Transnational households and ritual: 
an overview

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Abstract In this article we introduce five papers, all by social anthropologists, all concerned with transnational households and ritual. Despite wide-ranging research on transnational migration and diasporas, many aspects have been accorded less consideration than they deserve. The transnational practices of migrant families, other than remittances and other economic activity, remain under-investigated. Some thought has been given to the transnational dimension of religious belief systems, notably Islam, but the micro-politics of religion has been largely ignored, and there has been little discussion of transnational religious practices (rituals) at the level of households and families, especially those performed by migrants back in their countries of origin. Household-level analyses of the performances of and meanings attributed to life-crisis rituals and consideration of what Salih has called the ‘transnational division of ritual space’ offer a valuable route to understanding relations between place, culture, ethnicity and gender among migrants in a transnational world, and illuminate contemporary processes of globalization.

During the 1990s, discussions of ‘globalization’ and ‘transnationalism’ figured prominently in debates in all the social sciences. Many such debates dealt with migration and diasporas in the context of a transnational, globalizing world encompassing issues as diverse as the political economy of migration, the influence of new media on the formation of transnational ‘communities’, the nature of diasporic identity and its implications for the idea of citizenship and the nationstate, and the appropriateness of such concepts as ‘post-national’ (see Vertovec 1999). There has been concern, too, over the question of whether transnational migration or ‘transmigration’, as it is often called, is as new a phenomenon as is sometimes claimed and, if not, how transnational migration now differs from international migration in the past.

Surprisingly little was written about transnationalism’s gendered character, though this field is developing fast and a special issue of the journal Identities, guest-edited by Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001a) on ‘gendering transnational spaces’, opened up a number of questions about communication, nation-state building and citizenship via an analytical framework focusing on a ‘gendered geography of power’ (Mahler and Pessar 2001b: 448). The transnational domestic sphere, however, is still poorly documented (but see Alicia 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; and, among our own contributors, Gardner 2002; and Salih 2002), and in general the transnational practices of migrant families, besides sending home remittances and other economic activities, remain under-researched (Landolt et al. 1999).
On religion, some thought has been given to the transnational dimension of belief systems and to transnational religious organization, notably of course Islam (Ahmed and Donnan 1994; Metcalf 1996), but the micro-politics of religious practice is still under-investigated. There is an absence of discussion of transnational religious practices (rituals) at the level of households and families. It is true that rituals and ceremonies, mainly of a public, collective and religious character, performed by immigrants in their countries of residence have been the object of increasing notice in Europe and North America (see Andezian 1986; Bhachu 1985; Byron 1999; Fortier 2000; Gardner 1998; Gell 1994; McCarthy Brown 1991; Smith 1999; Werbner 1996). Less attention, however, has been paid to migrants’ performances of rituals in their countries of origin (but see Ahmed 1986 and Gardner 1993 for discussions of Muslim return migrants in Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively). Kelly (1990), who claims to have coined the highly pertinent term ‘transcontinental families’ in 1985, described the arranged marriage of a potential migrant in Bharuch, India, and his British-based fiancée, but in passing provided only a tantalizing glimpse of a transnational ritual. Analyses at the household level of the performances of and meanings attributed to classic life-crisis rituals (births, marriages and deaths) and other religious and ceremonial occasions, as well as consideration of what Salih (2000) calls the ‘transnational division of ritual space’, should offer an important route to understanding relations between place, culture, ethnicity and gender among migrants in a transnational world, and illuminate contemporary processes of globalization.

