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1

Entering the Transnational World

The transnational sphere is no longer peripheral to the social world. Erstwhile, it may have been considered obscure enough to be corralled to the hindmost corners of the social sciences or too bland to be of interest to the general public. Not anymore. The *New York Times* described the warm, sunny season of 2015 as the "summer of refugees" (Lee 2015). It might just as well have dubbed it the "summer of *transnational* refugees" since what it meant were not the great many internally displaced persons in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Libya, but those refugees who crossed national borders, in many cases more than once. It was the existence of these transnational refugees that led to polarization in societies north of the Rio Grande and the Mediterranean, and south of the Torres Strait. *They* stirred new discourses about dignity, responsibility, borders, protection, the openness of societies—and its limits. Five years later, in spring 2020, a global pandemic brought public life in all parts of the world to a screeching halt. In desperate attempts to fight the Corona virus, flights were canceled and turnpikes erected, cross-country mobility collapsed, and the sky, usually rutted by dissolving white vapor trails, suddenly appeared empty and blue as the absence of planes evoked a tabula-rasa-like firmament. Yet, far from marking the endpoint of the transnational age, this exceptional crisis with its lockdowns, confinements, and travel restrictions actually helps *reveal* the degree to which transnational activity has, in normal, non-pandemic times, silently become a major part of our everyday lives. The non-mobile state of emergency exposes the transnationally mobile state of normality.

The long summer of transnational refugees and the Corona crisis are but two examples of the fact that human activity across national borders is no longer a marginal issue, but is at the heart of what moves and shakes societies in the 21st century. Transnational trade is seen by some as an indispensable

condition for prosperity, while its critics organize in transnational movement organizations, from the Global Justice Movement to Occupy Wall Street. Over the last half century, transnational tourism has become a mass phenomenon and an elementary part of middle-class lifestyles around the world. Yet frequent air travel not only brings people from different countries together, it is also one of the main sources of increased greenhouse gas emissions (Chapman 2007)—which, in turn, is addressed at global summits, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference, for which delegates from 195 nations traveled to Paris in December 2015. A year earlier, the spread of Ebola had shaken the world. Transnational mobility was even then—long before the spread of SARS-CoV-2—quickly identified as a key driver of its potential spread; borders were closed—with moderate success—in West Africa, and airport entry screenings were introduced in countries around the globe—again with meager results (Bogoch et al. 2015; Mabey et al. 2014; Rainisch et al. 2015). Another example are transnational terrorist attacks, which are increasingly employed as a strategy in asymmetric warfare (Schneckener 2006). In short, many challenges we are facing today either breed or result from transnational activity. The world we live in is now essentially a transnational world.

Yet we still know astonishingly little about this transnational world and its structure. Is it a "flat" world in which everything is connected? Or is it rather a "world of regions" in which people cross borders primarily to neighboring countries? How globalized is the transnational world actually? Which parts of the planet are the most integrated regarding transnational interaction? And where on earth are borders still rarely crossed? How did the transnational world evolve over time? Why exactly is it that people move and communicate across borders? How, for instance, do political, economic, or cultural factors influence the creation (and structure) of transnational ties? Do different types of cross-border activity (say migration vs. tourism, or online friendships vs. phone calls) differ in this regard? Moreover, what role does geographic distance play? Does space still matter, or have cross-border mobility and communication become detached from physical restraints due to new means of mass transportation and the digital revolution, as many commentators have suggested? Finally, do our planet-scale mobility traces follow patterns similar to our local movements within cities? And is our cross-border mobility structurally comparable to how other species move in space, or has our ingenuity unchained us—at least partially—from the shackles of spatio-temporal restraints? All these questions have not been tackled in a fully unified, systematic way as yet, despite the ubiquity of transnational phenomena. It is time to search for some answers. It is time to start mapping the transnational world.

Scope and Main Argument

Our endeavor is ambitious, not least due to the scope of the subject matter. As the examples given above reveal, there is a multitude of social phenomena that transcend national borders—so many, in fact, that it would be impossible to address them all in sufficient depth within the scope of a single book. It is thus necessary to restrict ourselves to a certain class of transnational phenomena. Here, we will focus on the mobility and communication of human individuals across nation-state borders. To describe this subject as concisely as possible, we will draw on the notion of *transnational human activity* (THA) as an umbrella term for:

1) *transnational human mobility* (THM), which shall denote activity in which national borders are crossed physically by the individuals involved,[1] and
2) *transnational human communication* (THC), which refers to activity in which information[2] is sent across national borders by the individuals involved.

The intermediary term "human" serves to distinguish our subject of analysis from, on the one hand, other living species (whose mobility patterns will play a role in Chapter 5) and, on the other hand, from inanimate transnationally active entities such as cargo containers, volcano ash, nuclear fallout, multinational corporations, or non-governmental organizations (including the social movements mentioned above). Since the term "transnational" is used differently in different contexts (Vertovec 2009), a few more words on how we understand it here may be considered useful. For one thing, our definition only implies that national borders are *crossed*, not that they *dissolve*. A dissolution of national borders may of course occur—the field of transnational migration studies has rightly broached this issue (Basch et al. 1994; Khagram and Levitt 2008)—but for our purposes it suffices to assume that individuals and information flow *between* countries. Yet, we do not use the term "*inter*national" (*inter* = "between"), because it is used in the field of international relations to describe affairs between governments. "Transnational," by contrast, is conventionally used to denote "movements of tangible or intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or international organization" (Nye and Keohane 1971: 25) and is thus the fitting term here. This is also in line with how "transnational" is applied in contemporary sociological research on cross-border activities (e.g., Gerhards and Rössel 1999; Mau 2010; Kuhn 2011; Delhey et al. 2015). Note, however, that this take on the term is less demanding than the one sometimes found in transnational migration research that sees *sustained* interaction—that is, regular cross-border

movement and communication by the same individuals—as an elementary feature of transnationalism (Levitt 2001; Portes et al. 1999). For the purposes of this book, which is not interested in the life-worlds of specific individuals, but in understanding aggregated structural patterns of human cross-border activity at the regional and global scales, it suffices to assume that THA occurs when *any* individuals move and communicate between countries.

