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Lives Across a Liquid Landscape: Cornish Migration and the Transatlantic World

As metaphors of flux and flows colonise the geographical study of places so regions become stretched over space. Viewed no longer as bounded constructions anchored to physical places regions become spaces of openness and connectivity (Smith 2004). Such a discourse of regions - as complex stretched networks with an 'unbounded lattice of articulations' (Allen et al 1998, 65) - leads to a relational and non-topographical approach to regions, one where network supersedes territory. Yet this perspective, while opening up understandings of the contemporary world, with its frenetic migrations of capital, commodities and cultures, has been accused of overstretching its own analysis. Jones and MacLeod (2004) counter such relational arguments by re-emphasising geographies of territory and scale, proposing that everyday issues of regionalization and regionalism are enacted in 'territorially demarcated and scalar defined terms' (see also Deacon 2004). By re-inserting the concepts of scale and identity they also re-ground the study of regions on discrete territories. However, this debate in regional geography tends to focus on contemporary regions, notwithstanding plentiful references to Paasi's model of the institutionalization of regions over time (Paasi 1986, 1991). But the latter implies that both geographical and historical sensitivity must be brought to bear on area studies.

Relational, non-topographical paradigms also clearly have relevance to the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora. Nonetheless, the role of transnationalism and diaspora in historical migration studies tends to be under-theorised. Picking up on Jones and MacLeod's distinction between the new regional spaces and the new spaces of regionalism of contemporary regionalization/regionalism, in this paper we distinguish between a transnational space and a space of transnationalism. The former comprises those networks, economic, social and cultural, that link places across boundaries and give rise to functional spaces. The latter is more concerned with the issues of identity, belonging and meaning associated with such concepts as diaspora. Furthermore, to pursue this distinction historically, we engage with a case study of a sub-nation state migration. In doing this the taken for granted and banal 'national' flagging of transnationalism might be peeled away (Billig 1995), revealing a more

fluid, layered and contested picture. In this case study we argue that transnational spaces in one temporal era can provide the sediment around which spaces of transnationalism cohere in a later era. Moreover, just as ‘nations’ can comprise more than those living within a state, a geographically bounded territory (Lee 2004), so the imagined community of transnationalism can in this instance be constructed on the basis of what might appear at first glance to be a ‘trans-regional’ transnational space.

Scale, transnationalism and diaspora

Burgess (1999: 1-29) has summarised the competing scales adopted by scholars working in the field of the new British history. The ‘anglocentric’ framework of an older generation of English historians gave way to Eurocentric frameworks as early modern British historians looked to Europe in order to contextualise issues of state formation. Historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth century then pursued an ‘atlantocentric’ framework as they followed the British across the oceans. The latter framework has been taken further by the new areas studies, where the prevailing zeitgeist has moved away from politically constructed geographical entities to areas previously overlooked as significant sites in and of themselves. This was stimulated by the Ford Foundation’s important initiative, ‘Crossing Borders: Revitalising Area Studies’ in 1997 that made a case for ‘process geographies’ and evolved a project at Dale University that was entitled, ‘Oceans Connect: Culture, Capital and Commodity Flows Across Basins’. The thrust of this new perspective was to bring to light a set of historical regions that had remained largely invisible on the world map. Reflecting the more relational turn, according to the ‘oceans connect’ perspective the world is not divided into knowable and self-contained ‘areas’ but is part of an inter-linked whole in which people, ideas, capital and technology are connected across great physical divides. Area studies are thus re-framed around oceans and sea basins, helping us to avoid a traditional over-determination by national historiographies and opening up the possibility of viewing territories in a different light. For instance, previously marginalised and overlooked geographical areas take on new significance and littoral societies can be viewed not merely as peripheries of nation-states or continental civilisations but as communities with a specific role in maritime flows. Taking this as our cue we argue here that analysis of migration flows from Britain at a smaller, regional scale is needed to shed light on larger processes, a point made several decades ago by Thistlethwaite (Vecoli and Sinke 1991).