This was the background to a workshop held at the University of Sussex in May 2000 sponsored by the Social Anthropology Subject Group and the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. The purpose was to enable anthropologists whose recent research had touched on these issues to compare notes and explore the analytical and theoretical themes emerging from their ethnographies. The proceedings were built around a small number of case studies, seven in all; of which five are collected here. Katy Gardner’s paper focuses on the sacred and profane rituals (principally funerals), which take place when British-based migrants from Sylhet (Bangladesh) die. These, she argues, reveal a great deal about the conceptualization of place and belonging among Sylhetis in Britain and Bangladesh, and indicate the emotional costs of transnationalism, and how these differ between men and women, and old and young. Karen Fog Olwig looks at a wedding on the Caribbean island of Nevis, which brought together a large and globally dispersed family network. Her analysis of the event shows the complex social, economic, emotional and cultural relations that are involved in the construction of ‘home’ and the variegated meanings that surface and become contested in the process. Ruba Salih and Kanwal Mand are also concerned with weddings. Salih analyses the performance of rituals in Morocco during migrants’ summer return from working in Europe, suggesting that rituals are an important locus through which their formulation and construction of their identities vis-à-vis those who remained at ‘home’ can be understood. Mand concentrates on a Sikh family based in the UK and Tanzania, but with ongoing connections with Punjab. Her analysis demonstrates the considerable resources, social and material, which come into play during weddings that are transnational in scope, and shows how status is gained transnationally through a marriage ceremony in which the performance of rituals is deemed ‘correct’ and ‘ideal’. Finally, if these four contributions concern a funeral and three weddings, as it were, Nadje Al-Ali’s paper takes us beyond specifically...
individual life-crisis events to examine the increasing role of everyday ritual and ritualized activities (Islamic and other) among Bosnian refugee families in Britain, who are attempting to carve out a specific Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) culture and identity.

Our focus, then, is on rituals performed by households and families distributed across transnational space through international movement as migrants or refugees. This introductory overview situates the papers and the ethnography in a wider theoretical and analytical context, drawing attention to certain emergent themes that have special pertinence to our understanding of globalization and transnationalism. The following section assesses the significance of a household-level perspective for the study of transmigration. We then look at household-level rituals in a transnational context, concluding with some reflections on rituals and change and pointing to opportunities for further research in this field.

Why focus on households and families in the study of transnationalism?

All societies have become more ‘porous’, a metaphor used by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994), among others. The globalization of production, distribution and exchange, including the division of labour, facilitated by new communication technologies, widely accessible mass media, and mass international transport systems, as well as the hegemony of neo-liberal economic and social principles, has opened up all societies in ways unimaginable two decades ago. This has been accompanied by a new age of migration (Castles and Miller 1993) involving increasing movement of many kinds, but especially migration for work or refuge. Contrary to predictions made in the 1970s, international migration has not slackened, but intensified, with ever greater numbers of migrants and refugees drawn from an ever-increasing range of sending societies moving to an ever-widening range of countries of reception.

Recent theories of transmigration suggest that in the past (unless ‘guestworkers’ recruited for specific periods of employment) migrants were expected to settle in the countries of reception. Nowadays, however, they are more likely to retain significant, ongoing ties with their countries of origin (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992 and a huge subsequent literature). Transmigration may not in fact be new (Sikhs, for example, have been transnational for more than 100 years), but has certainly ‘reached particular intensity at a global scale at the end of the twentieth century’ (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 4). Partly as a consequence of and as an attempt to come to terms with globalization and policies of neo-liberalism, contemporary transmigration:

- entails manifold socio-economic, political and cultural linkages across frontiers;
- problematizes bounded conceptualizations of race, class, ethnic group, nation and culture;
- raises questions about identification, rights and entitlements; and
- gives rise to populations that have multiple orientations: to receiving societies, to sending societies, to transnational diasporas.

