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Designing a structure/agency approach to transnationalism

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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Abstract

Research on post-migration processes usually focuses either on micro-level behaviours or on macro-level interactions between states and their diasporas. This paper aims to fill a gap by proposing a structure/agency approach likely to address the micro-, meso- and macro-level factors that account for cross-border phenomena. The first section compares the main structure/agency approaches (Bourdieu's theory of practice, Giddens' structuration theory and Archer's morphogenetics) with a view to highlighting the core elements that characterise these theories. The second section outlines an innovative framework that combines Habermas' theory of communicative action and the 'plural man' theory of Bernard Lahire. The central idea is to use a renewed concept of social institutions (family, associations and businesses) as an entry to the study of social practices and structuration processes.

Non-technical summary

This paper proposes a structure/agency approach to address the micro-, meso- and macro-level factors that account for cross-border phenomena. It compares the main structure/agency approaches: Bourdieu's theory of practice, Giddens' structuration theory and Archer's morphogenetics. The paper takes the basic components of the structure/agency theory and uses them to define a new approach to transnationalism. The author suggests that the Habermas theory of communicative action and the non-Cartesian concept of the plural man provide a better framework for understanding the converging dynamic of actors' practices and their structural impacts. Any form of transnational practice can be understood as the agentic strategies of migrants who want to overcome the fundamental contradiction of their position: being here but not from here, being from there but not there.

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1 Introduction

From the 1990s onwards, one observes a growing commitment of hometown organisations to the development of their place of origin. These hometown groups originate from a wide array of origin countries: Berbers from southern Morocco, sub-Saharan people from the Valley of the Senegal River, Mexicans from Zacatecas, Guanajato or Michoacan, Punjabis from India, Laotians, Guineans, etc. These long-distance development initiatives, also called 'collective remittances', are not new, and historians have long documented the philanthropic activities of village fellows abroad (Moya 2005). But, the literature points out an unprecedented surge of this type of engagement during the last 20 years (Zabin 1998; Lacroix 2005). This dynamic is typically an issue of 'emergence' (a behaviour appearing in different settings) and of 'convergence' (the aggregation of behaviours of a sizeable number of actors, large enough to affect their structural context). Accounting for such a parallelism requires an adequate understanding of macro- and micro-level dynamics: the cultural foundations of hometown networks explaining collaborative endeavours, the policy and economic contexts favouring local development initiatives, etc. Although largely dominant in migration studies, methodological 'individualism' or 'institutionalism' fail to provide a framework likely to get to grips with the complexity of intertwined processes. The structure/agency approach, designed to address the reciprocal effects of actors' behaviours and their structural context, appears as a more appropriate tool. This paper reflects upon the possibility of adapting this approach to the study of transnational practices.

Structure/agency is primarily a critique of past structuralist approaches, such as the Levi Straussian structuralism and Parsonian functionalism. The latter deny individuals the capacity to affect societal structures. The structure/agency approaches acknowledge people's reflexivity and (active) agency. Practices are conceived as the point of contact of actors' subjectivities and context forces. The intent is to conceive within the same model the relation between individuation and socialisation, between freewill and the principle of coexistence. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu 2000), Antony Giddens' structuration (Giddens 1984) and Margaret Archer's morphogenetics (Archer 1995) delimit its conceptual field.

Most works using a structure/agency approach focus on the appearance and evolution of migration dynamics. In the first instance, Goss and Lindquist (1995), adapting Giddens' structuration theory, propose the concept of migrant institution as a mid-level unit of analysis from which the study of structural evolutions and people's subsequent reactions becomes possible. Their theoretical contribution draws on the study of Filipino migration. They show how the migrant institutions taking charge of the migration process evolved over time, with the emergence of private institutions and brokers fulfilling the role of intermediaries between potential migrants and governmental schemes. The second example is some research carried out by Eva Morawska (2001, 2011), also based on structuration theory. She focuses on the Polish migration system and its evolution since 1989. She analyses the re-shaping of migration networks in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain and the subsequent reconfiguration of European migration policies. The last example is provided by the work done by the International Migration Institute on the role of migrants' agency in

the making and unmaking of migration systems[1] (Bakewell et al. 2011). This research draws on a comparative study of Indian, Moroccan and Ukrainian migrations and its theoretical framework relies on Margaret Archer's morphogenetic approach. It seeks to explain the evolution of migration corridors through the agency of individuals reacting to their changing environment. In these three research projects, the case studies are different, and the unit of analysis and the attention paid to the different context factors vary, but the intent is roughly similar. Their aim is to correlate long-term shifts in migration trends with migrants' strategic behaviours and political and economic dynamics.

There hasn't been, to my knowledge, any attempt to apply the structure/agency approach to other areas of migration studies in general and to transnational and diaspora studies in particular. Works either focus on actors' practices and socialities or on the role of states in the making of diasporic groups, but fail to draw a more comprehensive picture linking both levels of analysis (Faist 2010: 27). The structure/agency approach is particularly adapted to the study of collective remittances. It provides the possibility of explaining both emergent practices of development and convergent behaviours of migrants.

The objective of this paper is two-fold:

1. It aims to identify the core elements of the structure/agency theory and how they have been dealt with by leading social theorists.
2. It proposes a structure/agency approach likely to address immigrant transnationalism.

The first part sets the foundation stone of the conceptual framework delineated in the second section. The structure/agency approach did not appear out of the blue in the 1970s. It draws on a long-standing philosophical and academic debate on structure and, more widely, on the man/world relationship. It is first necessary to locate the structure/agency theory within this century-long debate. In social sciences, the term 'structure' is a polysemous word, which refers either to the formal features of the society or to the fundamental principles (or infrastructures) that explain its formal structuring. The question of the attitude of actors with regard to their wider context sets up two opposing schools of thought. One could adopt a Cartesian stance, and draw a hermetic line between the human *cogito* and the outside world. In this regard, social behaviours derive from the formulation and enactment of individual strategies in the face of a given context, and sociality is second insofar as it is itself an outcome of individual strategies. On the other hand, one could regard self-consciousness and rationality as a consequence of socialisation. For non-Cartesian thinkers, people's feeling of existence derives from their inscription into the world. Heidegger's ontology of being and Wittgenstein's theory of language illustrate such an approach.

The preliminary mapping of this intellectual background sets the stage for the comparison of the three existing structure/agency approaches (Bourdieu, Giddens and Archer). I compare them by highlighting the way these scholars address the five components of the structure/agency theory: 1) structure, 2) agent, 3) agency; and the two aspects that characterise the reciprocal relation between structure and agency, namely 4) emergence (appearance of new behaviours), and 5) convergence (their aggregative patterning of social structures). It will be shown that the three authors combine in different ways the Cartesian

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[1] www.imi.ox.ac.uk/research-projects/themis

and non-Cartesian lines of thought. Bourdieu's theory of practice renews the Levi-Straussian structuralist perspective by asserting the prevailing role of social structures. But when it comes to account for the latter, the theory of social capital depicts social actors as rational beings pursuing personal interests. Antony Giddens' structuration theory is a walk on the thin line between the two models. While endorsing a non-Cartesian conception of the agent, he insists on the importance of human reflexivity and simultaneously relies on a Cartesian-like definition of structures and passive (virtual) features of social life. Margaret Archer, as a staunch critical realist, provides a more coherent account. She argues that both structures and agents are endorsed with 'emergent properties'. Relying on a strongly Cartesian framework, she draws an ontological line between structures and agents. Their interplay provides a concrete ground for human reflexive capacities and the deployment of articulate interests and strategies. Beyond their discrepancies, the three theories propose highly abstract explanatory models of the structure–agency relationship. This is particularly true for social structures that are described at an ontological level. In doing so, authors tend to overlook the role of societal configurations and actual institutions. Furthermore, the three approaches have been designed to address social interactions within a single societal system. These two particularities pose problems for the study of transnational practices. Both the importance of state and non-state institutions and the complexity inherent to the dual embedding of migrants cannot easily be dealt with by the existing approach. For this reason, a new model is proposed based on the theory of communicative action of Jürgen Habermas.