The concepts of transnationalism and diaspora reflect the turn to flows and connections linking disparate places across the globe. Transnationalism received much scholarly attention following a number of key texts by anthropologists in the early 1990s (Rouse 1991 and 1995; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Basch *et al.* 1994), and accompanies, or arguably supersedes, bipolar analyses of migration that focus on how migrants settle and adapt to new surroundings, shape their communities, construct their identity, or are socially excluded by the host community (see Lucassen and Lucassen 1999; Brettell and Hollifield 2000 among others calling for such an approach). Transnationalism focuses on the way migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations across international borders. This can be in the name of ethnicity, race, religion, language, locality, occupation or nation-state of origin, class, gender, or any other factor and is characterised by a high density of interstitial ties on informal or formal levels (Mato 1997; Faist 1999). Societies of origin and settlement become ever more linked making the sending and receiving communities a single area of action (see among others Kearney 1995; Castells 1996; Hannertz 1996; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Portes *et al.* 1999a and 1999b; Vertovec 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999). Transnational networks are often maintained across borders through time (Glick-Schiller 1997) linking ‘a community in its present place of residence and its place of origin, however distant, and between the various communities of a diaspora’, (Faist 1999; Spoonley 2000) and sometimes result in transnational communities - the building blocks of diasporas that may or may not take place (Levitt 2001a).

In this manner, the concept of transnationality appears to shade into that of ‘diaspora’. Broadly speaking, ‘diaspora’ refers to scattered communities in a period of migration, but has a variety of meanings, from a dispersal of a people resulting from expulsion or involuntary exile, to those who have moved from their homeland as labour migrants, for trade or imperial reasons, or as a part of a cultural diaspora (Cohen 1997a). Today, diasporas have become the exemplary communities of transnational movement and by virtue of their intensity and importance, can actually challenge the very nature of nation-states (Tölölyan 1991:5). Our contention here is that the application of the concept of transnationalism to a sub-nation state grouping also challenges taken for granted assumptions of the nation.

Cornwall: a contested space

Neither the ‘new British History’ nor the ‘new areas studies’ incorporate the experience of the Cornish, that ‘small but strongly formed Celtic people’ according to one mid-nineteenth century observer (Merivale 1857). Cornwall has been approached in an ambivalent fashion, its people sometimes co-opted as one of the peoples of the British Isles (Blair 2000; Brown 2004), but at other times invisible. However, as a result of its migration experience Cornwall looks both inwards – to the heart of the European and British polity – and outwards – via global connections forged during its historical experience and via the north-south links of the Atlantic Arc, which reflecting its importance as a littoral society at the heart of the transatlantic world. Moreover, a study of Cornwall raises questions about the limits of transnationalism as an organising concept. For the Cornish made up a distinct transnational space in the nineteenth century, though then for the most part seen as part of a nation. But the transformation of this into a space of transnationalism in the late twentieth century reinforced the intermittent claims to national status that had surfaced within modern Cornwall (Deacon et al 2003).

Cornwall is a peninsula in the south west corner of the British Isles, surrounded on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean. It covers an area no more than 1,365 square miles and at no time during the first half of the nineteenth century boasted a population greater than 375,000. Yet for a region with such a small population, the Cornish exerted a disproportionate influence upon the global metalliferous mining industry and related technologies, and also made a significant contribution to the expansion of the agricultural frontier in parts of North America and Australia. Uneven patterns of regional industrialisation in Britain draw attention to Cornwall’s leading role in the industrial revolution in the field of metal mining and steam engineering. (Pollard 1981; Von Tunzelmann 1981, 150-151; Deacon 1998). But Cornwall was also one of the first regions to de-industrialise following mining decline from the 1860s. During its industrialisation and de-industrialisation it witnessed considerable migration. According to Baines (1985, 158-9), Cornwall is estimated to have lost 118,500 people through overseas emigration in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a figure equivalent to 40 per cent of its young adult males and 25 per cent of its young adult females. During the 1860s and 70s Cornwall was the only English region where there were more lifetime male emigrants than lifetime internal migrants. Assuming that the

rate of return to Cornwall was the same as to England and Wales as a whole, Baines estimates that gross emigration would have been about 20 per cent of the male Cornish born population in each ten year period from 1861-1900 and about 10 per cent of the female. This was, according to Baines, mainly attributable to the collapse of the mining industry, although he suggests that migration figures would have been high even without the departure of miners. For these reasons, he suggests Cornwall is worthy of further study.

