Towards a Typology of Transnational Affect

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In this paper, we aim to further develop the notion of 'Transnational Affect', a term that we emerged first in an article in the journal Global Networks (2005) and further elaborated in a forthcoming in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (forthcoming). Our goal today is to present our initial thoughts in developing a typology of transnational affect.

Transnational studies have made it abundantly clear that there are compelling reasons as to why migrants (temporary or permanent) maintain connections with their home country and transnational networks. We argue that transnational studies should not simply focus on the material flows, institutions and enabling structures, but also on what compels groups to remain within and continue to reproduce transnational social fields. In other words, what are the non-material conditions which foster and underpin transnational networks and relationships? We have coined the term 'transnational affect' to signal the traffic as well as the role of affects and emotion in the reproduction of transnational social fields.

Of course, our work does in many ways draw on the important work on the sociology and sociality of emotion (Thomas J. Scheff, Deborah Lupton, etc.) who have the argument that 'emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices (Ahmed 2004: 9). Emotions have also been theorised in anthropology (Catherine Lutz, Marushka Svasek and Kay Milton, etc.); and more recently in work on emotional geographies (Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, Mick Smith, etc.). Affect has evolved in more recent years as a distinct field of enquiry and has been developed in a range of fields, from psychology (Tomkins), philosophy (Spinoza, Deleuze), geography (Thrift), to neuroscience (D'Amasio), and cultural studies (Massumi, Ahmed, Probyn and others).

> *An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. … Affect is the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience. (Shouse 2005:5) …*
>
> *Affect is what makes feelings feel. It is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality), as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (the half-sensed, ongoing hum of quantity/quality that we experience when we are not really attuned to any experience at all).*
> *Shouse (2005)*

From here <u>we define transnational affect</u> as:

> The circulation of bodily emotive affect between transnational subjects and between subjects and symbolic fields which give qualitative intensity to vectors and routes thus reproducing belonging to and boundaries of transnational fields.

A definition such as this does not go far enough in capturing the conceptual and empirical diversity of 'affects' in shaping the vectors, flows and forms of transnational community. To that end, we propose a typology of transnational affect.

- SHAME
- PRIDE
- GUILT
- LOVE
- FEAR-TERROR
- INJURY & PAIN
- HATRED
- DISTRESS-ANGUISH
- DISGUST
- NOSTALGIA & SENSE MEMORY

Empathy & Contagion

We have identified two preliminary 'clusters' of affects. The first revolve around what Thomas Scheff (1997, 1990) and others have called the 'social emotions' or what Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1991, 1993) calls 'secondary affects' and they are: shame, pride, guilt and love. The second cluster revolves around what Tomkins has identified as primary affects. In particular, those which are negative and connect to primal fight or flight responses and they are fear, terror, injury, pain, hatred, distress, anguish and disgust. We also have a formative 3rd cluster that we hope to explore in future, the intensities of nostalgic, sensorial and embodied memories. We believe that transnational affect is generated through empathy and contagion.

To illustrate how transnational affect works, we have chosen 2 mini-case studies from the first two clusters.

Cluster 1: A moral economy of translocal villagers (shame, guilt, pride and love)

Elangovan belongs to the Musuguntha Vellalar translocal community living in Singapore. The Musuguntha Vellalars are an endogamous caste group that originates from 32 villages in the district of Thanjavur in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Elangovan's family was part of a chain migration – fellow caste members were instrumental in aiding their migration to Singapore. As a tight-knit group, where cross-cousin marriage is

a norm, obligation and responsibility to each other is an integral part of community life. The villagers in Singapore – made up of more than 90 families have maintained strong links to the villages. Returns, remittances, marriage and replication of caste/village based rituals/rites of passage and social gatherings are a norm. These villagers bound by their social ties have also reproduced various affective mechanisms which compel their members to continue the cycle of reciprocity, obligation and responsibility to one another and transnationally.