While the above typology treats mobility and communication simply as different categories of human activity, one could also regard communication as "self-extension vis-à-vis the transmission of information" and thus as "virtual mobility of the self" (Kellerman 2006; similarly, Recchi et al. 2014). One could thus also argue that our entire study is about mobility, taking into account both its physical and virtual forms of appearance. While this interpretation is certainly interesting and highlights the potential utility of studying these two phenomena comparatively, we will stick to the term "communication" due to its intuitive, lay nature.

Our empirical analysis will be based on eight concrete types of THA (cf. Table 1.1). Of these eight activity types, five involve physical mobility (THM): asylum-seeking, migration, refuge-seeking, student exchange, and tourism. Let us have a look at the data sources.

- Data on *refugees* was obtained for the years 2000 to 2010 from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention (as broadened by a 1967 Protocol), a refugee is defined as a person who:

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR 2014a).

- Data on *asylum-seekers* was obtained from the same source (UNHCR). An asylum-seeker is "someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated" (UNHCR 2014b). Thus, in our analysis, asylum-seekers and refugees represent two separate types of mobility networks.
- Decadal data on *migration* was extracted from the World Bank's Global Bilateral Migration Dataset for the years 1960 to 2000 (Özden et al. 2011), supplemented by United Nations data for 2000 and 2010 (UN 2012). The latter source defines migrants as "foreign-born" persons, or, where data on place of birth is unavailable, as "foreign citizens" (UN 2012: 3).

- Information on transnational *student mobility* was obtained from Princeton's International Networks Archive (INA 2013) for the years 1960 to 1998 and from UNESCO for the years 2000 to 2010. UNESCO defines international students as "[s]tudents who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purposes of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin" (UNESCO 2010: 264).
- Data on *tourism*, available from 1995 to 2010, was obtained from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), according to which "[a] visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor) if his/her trip includes an overnight stay" (UNWTO 2008). Here, we are specifically interested in "arrivals of non-resident tourists at national borders, by country of residence."[3] Note that this definition does not premise any specific visiting purpose and may thus include business travel as well as holiday trips.

Three activity types under study represent communication (THC): online friendships, phone calls, and remittances.

- *Online friendships* are based on Facebook data retrieved from an interactive graph that was available online (Facebook 2012) and converted into a network matrix. For each country *c*, this matrix contains the five countries to which *c*'s population is most connected via Facebook friendships, ranked from 5 (highest number of Facebook friendships) to 1 (fifth-highest number of Facebook friendships). Our data matrix is an aggregated and slightly simplified version of a dataset that covers all 57 billion Facebook friendships formed in 2011 (Yearwood et al. 2015; Eckles 2018).[4]
- Data on international *phone calls* (measured in million minutes) from 1983 to 1995 originates from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and was retrieved from Princeton's International Networks Archive (Louch et al. 1999).
- Information on *remittances* in 2010 was obtained from the World Bank (Ratha and Shaw 2007). Remittances can be defined as "current private transfers from migrant workers who are considered residents of the host country to recipients in the workers' country of origin" (World Bank 2011: xvi). We regard remittances as a type of THC because they are transfers between individuals that "often involve related persons" (IMF 2005: 75) and can thus be understood as expressions of support or solidarity, and ultimately as a form of communication.

In addition to analyzing these eight activity types individually, we are also interested in getting an idea of what the structure of THA looks like *as a whole*. The multiplexity of human mobility and communication—that is, the variety

TABLE 1.1. Types of transnational human activity studied.

Type		Weight (%) 2000	Weight (%) 2010	Weight in THA index	Available years and source(s)
THM	Asylum- seekers	0.1	0.1	60	2000, '02, '04, '06, '08, '10 (n = 6), UNHCR (2013)
	Migrants	18.5	16.9		1960, '70, '80, '90, '00 (n = 5), World Bank (Özden et al. 2011); '00, '10 (n = 2), UN (2012)
	Refugees	1.1	0.8		2000, '02, '04, '06, '08, '10 (n = 6), UNHCR (2013)
	Students	0.2	0.2		1960, '64, '68, '72, '74, '76, '80, '82, '84, '86, '88, '90, '92, '94, '96, '98 (n = 16), INA (2013); '00, '02, '04, '06, '08, '10 (n = 6), UNESCO (2010)
	Tourists	80.1	82.0		1995, '96, '98, '00, '02, '04, '06, '08, '10 (n = 9), UNWTO (2014)
THA	Online friendships	–	33.3*	40	2011, Facebook (2012)
	Phone calls	–	33.3*		1983–1995, INA (2013)
	Remittances	–	33.3		2010, World Bank (Ratha and Shaw 2007)

Note: * closest available year is used instead of 2010.

of ways in which people interact—needs to be addressed. Concentrating on single activity types alone could never capture the full nature of the phenomenon and would only allow us to see type-specific and thus "biased" patterns (Martin and Lee 2010; Stopczynski et al. 2014). To get a tentative impression of the *overall* picture, we combine the activity types in three aggregated indices:

- First, a *THM index*, in which the cell values of the 2010 matrices of the five types of mobility are added up. This simple procedure is reasonable because all mobility networks are based on the same unit of analysis: individuals moving between countries.[5] As shown in Table 1.1, the weight in the THM index differs drastically by mobility type, with tourists and migrants making up 82.0 and 16.9 percent, respectively, whereas asylum-seekers, refugees, and students taken together account for only 1.1 percent of all THM.
- Second, a *THC index* is created from the latest available matrix of the three forms of communication under study. This is less straightforward, as the units differ between the types of THC (remittances are in

US dollars, phone calls in minutes, etc.). We deal with this issue by normalizing the units and calculating the average value across the three types of THC, giving each of them the same weight.

- Third, we create a *THA index* by adding the standardized values of THM and THC, giving a weight of 0.6 to the former and a weight of 0.4 to the latter. The purpose of these factors is to account for the fact that physical mobility requires more effort than indirect communication and should therefore receive more weight.