The Cornish transnational space

Although at first agricultural districts in north Cornwall were as important sources for migrants in relative terms as were the mining districts, after the 1850s Cornish migration became increasingly dominated by miners and people from mining districts (Cornish Global Migration Database). Heading first for the lead mining districts of Wisconsin, Cornish miners turned their attention westwards during the Californian gold rush and reacted to deep lode mining in the Sierra Nevada, Rocky Mountains, and other western mining fields thereafter (Calhoon 1995; Ewart 1989; 1998). Around 5,000 Cornish migrated to Gilpin County Colorado between 1870 and 1914; at Central City they made up over 50 percent of the population and 70 per cent of the mining workforce (Granruth 1999: 42-43). By the late nineteenth century the collapse of Cornwall's mining industry and the development of mining fields across America meant that Cornish miners and their families were to be found in virtually every state where there was mining or quarrying activity (See Rowse 1967; Rowe 1974; Todd 1995; Payton 1998). By the turn of the twentieth century the Cornish accounted for 55 per cent of the population of Wolverine Michigan, over 60 per cent of the population of Grass Valley California and 98 per cent of the population of New Almaden, California (McKinney 1997: 14). 'It...almost seemed that [I] had stepped into an unknown country,' wrote Edmund Kinyon in 1911, amazed at the odd ways of the Cornish of Grass Valley and the unintelligible dialect that they spoke (Kinyon 1950). These migrants settled in communities that acquired a discernible Cornish identity built on mining prowess. To be Cornish was synonymous with mining skill and excellence. Dense transatlantic migration networks between towns and villages in Cornwall and places across the US had thus produced culturally distinct enclaves in the Americas with more in common with Cornwall than with their neighbours.

Furthermore, the Cornish inclination to keep to themselves led to a sense of their 'otherness', indicated in 1879 by Robert Louis Stephenson, who observed:

a knot of Cornish miners who kept grimly to themselves, one reading the New Testament all day long through steel spectacles, the rest discussing privately the secrets of their old-world, mysterious race...a division of races, older and more original than Babel, keeps this close, esoteric family apart from neighbouring Englishmen. Not even a Red Indian seems more foreign in my eyes (cited in Rowse 1967: 255-256).

Stevenson echoed earlier views by visitors of Cornwall as not of England (Collins 1850) and by the Cornish themselves as 'ancient Britons', proud to hail from Great Britain, but equally proud of being the descendants of the original British inhabitants of that island (Payton 2001). Yet in the 1800s they were usually content to note, on official forms or memorials for example, that they were from Cornwall, England, and therefore implicitly English. While the Cornish appeared ambivalent about being categorised as English and/or British, for functional purposes when seeking work they were quick to accentuate their Cornishness. They were keen to perpetuate the myth of their superiority as hard rock miners par excellence to maintain an edge over ethnic rivals, particularly the Irish, in the expanding US mining labour market.

So the Cornish at the end of the nineteenth century can be viewed as occupying a transnational space, or perhaps a transregional space. Physical movement, financial remittances and shared ideas linked communities in Cornwall to the Americas and Australia. An identity based on industrial pride and prowess was carried abroad and transplanted to communities that manifested a Cornish way of life with Methodist chapels and their choirs, brass bands and self-help societies, distinctive foods (pasties and saffron cake) and the Cornish dialect. Institutionally, this transnational space was reflected in the formation of Cornish societies in cities such as New York, Chicago, Detroit and Boston and in states like California, as well as Mexico City, Toronto, Winnipeg and Victoria, BC. The Southern California Cornish Association as late as 1934 recognised the importance of maintaining an interconnectedness with Cornwall:

We have joined hands we Cornish folk across the main!

Hail One and All, Old Cornwall. (*West Briton*, 21 January 1935).

