to the nation-state and allowing previously marginalized groups to challenge existing social hierarchies. But, more often, studies of migration are accompanied by a methodological nationalism, researchers taking it for granted that the identities constructed in diasporas were inevitably national identities, looking back to the nation-state or the aspirant yet to be realized nation-state of the homeland (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; see Boyle 2001 for examples). More broadly, Jan and Leo Lucassen (1999: 22–4) have criticized what they call the 'ethnicity-forever' approach to international migration, something they argue also underlies studies of transnationalism, which they claim suffer from an essentialist cultural flaw that assumes the pre-eminence of ethnic affiliations.

Clearly, even if we restrict discussion to territorial identity, other scales of identity might coexist with the national scale, and ethnicity itself might have been experienced at a variety of scales. Translocalism implies local identities cohering around the villages or towns of origin. Another potential level of territorial identity looks to an intermediate scale between nation and locality. The term 'transregionalism' would

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logically apply to this scale. In practice, transregionalism could coexist with translocalism and transnationalism as identities 'nest' one within another (Herb and Kaplan 1999). Thus, depending on the context, members of migrant groups might identify with their hometown or village, the plethora of hometown associations in nineteenth-century North America providing plentiful evidence of this (Moya 2005), with their ethnic group, which may or may not be a nationality, or with their region of origin. This echoes Pries's (2005) call for a combination of scalar frames of reference when analysing transnational processes. It is not that transregionalism replaces translocalism but that transnational phenomena operate at multiple levels, at one and the same time local, regional and/or national (see also Levitt 2001a).

A lack of dialogue between scholars who study the pre-1930 and post-1960 migration currents may have delayed the emergence of a detailed typology of similarities and differences between them or of their temporal connections (Moya 2005). This would appear to point to unstressed historical continuities. However, here we investigate what at first sight appears to be a case study of historical discontinuity. First, we interrogate the concepts of transnationalism and translocalism by applying them to a case study of the links between nineteenth-century migrants from Cornwall and their home region in the British Isles. Adopting a traditional historical approach Payton has traced the emergence of 'an international Cornish identity' in the final decades of the nineteenth century. For 'several decades', until the First World War, he argues this was 'of global significance' (Payton 1999: 368). As we show below Cornish migrants were an important part of nineteenth-century labour migration streams. However, were they an example of transnationalism, of translocalism or of both? We apply to them some criteria for the presence of transnationalism in order to assess this more explicitly. While aspects of both transnationalism and translocalism were present in the Cornish case, neither seems wholly appropriate for explaining the multiple scales of the networks and identities linking migrants to their homeland.

Second, we combine a concern with scale with that of time, examining how connections between Cornish emigrants and Cornwall have changed and comparing nineteenth and early twenty-first century transnationalisms. Payton (1999: 392) has also identified a rekindling of interest in Cornish identity in the 1970s, growing in energy during the 1980s and 1990s. This 'sudden reassertion of an international Cornish identity' was, he claims, partly because of the enduring memories of a residual Cornishness and partly reinvented, a reaction against the rise of globalization and multiculturalism. However, applying the same concept of transnationalism to both the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries would appear to stretch it too far. Pursuing this distinction on a case study at a regional scale helps to peel away the taken-for-granted and banal 'national' flagging of transnationalism (Billig 1995), revealing a more fluid, layered and contested picture. We argue that in this instance a transnational space in one era provided the sediment for a revived transnational project in a later era. Moreover, an imagined transnational community has been in this instance constructed on the basis of what we term a transregional space.

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Cornwall: a contested space

Cornwall is a peninsula in the southwest corner of the British Isles, surrounded on three sides by the ocean. It covers an area no more than 1365 square miles and at no time during the nineteenth century boasted a population greater than 375,000. Yet, for a region with such a small population, the Cornish exerted a disproportionate influence on the global metalliferous mining industry and its related technologies. During the uneven regional industrialization of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe the Cornish played a leading role in the fields of metal mining and steam engineering (Nuvolari 2004; Pollard 1981). Cornwall was also one of the first regions to deindustrialize following the mining decline from the 1860s. In both industrialization and deindustrialization phases it experienced considerable migration. According to Baines (1985: 158–9), a net 118,500 people migrated overseas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a figure equivalent to 40 per cent of Cornwall's young adult males and 25 per cent of its young adult females. During the 1860s and 1870s Cornwall was the only English region where there were more male overseas emigrants than migrants to other parts of the UK. Assuming that the rate of return was the same as to England and Wales as a whole, Baines estimates that gross emigration would have been about 20 per cent of the male Cornish-born population in each ten-year period from 1861 to 1900 and about 10 per cent of the female. For these reasons he suggests that Cornwall is worthy of further study.