The second part of this paper is dedicated to the design of a Habermassian structure/agency approach to transnationalism.

The theoretical framework drafted in this paper seeks to move beyond existing approaches by combining three key components:

- the non-Cartesian conception of the *plural man* (l'Homme Pluriel), elaborated by contenders of Bourdieu's approach (Corcuff 1999; Lahire 1998), provides the possibility to understand agents' reflexivity and emergence in the context of social complexity;

- the Habermassian theory of *communicative action* accounting for agency and convergence;

- the Habermas approach to the formation of societies will be complemented by a novel conception, of *social institution.* This concept is key to link up agents' practices and structural elaboration processes.

This theoretical framework will be applied to unravel the mechanics of hometown transnationalism. Against this backdrop, collective remittances appear at the crux of migrants' dual embedding, diasporic policies of sending states and the development dynamic in sending villages.

2 Structure/agency theories in a comparative perspective

This section is divided into three parts. The first two delimit the conceptual background from which stems the structure/agency theory. They draw a broad-brush overview of the different definitions of the concept of structures and delineate the elements of the debate that oppose Cartesian and non-Cartesian approaches to the man/world relationship. We will draw on these elements to locate and compare the respective structure/agency models within their broader intellectual context.

2.1 Social and societal structures in social sciences

One can distinguish two broad meanings of structure. The first one refers to the actual organisation of a society. Structures are the structures of a society taken as a composite ensemble of distinct units. Two lines of thought are to be distinguished: for some, structures are horizontal patterns of interpersonal relations. For others, they are vertical articulations of institutionalised domains of activity. Since Levi-Strauss, the concept of social structure does not refer to societal morphology, but to the guiding principles that explain this morphology. This second conception is dominant in contemporary social sciences.

2.1.1 The form of societies

'Structure' can first designate the form of a given society. The horizontal (or relational) structuring of a group is given by the ensemble of interpersonal relations within the group. In this regard, the work of the social scientist is to identify and to find a model of recursive behaviours. This approach is spearheaded by Radcliffe-Brown, for whom the form of a society is primarily (in the context of pre-state social formations) the form of marriage patterns (Radcliffe-Brown 1952). This line of thought has been endorsed by interactionist sociologists, who tend to see structures as patterns of aggregate behaviours (Porpora 1989). They share an absence of regard for the role of institutions and a focus on individual and collective behaviours. In this perspective, the structure becomes the ensemble of social interactions within a society.

In the second widely used conception, the term 'structure' refers to the institutionalised domains of social activities: economy, polity, civil society, etc. The vertical (institutional) structuration of a society derives from the interrelations maintained between these different levels. Durkheimian sociology and Parsonnian functionalism are approaches to the emergence and maintaining of the division of social labour. Their institutionalisation is conducive to their objectivation from daily interactions. The architecture of a society includes its cultural buttress. Ideas, ideologies, beliefs possess their own internal dynamics. A society must therefore be apprehended with its material and immaterial components. Marx's theory of modes of production is an attempt to deal with this multiplicity of levels by linking the social structures of interpersonal relations taken within role-positions systems and the emergence of superstructures such as the rise of nation-states, of cultural institutions such as churches and the capitalist economy. The different schools of thought give a distinct role to the various structural domains and layers. For example, for Marxists, culture is only a by-product of religious and political institutions, and the latter are only part and parcel of a societal system dominated by production relationships. Conversely, Weber's protestant ethic shows that economic relations hinge upon systems of belief that, in turn, foster mutual trust.

2.1.2 The guiding principles of social patterns

The second meaning of the concept of structure concerns the underpinning principles of social patterns. This conception does not focus on the objective morphology of a society but on what explains it. Two approaches are apparent in the literature.

In the first place, drawing on Saussure's analysis of linguistic structures, Claude Levi-Strauss designed a theoretical model likely to comprehend not visible social behaviours, but what explains them. Structuring principles transcend internal relations of societal sections. Contrary to Radcliffe-Brown, he argues that it is possible to separate the form of social relations and their actual content (Levi-Strauss 1958: 303). He seeks in myths, cultural practices or in the mathematical ordering of matrimonial lineages the building bricks of these models.

In the second place, a positivist approach to structuring principles sees them as inbuilt into the relationships maintained by society's parts. In contrast with the previous conception, structures are not derived from an abstract model of interrelations, but logical features of interactions between the different segments of society. This is what Douglas Porpora has coined 'structure as lawlike regularities among social facts' (Porpora 1989: 197). At the macro level, the different sections of the society maintain necessary and concomitant relationships that are to be carved out by the analyst. For example, does the size of a population have an effect on the fertility rate? At the micro level, structures are but the condensation and repetition of micro behaviours, the latter being the genuine unit of analysis. In that case, the structuring principles of societies do not differ from the frames of human behaviours: knowledge, moral principles, rationality, etc.

The three approaches to structure and agency analysed in this paper define structures as guiding principles. We will see that Bourdieu explicitly derives his concept of *habitus* from the Levi-Strauss model. Archer endorses a positivist stance and identifies 'structural properties' in internal features of culture, actors and institutions. Finally, Giddens hesitates between a Levi-Straussian approach to 'deep structures' and objective properties of the social world (Lizardo 2010). As will be shown, this common focus on guiding principles has led the social theorists to neglect the importance of actual institutions, or tend to reduce them to a by-product of social practices.

2.2 Two visions of the man/world relationships

Thinking the interface between social structures and actors' agency inscribes structure/agency theory in a wider philosophical debate on the man/world relationships. Two models prevail, commonly designated as the Cartesian and non-Cartesian approaches. Both are presented through the filter of two leading conceptions of the subject: Descartes' approach to *cogito* and Heidegger's *Dasein*.

2.2.1 Cartesian and Heideggerian conceptions of the man/world relationship

The philosophical tradition opposes two conceptions of 'man'. The classical conception derives from the philosophy of Descartes. It assumes that beings are self-sufficient entities. For Descartes, people are ontologically distinct from the rest of the world. The man is *res cogitans*, a category of being characterised by its capacity to reason, its *cogito* as opposed to

other beings, which are mere 'res extensa'. The Cartesian tradition is therefore posited on two elements: the self-sufficiency of beings and their ontological distinctiveness. The subject finds in itself the principle of its own existence and relies on its capacity to reason to relate with the outside world. Through Kantianism, liberalism, utilitarianism or the rational actor theory, the Cartesian tradition irrigates contemporary economic and social theory.

In contrast to ego-centred conceptions, non-Cartesian thinkers assert that beings are to find the principle of their existence through the mediation of the social and natural environment. *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1986) illustrates this stance.[2] Martin Heidegger develops a conception of beings as interdependent entities. Self-sufficiency, he argues, is relevant when one considers the material constitution of objects (their weight, shape, volume, chemical composition, etc.). But the characterisation of beings cannot be limited to their formal characteristics. Being hinges upon the inscription within a web of utilities: the being of a hammer cannot fully be grasped without its functionality, and beyond, its relationships with nails, wood, workshops etc. The being of things is therefore characterised by their formal structure on the one hand and by their intertwined functionality on the other.

When one takes into consideration the functional relationships that things (objects, symbols, ideas, animals, actors...) maintain together, the world appears as a canvas of relations. The latter level is already a social construction. The utility of objects derives from the use they are given and therefore from the technical and cultural environment of societies: a hammer is for us a tool, but it would appear as a curious object made of wood and metal in a society which does not know what it is meant for. The utility of objects is therefore relative to a cultural system. The functional canvas is the support of a symbolic canvas of meanings, and beyond, of a shared conception of the world. Heidegger insists on the fact that the mode of acquisition of this moral-practical knowledge is conducive to a withdrawal of conscious awareness. With the mastering of a skill, the practice becomes a habit that is done without paying any attention to it. Familiarity gradually veils the world and one's relation to it. Once again, this view contrasts with the Cartesian tradition, which conceives the conscious activity of thinking as the matrix of our relation to the world.