The overall indices should be understood as only providing a tentative impression of THM, THC, and THA as a whole, because (a) we do not include all conceivable activity types, (b) the units are only partly compatible, and the size of the weighting factors in the latter two indices is to a certain extent arbitrary, and (c) not all elements date from the same year (although our finding of long-term stability in Chapter 5 will indicate that older data can readily be used as a proxy). Despite these shortcomings, we think that our indices constitute a significant first step to covering the multiplex nature of THA.

We will study these cross-border activities worldwide, considering 196 sending and receiving countries (see Table A1 in the Appendix for a full list), which add up to a planet-scale network of 38,220 country dyads. Figure 1.1 illustrates exemplarily what the eight networks look like in 2010 (or the closest available year) when drawn on a world map. We can see that for all eight types of THA, the network is comprehensive and covers all parts of the globe. At the same time, the intensity of the ties varies in line with the above description: for example, there are a lot more tourists (panel E) than asylum-seekers (panel A) and refugees (panel C), resulting in a more intense web of ties. The Facebook network (panel F) looks a bit different than the other networks due to the specificity of the data format described above: rather than having information on the absolute number of Facebook friendships between countries, we only know the rank-order of the five largest connections for each country.[6]

Apart from the similarity in global coverage and the difference with regard to intensity, the graphs hint at several issues that arise in such plain visualizations of THA networks via arrows on a world map: First, in several of the maps, dark lines seem to accumulate in (or over) Europe, which could either occur due to Europe actually being central to the network *or* as a by-product of the chosen map projection, which positions Europe at the center. A less Eurocentric map projection would likely lead to a different picture. For example, the major student mobility ties from China and India to the United States that "pass through Europe" in panel D could more plausibly be drawn as crossing the Pacific Ocean on an alternative map projection or a globe.

Second, the networks displayed on these maps may look more globalized than they actually are since a long-distance tie will be equally thick but much

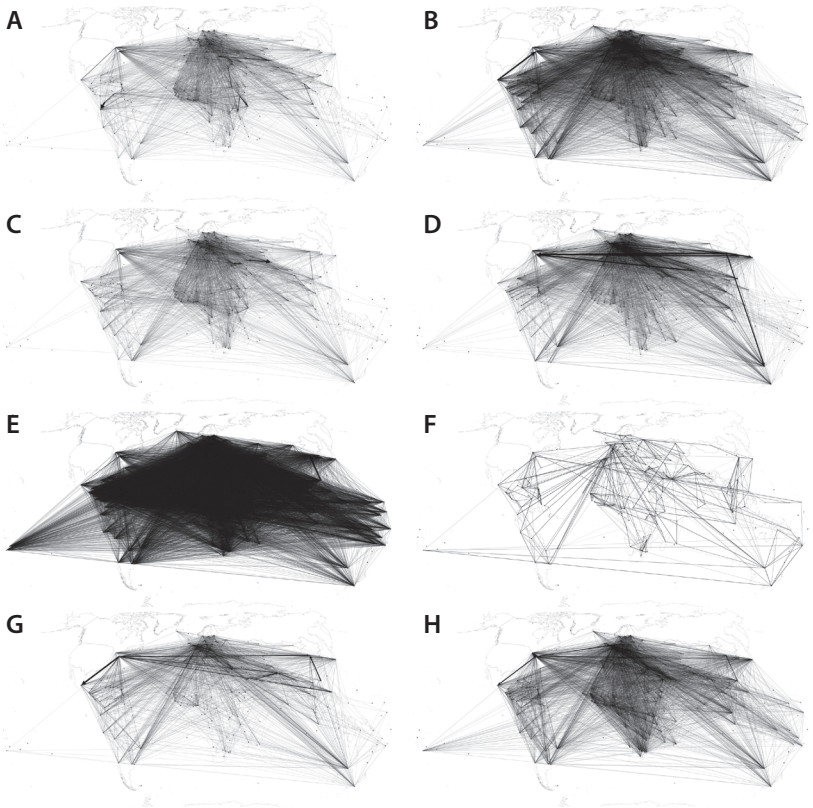

FIGURE 1.1. Visualizing the eight networks of transnational human activity on world maps. *Note:* A) Asylum-seekers, B) migrants, C) refugees, D) students, E) tourists, F) Facebook friendships, G) remittances, H) telephone calls. All maps show the state of the network in 2010 or the closest available year. Author's illustration created in Gephi (Bastian et al. 2009).

longer than a short-distance tie representing the same number of mobile persons or communicative acts. As a consequence, long, globe-spanning connections are visually overly present whereas short, intraregional connections of equal size move to the back. We may call this phenomenon the *optical illusion of globalization*: the world may look more globalized than it actually is, simply because globe-spanning connections are visually more present than regional ones.

These difficulties do not only arise for us, but are present in many of the fascinating previous attempts to visualize "global" connections, from travel and communication infrastructure to data transfers to energy links, on world maps (e.g., Le Monde diplomatique 2003; Lévy 2008; Zuckerman 2008; King et al. 2010; Doyle 2016; Galka 2016; Khanna 2016), and critical geographers have rightly pointed to the biased representations that can arise from maps with

arrows that indicate mobility flows (e.g., van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2019). We will tackle these issues in two ways in this book: First, we use alternative "mapping" techniques that let an algorithm decide which countries are particularly closely linked to each other through mobility and communication. By bringing the "community structure" of the nodes—rather than the ties—to the fore, this computational approach illustrates the congruence of the geographical map and the regionalized network structure (Chapter 3). This already mitigates some of the issues described above, including the optical illusion of globalization. Second, we also "map" the transnational world in a *metaphorical* rather than visual way, using statistics to describe its structure. This will actually be the dominant strategy in large parts of the book: The physical map that depicts a crossed distance in centimeters on printed paper gets converted into physical distance as a statistical variable that measures crossed distance in virtual kilometers. By "mapping" metaphorically, or statistically, rather than visually, our "map,"—that is, our representation or estimation of the transnational world—becomes more accurate and detached from specific projections. We also become able to enrich the mere geographic outline of the world with information on countless other factors that potentially structure transnational mobility and communication, from the political to the cultural to the economic sphere. This allows us to detect the patterns that actually matter, leading to a more coherent depiction of the structure of the transnational world.