Nonetheless, Cornwall and the Cornish have been the subject of only sporadic and fleeting attention from academic and political communities in the UK. It has been approached in an ambivalent fashion, its people sometimes paraded as one of the peoples of the British Isles (Blair 2000; Stoyle 2005), but at other times rendered invisible, 'ignored by traditional all-British political reflection – too insignificant to figure, as it were, in its dazzling image of greatness and global reach' (Nairn 2000: 14). This is partly due to Cornwall's 'category problem', administered as an English county but with long-standing claims to a Celtic and non-English identity (Deacon forthcoming). Competing constructions of Cornish identity to some extent flow from its location as a littoral society that was at the same time at the heart of the trans-atlantic world. Historically, maritime links and an emigration experience ensured a perspective that looked overseas. It is therefore no coincidence that the Cornish role in international migration is the exception to the above rule of invisibility, with the Cornish figuring more frequently in accounts of nineteenth-century migration (Baines and Woods 2004; Magee and Thompson 2006a)

The Cornish nineteenth-century transnational space

While at first agricultural districts were important sources for migrants, after the 1850s miners, and others from mining communities, increasingly dominated Cornish migration. In North America the lead mining districts of Wisconsin became the first major destination for the Cornish, who then turned their attention westwards during the Californian gold rush and participated in deep lode mining in the Sierra Nevada, Rocky Mountains, and other western mining fields (Calhoon 1995; Ewart 1998). By

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the late nineteenth century the collapse of Cornwall's mining industry and the development of mining fields across America meant that Cornish miners and their families were to be found in virtually every state where there was mining or quarrying activity (Payton 1999; Rowe 1974; Rowse 1969; Todd 1995). By the turn of the twentieth century, the Cornish accounted for over 50 per cent of the population of various American towns, for example Central City in Colorado, Wolverine in Michigan and Grass Valley and New Almaden in California (Granruth 1999: 42–3; McKinney 1997: 14). Meanwhile, the settlements of Moonta and Wallaroo in South Australia were overwhelmingly Cornish and Cornishmen constituted anywhere from 60 to 80 per cent of the immigrant labour force at Morro Velho, Brazil up to the 1920s, while being the largest white ethnic group at Pachuca, Mexico before 1900. Furthermore, in the South African mines before the Boer War, Cornishmen made up 25 per cent of the white labour force. In the 60 years from the 1840s migration had thus become 'deeply woven into the fabric of Cornish life' (Magee and Thompson 2006a).

Migrants settled in communities that acquired a discernible Cornish identity built on mining prowess, culturally distinct enclaves with more in common with Cornwall than with their neighbours. Within them the Cornish could represent themselves as 'ancient Britons', proud to be the descendants of what they saw as the original inhabitants of Great Britain (Payton 2001). Yet, at the same time, they were usually content to note, on official forms or memorials for example, that they were from 'Cornwall, England' and therefore implicitly English. One element of transnationalism missing from Cornish migrants' repertoire in the early twentieth century was therefore long-distance nationalism, in contrast to the Irish. Their identity politics did, like that of the Irish, rest on symbols of ethnicity, but at this stage, these symbols and the historical context from which they emerged did not include clearly national imaginings. Instead, Cornish identity performance is best regarded as an example of long-distance regionalism. While the Cornish were willing to be categorized as English, when seeking work they were quick to emphasize their Cornishness. They were keen to perpetuate the myth of their superiority as hard rock miners to maintain an edge over ethnic rivals, particularly the Irish, in an expanding global mining labour market.[1]

This is evidence of a distinct immigrant group, conscious of its own ethnicity and with an identity based on industrial pride and prowess, transplanted to communities that manifested a Cornish way of life with Methodist chapels and choirs, brass bands and self-help societies, distinctive foods (pasties and saffron cakes) and the Cornish dialect. How far was it an example of transnationalism, with concurrent and regular links back to Cornwall? Portes et al. (1999) set out some criteria for measuring transnationalism. These include economic, political and socio-cultural contacts, ranging from cross-border trading through fund raising for electoral candidates at home to artists from home countries performing abroad. In all these spheres, we find examples of transnationalism in the Cornish case.