Transmigration concerns individuals, households, families and whole communities with stakes in different worlds, where those worlds are distributed transnationally; Rouse’s (1992: 45) striking phrase ‘chronically astride borders’ comes to mind. Of course, multiple location need not always be literally transnational, namely involve
crossing national frontiers. It may be transregional too, as with much African and other migration. The difference between transregional and transnational migration is worthy of attention, though not something we address here. One obvious difference between the contemporary rural–urban migration in Zambia, described by Samuels (2001), for instance, and the cross-national border migrations discussed in our papers, is, however, that the latter are not ‘free’. That is, they generally involve all kinds of legal complications (or their evasion). Indeed, despite the claims for its demise that are sometimes made, the state is still an important player shaping transnational practices (including ritual practices) of ordinary families, as the papers by Gardner, Salih and Mand amply illustrate. Thus, the role of the nation state and national regulation often remains crucial, and for this reason, among others, Salih entitled her thesis (and forthcoming monograph) Transnational lives, plurinational subjects, using the term plurinational to underline that ‘transnational activities take place within, and not despite, national normative and cultural constraints’ (Salih 2000: 11).

While acknowledging the continuing importance of states, we would contend that from the point of view of the theory of transmigration, a concentration on transnationalism may focus attention on the public arena of politics or citizenship at the expense of more domestic and private activities, often inadvertently giving prominence to men at the expense of women. As Gardner argues in her paper, ‘to understand the meanings and implications of transnationalism for ordinary people we need also to consider activities and relationships within households and families’.

Our original prospectus for the Sussex workshop directed contributors’ attention to the household as the unit of enquiry around which to build their papers. By ‘household’ we referred, in the standard way, to the ‘basic unit of society involved in production, reproduction, consumption and socialization’ (Moore 1988: 54; see also Goody 1958). As Moore has argued, households organize a large part of women’s domestic/reproductive labour. As a result, both the composition and the organization of households have a direct impact on women’s lives, and in particular on their ability to gain access to resources, to labour and to income (Moore 1988: 55).

Our aim was twofold: to see what happens to households under conditions of migration and transnationalism, and to examine what a focus on household relations and practices might tell us about transnationalism. Both questions remain important concerns to which we hope these papers make an initial contribution. In practice, however, during the workshop we found ourselves referring to other entities pertaining to the domestic sphere, notably ‘families’, groups and networks of relatives (kin and affines of many kinds), dispersed through transmigration. In the transnational context, where people, practices and resources are spread between places, ‘the household’ became more and more difficult to define. Indeed, the term was often unhelpfully narrow because wider networks of kin, neighbours and friends were clearly central to many of the ritual events under discussion.

Writing on the Caribbean, Wiltshire comments that the transnational family is a large amorphous structure made up of conjugal and nuclear units, as well as consanguineous segments that spread across national boundaries. A network of interdependent linkages characterizes the transnational family. Critical family functions such as economic support, decision-making and nurturing are divided among the central links in the network (Wiltshire 1992: 182).

With transmigration, these wider groupings and networks may take on a new
significance, or perhaps acquire a significance they previously did not have, with their members drawn together by the rituals in which they participate. Without abandoning the ‘household’, then, we found our ethnography pushing us to examine other, perhaps more traditional, analytical phenomena such as the ‘domestic group’, the ‘family’ (‘extended’ or otherwise), ‘kinship’, ‘affinity’, ‘conjugal’ or the ‘home’, compelling us to investigate what they might tell us about transnationalism. These family or household groups and sets of relationships are the focus of this collection.

It is, however, important not to reify a distinction between what Gardner, echoing the sociology of South Asia, calls ‘great’ and ‘little’ transnationalism, the ‘macro’ transnationalism of state and economy, and the ‘micro’ transnationalism of household and family. It is their interrelationship that is crucial, and a focus on the local and micro, on households and families, enables us to address, as Gardner puts it, the articulation of the global with ‘questions of identity, status and culturally specific forms of hierarchy and inequality’, and consider how ‘transnational activities articulate with different forms of power in different locations’.

One way of exploring the articulation Gardner identified would be to focus on the transnational household or family, the state and state regulation, and our data contain much that is relevant to that focus. Here, however, we take a somewhat different tack and observe transnational households and families through the lens of ritual.

What does ritual tell us about transnationalism and transnational families?