An important component of our analysis will be to study how the transnational world has evolved over time, looking at periods of up to five decades, from 1960 to 2010 (see Table 1.1 for the specific years for which empirical data was analyzed in each activity type). Our material is thus quite comprehensive. For 2010 alone, the data contains information on approximately 500,000 asylum-seekers, 3 million students, 10 million refugees, 200 million migrants, 1 billion transnational tourist trips, and 419 billion US dollars of remittances. In this highly aggregated form, such numbers may appear like abstract, inane statistics devoid of any life or soul. It may therefore be important to remember that hidden behind these figures are the fates and stories of living human beings, who walked, drove, or flew across a national border, who pressed a button to send a friendship request on Facebook, who made a phone call to stay in contact with someone they hold dear, or who stepped into a Western Union office to send a share of their wages home to their family. They might include a 19-year-old Eritrean refugee who fled to Ethiopia, a Guatemaltecan farmer who trudged through the Rio Bravo in a pitch-black night, a Singaporean manager who jetted to a business meeting in Hong Kong in the hope of million-dollar deal, a French family on an educational journey to Israel, an Indian exchange student who spent a semester at McGill University in Montreal, a Swiss backpacker trying to stay in contact with a friend he made in Indonesia, or an Ecuadorian migrant in Madrid who sent money to her mother back home in the Andes. In this study, we won't see

or hear about these individual fortunes. In order to be able to map the transnational world at the planet scale, we are forced to take a "satellite-eye's view." This perspective implies that information on the individual fates behind the figures is disregarded, but what we lose in detail we gain in vision. Only this strategy allows us to get an idea of the overall picture, to identify the general patterns and mechanisms at work in the transnational world.

It should also be noted that neither the selection of the specific types of THA nor the specification of the time frame is theoretically derived. Rather, they are driven by the availability of empirical data. Ideally, we would of course want to include *all* conceivable forms of mobility and communication and go back in time until the moment when a national border was crossed for the very first time. Yet the old dictum that empirics is "dirty" in sociology (Hirsch et al. 1987) particularly holds for a study operating at the planet scale. In other words, we are simply forced to work with what has been made available by large organizations and companies, such as the United Nations, the World Tourism Organization, or Facebook. Digitalization and the possibility to trace the mobility and communication patterns of people via smartphones and social media may provide alternative options in the not-so-distant future—and the emerging field of digital demography is making rapid progress in this regard (e.g., Hawelka et al. 2014; State et al. 2013; Pentland 2014: 212; Ruktanonchai et al. 2018; Spyratos et al. 2018). Yet, it will still take several years of technological diffusion until such an approach may be suitable for deriving conclusions about the behavior of entire populations *in all parts of the world*, including the most deprived ones. According to one estimate, global smartphone user penetration only reached 46.5 percent in 2020 (Statista 2021), and half the world population is still offline (White and Pinsky 2018).

Even though the goals of this study are primarily sociological in nature, our topic cuts across a range of fields and disciplines. Transnational studies, transactionalism, (neo-)institutionalism, systems theory, world-systems theory, international relations, integration studies, sociology of Europe, comparative regionalism, globalization research, migration studies, communication science, relational sociology, social network analysis, economics, human geography, complexity science, and ecology are all fields and subfields that this book will touch upon, some of course more thoroughly than others. One challenge thus lies in connecting these different fields with all their diverging approaches, terminologies, and epistemic interests. Nevertheless, we deem this interdisciplinarity productive. Since no single theory alone can explain social integration at any level satisfyingly (Münch 1998: 64), we must look at a combination of theories and approaches. In order to be able to systematically connect several of these fields of research, we will use Chapter 2 of this book to identify four different paths to what we identify as the main research gap that is addressed in the book.

This main research gap consists in the lack of consideration given to the role of world regions in the sociological analysis of human cross-border mobility and communication. So far, no comprehensive comparative-universalist study has been conducted that could systematically evaluate their relevance and discuss emanating sociological implications—for example, regarding the prospects of planet-scale social integration. The core argument of this book is that—despite much talk about *global*ization—transnational human activity takes place predominantly within world *regions*, and that this regionalism can be explained to a large extent by how humans (and not only them!) move and communicate in physical space. We will show that such proximity-induced regionalism occurs in all parts of the world and that it does not weaken over time. We will further provide evidence that, in explaining this regionalism, alterable social factors—including cultural, economic, and political ties of all kinds—play a much lesser role than mere geographic distance. Moreover, we will demonstrate that the structural pattern underlying this phenomenon can be approximated by a simple mathematical function, the power-law, which has also been used to model how humans move at lower geographic scales—for example, within cities—and how non-human animals move across space. A meta-analysis of the precise shapes of these power-law curves across species and scales reveals a deeper underlying pattern, which we dub the "meta-power-law of mobility." These findings and their consistency with mathematical laws and observations from the natural world suggest that the structure of THA is prone to remain regionalized and that it will not be replaced by truly "globalized" patterns anytime soon. We also argue that this concentration of THA within regions can—from a sociological perspective—be used as an indicator of social integration at the world-regional scale and that this "bottom-up" form of regional integration must be analyzed from a comparative-universalist perspective. Hence, we further aim at building the base for a Comparative Sociology of Regional Integration.

Of course, some past studies and disciplines have already noticed that "regions matter." In political science, for example, Katzenstein (2005) has proposed a "world of regions"; in geography, Keeling (2008) discusses how a "regional world" matters for transportation, and migration researchers have repeatedly recognized that migration primarily occurs within world regions (e.g., Abel and Sander 2014; Sander and Bauer 2015; Mberu and Sidze 2018). Perhaps most notably, the *DHL Global Connectedness Index* in its two most recent updates (Altman et al. 2018; Altman and Bastian 2019), discusses, based on a remarkable analysis of a range of transnational flows of trade and capital as well as information and people, the questions of how globalized the world actually is and whether "globalization [is] giving way to regionalization?" (Ibid.: 20). However, our study is not only more comprehensive than a lot of past work (covering eight different types of human mobility and

communication, and—with up to 50 years—a very long time frame), but also contains a novel interdisciplinarly inspired sociological framework. While research on THA is vibrant (see also Chapter 2), a comprehensive global-comparative analysis of its regionalized structure, across an encompassing set of distinct types of human mobility and communication over a longer time period that also provides a deeper social-scientific interpretation, is—to the best of our knowledge—missing to date.