In common with many modern transnational communities, some in Cornwall maintained close links with overseas migrants. Cornish historian A. L. Rowse recounted in detail the ties that existed during his early twentieth-century childhood,

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binding mining villages near St Austell to the urban centres of South Africa: Maritzburg, Johannesburg, Kimberley and Cape Town. He noted the regular comings and goings of the migrants, the receipt of letters, postcards and books, the remittances sent home to wives, the exchange of newspapers and journals, and the rise of Cornish societies and associations in the Transvaal. As he said, 'people knew what was going on in South Africa rather better than what was happening "up the country"' (Rowse 1942: 34–5). Such reports imply the existence of transnational communities in the early 1900s with people raising families across borders, men returning home to get married, and emigrants remaining interested and closely connected with the affairs of their sending communities. By the late nineteenth century transnational communities could span multiple settings, as exemplified by reports of widespread interest among Cornish people in Butte, Montana, in the outcome of a mining strike in South Africa in 1913 (*Cornishman*, 24 July 1913). Transnational flows are also evident in the fact that, of the 342 miners who died in the major Cornish mining district between 1900 and 1902, 64 per cent had worked in one or more mines overseas and all of these had been in more than one country (Burke 1981: 429).

The political importance of Cornwall's transnational linkages were highlighted during the Boer War in 1900 and immediately afterwards. Feelings ran very high in Cornwall where the Boer War sharply divided communities and families. In the 1900 general election, the young pro-Boer David Lloyd George had to leave the town of Liskeard in east Cornwall because of threats from an angry crowd (Rowse 1988: 81). Three years later, a by-election in the mining division (centred on the twin mining towns of Camborne and Redruth) was fought largely around overseas issues and the maintenance of links with the colonies. Arthur Strauss, the Liberal Unionist candidate, noted the importance of Cornwall's links to South Australia, 'where whole districts were wholly peopled by the Cornish', a fact he considered of great significance for a people living in a county whose area was limited and who had to find homes beyond the seas (*Cornish Post and Mining News*, 2 April 1903). Cornish people overseas were also swept up in this electioneering; they were able to participate because Cornish newspapers were widely available and those printed in mining settlements abroad often carried items of news from Cornwall. The residents of Calumet, Michigan, were reported to have been anxiously awaiting the result of the election, one chastising the editor of the *Cornish Post and Mining News* in a letter for being partial towards one of the candidates (*Cornish Post and Mining News*, 30 April 1903).

Economic links with South Africa were very important to Cornwall: remittances from the Transvaal alone around 1900 amounted to one million pounds a year. This was enough to keep an eighth of the entire Cornish population in basic standards of comfort. Recent research has shown how 'migrapounds' from South Africa had a substantial influence on the Cornish Edwardian economy, responding to family and community members in distress at home and as part of a family-level strategy of diversifying income (Magee and Thompson 2005). Indeed, many Cornish towns and villages had been dependent on remittances for decades, the *West Briton* reporting in 1877 that as much as £900 a month was flooding into St Just in Penwith. Each week

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in 1896 up to £1500 was being received at Redruth from overseas, with a similar amount flowing into neighbouring Camborne (*West Briton*, 19 November 1877 and 24 September 1896). These remittances not only helped to maintain families; they also provided the means by which local communities could provide places of worship, schools, housing, public parks and libraries. For instance, in 1907/8 an expatriate Cornishman among the Cornish in South Africa collected almost £90 for the Lamp Committee and Working Men's Institute of his native village of Lanner (*Cornubian*, 16 January 1908). In addition, £20 was collected in the Kolar Goldfields in India for the construction of a Wesleyan chapel in the mining hamlet of Tregajorran (*Cornubian*, 19 November 1908). New terraces of housing were constructed in the mining towns and villages, and successful return migrants erected private villas, commemorated in the exotic names many still bear.