At the turn of the twentieth century, connected on both sides of 'the great divide' by transnational contacts, Cornish people were able to debate their common affairs and negotiate claims in what has been termed a 'transnational public sphere' (Soysal 1987). Here was a classic transnational space, with family and community links renewed by new migration, return migrants and by letters and reports in the press on both sides of the Atlantic. Cornish people were so familiar with the United States that it was considered almost the parish next door, with American accents discernible in Cornwall's mining communities, as well as the tastes and values that revealed contact with the American way of life. And yet this was a *transnational* space occupied by a British industrial *region*, the inhabitants of which at this time only fleetingly referred to themselves as a nation.

The demise of the transnational space

Paradoxically, while those Cornish in California were reaffirming their Cornish heritage and identity, that same identity had been under threat in some states before 1900 as the following example from Mineral Point, Wisconsin, one of the earliest Cornish settlements, illustrates:

while many of the Cornish immigrants in their lifetime keep up a correspondence with Cornwall, the second generation has almost entirely dropped it, although an occasional Cornish newspaper is received in the region. The Cornish descendants are scattering, and have almost lost their identity as a race. They do not hesitate to marry with other nationalities...(Copeland 1998: 330).

This area of Wisconsin witnessed some of the earliest migration flows outside Cornwall; by the turn of the twentieth century the majority of the Cornish resident in the region had been born there and did not appear to have the same degree of psychological attachment to Cornwall that their parents and grandparents had. Indeed, some family networks began to break down as immigrants and their children played out their lives in host communities far removed from Cornwall. Letters were written less frequently or not at all to relatives in Cornwall whom they had never met or had not seen for many years.

Although kinship, religious and parochial or village affiliation with Cornwall were still important, activities were increasingly focused on the United States of America as an investment was made in the infrastructure required to support life in the receiving communities. Additionally, we find that the parameters defining Cornish identity were becoming fuzzier from the late nineteenth century partially as a result of ‘Americanization’ - including American schooling, intermarriage with other ethnic groups and social mobility. This manifested itself at many levels, ranging from a move away from Cornish sports such as wrestling, cricket and football to American sports such as baseball and basketball, epitomised by the ‘Cousin Jack’ basketball team active at Calumet, Michigan, in 1909. It also occurred in speech, with Cornish migrants and their American born children dropping the dialect that had marked them out as different. ‘I soon dropped my accent when I got to school here [Grass Valley]’ stated William T. George, ‘because everyone made fun of me.’ (Ewart 1998: 45). Ashamed of their parents’ accents, second generation Cornish made a concerted attempt to become what Thurner has described as “un-hyphenated Americans” the more to fit into a monocultural American society that was being assiduously championed after the First World War (Thurner 1994: 311).

But perhaps of greater significance was the decline of mining itself, the industry that had largely defined what it meant to be Cornish, as mines across the US closed particularly in the years after 1930, as they had done in Cornwall. Communities began to fragment as people moved away in search of alternative employment, and old customs began to die out as the youth jettisoned their parents’ values and identities in their quest to achieve the American dream (See Waters 1990 for more on this subject). Crucially, with a decline in metal mining in the USA, the numbers of Cornish immigrants to the US slowed considerably after the 1920s and the once dense transatlantic migration networks began to disintegrate. Lack of exposure to news, ideas and ways of doing things in Cornwall resulted in a diminishing of the Cornish presence in some overseas communities. One by one the Cornish associations disbanded until only a handful remained and those immigrants who stayed in the old mining communities often became retrospective and increasingly nostalgic about their Cornish roots and heritage.

The retrospection associated with the overseas Cornish at this time reflected that in Cornwall itself, where mining had already declined and the way of life that had emerged with industrialisation was passing into history. Some saw the need to look back to a period before industrialisation, stressing Cornwall's Celtic antecedents, exemplified by the movement to *kyntelleugh an brewyon es gesys na vo kellys travydh* (gather up the fragments before they are lost) by newly formed Old Cornwall Societies from the 1920s. Around the Cornish world a similar reaction occurred as people sought to record, conserve and protect what was left of Cornish heritage: 'At Mineral Point the Cornish restoration and the interest in Cornish foods and customs during the 1930s came just in time to preserve an interesting chapter in the history of the lead region' (Fiedler 1986: 169). Vernacular Cornish cottages, unique to the lead region of the Upper Mid West, were restored at Mineral Point in the 1930s (Fielder, 1986: 167-8. The Pendarvis restoration is the only officially designated Cornish heritage site in the US). Later, the much-depleted Grass Valley Choir made a tape recording of Cornish carols and hymns in 1950 to record for posterity the musical contribution of Cornish pioneers in America.