Before having a closer look at the outline of this book, which aims to fill this gap, a few more basic definitions regarding some of the above-introduced terms, such as *region*, *regionalism*, and *integration*, may be useful to clarify what is meant by them in the context of this book.

Bringing the Regional Scale In

In an abstract sense, *integration* can be understood as "forming parts into a whole" (Nye 1968: 856; Esser 2002: 261; Gerhards and Lengfeld 2013: 21). *Social integration* can then be defined as "the extent and intensity of the interlinkages among the constituent parts of a social unit" (Münch 2001: 7591). Here, we argue that THA, as defined above, may serve as an indicator for *social integration beyond the nation-state*: If many people move and communicate between two countries, then these countries are well-integrated. If a lot of people move and communicate within a world region, then this world region is well-integrated. And if numerous people move and communicate between world regions, then the world is well-integrated. People and their messages thus provide the "interlinkages" that form the base of social integration. In making these assumptions, we connect to a long tradition of sociological thinking that sees society as composed of networks of social interaction. Marx (1993 [1939]: 265), for instance, argues that "[s]ociety does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand." Durkheim (2009 [1951]: 10) speaks of the "network of social life," and for Simmel (1971 [1908]: 23), "[s]ociety exists where a number of individuals enter into interaction." We are also close to the positions of Karl W. Deutsch's transactionalist theory, which we will discuss in detail in Chapter 2, and other authors with similar views: Gleditsch (1967: 373), for instance, assumed that "integration and interaction are closely related, and that interaction patterns may be the most practical means of measuring integration." A newer strand of research, which we will also get to know in Chapter 2, has built on Deutsch's work and made similar arguments, taking transnational activity in Europe as an indicator of European integration "from below" (Delhey 2007; Mau et al. 2008; Kuhn 2015; Recchi 2015; Delhey and Deutschmann 2016). Integration, understood in this way, is essentially a relational concept (Esser 2002: 262; Delhey 2005: 11) that regards society as "a web of social

relationships" (Immerfall and Therborn 2010: 668), which fits our methodological approach of looking at THA from a social networks perspective. All these positions imply that when human interaction increasingly transcends national borders, it becomes harder to justify the common practice of equating society with the nation-state—a point we will come back to in Chapter 2.[7]

Note that for many authors in the transactionalist tradition, THA merely constitutes the *base* of social integration. On this foundation, they argue, additional layers of integration may be built, be it in the form of a sense of community, mutual trust, or overarching institutions (cf. Chapter 2). In this book, we will, mainly for practical reasons, focus on THA as the base layer of integration, largely ignoring the question of whether additional layers (have begun to) form on top of it. Our concept of integration may thus be seen as less demanding than alternative ones that contain more exigent elements and might thus provide a more complete picture of social organization in all its facets. Yet, a planet-scale analysis based on such a multi-layered, complex conception of integration would clearly go beyond the scope of a single book. We will return to the necessity of this restriction—and the potential feasibility of overcoming it in future—in Chapter 6 (section "From Activity to Attitudes").

We have now introduced the link between THA and integration. But where exactly do "regions" and "regional integration" come in? *Region* is a complex term, and no consensus about its meaning exists (Sbragia 2008; De Lombaerde et al. 2010: 736; Börzel 2011: 5). In an abstract sense, it denotes "spatial compartments of formal, functional or perceptual significance" (Murphy 1991: 23). When we speak of regions in this book, we mean *world regions*—that is, large-scale groups of countries that may cover entire continents.[8] Building on the United Nations M49 geoscheme, seven such regions will be considered: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania. Figure 1.2 shows their scope on a world map (cf. Table A1 in the Appendix for a detailed list of countries per region).

Of course, there are reasonable alternative constellations of regions whose usage could equally be justified—Murphy (1991: 25) even speaks of "an infinite array of possible spatial compartmentalizations." Yet our aim here is not to start from *the* definite constellation of regions, but rather to demonstrate the relevance of regions for the structure of THA using *one* possible arrangement of regions. For this purpose, the above-introduced working constellation of regions will suffice. Notwithstanding, we will demonstrate that our approach can equally be used to test and compare outcomes for alternative constellations of regions that may, for instance, be based on membership in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) or Huntington's (1996) civilizations. In one analytical step (Chapter 3, "Letting the Algorithm Speak"), we will even allow regions to emerge from within the data itself via a network-analytical method called community detection. Here, an algorithm decides which countries are densely

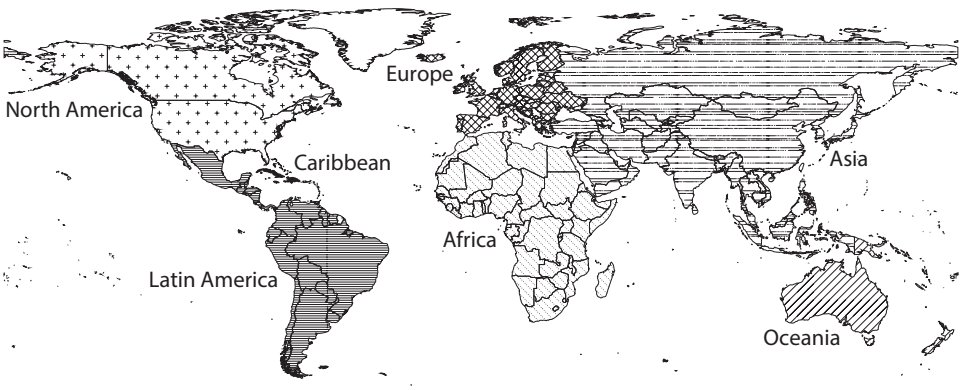

FIGURE 1.2. Regions.
Note: Author's illustration based on Table A1, which, in turn, is derived from the United Nations M49 geoscheme.

connected with each other through ties of THA and thus form a cluster, and it is on us, as observers, to decide whether these resulting clusters of countries are congruent with world regions and, if yes, which name they should be given. We thus experiment with different conceptions of regions throughout the book to illustrate the robustness of the main finding: that the transnational world is regionalized—regardless of the specific definition of regions.