But Heidegger, as well as the 'natural' and the 'functional', adds a third mode of being which is proper to human beings, the so-called *Dasein*. This distinctive feature of people is to take a stand upon their own being. They forge a representation of who they are in the world and act accordingly. And their stand is adopted in line with their understanding of the two other orders of being, their materiality and their interrelated meaning. For Heidegger, actors' reflexivity is immersed in the world, enmeshed in a canvas of materialities, functionalities and meanings out of which they formulate their personal understanding of what they are. There is continuity between individuals and their environment and their sense of being derives from this immersion within the world.

These two philosophical lines of thought draw two opposite conceptions of the man/world relationship.

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[2] The second founding work is Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. This work has been particularly influential in Giddens' structuration theory (see below).

	Heideggerian model	**Cartesian model**
Structures	Normative (active)	Field of opportunity (passive)
Man/world interactions	Infra-conscious	Conscious
Subject's reflexivity	Dasein	Cogito
Mode of being	Interactionism	Autonomy
Motive for action	Existence	Rational interest

Despite their obvious incompatibilities, both approaches have heavily influenced structure/agency theorists. There are two aspects of Heidegger's theory that are commonly summoned up by social scientists. The first one regards the infra-conscious learning process of social norms and uses of objects. This aspect is present among most scholars, Margaret Archer included (Archer 2000: 167). The second one is the temporality of the human condition. The consciousness of time is the ontological matrix of our relationship to the world. This has been used by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and Antony Giddens (Giddens 1981: 29 cited in Stones 2005: 27) to show that the agentic capacities locate people in a temporal flow between their memories of past events and their projected achievements. Likewise, we will see that the three authors tend to adopt a Cartesian vocabulary of interest-led beings when they strive to account for individual and collective practices. By and large, it can be said that the Cartesian model provides an appropriate framework to understand what I call 'emergence'; that is to say the innovative reactions of individuals facing structural constrains. But this model fails to explain why emerging behaviours are adopted by cohorts of people, large enough to produce new structural configurations. In other words, how do individuals assessing reality from the confines of their subjectivity arrive at similar diagnostics and take a coordinated course of action? One would have to show why people enclosed in their rational subjectivity would necessarily adopt converging diagnostics and behaviours. In doing so, social theorists tend to fall into ex-post empiricism when they suppose that identical situations automatically lead to converging reactions of actors. Conversely, endorsing a non-Cartesian approach aptly explains 'convergence'. Human rationality, in this perspective, is rooted into an intersubjective substrate, which links individuals with their social and natural environment. But, this approach falls short when it comes to account for innovative behaviours and interest-driven individualism.

2.3 Bourdieu, Giddens, Archer: three approaches to structure and agency

The difference between Bourdieu's theory of practice, Giddens' structuration and Archer's morphogenetics stems primarily from the standpoint they adopt to address the back-and-forth movement between structure and agency. Bourdieu analyses this relation through the groups' (class) intersubjectivity (*habitus*). Giddens adopts the subjective viewpoint of actors. Archer's focus is on structures as an objective reality affected by people's actions. Beyond their divergences, what Archer, Bourdieu and Giddens share in common delineate the core

assumptions of the structure/agency approach: the reciprocal relationship between structures and agency; the heterogeneity of structures (whether material or symbolic); a certain degree of autonomy of agents forsaking deterministic social mechanisms and fostering social innovation.

2.3.1 Pierre Bourdieu: Heideggerian collectives, utilitarian game

Pierre Bourdieu makes use of Heidegger's philosophy to renew Levi-Straussian structuralism and rescue it from essentialist drifts. Like the French anthropologist, Bourdieu focuses on the mental mechanisms that underpin the appearance and functioning of objective structures of society. The concept of structure is not an objective reality that is the cause of actual practices of people. It is a methodological tool explaining social patterns.

For Bourdieu, society is divided into distinct and specialised *fields* (economic, sport, literary, religious, etc.). Each of them is regulated by internal rules, vocabulary, techniques, etc. Actors embedded in these fields learn this ensemble of practical skills and rules which enables them to relate, collaborate or compete with other members. Bourdieu coins what he calls a 'set of dispositions' the *habitus.* The reception, evolution and transmission of this intersubjective habitus are an infra-conscious process, which comes with practice and imitation. Its mobilisation by individuals through everyday practices buttresses a shared sense of belonging. But the incorporation of the habitus is also conducive to the incorporation of the structure of domination that characterises the field (Bourdieu 1994: 127). By learning its codes, actors become familiar with the functioning of social context and thereby become aware of their own position within it.

Bourdieu's focus on structures addresses and combines a horizontal conception of social structures as a set of interpersonal relations (with the concept of field) and the mental infrastructures that underpin those (*habitus*). From there, Bourdieu leaves the point of view of groups' structures to focus on individuals' strategic behaviours. In doing so, he leaves aside the vocabulary of intersubjective regulations to endorse that of interest-led actors. Central to his argument is the concept of capital. The term appears in the first version of the *Theory of Practice* with the concept of *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 2000). By that, he means an interest in complying with collective norms insofar as it allows them to avoid social pressure and accumulate 'symbolic capital' (reputation) in the eyes of the other. A decisive move is made in 1980 with the concept of *social capital*. In a short introductory article in the *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, Bourdieu defines social capital as '*l'ensemble des ressources actuelles ou potentielles qui sont liées à la possession d'un réseau durable de relations plus ou moins institutionnalisées d'interconnaissance and d'inter-reconnaissance; ou en d'autres termes, à l'appartenance d'un groupe*' (Bourdieu 1980: 2). This set of concepts serves to unveil the actual strategies of actors within social fields. For Bourdieu, any social field functions as an economic market in which actors must possess and invest capital to gain a dominant position. Bourdieu thus developed an approach to the social actor that relies on a more utilitarian stance. Social life, in that regard, is conceived as a set of interactions motivated by the search of profits: '*les profits que procurent l'appartenance à un groupe sont au fondement de la solidarité qui les rend possible*' (Bourdieu 1980: 2). This approach derives from an obvious analogy between society and markets, between social and economic actors. Despite this utilitarian stance, Bourdieu rejects the notions of *interest* and of *rational choice* as drivers for human behaviour. He asserts that, to be part of a given field, actors tacitly accept its rules. In doing so, an 'ontological complicity' links actors and

social structures (Bourdieu 1994: 151). Bourdieu prefers to use the term *illusio* to qualify the relationships between actors and their perception of field. An actor does not comply with the rules of a game because it conforms to his interests, but articulates interests which conform to the functioning of the game he is part of. For Bourdieu, agents derive self-understanding from incorporated structural rules, and not (as would be the case for utilitarian agents), from their personal interests. Heidegger's *Dasein* shadows Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the agent. In other words, actors are not ontologically utilitarian but become so within a utilitarian game. As he puts it: 'le sujet (…) n'est pas *l'homo economicus*, mais l'homme réel, que fait l'économie' (Bourdieu 1977: 12)

And yet, despite this ultimate move towards Heidegger and the substitution of 'interest' by the concept of *illusio*, the Bourdieu approach to structure and agency leaves an impression of ambivalence and incoherence. When it comes to explaining the role of actors within social fields, Bourdieu relies on an explicit analogy between market and society (Ponthieux 2006). There is an absence of nuance in the analysis of actors, conceived as the prisoner of a logic of competition. Bourdieu operates a shift between the theory of *habitus*, heavily influenced by Levi-Strauss and Heidegger, and his understanding of actors' behaviours akin to the rational actors' theory. The second critique that can be made of this approach is that it draws on a sociology of 'people-at-their-place'. It is designed to analyse the functioning of specific social groups. This leaves no room for addressing emergent processes and the social complexity of actors' positions and belonging. Finally, due to the focus on *habitus* and actors' practices, Bourdieu tends to overlook the role of materiality of objective (observable) structures. He limits the conception of social fields as a set of ordered interpersonal relations without paying further attention to their institutionalisation. By and large, he overlooks the specific role of institutions, which are conceived as a mere objectivation of the *habitus* that regulates the group. Furthermore, the institutionalisation of the rule is not only secondary, it is also seen as an illusion that conceals the normative strength of routinised practices (Bourdieu 2000: 300). Institutions are conservative artefacts meant to protect and re-product an existing social order facing change.