However, in spite of such efforts, it was clear that many Cornish cultural events were increasingly stage-managed and may be viewed as a *cri de coeur* for Cornish families to maintain links with the cultural heritage of the former little Cornwalls and by association, ultimately with Cornwall itself. By the mid-century the dynamic links in the transnational chain had sundered. While both Cornish-American communities in the States and the Cornish in Cornwall shared in an increasingly antiquarian and nostalgic attitude to their heritage, this shared response was happening in separate places. By the mid twentieth century those Cornish associations that had managed to survive were mere shadows of their former selves, beset by financial difficulties and comprised of small and aging memberships. In Cornwall, many families lost touch with their cousins overseas and memories of life in communities beyond Cornwall became retrospective and mired in nostalgia. In the 1960s the Cornish transnational space had effectively dissolved, a matter for the history books rather than contemporary life.

From Cornish migration to Cornish diaspora

As early as 1916, a monocultural, static conception of America was being questioned:

America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strand, is false to this cosmopolitan vision (Bourne 1916: 86-87).

By the end of the twentieth century for some globalisation, an explosion of travel and migration was transforming the form and shape of human communities around the world (Held 2000: 1-2). But it has not necessarily led to the cultural annihilation predicted by some observers, where regional, ethnic or national distinctiveness vanish into a 'melting pot'. Rather it has had the opposite effect, as ethnic groups seek to reconcile the local with the global, in the process rediscovering, reconnecting, re-affirming, and celebrating their various cultural heritages (See for example Mulgan 1998; Cochrane and Pain 2000; Mckay 2000: 47-84).

As communities underwent change in the USA, various economic, social and demographic forces were changing communities in Cornwall. The Celtic revival that began in the mid-nineteenth century but picked up momentum in the 1920s represented an opportunity for Cornwall and the Cornish to look back beyond the crumbling mine engine houses of a failing industrial period to a perceived golden age. At first the preserve of an antiquarian middle class, by the 1970s this was beginning to have a wider impact on Cornish society. Affiliation with a Celtic past allowed the Cornish to opt out of monocultural conceptions of industrial Britain, and include themselves within a north-western European Celtic arc, claiming a common identity with Bretons and Galicians in mainland Europe, and Welsh, Scots, Manx, and Irish within the British Isles. But not the Anglo Saxon English. The Cornish language, which had ceased to be spoken in a vernacular way in the late eighteenth century, was revived, along with the use of St Piran's flag (a white cross against a black background) and the Celtic cross. Other symbols of Celtic Cornwall were invented rather than re-invented, including a Cornish Gorseth, established in 1928 complete with Bardic ceremony, and the revived use of the kilt in the Cornish national tartan

with its predominant colours of black and gold. This new Celtic iconography, which would have meant little or nothing to most Cornish people in the 1800s, was blended with established and accepted industrial icons and notions of Cornishness: brass bands, rugby football, male voice choirs, thrift, independence, sobriety, hard work and allegiance to Methodism.

The fact that increasing people are today willing to define themselves as Cornish is attributable to many factors. First and foremost, it is a response to the arrival in Cornwall of many thousands of migrants from England since the 1960s. More recently, the British Government's decision to allow devolved power to Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland has helped Britain unravel into its constituent national parts. This new political environment has provided the Cornish with an opportunity to challenge the dominant discourse of 'English county'. Instead, demands appeared for Cornwall to be accepted as a distinct European region; moves were made towards securing ethnic minority status for the indigenous Cornish, the Cornish language has been recognised as a minority European language, and a Cornish Constitutional Convention provided evidence for a popular groundswell of opinion in favour of a regional assembly in the shape of a petition of 50,000 signatures (Sandford 2003). Some went further. A discourse of the Cornish as a nation has long paralleled that of Cornwall as an English county. As noted by Morse in the Canadian context, contact with people of a different 'nation' often makes people more conscious of their own nationality (Morse 1977). In Cornwall too, a significant and growing minority was prepared to adopt the description of nation, although sometimes in addition to county, rather than in opposition to it.