‘Ritual’ has been a much-contested term in anthropology. Here, we refer to purposive and expressive ceremonialized performances, which in the cases with which we are principally concerned serve to mark, often to celebrate, the classic ‘life-crisis’ events of birth, marriage and death. Such performances, if not universal, are certainly widespread and, in most cases, carry a great deal of practical and symbolic weight. At one level, then, the study of such life-cycle rituals can tell us a great deal about the experience of being spread between places for transnational families, for it is at these moments of ‘crisis’ or change that, among other things, identity, status and interpersonal as well as internal conflict are often expressed. Many of our questions are therefore simple, even while the answers implicated by the papers are more complex. How do families and households that are transnational carry out such rituals? What do these rituals ‘do’ and ‘say’? And what do such rituals tell us about transnationalism?

This focus addresses in a new context some of the ‘classic’ themes with which social anthropology was concerned throughout the twentieth century (from Durkheim and Van Gennep onwards) and establishes links with important mid-century work (exemplified in various ways by Fortes, Gluckman, Goody, Leach and Turner) dealing with the ritualization of social relations as an ongoing, dynamic process, rather than with rituals as static cultural events.

Such rituals, as well as the ‘everyday routinized activities and practices’ with which Al-Ali is concerned, may be religious (by commonsense definition), or secular, or a combination of the two. But, although religion has an important role in each of the papers (Islam for Al-Ali, Gardner and Salih, Sikhism for Mand, Christianity for Olwig), it is not our task to treat the specifically religious dimension of these transnational rituals (see below). In fact, we begin with the highly practical matter of organization.
Organization and resources

Transnational rituals are costly. All rituals require the marshalling of human and material resources, but the demands the transnational rituals described in our papers (and elsewhere) make in terms of material (money and goods), organizing capacity and social capital are often quite remarkable. Consider, for example, the costs (albeit distributed around an extended network) of bringing together relatives and friends from the American and British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, the USA and the UK to attend Jim’s wedding on Nevis (described by Olwig), including travel, clothes, presents and hospitality. Or think of the resources devoted to organizing Sunny’s wedding in Tanzania, described by Mand, which, among other things, needed daily telephone calls to England to sort out details of who was attending and how to deal with the official documentation required to facilitate their movement.

It is not just that the logistics of bringing people together for transnational rituals, especially weddings, are costly and that organizing them requires considerable networking skills and know-how. ‘The expectation’, says Mand, ‘held by many local Sikh women was for an elaborate affair’, an expectation encouraged by their viewing (in Tanzania) video recordings of other weddings that had taken place in Britain. Big spending and display seem to characterize many of these rituals and there is a close connection with conspicuous consumption, as may be seen in Salih’s material on a wedding in Morocco. Salih also notes that through superficially ‘traditional’ rituals, ‘migrants display their new social status and, in a way, their modernity’.

Although we are principally concerned with life-crisis rituals, it is apparent from other material that participation in local rituals ‘back home’ by returned migrants or migrants who are engaged in operating transnationally frequently demands a show of resources. The Osellas’ analysis of the annual kuthiyottam ritual in South Kerala (Osella and Osella 2000) reveals a ‘dramatic’ rise in ritual costs with the increased participation of newly moneyed Gulf migrants. As Mand points out, however, while ‘considerable social, symbolic and material resources come into play during a wedding event that is transnational in scope … access to resources and experiences of place are not uniform’. If transnational networking is beyond the resources of some people, then an obvious consequence is that transnationalism becomes a vector through which stratification takes shape and is expressed. Ritual performance, both the ability to undertake, fund and organize a major ritual performance, and the performance itself, ‘says’ this. Moreover, as Gardner has suggested, ‘while transnational rituals may symbolically express togetherness, the reality is that people are physically apart, and only the very richest transnationals can move between places often enough to stop this from being painful.’ Both these points bring us to gender.