2.3.2 Antony Giddens and structuration theory: a walk on the thin line

Structuration theory is primarily meant to explain the way in which actors cope with their environment. Like Bourdieu, Giddens articulates his model based on a *non-Cartesian conception of the self*. Personal identity is a product of the socialisation of individuals. Following Wittgenstein, he asserts that the I/Me distinction (from others/not me) is internal to language (Giddens 1991: 51). This conception of the social subject grounds the fundamental assumption of the structuration theory, namely the *ontological continuity* of structure and agency. The theorem of duality of structure assumes that structures are both the medium and outcome of agency. Structures are produced and reproduced through actors' practices. The third common point between structuration and the theory of practice is that social structures are regarded as underlying principles of human agency. They both discard a positivist conception of structures. They are simultaneously the matrix of perception and of action (Bourdieu 2000: 261). They are principles of phenomenological and behavioural conditioning, or put differently, they are a set of dispositions towards material and immaterial (ideological) orders. This combination is apparent in the breakdown of social structures proposed by Giddens. He distinguishes two overarching categories of structures:

the material resources on the one hand, and the immaterial rules on the other. The former include the allocative resources (material objects, financial capital, etc.) and authoritative resources that are composed of the people whom actors can rely on to achieve their purposes. The latter comprise the framework of meaning (significations) and the framework of legitimation (norms) that enable actors to appraise others' doings and what should or should not be done. The last parallel between the two authors is the privileged attention granted to routinised practices (or *hysteresis* in Bourdieu's terms). It is through the routine of daily practices that social structures, once incorporated, acquire their unquestioned efficiency.

The parallelism between Bourdieu and Giddens stops when one considers the role of social structures. Unlike the French sociologist who conceives the *habitus* as the intersubjective background from which stem collective identities and of convergent practices, Giddens sees structures through the eyes of individual actors. In that regard, they are the principle through which they can exercise their agency; that is to say, their power to modify reality. The theorem of duality erects agency as the exclusive dynamic principle. In contrast, structures are downplayed as mere *medium.* Giddens thus discards the second term of the reciprocal relation between structure and agency: agency affects structures, not the other way round. Structural properties do not act and individuals are '*the only moving objects in social relations*' (Giddens 1984: 181). In contradistinction, Bourdieu regards structures as '*structures structurées prédisposées à devenir structures <u>structurantes</u>*[3]' (Bourdieu 2000: 256). For Giddens, material objects and immaterial ideas and skills exist as such but become structures only if used ('instantiated' in Giddens' terminology) by people when a course of action is taken (hence duality). Out of this framework structures have only a latent (virtual) existence.

In order to raise agent practices at the level of exclusive dynamic principles, Giddens identifies a number of characteristics that enable them to take action: their *transformative power* (i.e. the capacity to act upon structures), their *knowledgeability* (the stock of knowledge they rely on to undertake action), their *rationality* (the capacity to assess their situation and establish priorities) and their *reflexivity* (i.e. the consciousness, as a social actor, of their transformative capacity and the capacity to monitor one another's actions). The latter is critical to the definition of the motives of action. Through their reflexive capacities, actors refine their objectives. In doing so, they inscribe their action into a temporal flow of past events and future engagements. Thanks to these characteristics, actors are able to use available means to make their way into life. We thus see that the structuration theory gradually puts forward a perspective in which actors' inner motives are brought into light.

This back and forth movement between Cartesian versus non-Cartesian positioning is also to be found in the way Giddens addresses the problem of convergence. Following his Wittgensteinian inclinations, Giddens regards people's reproductive behaviours as a source of '*ontological security*'. The predictability of others' doings in daily interactions fosters a sentiment of mutual trust and buttresses people's self-perceptions (Giddens 1984: 23). Individuals build up their own self through their inscriptions into a social order. From here, Giddens moves on to the analysis of individuals' behaviours and seeks to respond to the question: why do people comply with collective norms? Giddens argues that actors are

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[33] My underscoring.

'accountable': their behaviours are to meet the expectations of the people they interact with. People observe each other's actions and check their compliance with moral-practical rules, and beyond, the social order they draw upon. With the notion of accountability, Giddens introduces the idea of 'co-monitoring' to account for the pressure that collectives exert over the conformity of one's practices to the social norm. Like Bourdieu (with the concept of symbolic capital), he thus explains convergence with the weight of social control, reputation, and the need to escape sanctioning. Another parallel can be drawn between Giddens' definition of 'authoritiative resources' and Bourdieu's 'social capital'. Both concepts refer to the idea of convergence as power-framed collaborative behaviours. For the French and British sociologists, actors' interpersonal relations are a source of transformative power. It follows that in both structuration and the theory of practice, convergence dwells on two principles: on the one hand a 'negative' principle (the threat of sanction) and a 'positive' principle (the need for action coordination). In that regard, the idea of convergence is consistent with actors' personal interests. It is in actors' interest to engage in reproductive and collaborative practices in the face of constraining (co-monitoring and social control) and enabling (allocative resources, social and symbolic capitals) features of social structures. This utilitarian leaning of the structuration theory is not offset by a non-Cartesian concept of interest, as it is with the notion of *illusio* forged by Bourdieu.

The second problem addressed by structuration theory is the passage from individual actions to the 'constitution of society'. Here again, Giddens elaborates a complex theoretical apparatus meant to label the different processes at stake. The social system is compartmentalised into distinct organised sets of rules/resources. For example, political institutions are primarily underlayed by authoritative resources (D. auth), then by structures of Signification (S) and finally by Legitimation structures (L). Likewise, the order of discourse is framed by an S-D-L set, etc. The institutionalisation of these rules/resources sets delineates the structural properties of a society. Finally, structural principles are what organise a society as a totality (Giddens 1984: 185). The concept refers to the principles of interrelations between the overarching institutional domains of a society. For example, tribal societies are characterised by the overall interlocking of political and economic structures, while state-based modern societies display a greater autonomy of the different domains that constitute social life.

This aspect of the structuration theory remains particularly obscure to the reader. To my knowledge, there hasn't been any attempt by commentators to clarify Giddens' argumentation. The becoming of societal institutions is left in the shadow of what he calls 'the unintended consequences of social action'. But, one could argue that the problem remains of secondary importance insofar as institutions are dependent variables of agents' practices. The 'real thing' happens at the level of agentic choices of actors and not in the becoming of institutions. As a result, the structuration theory is compounded at the micro level of practices by the theorem of duality. From there, it is difficult to move to higher levels of structuration processes without losing sight of people's agency. Giddens falls into abstract aggregationism when it comes to explain institutionalisation processes and societal configurations.

Despite Giddens' Wittgensteinian initial stand, the structuration theory suffers from a strong utilitarian pathos. The idea that an actor's self-consciousness derives from his socialisation into his social environment opened, *a priori,* the possibility of thinking about

the place of individuals in convergence processes. But his constant desire to strengthen the concept of agents and the parallel efforts to emasculate the concept of social structures has sent the structuration theory in a different direction. In practice, it is impossible completely to leave aside the role of the macro-level institutions and of the micro-level interpersonal relations. The structuration theory revisited by Rob Stones takes this problem into account (Stones 2005). The 'strong' structuration theory acknowledges the 'role-position' of actors; that is to say their position within the wider net of interpersonal relations and the rights and duties associated with this positioning. This provides the possibility of paying greater attention to the social configuration in which actors evolve, but, by leaving the subjective focus of agents, Stones steps away from structuration orthodoxy. Keeping these limitations in mind, structuration theory constitutes a powerful toolbox to account for the behaviours of social actors in their structural context.