Social remittances were as important as economic ones. Many overseas Cornish communities maintained close links with their area in Cornwall through letters, the telegraph system, the constant coming and going of migrants, networks of mutual aid societies such as the Freemasons and particularly through newspapers. One Cornishman in the USA in 1910 described the *Cornish Post and Mining News* as 'our love letter from home' (Burt 2003; *Cornish Post and Mining News*, 17 February 1910). Methodist preachers regularly travelled to and from the home country, while Cornish artists and performers plied their talents transnationally. Two international performers were Richard Jose, the well-known countertenor who migrated to the USA and performed all over the United States as well as in Cornwall, and the 'Cornish Nightingale', Fanny Moody. She toured the United States in 1893, Australia in 1895 (where she sang in front of more than 2000 Cornish-Australians), and South Africa in 1896. One source described her triumphant tour through South Africa as 'doing more to unite the Cornish people of this community than any other event in history' (*Cornubian*, 2 April 1897).

These political, economic and cultural links suggest that, for a short period from the 1870s to the 1910s, many Cornish people inhabited a classic transnational space, with family and community links renewed by fresh migration, return migrants, remittances and by letters and reports in the press in both sending and receiving communities. Yet, while some migrants maintained an intense interaction with Cornwall others were less likely to do so, making no return trips and with their everyday life oriented firmly towards their new home. Though unquantifiable, it is likely that the majority of overseas migrants from Cornwall fell into this category. In addition, many of those sporadic transnational links that were maintained might be better described as translocal, linking localities and communities at the points of origin and destination (Schwartz 2006). For instance, a choir composed of Cornish expatriates in Mohawk, Michigan, divided the money raised from concerts in 1909 between the Methodist Episcopal chapel in Mohawk and a chapel in St Ives, Cornwall (*Cornish Post and Mining News*, 28 January 1909). Similarly, the Camborne Rugby Club funds in Cornwall were boosted by the receipt of £7 from Camborne 'old boys' resident in Butte, Montana, in 1913 (*Cornubian*, 15 August 1913).

Moreover, even before the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when Cornish

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people in the western states of the USA were reaffirming their transnational links, connections were starting to fray in other places. It was observed as early as 1898 among the Cornish of southwest Wisconsin that: 'while many of the Cornish immigrants in their lifetime keep up a correspondence with Cornwall, the second generation has almost entirely dropped it, although an occasional Cornish newspaper is received in the region. The Cornish descendants are scattering, and have almost lost their identity as a race. They do not hesitate to marry with other nationalities' (Copeland 1898: 330). Even translocalism was at a low ebb in this region. Migrants in the districts of earliest settlement, together with non-mining communities appear to have had the least frequent interaction with home (see also Mindenhall 2000 for the Cornish in British Columbia). By the 1890s there were also hints that the Cornish identity in Cornwall and Cornish identities overseas were beginning to diverge. In the early 1900s the theme of the returning migrant unable to rediscover his place at home had become common in Cornish literature. Yet, in Cornish-American and Cornish-Australian fiction the mood remained more optimistic and less melancholy and introverted (Payton 1999: 376–7).

Nonetheless, the locality-level and neighbourly context implied by translocal relations were supplemented by a continuing symbolic allegiance to a territorial scale larger than the locality. The formation of Cornish societies at the end of the nineteenth century was a symptom of more than a local identity and was a significant exception to the more general absence of hometown associations among British emigrants. Cities like New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Boston, Mexico City, Toronto, Winnipeg and Victoria, British Columbia, and states like California and Montana hosted Cornish societies. They existed in London, Manchester and Cardiff and in Australia too; the South Australia society was formed at a banquet in the Adelaide Town Hall in 1890 and there was another one at Broken Hill, in New South Wales. Across South Africa they also proliferated; the Cornish Association of the Rand for example had branches in Fordsburg, Germiston, Roodepoort, Krugersdorp, Randfontein, Benoni, Denver and Johannesburg, while associations were also set up in Durban and Kimberley.