What is fascinating here is that the power of gossip, gaze and *nandri-kaadan* (thankful indebtedness) generated a range of secondary affects such as guilt, shame, fear of ostracism and pride among its members that became instrumental in maintaining the translocal social field. The moral order imposed by the translocal village - structures the lives of the Musuguntha Vellalar communities located across national borders – in many ways reinforce a sense of communal identity, belonging and social viability among its members. This is clearly exemplified in Elangovan's story. Elangovan's parents decided that their 26 year old son, having completed his studies and now in a secure job is ready for an arranged marriage to a cousin in the village. However, Elangovan was found to be romantically involved with a Singaporean woman. Elangovan and his girlfriend were spotted by a fellow caste member at a cinema. The news of this story rapidly spread across the community in Singapore and almost immediately reached the villages in India. Inevitably, Elangovan's parents learnt of his relationship. But for them the news circulated through the gossip network and the collective village gaze were enough triggers to shatter the very foundations of their sociality and viability within the translocal village. The lost of reputation, honour, and pride were very real and tangible experiences for the parents. They pleaded with their son, and gradually resorted to extreme emotional pressure and even threatening suicide. Eventually Elangovan gave in and married his cousin. So here we can observe, the ways in which affective regimes worked to compel Elangovan's parents to regulate and police their actions in order to remain in the transnational social field.

Cluster 2: Transnationalism, trauma and long distance nationalism: the East Timorese refugee community

In this second cluster, we focus on the East Timor community living in Australia prior to its independence in 2001. In doing so, we discuss the affects stemming from quite direct bodily experiences, typically at the most negative end of the spectrum that invoke embodied memory in very intense ways and because of their connection to the primary 'fight or flight' affects, the depth of presence and bodily response is that much greater (Wise, 2006).

The East Timorese started arriving as refugees since 1975 following the Indonesian invasion. The Australian government also granted temporary protection visa to a large group of East Timorese fleeing the Dilli Massacre in 1992. Nearly all Timorese in Australia were victims of torture or trauma, or had families, relatives or close friends who were. As a community, they were intensely involved in the long-distance nationalist project, and since independence, have become a transnationlised community, rather than 'returning from exile' en-mass.

During the struggle a kind of somatic community of Timorese refugees in Australia was enacted through protest performances (street theatre) and religious vigils (open mass) which formed the core of East Timorese Independence movement. Amanda's research showed how these refugees reintegrated their trauma into the wider meaning of the homeland struggle. This was an outcome of the isolating nature of traumatic memory, the need for some kind of meaningful reintegration of that experience, the drive of 'migration guilt' and to create a sense of belonging to a community that somatically shares their isolating experience. One of the important outcomes of trauma is the way that it ruptures the self, and ruptures the narrative of memory. For many, East Timorese the bodily protest strategies provided an effective means though which trauma could be bodily invoked, re-experienced and re-scripted, in a way that de-isolates them, allowing them to share, re-narrate or re-integrate their pain with the larger homeland project (Wise, 2006).

Affective Intensities or the Flows and Relations that Transnational Affects Produce

Typologies are inevitably partial and full of conceptual and empirical overlaps. The modalities of transnational affect presented above overlap and interconnect with one another, and different constellations produce different modes of what we call 'affective intensities'. Affective intensity signals affects as palpable, embodied, resonant, working in and through the body as it responds to the world, located, as Tomkins has argued, not in the body, but circulating between them (Ahmed 2004: 10).

Intensities are also more 'intense' through interconnection of affects. Their very embodied and emotional intensity allows them to travel beyond the actual moment of shame or embarrassment (for example) in contexts of sociality or object-contact.

Corporeal palpability embeds affects into transnational community members and the associated emotions and attendant behavioural responses carry across distance and time. Thus, it is the scale and intensity of affect across the transnational social field that reproduces sociality across space.

In turn, affective intensities produce vectors. Vectors cross-cut all the forms of intensity we will describe in the following section. Vectoral intensity highlights the directional flows produced from a confluence of affects producing both magnitude and direction.

> **Vector:** *"quantity having both magnitude and direction; it may be represented by a directed line segment. Many physical quantities are vectors, e.g., force, velocity, and momentum. Thus, in specifying a force, one must state not only how large it is but also in what direction it acts."*
> (Columbia 2002)

They signal the depth of transnational paths and routes carved out through embodied affects. We think of vectors as akin to an ocean rip; amidst a broader ocean of sociality. They are flows which run deeper and with greater force.

1. Intensity of Ties or Exclusions

Examples in the transnationalism literature show how intense communication circuits, transnational familial responsibilities, circulating objects and gifts evoke affective resonance in the sender and recipients – collectively intensifying the ties. Affects attached to these networks create more or less intense ties depending on the affects and socialities involved. For instances, transnational migrants speak of 'not having left home at all' simply because of the intensity produced and convey through regular phone calls.

Conversely, affects can produce exclusions (forced or voluntary) from transnational social fields. Affects such as shame due to unfulfilled obligations, or around sexuality, marriage choice, and so; can potentially exclude transnational subjects, pushing them out of the field.