Through most of our analyses in Chapters 3 and 4, however, we will stick to our primary, United Nations M49 geoscheme–based constellation of regions, as it has several advantages over others. First, it is *comprehensive*—that is, each and every of the 196 countries under study can be assigned to one of these regions. Second, it is, apart from a few exceptions,[9] *disjunct*—that is, almost every country can be assigned to one region only. Third, it is *meaningful*—that is, its regions' names correspond to "actual" regions, regions whose labels are used in everyday life by many of the individuals who live in them. In other words, they have "generally recognized perceptual and/or functional significance in the societies under examination" (Murphy 1991: 26). This realist approach—that is, a preference for categories that are not "empty" but have meaning to the subjects that experience them—can also be found in other sociological fields, such as class analysis (cf. Grusky and Weeden 2001: 206). Furthermore, this meaningfulness would allow us to link our analyses to a subjective sense of community (e.g., people's degree of identification with their region), the next layer of integration mentioned above (even though doing so goes beyond the scope of this book). Such meaningfulness is also given in the conceptualizations based on Huntington's civilizations or IGOs: Policymakers may, for instance, be interested in the performance of the European Union or UNASUR with regard to internal exchange across borders in

global comparison. However, it is not necessarily given for the "regions" that may emerge via the inductive, algorithm-based approach—there, we may *try* to search for meaning and assign realist labels, but the fit won't be perfect, and a certain dissonance is likely.

This last point already shows that regions are not mere geographic entities, but always also comprise a *social* component. Murphy (1991: 24) accordingly describes them as "socially significant spatial units" that are "the results of social processes that reflect and shape particular ideas about how the world is or should be organized." Other authors have similarly characterized regions as "aspects of the spatial environment [that] are themselves humanly produced and humanly changeable" (Urry 1987: 437) or have stated that "regions are not givens but socially constructed and transformed over time" (De Lombaerde and Söderbaum 2013: xxv). Furthermore, regions are "spatial constructs with deep ideological significance that may or may not correspond to political or formal constructs" (Murphy 1991: 29) and "[j]ust like nation states, regions are highly subjective (even imagined phenomena, created and recreated not only through material incentives but also through identities, ideas, cognitive resources, and not least our theories" (Söderbaum 2011: 62). This last quotation points to the fact that regions are not just ontological facts but also serve as epistemological frames—that is, as auxiliary constructions that may help us get a more adequate understanding of the world. In our case, introducing world regions as a new scale situated between the nation-state and all-encompassing world society may help provide a clearer picture of the structure of THA and show that cross-border activity is rarely actually "global" activity. For this to work, we do not have to be able to start with a definite, "perfect" set of regions (which would be impossible to obtain); it suffices to have *a* set of regions, the ontological and epistemological relevance of which can be tested *as we go*—that is, in the course of our analysis. Such examinations will in fact be a central element of this book. For instance, we will test whether THA actually clusters within the set of regions we introduced (Chapter 3), and we will aim at disentangling the social and geographic influences of this regional clustering (Chapter 4).

By using such a scale-based approach (national—regional—global), we do, however, follow a perception of social life that is partially space-bound. Thereby, we are close to Durkheim and Mauss (1971 [1913]: 809), who, more than a century ago, argued that "in studying social phenomena in themselves and by themselves, we take care not to leave them in the air but always to relate them to a definite substratum, that is to say, to a human group occupying a determinate portion of geographically representable space." This is not self-evident, though, and we will, in the course of this book, discuss—and criticize—positions that do not accredit space such a structuring role in modern society—in specific, Luhmann's conception of world society (Chapter 2)

and the so-called "geography-is-dead" hypothesis in globalization research (Chapter 5). While such outright denial is rare, neglect is the rule (cf. Giddens 1985; Urry 2001; Abbott 1997). This negligence of physical space in mainstream social research has no doubt contributed to opening up the gap that we address in this book: providing a detailed account of the space-bound, regionalized structure of human cross-border mobility and communication. We will return to this point and discuss it in more detail in Chapter 6.

Having introduced "integration" and discussed our conception of "region," we can now combine the two terms and elaborate on the term "regional integration." While "integration" has always been a core concept in sociology (Delhey 2005; Roose 2012), the term "*regional* integration" is rather alien to the discipline. It is more commonly used in political science and international political economy to study the IGOs and free trade areas (FTAs) that have formed all over the globe during the last decades (cf. Chapter 2 section "Coming from Politics"). Political scientists and economists benefit from the fact that *political* and *economic* processes of regional and global integration manifest themselves in clearly discernible ways, with tangible founding dates, lists of participating nations, treaties and paragraphs that can be reviewed and analyzed. The *social* dimension of regional (and global) integration, by contrast, is much more elusive, and thus much harder to grasp adequately. Due to these differences in content, a sociological approach to regional integration may warrantably deviate from politological understandings of the term. Yet even in political science itself, there is no generally accepted definition or standard usage that we could adopt or from which we could deviate.[10] We second Genna and De Lombaerde's (2010) defense of "the necessity of conceptual pluralism" (584) in the study of regional integration: the utility of a certain definition will depend on the specific area of interest. Throughout this book, we will use *regional integration* as the umbrella term for: (*a) regionalization* as the process by which regional integration comes about over time, measurable, for example, through an increase in density of THA within regions, and (*b) regionalism* as the state of regional integration at a certain point in time, measurable, for example, via the density of THA within regions at that point in time.