2.3.3 Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory: the utilitarian turn

Responding to the philosophical school of 'critical realism', Margaret Archer seeks to re-assert the concrete existence and objective influence of social structures, while preserving an individualist conception of social agents. She elaborates a sophisticated model in which the dynamics of material and cultural structures play a role as important as human agency in the making of social processes. Under the aegis of critical realism, Archer draws on a strongly Cartesian approach to the man/world relationship. Between agents and structures, Archer establishes a hermetic barrier, which protects actors from deterministic forces of the structural environment. This barrier is erected by defining the distinct constituencies of structure and agency.

On the one hand, Archer's actors are conceived as self-sufficient beings whose principle of existence derives from the bodily experience of their practices (Archer 2000), and not from their immersion into their social context. Their behaviours hinge ultimately upon their 'internal conversation'; that is to say upon the capacity for people to bracket themselves out of the world and ponder about their situation (Archer 2003). Archer has developed a stratified conception of the agent. People are simultaneously *human beings* endowed with physical capacities and psychological leanings (including their reflexivity and rationality); they are *agents* – members of collectivities and thereby bearers of social roles and collective interests; and they are *actors*, who can be defined as a combination of the two previous levels; that is to say as agents of their group, personifying their roles in accordance with their capacities and personalities. These characteristics of individuals, designed as 'People's Emergent Properties' (PEPs) hold a decisive sway over agentic behaviours.

On the other hand, social structures are given specific attributes that account for the sway they hold over people's practices. Archer unpacks material and immaterial structures by distinguishing 'structure' (institutional and natural) from 'culture'. 'Structural Emergent Properties' (SEPs) are defined as 'internal and necessary relationships', which entail material (physical and human) resources and immaterial (ideal) resources for 'Cultural Emergent Properties' (CEPs) (Archer 1995: 172-190). Both exist under the form of the product of unintended consequences of past practices and will exist as an outcome of present courses of action. In other words, Archer argues that structures and agency possess a concrete existence, but at distinct temporal levels: structures pre-date and post-date action (Archer 1995: 153). By defining social structures as 'Emergent Properties', Archer brings into line

those generative capacities that have a bearing on the shaping of agency and its outcomes. For example, the size of a population is an emergent property. It generates an inertia that, in turn, accelerates/mitigates demographic dynamics such as the fertility rate. In other words, Archer is less interested in the actual reality of material and immaterial and their formal impingement upon society, than in their capacity to affect the course of human action. In that sense, Archer, like Giddens and Bourdieu, focuses on structural principles rather than on formal content.

Morphogenetics (the process of transformation/reproduction of social structures) results from the interaction between the three forms of emergent properties (cultural, agential, structural). The structural context does not *determine*, but orients/conditions agency. Conversely, agency does not *produce* structures, but reproduce or transform them. The concept of morphogenetics thereby maintains a sharp distinction between structure and agency until the critical level of interaction between both. This stand makes the theory of morphogenesis a non-reductionist perspective *par excellence.* That is to say, a theory that does not presuppose any prevailing causal factor in social dynamics (Stones 2005).

Like Antony Giddens, the sociologist regards societal structures as the outcomes of the unintended consequences of people's practices. However, she is free from the logical implications of duality and can envisage the specific dynamic of structures, regardless of human activities. 'Morphogenetics' thereby offers a better perspective on macro societal dynamics than its competitors. This conception inscribes Archer in line with a Marxist perspective (save the fact that she does not regard economy as the exclusive structural buttress of human societies). This proximity between Archer and Marx is explicit when she addresses the complex interplay between the different forms of social structures (designed as 'third order relations' in Archer's terminology, see Archer 1995: 302). Following Marx's views on social change (Lefebvre 1975), Archer argues that social change is more likely to happen when the tensions between these structural levels build up; when, for example, there is a growing contradiction between a system of values and the economic or political conditions of the people. Structural contradictions set the stage for social change.

However, individuals do not bring about change. Only the convergent practices of groups have this capacity. Margaret Archer takes this problem into account by distinguishing two forms of 'collective agents'. *Primary agents* are un-organised groups of people sharing the same social characteristics while *corporate agents* aggregate around the conscientisation of vested interests. Little is said about primary agents. Deprived of shared consciousness, they may as well be regarded as a category of structural emergent properties. Archer pays more attention to corporate agents. This category is regarded as the paragon of social agents. She introduces the notion of interests as the principle of group formation: '*Only those who are aware of what they want can articulate it to themselves and to others, and have organised in order to obtain it, can engage in concerted actions to reshape or retain the structural and/or cultural features in question*' (Archer 2000: 265). Agency is therefore interest-governed, rather than rule (or *habitus*)-governed (Archer 1995: 259). It is the moving principle of social dynamics. In line with a utilitarian perspective, people's interests result from their assessment of their objective situation, and an imagined (subjective) projection of the objective improvement of this situation. The concept must somehow refer to the objective conditions of agents. It stands at the antipodes of the existential conception of interest defended by Bourdieu (*illusio*). But then, how can one explain that people have

an understanding of their objective situation if people's relation to the world is mediated by cultural (socially constructed) schemes? And secondly, how can there be a shared understanding of subjective imaginings if the latter are forged within the confines of individuals' minds? How does the mumbling of internal conversations converge towards the conscientisation of identical interests (and not towards solipsism)? We see here that, in order to make the case for interest-based agency, the author has to respond to the critic of non-Cartesian thinkers. Archer has strongly argued in favour of the *cogito* thesis, dedicating a long description to what she calls the 'internal conversation'. But the shift from individual to collective representations that make possible coordinated action and convergence remains to be brought to light. The absence of a conceptual tool accounting for intersubjective structures weakens her argumentation. This philosophical debate is far from over. Until then, social scientists will have to choose their side.

2.3.4 Structuration, morphogenetics and the theory of practice in a comparative perspective

This comparative overview of the three main structure/agency theories highlights the different ways authors have sought to address this relationship. The three models are based on the idea that human action is not the mere outcome of structural conditioning, but that both terms maintain reciprocal relationships. It derives from an effort to relocate actors (and human voluntarism) in the making of socio-historical processes. The difference of approach is shaped by the philosophical ground (critical realism, Heidegger, Wittgenstein), the epistemological standpoint (actors' subjectivity, collective intersubjectivity or structures' objectivity) and the critical target (functionalism, structuralism, structuration) endorsed by the authors.

Beyond their differences, is it possible to envisage a way forward to an overarching theory of structure and agency? Some authors have attempted to reconcile the different models into one conceptual framework. The strong structuration designed by Rob Stones (2001, 2005) does the job but at the cost of restricting the remit of the approach to the analysis of actors' behaviours. In doing so, he abandons the ambition of structuration to be a far-reaching theory of 'the constitution of society' (Stones 2005: 121-122).

A thorough reconciliation seems impossible. The review of the three theories reveals two opposite ways of addressing the relation between emergence and convergence. The Cartesian model is posited on the idea that emergence precedes convergence. Actors are already equipped with imaginative and generative capacities when they confront the social world. The second, non-Cartesian model, postulates that emergence follows convergence. In other words, people can exert their transformative powers in the social world because they have been granted access to it through their socialisation; that is to say, through the incorporation of the deep structures that underpin the social game. Rob Stones might argue that one does not have to solve this millennium-old philosophical conundrum to carry out a proper structure/agency analysis. I would respond that this is not my intent. This review is not meant to nominate the winner of the best structure/agency theory, but to clarify the elements that will help the reader to make his/her choice (or to design his own approach) in accordance with his/her research object and intellectual leanings...

Before jumping to the second section of the paper, I would like to highlight two domains that have been only superficially addressed by structure/agency theorists. The first one is the question of institutions and their place in social configurations. In the work of the

three authors, their treatment of institutions is fairly conventional. The focus on structuring principles and the neglect of societal configurations lead the researchers to regard institutions as mere reifications of these underlying properties. However, the variety of institutional entities, from families to states, from local volunteer organisations to global markets, deserves a more detailed account. There are profound differences between these different categories. Institutions cannot only be considered as normative features of the social space. They are also *places* of encounters and dialogues. Put differently, it is not solely their normative content and function that matter, but also their form and position on the social exchequer.