These cultural stirrings began to affect those living in Cornwall in the 1970s. As they did, a more complex and hybrid contemporary Cornish identity began to emerge. Ulrich Beck has commented that 'the individual is at the same time a member of different communities' (cited in Pütz 2003). Identities are not legacies passively received but representations socially produced, and in this sense, matters of social dispute (Mato 1997: 198). Although the mining and extractive industries that underpinned a nineteenth century Cornish identity have declined on both sides of the Atlantic, new interpretations of Cornishness were replacing them, and the English county-based identity of the nineteenth century. More importantly, the transcending of

a mere county identity has allowed the Cornish to claim, in common with the Irish for example, a diasporic identity. And the Cornish overseas have been centrally involved in the promotion of this new sense of Cornishness. Less inhibited perhaps about dual or multiple identities than many people in Cornwall, the Cornish overseas have melded, relatively easily, nineteenth century symbols of Cornishness with those of the Celtic, thus creating the image of the 'industrial Celt'. This appeared rather later in Cornwall, finding a public outlet around Cornish rugby in 1989-91. 'What we appear to be witnessing', notes anthropologist, Amy Hale, 'is a kind of cultural feedback resulting from a heightened awareness of ethnicity within the Celtic regions themselves...learning about the often shared experience of emigration has created new opportunities for dialogue around the Cornish world' (Hale and Payton 2000: 95).

The Cornish space of transnationalism

The years from the 1970s witnessed a renaissance of Cornish identity overseas, aided by an explosion among ordinary people interested in genealogy and heritage, a process that has been ongoing and accelerated more recently through access to the Internet. This 'virtual community' can be viewed as an 'electronic public sphere' that reflects 'a hunger for community' in our modern era (Rheingold 1995: 6). A transnational public sphere has emerged that has allowed the Cornish in America and in Cornwall to refresh, negotiate, and contest their common heritage. However, this is more a sphere of the imagination, tied together as much by virtual networks as concrete links of occupation, family and community and actual physical movement or face-to-face interaction. The transnational space of the nineteenth century has mutated into the space of transnationalism of the twenty-first.

This is exemplified by the Cornish American Heritage Society (CAHS), set up in 1982 with the aim of preserving the history and culture of Cornish people and strengthening connections between Cornish communities around the world. This organisation, with its initial membership of several hundred, held its first 'Gathering of Cornish Cousins' in Detroit, the first of a series of biennial meetings across North America. Through its gatherings and its quarterly newsletter *Tam Kernewek* the CAHS has been one of the main factors in the renaissance of Cornish transnationalism. By 1999 there were 32 Cornish societies and organisations in North

America, many of which have names derived from the Cornish language including *Penkernewek* (Pennsylvania) and *Keweenaw Kernewek* (Michigan) and most with active websites and journals. The CAHS has become the organ *par excellence* of the revived public sphere of modern transnational identity. *Tam Kernewek* helps to coordinate the activities of the various Cornish organisations throughout North America and encourages Cornish participation at Celtic festivals in the USA. These popular festivals are often organised by the descendants of immigrants, ‘to educate others, celebrate their heritage, and promote and preserve aspects of traditional culture perceived as somehow being under threat’ (Hale and Thornton 2000). Cornish participation at such festivals is a more recent feature than that of the Irish, Welsh or Scots, but in 1998 the Cornish were awarded the first prize for the best tent at the Potomac Celtic Fest, an important milestone along the route of ethnic visibility for the Cornish in America, all semblance of former sectarian strife with the Irish now seemingly laid aside. ‘Many were interested, even excited, to know that there is an active Cornish presence in the United States’, noted Cornish-American Nancy Heydt (1996).