The gendered character of transnational rituals

Ritual, says Mand, is one of the arenas in which ‘the differential access men and women have to material and social resources’ may be revealed. An outstanding feature of contemporary transnationalism, now widely recognized, is its gendered character. The way in which gender and gender relations shape, and are shaped by, transnational rituals is an important aspect of the ethnography presented here. At this point religion starts to be important. Although we have said that we are not specifically concerned with the religious dimension of ritual practice, we nonetheless
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recognize that belief and doctrine may be significant. Some years ago, in a wide-ranging paper concerned chiefly with circum-Mediterranean societies, John Davis (1984) showed how Islam and Catholicism gendered religious practice, albeit in different ways. The same is true of the diverse varieties of Christianity and Islam. We would therefore expect transnational rituals that partake of religion also to be gendered, though how transnational rituals are gendered may be different from when they are not transnational.

Mand described how Sikh wedding rituals engage men and women in different ways: ‘Roughly divided the involvement can be categorized as the domestic (local) and the public (transnational) context whereby women undertake activities close to ‘home’ whilst when it comes to dealings with public institutions (immigration authorities) it is men who hold sufficient political and material resources.’ The death rituals Gardner discussed are also, unsurprisingly, highly gendered and spread between places. In the form of Islam prevalent in Sylhet (Bangladesh), the division of male and female space is emphasized and women are excluded from places such as mosques and graveyards. In this case, gender and ritual are linked through the transnational division of ritual space: for British-based Sylhetis the more informal female rituals associated with death and burial take place in Britain, the more formal male rituals in Sylhet. For British Sylhetis, ‘the desh is strongly associated with sacred capital’, which men have more opportunities to access than women.

There are important differences, too, in the extent to which men and women are engaged in the organization of rituals and the accompanying events. Al-Ali’s ethnography (personal communication) records a strongly proactive role taken by women in the organization of everyday rituals among Bosnian refugees, compared with their apparently much more passive role among Sylheti migrants (both in Britain). The Moroccan women Salih discussed seem to be in between. Olwig’s paper partly concerns the role of women in Caribbean households, and their local and transnational organizing capacity. This harks back to earlier discussion of Caribbean households, and Afro-Caribbean households in the diaspora, which have historically often been ‘matrifocal’ and ‘anchored’ by women, to employ a term used by Olwig in a slightly different context. Wiltshire, for example, describes women in the Caribbean as ‘the hub around which the networks were forged’, and the transnational family as ‘the critical institution underpinning the transnational networks’ (Wiltshire 1992: 181). To Sutton’s (1992: 246) comment that ‘Caribbean women bring their own distinctive stamp to the process of maintaining and creating the circuits of exchange in goods, people, and cultural meanings’, we would like to add, ‘and the organization of ritual’.

What kind of statement do these rituals make and to whom?

Materially, practically and symbolically, household and family rituals are important ‘performances’ that both say and do many things. A striking feature of such rituals, and indeed of all rituals, is that they are multifaceted and multivocal. Among other things they provide the context for so much else: a wedding in Meknes gives women an opportunity to compare and contrast the welfare systems of Italy and Holland; Jim’s wedding on Nevis enables the family members to hold a meeting and get stuck into a blazing row about inheritance (family gatherings were ever thus).

It is in connection with their multivocality (among other things) that a private/
public distinction becomes problematic. Although they are not ostensibly collective public events like, for example, the saints’ days traditionally celebrated by the Italian ‘community’ in New York (one recalls the vivid opening scene in Scorsese’s film *Mean Streets*, and see Fortier (2000) for a similar event in London’s ‘Little Italy’), or the Saint Patrick’s day parades in Albany described by Byron (1999), the weddings discussed by Olwig, Salih and Mand, or the *kuthiyottam* rituals considered by Osella and Osella (2000), are in fact open displays, with the emphasis on ostentation. Many, for example, involve quite elaborate public parades. Migrant weddings in particular, but in some cultures certainly funerals also, lend themselves to exhibitions that send a vivid message to other individuals, households, families, indeed whole communities, migrant and non-migrant.