Such associations were both institutions through which the Cornish could contribute to the development of their new societies and reminders of their origins, though the memory of this took on an increasingly romanticized hue as the years wore on (Payton 1999: 378–9). The expressed aims of the South Australian Cornish Association were typical: 'to assist in forming and maintaining friendly intimacy and interest among those who are of Cornish birth or extraction' and 'to keep alive Cornish customs' (Faull 1983: 110). Some Cornish associations were more than mere social clubs. In South Africa, they demonstrated a remarkable degree of social and political mobilization, ensuring that men on the Rand continued to support their families at home through remittances and organizing a Sick and Benevolent Fund for the relief of distressed Cornish widows and orphans in the Transvaal and a Labour Bureau to help Cornishmen find work. Moreover, the Association of the Rand sent £40 a month to the Mining Division in Cornwall for the relief of destitute miners' families, thus maintaining a connection with Cornwall (Dawe 1998: 271–7). Such

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societies kept a sense of attachment to Cornwall alive, an identity that was symbolic transnationalism at the regional level.

The demise of the transnational space

Both long-distance regionalism in the Cornish case and nationalism in the Irish eroded with the passage of time. By the 1920s it is claimed that the Irish-Americans were beginning to abandon their historical memories (McCaffrey 1976). Even earlier, at the beginning of the new century, one study concludes that the Irish in Australia were vanishing, material success and rising incomes bleaching the borders of ethnicity (O'Farell 1987: 307). By the early twentieth century the majority of the Cornish resident in Wisconsin, the destination of some of the earliest migration flows, had been born there and did not share the same degree of psychological attachment to Cornwall as did their parents and grandparents. Some family networks broke down as immigrants and their children played out their lives in host communities far removed from Cornwall, and letters were written less frequently or not at all to relatives in Cornwall whom they had never met or had not seen for many years. The decline of links with Cornwall was due to assimilation through schooling, intermarriage with other ethnic groups, and social mobility. Second- and third-generation Cornish people were more likely to associate their cultural identity with the area of their birth and/or formative years. The focal point of loyalty was increasingly detached from distant Cornwall, as exemplified in the minutes of the Cornish Association of South Australia in the interwar years of the twentieth century: 'the younger generation [have] no interest in the Old Land or its traditions, having been born here in different surroundings' (cited in Payton 1984: 211).

This manifested itself at many levels: sports played in Cornwall – wrestling, rugby and football – were given up for baseball and basketball in the USA, epitomized by the 'Cousin Jack' basketball team active at Calumet, Michigan, in 1909. In some places, particularly in Latin America, those Cornish who remained and married local people converted to Catholicism; their offspring lost their Methodist background and in some cases even the English language. Those children of Cornish immigrants who continued to speak English also ceased speaking in a dialect that marked them out as 'different'. 'I soon dropped my accent when I got to school here', stated Grass Valley immigrant William T. George, 'because everyone made fun of me' (Ewart 1998: 45). To some second-generation Cornish, their parents' and grandparents' values and cultural habits bore little meaning or relevance as they sought to become a part of the social, economic and educational structure of host communities, essential if they were to be accepted as 'un-hyphenated' Americans, Australians, New Zealanders and so on (Thurner 1994: 311). Of greater significance was the cessation of mining, the industry that had defined what it meant to be Cornish. The closure of the mines in 1923 decimated towns such as Moonta in South Australia, leading to unemployment and the end of Cornish immigration. Population dispersal eroded the Cornish cultural presence in mining settlements as families moved away to find new employment possibilities further afield. One by one the Cornish associations disbanded until only a

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handful remained and those immigrants who stayed in the old mining communities became retrospective and increasingly nostalgic about their Cornish roots and heritage.