We will provide a further differentiation and look more closely into how regionalization and regionalism can be measured in relative and absolute terms (i.e., how these phenomena relate to their counterparts at the global scale, *globalization* and *globalism*) in Chapter 3. For now, it may suffice to mention once more that in our conceptualization, THA, as defined above, serves as the medium by which integration comes about. Thus, what we monitor is a "bottom-up" form of integration that arises from the mobility and communication patterns of the individual human beings that make up society. Thereby, our perspective also contributes to countering the "exaggeration of formalized regional organizations at the expense of more fluid types of regionalization and

region-building around the world" (Söderbaum 2015: 5), offering a way to look at the social dimension of regional and global integration over and above the usual focus on the political and economic dimensions (see also Chapter 2).

On a more general, abstract level, our approach of focusing on the activity of individual human beings from a relational perspective may deserve a few more clarifying words. Theoretically, we build on the assumption that social life (and thus society) emerges from "below,"—that is, from networks of individual human interaction. With this individualistic-relational perspective on the social world, we connect to classical sociologists like Simmel and Elias. Above, we already mentioned Simmel's (1971 [1908]: 23) view that "[s]ociety exists where a number of individuals enter into interaction."[11] Similarly, Elias described a "society of individuals" (2001 [1987]) and pleaded for moving "figurations,"—that is, the relations within which these individuals stand—to the heart of sociological analysis (1978 [1970]). Two current sociological schools, relational sociology (Emirbayer 1997) and analytical sociology (Hedström 2005), take up similar stances. All these positions have in common that they imply a primacy of individual human interaction from which macro-phenomena emerge. Social systems, norms, and institutions thus play secondary roles from this perspective.

This position is by no means uncontested. There are alternative—and sometimes irreconcilable—perspectives on what constitutes the social world. For instance, rather than based on interconnectedness via contact and interaction, society could also be thought of as held together by common features, be it citizenship, legal rights, identity, centralized authority, or a shared culture organized around a set of norms and values (e.g., Durkheim 2013[1893]; Parsons 1951). Another perspective holds that even without concrete (face-to-face) interaction of people or the (socially constructed) existence of commonalities, public comparative discourses and the resulting horizon of orientation can bind social units together (Heintz and Werron 2011; Bennani et al. 2020). Furthermore, one could argue that interaction does not necessarily need to occur between individuals to be socially meaningful. Another possibility is a more one-sided, sender-receiver transmission of information via the mass media, that may, for instance, explain the global spread of American (pop-)culture and thus cultural globalization (Sreberny 1991) or, in general, the creation of "we-ness" (Hannerz 1996: 21). Our analytical position is also fundamentally different from cultural-historical and interpretative perspectives that would be able to carve out details and meanings that will move to the back in our macroscopic statistical analysis, and from systems- and field-theoretic approaches in the tradition of Parsons, Luhmann, Bourdieu, and others for whom society primarily consists of a series of thematic subsystems or fields (politics, economy, religion, education, etc.). Finally, we also diverge from the perspective of the Globalization and World Cities Study Group (GaWC) that partly has—like us—followed a network

perspective, but put *cities* at the center of analyses of globalization (e.g., Sassen 2000, 2002; Alderson and Beckfield 2004; Taylor 2004; Derudder and Witlox 2008; Bowen 2009). We deviate from their approach, for two reasons—one pragmatic, one substantial: First, as described above, the empirical data we analyze is collected at the country level, making a disaggregation to the city level impossible. Second, and more importantly, while GaWC researchers are certainly right to emphasize cities as important hubs of globalization, an important share of transnational mobility and communication still originates in the *hinterland*, in small towns and villages, and in this book, we want to capture this transnational activity as well. Despite continuing urbanization, almost half of the world population still lives in rural, non-urban areas today (UN DESA 2018).

These various alternative views do of course all have their individual strengths and merits. Many elements of the social world that they are able to elegantly unveil will remain unaddressed in our analysis. At the same time, however, we do believe that our activity-based approach is also an extremely useful and unique lens that allows us to see and highlight aspects of the transnational world that other perspectives are blind to (some of these blind spots will be carved out in Chapter 2). That being said, our approach is not the only meaningful conceivable way to put the general framework developed in this book into practice. While we will use the relational, activity-based approach to illustrate what a Comparative Sociology of Regional Integration could look like, we will also discuss, toward the end of this book, the option to broaden our conceptualization and apply it to other understandings of the social world, including approaches based on institutions or sense of community.

Although the activity patterns of individuals are central to our analysis, our study is not just based on the "individual level." Rather, since we examine trans*national* activity, nation-states become the units between which these individuals move and communicate. Thus, although our approach is theoretically microscopic (i.e., we assume that individuals and their actions matter), it is methodologically macroscopic (i.e., our analysis operates at a high level of aggregation). One consequence of this high degree of abstraction is that we can reasonably dispense with formulating an elaborate theory of individual behavioral motivation and rationality. In Chapter 5, we *will* introduce the assumption that individuals tend to maximize their utility, preferably spending the least amount of resources required to attain their goals. Overall, however, it suffices to assume, as many have before us, that human behavior is generally situated *somewhere* on a continuum between boundless free choice, on the one end, and full exposure to external forces, on the other (Marx 1972 [1852]; Parsons 1968 [1937]; Giddens 1984; Richmond 1988; O'Reilly 2016). For the purposes of this book, it is not necessary to attempt to specify further where *exactly* on this continuum people are situated. It should be conceded, though, that

in our analyses of the determinants of THA (Chapter 4), we will focus more on untangling the structural factors that shape transnational human mobility and communication, assuming that the remaining, unexplained variance in human cross-border activity leaves enough room for unfettered individual decision making and agency, on the one hand (as emphasized by rational-choice approaches to explaining human behavior), and habit, routine, and creativity, on the other (as emphasized by pragmatist approaches, cf. Gross 2018).