These rituals thus make a point about success and about change. But they are also about continuity. Transnational rituals make statements about membership, or at least claims to ongoing membership, in the community of origin, at any rate for the time being, and these statements have both a symbolic and practical significance. We may see this in the symbolic ‘languages’ through which such statements are made, of food, clothing and colours – tangible phenomena with multiple semiotic possibilities. They are not just made, however, but also *contested*.

Transnationalism, living across and between worlds, poses questions about identity, membership and belonging in all of them. ‘Home’ figures prominently in the ethnographies. In the cases described by Gardner, Olwig and Salih, the rituals concern (and in certain significant respects are located) ‘over there’, in places that in important ways the families still think of as ‘home’, and this is essential for our understanding of how they are performed and what they say. The situations Al-Ali and Mand describe are more complex. Bosnian refugees inevitably have ambivalent feelings about a place from which they were driven and to which they may never return. Sikh families dispersed between the Indian subcontinent, East Africa and Britain (and indeed North America) are twice and thrice migrants (cf. Bhachu 1985), with a more multifaceted view of where they are from and who they are. Although not concerned specifically with ritual, Goulbourne’s discussion of Caribbean kinship in Britain has considerable relevance here. ‘The trans-Atlantic character of family and kinship in Caribbean communities’, he argues, ‘appears as a significant aspect of the strategy for survival within the wider British social system in which Caribbeans are differentially – and this means inequitably – incorporated’ (Goulbourne 1999: 196.) In that connection, the transnational ties also provide ways in which ‘a sense of self- and national identity’ can be sustained (Goulbourne 1999: 190). Evidence from family ritual would, we believe, substantiate his point.

The dialectic of continuity and change (and ambivalence about both) is apparent elsewhere in these rituals. A prominent theme that emerges from the ethnography is that through their ritual performances participants are able to operationalize an ideal and perhaps normally unattainable concept of the family and family relations: what a ‘proper’ family does or should do. Underlying them, perhaps, is a model of the ‘good’ family or ‘ideal’ family relations, which modernity, transnationalism, and change have disrupted and challenged, and which momentarily the rituals allow one to glimpse and actualize. Embedded in that model would be notions of appropriate gender relations – just as the process of actualization is itself appropriately gendered – which might be at odds with how people live or want to live.
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This does not mean that the models (or indeed the rituals themselves) are static, unchanging and unchallenged. All the papers reveal the flexibility of ritual: it can be seen as both highly traditional (static), or not conventional enough, depending on who is performing, who observing, and what they want to say. In this way, rituals become arenas of contestation about wider issues: power, status, and boundaries of ‘community’, history and identity. It is the dialectic of continuity and change that is important, with rituals and what might be thought of or represented as ‘tradition’ used to negotiate, and perhaps assert, new identities and status. Rituals are a fertile terrain through which participants may creatively work through the meaning of modernity (or ‘tradition’) and navigate the individual and collective transformations wrought by migration under conditions of transnationalism.

Rituals and change

Whether new or not, or whether transnationalism takes a different (and varied) form compared with previous eras, a transnational perspective has undoubtedly opened up questions previously not addressed. The old literature on migration in Africa frequently dealt with movement across what were (or became) national boundaries. Urban African burial societies, which organized the transport ‘back home’ of the bodies of deceased migrants (often cited as the origin of urban ethnic associations), involved transnational rituals before their day, so to speak, demonstrating to surviving relatives that the deceased had indeed passed on, thus providing the opportunity to mourn and acknowledge a loss, and/or give a signal that they could set about dividing the inheritance. Such older, well-documented rituals may take on new significance when viewed through the current analytical lens of transnationalism.