The second problem with current approaches is their tendency to identify social actors and social groups. Agents are usually perceived as members of one single, relatively homogeneous group, produced either by solidarity of circumstances or a common intersubjective substrate (*habitus* or rules). The definitions of 'social fields' or of 'primary agents' sharing the same life chances leave the impression that actors are tied to univocal belongings.

But, agents are themselves at the crossroads between different social worlds (Mead and Morris 1962; Merton 1957) and thereby endorse distinct and sometimes confrontational statuses and identities. This caveat has been flagged up by critics of the structure/agency approach. Following Whittington (1997), Rob Stones regard the accounts of the 'role-position' of actors as a necessary amendment to structuration theory. Likewise, Michel Corcuff and Bernard Lahire ground their critical assessment of the theory of practice on the fact that people immersed into distinct social fields are socialised into different contexts and *habitus* (Corcuff 1999; Lahire 1998). Giddens nuances this stance by discussing the importance of intersocietal dynamics. What he has in mind is the emergence of transborder economic actors and markets (Giddens 1984). But, what is pointed out here, is rather the *intersocial* complexity of social relations. The same can be said of actual social groups. If agents stand at the confluence of diverging social dynamics, so do collectivities. This intersocial complexity pervades each level of social reality, from agents' identities to large local communities and larger segments of population.

These two issues (institutions and social complexity) are of primary importance in the study of transnationalism. The following section is an attempt to design a structure/agency approach that takes these questions on board.

3 Designing a structure/agency approach to transnationalism

The previous section unravels the DNA of the structure/agency approach. In the first place, this review brings to the fore the key components of structure/agency theory: human reflexive capacities, a reciprocal interaction between structure and agency, and an account of the material and immaterial dimensions of structures. In this chain of relations, I have argued that both processes of emergence and convergence take a privileged place. Indeed, the appearance of isolated behaviours and opinions are bound to fall into oblivion unless they are adopted and shared by a large number of actors. In other words, they are the processes that make the link between agency and structuration possible. Finally, we have seen that the logical order of the relation depends on the philosophical option of the social theorist. A Cartesian perspective posits the primacy of the actor, while the non-Cartesian

one privileges the structural context of convergence. To sum up, the three concepts of structure, agent and agency and the emergence/convergence dynamic that tie both ends of the relation are the fundamental components of the structure/agency model.

Henceforth, my intent is to outline a possible approach to transnational dynamics. As pointed out, existing models tend to neglect institutional dynamics and intersocial situations. Both are crucial to transnationalism, and to the study of hometown organising. Transnational studies have amply documented hybrid identities, cross-border social formations, the interlocking of networks, organisations and businesses…

The following approach is an attempt to operationalise the theory of communicative action of Jürgen Habermas. This theory has received a surprisingly limited audience among migration scholars and structure/agency theorists. It does however provide a far-reaching framework that criticises and complements the Weberian concept of instrumental rationality and tackles both the immaterial and material dimensions of the structural context. In this paper, I will more particularly rely on the concept of communicative rationality to account for convergence mechanisms. Habermas' review of Talcott Parsons' work, and more particularly of his use of the concept of medium, will also be helpful to relocate social institutions within societal configurations. This Habermassian approach to structure and agency relations is bolstered by a post-Bourdieusian perspective. Following contenders of the theory of practice such as Philippe Corcuff and Bernard Lahire, I introduce the concept of 'plural man' (l'homme pluriel), which, based on a non-Cartesian framework, provides the possibility of explaining emergence in a context of intersocial heterogeneity and role-status complexity.

Drawing on this array of theoretical sources, the following section elaborates the key components of the structure/agency approach to transnationalism: (reflexive) agent, emergence, convergence and social institutions. Each step will be illustrated by the example of collective remittances and transnational hometown organisations. In the concluding section, I will argue that this Habermassian perspective sheds new light on transnationalism.

3.1 Plural man's reflexivity

Going against the grain of current scholarship, I subscribe to the primacy of socialisation over individuation. From this perspective, individuation is an outcome of a structural configuration. Interpersonal relations forego self-consciousness, co-existence precedes existence. The subject is not a monade closed on itself but an entity which emerges with the encounter with other people and objects. Social and physical interactions are commanded by the necessity to constantly reactivate the recognition of the others and combat anomie. Self-consciousness is a state which stems from the feeling of one's own existence in the eyes of the others (Flahaut 2002). As a consequence, people do not live together simply to survive in a hostile world; it is neither a 'livelihood strategy' of actors, nor the outcome of a monitored social pressure. Life in society is a pre-requisite to psychic equilibrium and therefore to biological life itself. In other words, sociality precedes rationality. Individuals therefore need to reactivate through their interactions this feeling of existence again and again. Upon this fundamental thrust, social existence builds up. The learning of practical skills, language, and moral-practical norms shapes and reshapes one's pre-conscious and conscious understanding of the world and of oneself in the world.

The downside of such a framework is its inability to explain innovative behaviours, and therefore emergence. It is argued that this difficulty can be overcome if one takes into account the social complexity of human interactions. Individuals are socialised in a variety of contexts, learning the codes and norms of each of them. Individuals are *drawn* by their multiple structural embedding, and are thus to cope with an array of expectations and obligations.[4] It is not always easy to be at the same time the child of one's parents and the spouse of one's partner, nor is it self-evident to be a believer and a member of a materialist party, a factory worker and a basketball player, poor in a society that promotes wealth, or a Capulet in love with a Montagu... The man is therefore '*un homme pluriel*' (a plural man) (Lahire 1998). Out of this complexity, actors build up their individuality by forging and asserting a stand on their own existentiality in the world. The multiplication of roles and social belongings bolsters a sense of uniqueness among actors (Corcuff 1999: 162–3). The range of possible combinations sustains the feeling of one's own specificity. Individuality stems from complexity. At the same time, the greater possibility of bargaining between the different social positions produces a sense of autonomy. Individuality, it is contended, is an outcome of the structural configuration of societies, and not of *a priori* characteristics of human beings.

This approach has two implications for the definition of agency. In the first place, agency emerges from the necessity to take action in a composite world and to build up an identity despite often-confrontational roles. The literature provides a long series of analytical tools to address the range of possible behaviours of individuals. In times of peace or crisis, people can voice, exit, or be loyal (Hirshman 1970), protest or accommodate (Myrdal et al. 1962), turn to past experience or project themselves into the future (Emirbayer and Miche 1998), and exhibit a whole range of behaviours actors have recourse to in their daily life: lying, convincing, bribing, deterring, etc. But, whatever the degree of innovation in their behaviour, actors never cut off from the culturally embedded interpretation of the world they share with their counterparts. Acting is always seeking approval. Solving a contradiction is for individuals bargaining between opposite expectations. Responding negatively to some is responding positively to others, challenging one position in order to conform to another. Emergence, in that sense, can be seen as the innovative accommodation of contradicting obligations. Agency is therefore both productive and reproductive depending on the point of view adopted by the observer, but it is always drawn by social structures.

The second implication of such an approach is that the primary motive for action is the confirmation to people of their own stand regarding their being in the world. People act in accordance with who they think they are in the world. This assumption does not dismiss the importance of utilitarian interest. But the pursuit of interest appears as a second-level motive. Interest, as argued by Bourdieu, is *illusio*. It becomes relevant in a structural context where a utilitarian stance is meaningful. This also explains why people can endorse stances (such as sacrificial behaviours) that are in contradiction with their objective interests. Human actions are therefore put in motion by two levels of rationality: instrumental rationality,

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[4] Merton does not say anything else when he shows that criminality in Chicago between the two wars stems from the contradiction between the subjective 'ideal' of the American family head (which associates masculinity with economic affluence) and the objective conditions of economic and job scarcity (Merton 1938).

which relates an actor's objectives with available means, and a relational rationality, which is underpinned by existential concerns and frames the instrumental relationship to the world.