Nineteen ninety-nine saw the inception of the Cornish Foundation for North America (CFNA). The creation of this new society marked an important turning point in Cornish transnationalism and was set up because its founding members ‘care about Cornwall and our Cornish identity’ (Cornish Foundation For North America leaflet, 1999). Recognising that modern Cornwall had socio-economic problems resulting from the demise of mining and related industries, this non-political organisation aimed to provide financial assistance for projects in Cornwall related to community regeneration, continuing education opportunities for residents in Cornwall, and the restoration and preservation of Cornwall’s historical sites (Jolliffe 1999). Another key milestone in the resurgence of modern Cornish transnationalism was the revival of the famous Grass Valley Cornish Choir in 1990. Yet the resurrection of this iconic choir was to be much more than the restoration of a vital part of the heritage of Grass Valley, for it was to transcend retrospection and nostalgia. The Grass Valley Cornish Choir has become a catalyst for modern Cornish transnationality that Janus-like can look simultaneously to the past for roots in an increasingly rootless world, but also forward, to include among its ranks people from other ethnic and national backgrounds whilst forging new links with Cornwall and other Celtic parts of Europe.

The revival of the choir has resulted in cross-cultural musical exchanges that include new ideas and techniques as well as music, sung by choirs on both sides of the Atlantic and cemented by tours.

Simultaneously, organisations in Cornwall played their role in this space of Cornish transnationalism. The Cornwall Family History Society (CFHS), set up in the 1970s, has vigorously promoted the study of Cornish genealogy and heritage with its worldwide membership, many of its members seeking to transcend the myopic gazing through the tangled branches of their own family tree to forge an outward looking, more dynamic sense of global Cornishness. Indeed, it was members of the CFHS who were responsible for setting up the CAHS and in 1994 the influential *Cornish World* magazine was launched. This publication, often hard-hitting and unashamedly political, attempts to paint a picture of contemporary Cornwall that transcends both the utopian nineteenth century view of Cornwall resplendent in its industrial zenith, or of more recent ‘Disneyesque’ visions of Cornwall as a playground for tourists and the retired (Kennedy and Kingcome 1998). *Cornish World* has done much to alert its readers of the inescapable link between migration history and modern Cornwall and has fostered a sense of co-ethnicity and transnational identity among Cornish people around the world.

For many people, the high point of modern Cornish transnationalism came in the first *Dewhelans* (Homecoming) in May 2002, a cultural event similar to those that had been taking place every two years in Australia (*Lowender Kernewek*) and in North America, when many hundreds of Cornish from across the world gathered for a three-day festival at Pendennis Castle Falmouth. The future of the event was secured by the granting of European Objective One structural funding. Carleen Kelemen, director of the Objective One Partnership, explained the importance of *Dewhelans* 2004: ‘One of the priorities of the Objective One programme is to deliver economic and employment benefits based on the distinctive nature of Cornwall. *Dewhelans* 2004 will contribute directly to these aims. Not only will it help enhance understanding and appreciation of Cornish culture, it will do it in a way that is also economically beneficial.’ She added: ‘There is a niche tourist market for this kind of event, both in terms of the actual additional visitors it will bring to Cornwall and in terms of the boost that the publicity

generated will give Cornwall's economy and its national and international profile' (Deacon and Schwartz 2004: 198).

The Cornish space of transnationalism and national identity

The Cornish space of transnationalism was thus co-opted into the regeneration of the Cornish economic space. But this revived space of transnationalism has further implications. Adherence to an 'old country' which has claims on the loyalty and emotion of the Cornish worldwide has, according to Robin Cohen, 'implications for the international state system as a number of groups [like the Cornish] evincing a "peoplehood" thorough the retention or expression of separate languages, customs, folkways and religions looks set to grow' (Cohen 1997a: ix-x). Cohen notes that concepts of diaspora have great variety and mutability (Cohen 1997b: 118). In the Cornish case, mass movement of people has sometimes been interpreted as a crisis migration in the wake of mining failure: people were forced into 'exile' overseas (For a critique of this assertion see Schwartz 2002; 2003, chapters 1 and 2). However, Stephen Vertovec's interpretation of diaspora as part of a postmodern project of resisting the nation-state, which is perceived as hegemonic, discriminatory, and culturally homogenizing, and that moreover recognises and advocates the hybridity, multiple identities, and affiliations with people, causes and traditions outside the nation- state of residence, offers an intriguing new departure (See Vertovec 2000). Levitt's contention that, implicit in Vertovec's interpretation, is the question of whether life across borders involves resistance to the nation-state and allows previously marginalized groups to challenge the social hierarchy, is of relevance to the Cornish case (see Levitt 2001b). Attempts to make the Cornish ethnically visible worldwide place transnationalism centre stage. Although Cornish-American associations are not meant to be political organisations, by encouraging their members to acknowledge their ancestry as Cornish rather than English they nonetheless strengthen the case for the Cornish to be recognised as a national minority within the United Kingdom.