The retrospection of the overseas Cornish reflected conditions in Cornwall itself, where the way of life that had emerged with industrialization was passing into history. In consequence, some saw the need to look back to a period before industrialization, stressing Cornwall's Celtic antecedents, exemplified by the motto of the Old Cornwall societies formed from the 1920s: *kyntelleugh an brewyon es gesys na vo kellys travyth* (gather up the fragments so that nothing might be lost). This sentiment was significantly expressed in Cornwall's Celtic language, which had died as a vernacular at the end of the eighteenth century but was being enthusiastically revived by the end of the nineteenth. Around the Cornish world people sought to record, conserve and protect what was left of Cornish heritage. At Mineral Point, Wisconsin, an interest in Cornish foods and customs during the 1930s led to the conservation of Cornish cottages, unique to this region of the upper Mid West (Fielder 1986: 167–8). Meanwhile, many Cornish cultural events were increasingly stage-managed and were a call to families of Cornish descent to maintain links with the cultural heritage of the former little Cornwalls and, by association, ultimately with Cornwall itself. This was exemplified by the 'Back to Moonta' celebration held in South Australia in 1927 and the 'Christmas Festival and Homecoming' organized by the Grass Valley Methodist Church in 1953, the need for such events summed up in the printed pamphlet of the latter: 'Our Cornish families have been a vital part of Grass Valley for over a hundred years. With the passing years it will become inevitable that the rich heritage brought by the families from Cornwall will become lost with the growing American way of life … it becomes increasingly difficult to tell who is a "Cousin Jack" or a "Cousin Jenny"' (McKinney 2001: 236–7).

Yet, in spite of such attempts, several Cornish institutions foundered; for example the Grass Valley Carol Choir disbanded in 1967 and the Cornish Association of South Africa petered out in the late 1950s (Dawe 1998: 313). Moreover, while both Cornish-American or Cornish-Australian communities and the Cornish in Cornwall shared in an increasingly antiquarian and nostalgic attitude to their heritage, this response was happening in separate places. Those Cornish associations that had managed to survive were shadows of their former selves, beset by financial difficulties and comprising small, ageing memberships. In Cornwall, families lost touch with their cousins overseas and memories of life in communities beyond Cornwall became mired in nostalgia. By the 1960s it appeared that the Cornish transnational space had effectively dissolved, a matter for the history books rather than contemporary life.

The revived Cornish transnational space

The globalization of the later twentieth century has paradoxically accompanied renewed attempts on the part of descendants of migrant communities to rediscover, reconnect, reaffirm and celebrate their various cultural heritages (see for example Mckay 2000). This has been related to a general post-colonial unsettling of settler

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societies, as those of European descent look to genealogy for reassurance when faced by the prominence of native rights movements (Basu 2005). It also resonates with the widespread phenomenon across the developed (especially English-speaking) world whereby digging up the family roots provides psychological solace. As the winds of globalization and social change threaten to blow away familiar landscapes, the family tree grounds people in (apparent) stasis and certainty. This genealogical heritage turn has been particularly compelling among people of 'Celtic' descent in the regions of their historic settlement and Irish and Scottish genealogical heritage tourism has been the subject of much interest (see respectively Basu 2005 and Nash 2002).

The Cornish have enthusiastically participated in this explosion of interest in genealogy and heritage. A re-emerging interest in Cornish culture and heritage has led to a multiplication of Cornish societies and organizations, as at the beginning of the twentieth century. North America leads the way with around 32; there are also over 15 in England (including the long-running London Cornish Association founded in 1898), one in Scotland, two in Wales, ten in Australia (including a confederal umbrella organization), four in New Zealand, one in South Africa and one in Cuba. Many of these have names derived from the revived Cornish language including *Penkernewek* (in Pennsylvania) and *Keweenaw Kernewek* (in Michigan) and most have active websites and journals. This transnational public sphere allows the Cornish overseas and in Cornwall to refresh and negotiate their common heritage. Furthermore, for many this is a sphere of the imagination, tied together as much by virtual networks as actual physical movement or face-to-face interaction.

Nonetheless, virtual contact appears insufficient and people seek to supplement this by coming together to celebrate their Cornishness. One important facilitator for a renewed Cornish transnationalism appeared in 1973, in the shape of the three-day *Kernewek Lowender*, a Cornish festival focused on Moonta, Kadina and Wallaroo in South Australia. This biennial festival now draws around 80,000 people from all over Australia and New Zealand, from Cornwall and elsewhere. In North America too, the winds of change began to blow. In 1982 the Cornish American Heritage Society (CAHS) was formed with the aim of preserving the history and culture of Cornish people and strengthening connections between Cornish communities around the world. It held its first 'Gathering of Cornish Cousins' in Detroit. This grew in popularity to become a smaller North American version of the Australian *Kernewek Lowender*. Australian and American Cornish festivals were supplemented in 2002 and 2004 by the *Dewhelans* (Homecoming) festival in Cornwall itself, also attracting people from across the world. Meanwhile, the CAHS has become a promotional tool in a revived public sphere of modern transnationalism, including the Cornish Foundation for North America, an organization aiming to provide financial assistance for projects in Cornwall, a rash of town twinning schemes and the launch of the magazine *Cornish World* in 1994. This steered a course between the wistful harking back to a nineteenth-century Cornwall resplendent in its industrial zenith and the more recent 'Disneyesque' visions of Cornwall as a playground for tourists and the retired (Kennedy and Kingcome 1998). Furthermore, it was explicitly aimed at a worldwide market, linking the Cornish in Cornwall to their sometimes long-forgotten