Collective remittances and hometown organising can be understood within the framework of multipolar identifications. The choice to migrate is itself multidimensional. The migration project is a combination of personal and collective considerations. Future migrants are themselves in search of self-fulfilment, improvement of their economic or training conditions, etc. But their endeavour is framed by their place and role within the village society. They also are members of a household that expects to gain from the departure of their kin and they are a member of the village community that expects compliance with community obligations and social order. Migrants are expected to show the success of their personal endeavour; to meet the economic needs of their relatives abroad by sending money; to show their allegiance to the political order of the village. To exist as a migrant in their own eyes and in the eyes of their relatives back home, those who leave have to behave accordingly. They follow the migration routes delineated by those who went before them; join the expatriated village community; and participate in hometown activities in the place of arrival. The hometown group creates a space of intimacy by clustering in the same urban settings. Migrants' sense of belonging to the community of origin commands the sending of money, gifts and news to the family in the place of departure. This transnational mode of living is therefore not a livelihood strategy, but derives from their mode of multipolar existence within distinct social spaces.

Integration and the subsequent surge of new personal identities challenges this village identity. The socialisation of migrants in their place of work is conducive to the formation of a working-class ethos, especially among those who become unionists or political activists. Over the years, the divergent socio-professional trajectories of migrants has diversified their class identities. The economic crisis of the 1980s encouraged a number of migrants to create their own job and became an entrepreneur. Finally, family reunification and the arrival of children alter migrants' status. Once themselves children of a household who departed to foreign places, they become parents of children who are themselves part of the host society. Furthermore, social mobility and the need for larger housing lead newly formed households to move to new neighbourhoods. This entails the spatial and social dispersal of hometown groups. In this process, the one-time community of villagers becomes a disparate collection of people sharing little more than a common origin.

Within the framework of the plural man, migration appears as a multidimensional act and migrants as actors torn between different social statuses. This highlights the social complexity of migration and the paradoxes actors must face to adapt to their situation. These diverging dynamics set the background for migratory behaviours in general and collective remittances in particular. In the following section, we will see that this situation sets the stage for a new course of action.

3.2 Communicative action: connecting individuals' behaviours to collective representations

The theory of communicative action allows us to grasp the joint process of individual agency and group/society making. The theory is primarily a critique of the notion of *instrumental rationality* used by Max Weber and his followers. He calls 'instrumental rationality' the principle according to which action is intended to achieve personal ends with available

means within the limits of a moral framework. He argues that this model focuses on individuals and fails to explain the dynamics of action coordination. Jürgen Habermas coined the term *communicative rationality* to name an alternative form of rationality. This concept is posited on the idea that an action requires the mediation of an external observer to be acknowledged as a rational behaviour. Rationality cannot be purely assessed as an internal relation between personal ends and available means. Rationality, according to Habermas, is a mode of pretension to truth. He distinguishes three orders of reality, three 'worlds' (the objective/natural world, the intersubjective sphere delineated by meanings and norms, and the subjective representations that individuals nurture) and, from there, three possible forms of pretension to 'truth': conformity with objective facts, normative and moral rightness, and subjective truthfulness. Communicative rationality is the relation to the world that people endorse to assert validity claims with a view to achieve mutual understanding (Habermas 1987a: 91). Communicative rationality makes actions meaningful to observers, and this meaningfulness makes them assessable as rational or irrational. Hereby, Habermas develops a conception of relational rationality, which is not exclusive to but complements and frames the instrumental (means to an end) rationality of individuals.

In this regard, rationality appears as a coherent articulation between behavioural conduct and collective understanding of the world, its order and its functioning. The lifeworld is defined as an internal subjective perception of the world that renders the monitoring of behaviours' adequacy possible. People's lifeworld is subjective insofar as it incorporates personal memories, skills and psychological leanings. But it also rests on a shared cultural knowledge which, like *habitus* (Bourdieu), *rules* (Giddens) or *cultural emergent properties* (Archer) encapsulate the social and natural order. The lifeworld is therefore a ground for transmitting and renewing the cultural knowledge, inserting actors into the social hierarchy of the group, and shaping personal identities (Habermas 1987a: 152). It is transmitted through education and imitation of other's doings, but also through practice itself. The notion of *lifeworld* establishes a bridge between 'coping with' and 'understanding' the world, between subjective and intersubjective interpretations, between identity shaping and group formation, between emergence and convergence.

With this framework in mind, one can analyse the practices of migrants. Remittances in different forms can be understood as a form of communicative action. They can be regarded as a message through which migrants express a positioning with regard to other migrants and non-migrants; a way of expressing their interpretation of the rights and duties attached to their role of migrant. As shown above, this role builds up at the crossroads of personal, family and community expectations. Any form of remittances (the monies sent back home, the gifts given to relatives, and even personal projects such as the building of a house) are to be construed under this triple lens. The migrant house is emblematic: it is simultaneously an obvious sign of success, a warranty against life risks for the family and, when built in the place of origin, a sign of allegiance to the village. Remittances are communicative acts to meet expectations of observers, both in terms of material and symbolic expectations. In that sense, collective remittances are conceived as a meaningful and rational action for both senders and receivers. The comparative study of Prima Kurien in three Keralese villages (Muslim, Christian and Hindu) shows that the relative weight of esponsibility differs according to the cultural background of the sending setting. In the Muslim village, migrants spent large sums of money on collective endeavours. In Hindu

villages, the individual is brought to the fore through conspicuous religious rituals. In Christian villages, emigrants invest in productive activities for the benefit of their close family (Kurien 2008).

The life experience and socialisation of migrants in alternative social fields enriched their lifeworld with distinct *habitus* and references. This led hometown organisations to evolve or to disappear. In this context, the development projects became a rallying point to regenerate not only the meaning of their commitment to the hometown organisation, but also the meaning of their transnational engagements with the village of origin. Collective remittances emerged as a response to the multi-polarisation of personal roles (Lacroix 2012). In effect, development projects are fully inscribed into the three-pronged *habitus* of hometown migration (mark of personal fulfilment, compliance with family obligations, and allegiance to the village social hierarchy). But they also express their inscription into the society of arrival: through development practices, migrants become vectors of modernity and thereby, of values and lifestyle associated with the place where they settled. Collective remittances are located at the crossroads of three mental universes, three lifeworlds; the one of migrants, the one of non-migrants in origin communities and the one of non-migrants in receiving societies. Remittances are not a mere act of transfer but also an act of translation between different cultural orders. These projects are therefore a complex form of communicative action, which, beyond the material impact of the village, asserts the dual embedding of migrants. It renews without rejecting migrants' lifeworld of villager. Collective remittances are an output of a dual positioning of migrants towards both the sending and settlement areas. What remains to be seen is the place of social institutions (and therefore of hometown organisations) within the process.

3.3 The role of social institutions in structural elaboration

From this concept of rationality, Habermas infers a theory of the constitution of society. The communicative dimension of daily practices builds a shared understanding of the world, and therefore fosters social integration through the three forms of pretension to truth (objective conformity, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness). Henceforth, these three forms of relation to the world create three spheres of value: science, law and art. Habermas thereby identifies a first process of specialisation of societal fields. In parallel, Habermas relies on Parsons' concept of medium (Habermas 1987b: 288) to account for the emergence of economy and polity. Instrumental rationality, he argues, has led to money being substituted for langugae in order to mediate interactions for the exchanges of goods. Economy thus became a distinct sphere of society. Likewise, the regulation of the pursuit of power through a power normative framework has been conducive to the emergence of specialised polity. Habermas sees the emergence of economy, polity, science and art as autonomous societal fields backed upon their specific set of rules, institutions and socialities. This structuring into distinct spheres is the result of a process of rationalisation of the different ways of coping with reality (instrumental and communicative).

Beneath this partition of specialised societal arenas stands the level of everyday interpersonal interactions in which instrumental and communicative rationalities coexist in people's practices. For Habermas, the communication flows between the levels of the interpersonal sphere and specialised structures is ensured by civil society. Media (including the internet), associations and a whole range of intermediary bodies impede the formal disconnection between the different areas of the society and ensures that the *res publica*

does not fall into the exclusive hands of appointed experts. Habermas thus re-locates mid-range social institutions into the formation of social structures. Political parties, unions, associations, and media contribute to produce this social glue. Civil society is a transmission belt, which prevents the misappropriation of public matters.