When the up to two million people of Cornish descent believed to reside in the US alone are compared with Cornwall's population of just over half a million, with the indigenous Cornish making up only around 50 per cent of that total, the value of a worldwide 'Cornish' population becomes apparent. This was exemplified by a

twelve-point appendix to the Cornish National Minority Report of 2000 stressing the historical importance of Cornish migration in the creation of a vibrant sense of Cornishness (Deacon 2000).

The most overtly political event of recent years in Cornwall was the 1997 *Keskerdh Kernow*, a re-enactment of the Cornish Rebellion of 1497, when thousands marched on London to be defeated by the English at Blackheath. The marches of solidarity planned in the US to compliment those in Britain clearly unsettled some. For in the collective memory of many Cornish-Americans, Cornwall and its people were not victims of English oppression and tyranny, but skilled migrants from a successful English industrial region who contributed greatly to the economic powerhouse that was the United States of America. Cornish-American historian and Bard, Gage McKinney of California, noted that he felt uncomfortable lending support to any activity that might be construed as a gratuitous intrusion into the internal politics of another sovereign state (cited in Payton 1999: 399). But not all Americans were as reticent. The 2004 Christmas edition of the American TV show *The Simpsons* featured cult icon Lisa Simpson waving St Piran's flag and shouting *rydhsys rag Kernow lemmyn* (freedom for Cornwall now) and *Kernow bys vyken* (Cornwall forever) (*West Briton*, 8 July 2004). This international showcasing of the Cornish language and national movement came about after one of the show's production team had been to see a show by a stand-up comedian in the US who remarked that he was Cornish, not English.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how important transnationalism was, and is, for Cornwall and the Cornish. But it also shows how that transnationalism should not be viewed as a single phenomenon. The Cornish in Cornwall and the USA were originally united by a common identity based on mining pride and prowess. But this came under threat of extinction with the demise of mining, causing once dense transnational migration networks to ebb and Little Cornwalls in America to fragment. Yet, apparently subsumed within a cultural melting pot, Cornish identity was rediscovered in the second half of the twentieth century, re-inventing itself to face a new set of circumstances in the modern era. Once again the Cornish in Cornwall and the USA are united by a transnational public sphere, this time grafting new notions of identity

onto older ones. In the process the Cornish transnational space has been transformed into a qualitatively different Cornish space of transnationalism.

In the later nineteenth century the transnational space was most significant in the economic sphere, providing an outlet for Cornish workers coping with the restructuring that accompanied the early de-industrialisation of Cornwall's mining economy. Remittances flowed back to Cornwall and, along with return migrants, did much to soften the transition from a mining to services dominated economy (Perry 2002). In the late twentieth century the space of Cornish transnationalism has its greatest impact in the cultural sphere, both refashioning and feeding changing conceptions of the Cornish identity overseas and in Cornwall, helping formerly separate sub-cultures, of Celtic revivalism on the one hand and industrial prowess on the other, to blend into a self-representation of the Cornish as 'industrial Celts'. The renegotiation of Cornish identity in the face of massive social change in Cornwall was reinvigorated by the presence of a space of transnationalism, which, rooted in a former transnational space, legitimates new and alternative imaginations of Cornishness.

The Cornish case also implies that the concept of transnationalism, albeit one that distinguishes between different sorts of transnationalism, can be applied to what are often viewed as 'sub-national', 'regional' or even 'local' groupings. In this sense transnationalism does not just describe a process of transatlantic movement and connections; it plays an active role in the reproduction of the idea of 'nation', a point those who restrict their scalar gaze to the nation-state might do well to remember.

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