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cousins overseas. Another aspect of the renewed transnational space is the emergence of a pan-Celtic identity. Cornish participation at Celtic festivals is a more recent feature than that of the Irish, Welsh or Scots, but in 1998 the Cornish were awarded the first prize for the best tent at the Potomac Celtic Fest, heightening their ethnic visibility in America (Schwartz 2006). Pan-Celticism was absent from the earlier transnational space, when religious, linguistic and occupational divisions between Irish, Scots, Welsh and Cornish produced competition and conflict rather than a common consciousness. However, a search for trans-Celtic connections now accompanies links back to the homeland, as those of Celtic descent reassert their own contribution to ethnic diversity (Payton 2000).

As distinctly Cornish communities overseas had waned, economic, social and demographic forces were simultaneously changing communities in Cornwall. Socio-economic change began to sharpen in the 1970s, notably large scale in-migration and the rise of a service economy. In response, a more complex and hybrid contemporary Cornish identity began to emerge. Although the mining and extractive industries that underpinned the nineteenth-century Cornish identity had contracted, new interpretations of Cornishness emerged, challenging the English county-based identity of the nineteenth century (Deacon and Payton 1993). Transcending a county identity, some Cornish people began to claim a diasporic identity. Those of Cornish descent overseas were inevitably drawn into the promotion of this new sense of Cornishness. Less inhibited about dual or multiple identities than many people in Cornwall, the overseas Cornish found it easier to meld nineteenth-century symbols of Cornishness with those of the Celtic 'revival', thus creating the image of the 'industrial Celt'. 'What we appear to be witnessing', noted anthropologist Amy Hale, 'is a kind of cultural feedback resulting from a heightened awareness of ethnicity within the Celtic regions themselves … learning about the often shared experience of emigration has created new opportunities for dialogue around the Cornish world' (Hale and Payton 2000: 95).

The Cornish transnational space and identity

By the late 1990s, there were growing demands for Cornwall to be accepted as a distinct European region. Moves were being made towards securing ethnic minority status for the indigenous Cornish and a Cornish Constitutional Convention provided evidence for a popular groundswell of opinion in favour of a regional assembly in the shape of a petition of 50,000 signatures (Sandford 2003). Some went further. A discourse of the Cornish as a nation has long paralleled that of Cornwall as an English county but, after the 1970s, a significant and growing minority was prepared to adopt this self-description. In doing so, they were actually reasserting an ethnic consciousness. Nonetheless, Cornwall's administrative history guaranteed that its categorization remained uncertain and ambiguous. The Cornish people might be defined as a nation, but the territory of Cornwall was more often described as a county or region.

With the support of European regional aid grants for projects such as the *Dewhelans* festival, Cornish transnational space has been co-opted into the

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regeneration of the Cornish economic space. In many ways, this Cornish 'diasporic roots-tourism' resembles the Scottish heritage community ably traced by Basu (2005). In that instance the re-establishment of kinship ties to a territory has been seen as a performance that reproduces a myth of 'Celtic dreaming' and an association with the history of a colonized people displaced by oppression. Such an image provides a convenient diasporic consciousness that eases the unsettling complicity in the violence of colonization and provides an answering image to indigenous peoples as the Scottish clanscape allows Americans and Australians of Highland descent to recover their own indigenous identity. This strongly resonates with the process outlined here, with identity performances renewing ethnicity both at home and overseas and constructing new hybrids, for example the 'industrial Celt', but also resting on some old established stereotypes of the 'Celts' and the Cornish, most notably an uncritical adoption of the symbolic paraphernalia of tartan kitschness (Payton 1999: 395). Thus, transnational processes contribute to both flow and closure in the making and unmaking of identities (Meyer and Geschiere 1999), not merely in the diaspora but in this case more critically in the homeland.