Habermas thus defends a vision of society as an ensemble of heterogeneous and conflicting structural levels. In modern societies, where structural specialisation is at its height, civil society acts as a crucial arena where these contradictions are conflated.

It is my contention that social institutions in general, and not only those that are part of civil society, are to be seen as the grassroots matrix of social cohesion. Enterprises and families also play a role in the reconciliation of contradictory interests and positions. I see social institutions as social entities in which individuals strive collectively to solve the problems posed by structural contradictions. Social institutions are a framework of production and re-production of practices and, beyond, of a normative understanding of the lifeworld. The course of action taken by individuals always takes shape with reference to a set of social institutions (families, enterprises, associations...).

This perspective contrasts with common conceptions of social institutions. Social theorists usually perceive them as entrenched practices that display the widest time-space extension (Giddens 1984: 17). They do not have a distinct ontological reality other than the one of practices. For Bourdieu, institutions are epiphenomenal. They play a conservative role in a context where the norms of *habitus* are being challenged by pervading social change. In this regard, social institutions are but an illusion (Bourdieu 2000), a symptom of deeper dynamics. Finally, the account of social institutions which is proposed here differs from what Goss and Lindquist term 'migrant institutions'. They define this as '*a complex articulation of individuals, associations and organisations which extends the social action of and interaction between these agents and agencies across time and space*' (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 319). They are an outcome of collective agency enabling migration in reaction to changing policies. These authors regard institutions through the lens of their constitution and function. In this perspective, an institution is a social device meant to improve agentic capacities of actors. Put differently, social institutions are agentic prostheses. They are tied to the instrumental rationality of actors.

The theory of communicative action, combined with the plural man theory, sheds a different light on social institutions. In this perspective, actors are composite agents enmeshed into a complex role-set, and beyond that, into an array of societal arenas. In this framework, social institutions are not a mere outcome of hidden norms, nor an extension of agentic capacities, but places in which the deliberation process of communicative action is possible. They provide the possibility for agents to assert the validity of their behaviours, and thereby, to renew/reproduce a shared understanding of the world and of themselves within the world. They provide the possibility for actors and collectives to overcome social complexity and thereby play a key role in the process of structural elaboration. In that regard, social institutions constitute the missing link between coordinated individual actions and structural elaboration.

This conception can be applied to the case of transnational social institutions. I define migrant social institutions as the families, associations and businesses that enable migrants to overcome the structural constraints posed by the migration process. Among these

institutions, hometown organisations play a key role. Hometown organisations are widespread among groups with a rural background. Their primary function is to maintain the continuity of the identity of villager in the place of arrival. The role of the hometown group is to ensure that expatriates carry on fulfilling their duties as villagers and household members. They ensure that members keep on sending remittances to their parents and participate in collective events. For example, emigrants are to participate in customary duties such as the maintaining of public equipment (collective irrigation systems, religious buildings and festivals, etc.). But, as they cannot partake by providing their time and workforce, migrants send financial contributions. This form of participation in collective endeavours prefigures contemporary long-distance development projects. But hometown organisations are not only a convenient means for migratory ends. These organisations also provide a space of social gathering and support that fosters communicative dynamics. As shown above, the village identity of emigrants is challenged by the multipolarisation of their social embedding. In this context, development projects are communicative acts that allow migrants to take a stand on their plural being. In this context, hometown organisations play the role of a social institution in which members weave together the disjointed poles of their existence.

Finally, hometown organisations play an institutional role. They inscribe actors into their wider institutional environment. In departure areas, they are connected with village communities that show a range of needs and expectations. The need for public equipment is the result of wider structural dynamics. It is the direct consequence of declining public investment in rural settings in the wake of structural adjustment policies. Local populations are to take charge of the maintaining of public infrastructures, schools and health equipment to offset the withdrawal of the state. Public–private partnerships and the 'market citizenship' (Goldring 2002) imposed by public authorities are part and parcel of the liberal credo that infuses new models of local governance in Southern countries. This shift of responsibilities from public institutions to local populations has been all the easier given that the areas benefiting from collective remittances are often areas which display a troubled historical relationship with the central state. This is the case of the three areas studied in my personal research (Panjab, Kabilia and the Moroccan Anti-Atlas), and in other investigated areas (the Kayes region in Mali, Oaxaca in Mexico, etc.). These are areas populated with cultural or religious minorities, which have sometimes been in open conflict with the government. Another factor that has favoured this shift is the multiplication of policies linking migration and development. This is true in Northern countries (codevelopment policies in France, Belgium and Southern Europe, migration and development schemes in the UK and the Netherlands, etc.), and in sending countries (the Programme d'Electrification Rurale Généralisée in Morocco, the NRI-1 programme of the government of Panjab, the Indian Development Foundation plan at the Federal level, the 'Tres por Uno' scheme in Mexico, etc.) (Vezzoli and Lacroix 2010).

To sum up, this overview reveals the communicative and instrumental function of hometown organisations. They are spaces in which migrants strive to connect the different poles of their existence, and they are organisations that make funding applications, decision-making and project management possible.

4 Conclusion: using the Habermassian structure/agency approach for the study of transnationalism

The combination of structure/agency theory and Habermas' communicative action and the plural man approach has enabled us to formulate a theoretical framework likely to tackle the social richness of transnational processes. The social world is conceived as an assemblage of relatively autonomous and imperfectly coordinated structural fields. Social institutions, in this context, support the reproduction or renewing of people's lifeworld and its moral-practical compass, the formation of innovative behaviours and the convergence towards coordinated actions. The concept of communicative rationality, that highlights the collective dimension of rationalisation, opens the possibility of considering the passage between emergence and convergence. Social institutions, in this regard, provide an entry gate to observe social processes. At the same time, opening the black box of these social institutions offers the possibility to analyse the multipolar positioning of their members and inner complexity of their respective lifeworld.

The structure/agency approach to collective remittances allows us to disentangle the various micro-level and macro-level, the cultural, economic and political dynamics, which have been conducive to the surge of collective remittances in the 1990s. This phenomenon is the outcome of several parallel trends: the evolution of migrant communities linked to their integration into the host society, the geopolitical background in sending areas, the transformation of local governance in the wake of structural adjustment policies, the support provided by migration and development policies in Southern and Northern countries etc.

By and large, beyond collective remittances, this Habermassian perspective brings about a definition of transnationalism as a form of agency of migrants inserted simultaneously in several social spaces, several structural universes. The emergence of transnational practices is the result of an effort to overcome the contradictions posed by their dual embedding. It is not the result of a default of integration, but the consequence of a multiple insertion, or, one could say, of 'hyper-integration'.[5] I argue that transnationalism is an outcome of societal dynamics at both ends of the migration process. This stance rests on an attempt to reassess migrants' self-understanding: migrants are also non-migrants; that is to say, individuals who rely on alternate statuses and identifications such as citizens, villagers, workers, sons (daughters) or fathers (mothers). As such, they are to cope with the dynamics of the social contexts in which they are embedded. Transnational practices and social relations evolve according to the opportunities, resources and constraints implied by migrants' dual insertions. As such, this approach provides the possibility of moving away from the paradigm of circulation, which is conducive to a fallacious divide between migrants and non-migrants.

Finally, this Habermassian approach highlights the role of migrant social institutions. The work on collective remittances pays specific attention to hometown organisations, which are themselves a subset of cross-border voluntary associations. I have also briefly

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[5] Hyper-integration is to integration what 'hyper-text' is to text; that is to say, something that refers to and borrows from another text.

mentioned two other categories that are believed to be central in the making of transnational spaces, namely transnational families and migrant businesses. Both have received scholarly attention. A wealth of studies documents their role in integration processes and the maintaining of cross-border ties (Portes 2001; Grillo 2008). But, beyond their instrumental function, much could be gained by addressing them as spaces of communicative interactions. The Habermassian approach opens new avenues of investigation on the shaping of identities within the confines of migrant institutions, and their inscription into wider societal and inter-societal structural dynamics.

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