2. Strategic Intensity

Strategic intensity on the other hand actually has a sense of voluntary-ness about it. Ghassan Hage argues that migrants (and people in general), actively engage in strategies of affective intensification. Intensity, as Hage conceptualizes it, has to do with the extent to which a reality is involving and affecting BUT is also an intense relation where the person's engagement in a reality contributes to its intensity (1998: 193-194).

This important point frames his analysis of Australian Lebanese migrants in his study. He pays particular attention to the bodily movements and responses of a migrant reader to the news from Lebanon. Utterances, interactions and bodily movements which Hage refers to as *strategies of intensification* manifest as in actions

such as cursing or slapping the newspaper or spitting on the floor in response to various news items. The employment of such strategies is aimed at "narrowing the physical and symbolic gap between news and reader and in the process, augmenting the intensity of this reality for that reader" (1998:193-194). In other words, this is the *body doing work* to increase affective engagement with the topic at hand as well as happenings back in Lebanon.

3. Embodied Intensity

All affects are embodied, but 'embodied intensities' are particularly focused in the vectors produced through more intense forms of affective-bodily invocation, such as those produced through primary affects, and through sensory regimes. As we saw in the East Timorese case, affects such as fear, terror and pain are inscribed in traumatic memory. Traumatic memories are 'remembered' in the body and more susceptible to sensory and embodied triggers - for instance – the siren of a fire engine, smell of a fruit from the homeland. Sense memories have a similar resonance, especially for migrants or refugees suffering displacement trauma. Bodily responses are evoked, such as twitching of a nerve, a faster and more intense heartbeat, tightening of the stomach, hairs standing on end, and so on. The direct invocation of the body, especially through negative 'fight' or 'flight' affects, creates particularly deep forms of Vectoral intensity. Sometimes, for instance, there is an involuntary pulling out of the present, and into the moment of remembered experience.

4. Temporal and Spatial Intensity

Closely related to embodied intensity is temporary and spatial intensity. Time and space contracts and expands according to affective engagement. At the extreme end of the affective spectrum, we can see how traumatic memories shrink time because they are so embodied. Such memories have a 'presence' that gives them a feeling of being closer than other memories. In this way, the shrinking of time brings the memories into the immediate present, at least until the memories are narratively integrated.

Similarly, affects such as shame or loss of face that many transnational migrants experience contract distance, creating a kind of spatial intensity; where the 'face' of the community in front of whom you feel shame is brought into the 'here and now' – creating a kind of imagined co-presence (even though the community may be thousands of kilometers away).

5. Moral Intensities

Moral intensities as we highlighted in Elangovan's story, can be found in numerous other studies which evoke a notion of moral community, both at the micro (familial) and macro (society/nation) level. Transnational affects emotionally reinforce a moral economy made up of social norms and systems of care, reciprocity and obligation. These are regulated through affects such as pride, honour, shame and fear of ostracism and policed through the collective evaluative gaze of the transnational community.

6. Symbolic Intensities

Symbolic intensities particularly refer to less localized or familial forms of transnational identification and belonging. In the East Timorese case, symbolic intensities manifested through the appropriation of primary affects stemming from trauma experience which were displaced and relocated into the national cause.

In another example, not long ago I was in the audience of a Sri Lankan Tamil community's cultural event in Sydney, Australia. The event was intended to be a social occasion but for 2 hours actual video footage of Tamil Tiger rebels in combat as well as graphic depictions of death and destruction was screened on stage. The film was shown to evoke 'affect; to approximate embodied experience of these traumas among young Australian Sri Lankan Tamils with no direct experience of war themselves - the intent obviously being to intensify and produce a contagion of bodily empathy with the national cause.

Affective Displacements, Relations and Scales

Finally, there are a number of ways in which affects are displaced or create displacements in communal, transnational contexts. These include:

o Displacing from the personal (trauma victim) to the national or symbolic collective (symbolic re-appropriation through affective transfer)

o Displacing from the personal to the collective (migration guilt) and the collective to the personal (guilt in the face of others).

o Contagion; displacing affects of others and experiencing as own.

o Experiences of negative affects creating a disjuncture and vector-flow away from the object communicating negative affect, and toward another collectivity (racism)

Conclusion

In conclusion, we argue that what all these intensities do is increase and make more palpable and compelling a sense of identification and belonging to a social and symbolic transnational field. They heighten the frequency, intensity and regularity of flows within a transnational network; and in some cases create greater or lesser degree of homeland orientation – symbolically or socially.

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