At one level heritage tourism and Celtic dreaming are, as in Scotland and Ireland, another resource in the frenetic competition of early twenty-first century global capitalism, one managed and marketed by the regeneration entrepreneurs of contemporary grant-dependent Cornwall. Yet, the existence of a transnational space offers potential for going beyond a heritage identity. Cohen notes that concepts of diaspora have great variety and mutability (Cohen 1997: 118). Building on this, Vertovec interprets diaspora as part of a project of resistance to the nation-state, perceived as hegemonic, discriminatory, and culturally homogenizing, a project that moreover recognizes and advocates multiple identities and affiliations with people, causes and traditions outside the nation-state of residence (Vertovec 2000). Implicit in Vertovec's definition is the possibility that life across borders involves resistance to the nation-state and allows previously marginalized groups to challenge the social hierarchy (see Levitt 2001b).

While transnationalism and transregionalism are generic processes, they can have different outcomes. The important aspect is not the host society but the historical context of the homeland. For example, the establishment of a Scottish Parliament arguably makes long-distance nationalism less relevant to Scottish politics. However, in Cornwall, where demands for more autonomy or the recognition of the Cornish people as a national minority are often seen as mere special pleading on the part of an English county and are ignored and where demographic change has undermined, the cultural distinctiveness of the Cornish, the existence of a transnational space takes on new meaning. Although Cornish-American and Cornish-Australian associations are not meant to be political organizations, by encouraging their members to acknowledge their ancestry as Cornish rather than English, instead of Cornish and English as was the case a century ago, they strengthen the Cornish case for recognition as a national minority within the United Kingdom. When the up to two million people of Cornish descent believed to reside in the USA alone are compared with Cornwall's population of just over half a million, with the indigenous Cornish

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making up only around 50 per cent of that latter total, the value of a worldwide 'Cornish' population becomes apparent. This was exemplified by a 12-point appendix to the Cornish National Minority Report of 2000 stressing the historical importance of Cornish migration in the creation of a sense of contemporary Cornishness (Deacon 2000).

Conclusion

In this article we have shown that the transnational concept can be productively applied to the Cornish case. We have also suggested that transnationalism should not be viewed as a single phenomenon. Cornish people in Cornwall and overseas were originally united by a common identity based on mining pride and prowess. At certain times and in certain places, particularly in occupationally homogenous mining communities, the density of networks gave rise to core transnationalism. Yet the material links between the nodes of the migration networks, whether individuals, families or occupational groups, was often at a locality level and thus can also be viewed as an example of translocalism. This transnational space then came under threat with the demise of mining, causing once dense migration networks to ebb and Little Cornwalls in America and Australia to fragment. As the Cornish people were assimilated, Cornish associations kept alive the embers of a regional, but also ethnic, identity. Apparently subsumed within a cultural melting pot, Cornish identity was rediscovered in the second half of the twentieth century, reinventing itself to face a new set of circumstances in the modern era. Once again, some of the Cornish in Cornwall, the USA, Australia and other places were united in a transnational public sphere, this time grafting new notions of identity onto older ones. In the process, Cornish transnational space has provided a resource through which claims for a distinct nationality and a greater ethnic distancing from the English are more confidently expressed. Here, the regional scale takes on more significance, allowing us to view Cornish transnational space as, fundamentally, transregional space. Furthermore, the renegotiation of Cornish identity in the face of massive social change in Cornwall was reinvigorated by the presence of this transnational space, which, rooted in nineteenth-century transnational networks, continues to legitimate and reinforce new and alternative imaginations of Cornishness.

Acknowledgements

Some of the research for this article was made possible by a Leverhulme Trust grant in 2004/5. We would also like to thank the three anonymous referees for their extremely useful comments.

Note

1. This was reproduced through a myth of 'Cousin Jack', the roving miner who possessed not just an abundance of mining skills but critically also considerable social capital in those kinship and neighbourly networks that enabled the Cornish to monopolize skilled and better paid mining jobs in some places on the mining frontiers (Payton 1999).

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