Rituals are not static events and ritualization is not a static process. This is revealed in the changing location of rituals and in the shifting transnational division of ritual space. Rituals are often detachable bundles of practices. Some Moroccan and Sylheti rituals are performed partly in one country and partly in another (with, in the Moroccan case discussed by Salih, a gap of some years between one bit and the next). This may be both a practical and a symbolic matter; sometimes facilities are simply not available in one location, or some rituals or parts of rituals seem most appropriately performed in one place rather than another. But the location of rituals or their various parts may change. This is perhaps happening among British-based Sylhetis, where we find a gradual reduction in rituals performed in Bangladesh as people’s orientation shifts towards London.

Commenting on the Sylheti and Bosnian cases during the workshop, Roger Ballard suggested that they illustrate transnationalized contexts at different stages of development (or words close to that). We would not necessarily wish to put it that way, but the point is taken. Our papers provide us with cross-sections of different social and cultural trajectories. In the case of the Bosnians, their transnationalism is relatively new and unwanted and whether they eventually return to Bosnia or settle in their countries of refuge is a difficult question, unresolved at the moment of study. Sikhs have long been international migrants, well adapted to living transnationally and organizing domestic and ritual life accordingly. The Sylhetis and the Moroccans are moving towards settlement in their countries of immigration, and perhaps drifting towards a world in which transnational ties will become weaker. As these practical
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links weaken, will the symbolic (ritual) ones also weaken? Will attenuated ritual (cf. what Gans (1979) called symbolic ethnicity) be all that remains, as perhaps it is for many of the Irish Americans in Albany (Byron 1999)? For the Nevisian family Olwig described, Jim’s wedding in fact might be the last occasion for a ritual gathering. The death of the grandparents and the decay of the old home meant for some that they had ‘lost an important anchoring point and source of identity … they were uncertain about when they would be coming back again’.

Further research

Many of the points we have made are tentative conclusions from the case studies, and more needs to be done to substantiate them and explore their ramifications. For example, although we have said a great deal about gender, we have said virtually nothing about age and generation. There are also other potential areas of research.

Referring to a wide range of institutions, organizations and communities that operate transnationally, Hannerz (1992: 46–7) comments that they ‘offer the contexts in which globalization occurs as the personal experience of a great many people in networks where extremely varied meanings flow’. This is certainly true of households seen through the lens of ritual. Family and household rituals show that transnationalism opens up the domestic as a site of public activity, creativity and loss; women often (though not always) play a central and public role in them. This observation leads us to think about transnational domestic rituals as a site for the micro-politics of cosmopolitanism. Does this apply to all rituals? Those we have discussed are for the most part family-based, largish-scale, public and generally costly. What about more intimate, informal, inexpensive ritual activities of the kind described by Al-Ali (coffee drinking, removing shoes when entering a home, wearing a veil)? And what happens transnationally to specifically ‘women’s rituals’, often more informal than men’s?

Secondly, rituals and the life cycle. Connections may be made between migration and life-cycle events, birth, death and marriage, as journeys (see Rapport and Dawson 1998, and forthcoming work by Gardner for more detailed discussion). How might the different sorts of rituals connect these different forms of journey? And how are life-cycle events experienced and symbolized differently across transnational space?

Finally, what are the connections between ritual, memory and the construction of personhood under conditions of transnationalism? Are ambivalence and uncertainty always key themes? If so, how might rituals express or seek to alleviate the disjunctions and absences inherent in lives spread between places?

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Notes

1. There were two other contributions to the Sussex workshop: Filippo and Caroline Osella (2000), to be published separately, and R. L. Stirrat’s ‘The ritual life of development expatriates’, which was part of his extended study of the culture of aid. We thank them and all other participants, particularly Roger Ballard, Harry Goulbourne and Ann Whitehead, for the wide-ranging discussions on which we have drawn in preparing this overview.
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2. Also, the status of boundaries may change, as happened with Goa in 1961, Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987).
3. There is a similar difficulty with the contrast public/private, which is otherwise a tempting one to make in this context.
4. See also Smith’s account of Ticuanense rituals in New York and Mexico and migrants’ participation in ‘cargo’ competitions for local ritual office (Smith 1999).

References
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