Another important aspect to consider is that, since we introduce the regional as an additional scale between the national and the global, world regions serve as a new level of comparative analysis. This implies that, unlike most sociological studies, our work is not simply based on the "micro level" and/or the "macro level." We do not just look at individuals and/or countries as "units of analysis." Instead, various levels and units, as well as *flows* between these levels and units, are considered: the worldwide set of nation-states serves as the grid between which people and their messages move. While focusing mainly on these ties—that is, the amount of mobility and communication of individuals between nation-states (which are, in turn, situated within either the same or a different world region)—we also take characteristics of nation-states (e.g., their population size), of nation-state pairs (e.g., whether their populations speak the same language), and, to some extent, of individuals (by looking comparatively at the type of activity) into account. In taking such a multilayered approach, this study not only attempts to model the complexity of the social world. It also acknowledges the continuing relevance of the nation-state, while trying to avoid—as much as possible[12]—what has been criticized as "methodological nationalism,"—that is., the fallacy of focusing exclusively on social activity within national containers (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; cf. Chapter 2 of this book). Instead, this study explicitly aims at shedding new light on patterns of human mobility and communication *between* nation-states, describing and explaining the structure of the transnational world.

Outline of the Book

This book consists of six chapters that build on one another. After this first one, which introduced the scope and purpose of the book, defined the main concepts, and now provides a brief outline of what follows, Chapter 2 identifies four paths that lead—from different angles—to the same main gap in past research: the lack of consideration given to the general tendency of THA to agglomerate within world regions and the missing sociological discussion of why this clustering happens and what it implies—for example, for the prospects of social integration and the planet scale. The first path leads to this gap *from below*—that is, emanating from the nation-state society and the *trans*national activity that occurs when its borders are crossed. We argue that in studying this

cross-border activity, scholars have thus far largely missed the role of world regions because of their tendency to either focus on transnational activity as a small-scale phenomenon occurring between specific locales (migration studies) or to follow the debatable practice of equating "transnational" with "global" *ex ante* (international relations). The second path comes—contrary to the first—*from above*—that is, from systems- and institutions-centered takes on "world-system," "world polity," or "world society" as theorized by Wallerstein, Meyer, and Luhmann, respectively. While these approaches are topical in that they aim to illuminate planet-scale social organization, they all tend to disregard the relevance of individual human cross-border activity and its regionalized structure, thereby again missing a basic feature of the transnational world. The third path comes *from Europe*, where sociologists *have* conceptualized regional integration via cross-border interaction. While they thus managed to walk on prudential middle ground, circumventing both the bifurcation "local vs. global" encountered on the first path and the negligence of individual mobility and communication found on the second, they also restricted themselves to the European case and based their analyses on particularistic terminology (e.g., "Europeanization"). We discuss the problems that these confinements entail and argue for developing a generalized, comparative-universalist version of this approach. The fourth path comes *from political science*, where there is both an old tradition of comparative-universalist integration research and a new subdiscipline that revived this tradition. We argue that this strand may, even though it focuses predominantly on institutionalized political integration, serve as a beacon for a sociological equivalent, a Comparative Sociology of Regional Integration.

Readers who don't feel the need to take the longer route through these paths are invited to jump directly to Chapter 3, where we start putting such a comparative-universalist perspective on social integration beyond the nation-state into practice. We first show that transnational human mobility and communication do indeed cluster within world regions, in line with our consideration and in contrast with a fully globalized world or a Wallersteinian core-periphery system that would expect activity ties to go from the peripheral countries in the Global South to the rich core countries of the Global North and to occur within the core, but not within the periphery. We then argue that past networks-based research on regionalization and globalization (which so far mainly comprises studies on trade and institutional ties between countries) has basically ignored that the decision to define these two processes as *either* inter- *or* independent affects the conclusions that are drawn. We offer a novel network-analytical approach that allows us to model regionalization and globalization as *both* inter- *and* independent and thus to compare respective outcomes. Empirically, this new perspective reveals that the regionalism of human cross-border mobility has, in absolute terms, become stronger over

time, and that it has remained by and large stable relative to the strength of global integration. The transnational world thus consolidates as a regionalized world.

In Chapter 4, we dig deeper and ask *why* this regionalism occurs. Is it because countries within regions tend to be culturally similar, frequently sharing a common history (e.g., through colonial ties), language, or religion? Is it because they have stronger economic bonds than countries situated in disparate regions? Is it because they often form part of the same supranational political community whose policies sometimes explicitly aim at increasing internal mobility and communication while enforcing external border controls? Or is it simply due to smaller geographic distances within regions? Of course the answer may also be a combination of all these factors—but in that case we might still want to know which factors are most influential in creating the intraregional agglomeration of human cross-border activity. Using a network-analytical modeling technique called multiple regression quadratic assignment procedure (MRQAP), we establish that while most of these factors play *some* role, spatial proximity is clearly the *main* explanation for the clustering of transnational activity within world regions. Its effect is particularly strong in Europe with its comparatively small geographic territory.

Building on this finding, Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the relation between transnational human activity and geographic distance. We first introduce antithetic theories from (a) natural- and complexity-scientific research on animal motion and local-scale human mobility (the "Lévy-flight" debate), and (b) social-scientific reasoning about the diminishing role of space in structuring human activity in the age of globalization (the "geography is dead" hypothesis). Empirically, we then find that a simple mathematical function—the power-law—is excellent at predicting the spatial structure of almost all types of transnational human activity. This suggests that planet-scale human mobility and communication is not detached from spatial restraints, in contrast with the globalization debate's argument. Rather, it follows a heavily bent curve that has also been detected in the displacement patterns of a broad range of animals from sharks and sea turtles to spider monkeys and jackals, as well as in human mobility within cities. Moreover, this pattern remains remarkably stable over time, in spite of all technological and socioeconomic advances. Thus, these findings support the idea that, despite our intellect, we as humans (continue to) move and communicate in space similar to other species on this planet.

Following up on this discovery, we compare the precise shape of the spatial mobility gradients across species and scales to examine whether meaningful differences can be found in spite of the overall similarity—and if yes, whether there is any allegeable order in that variance. We find that the scaling coefficients of these power-law curves (which define their precise shape) plotted against the maximum distance that can be reached by a given species at a

certain scale again form a power-law. This pattern—which we dub the "meta-power-law of mobility"—contradicts the prevailing theory in the Lévy-flight literature (random search optimization) and rather suggests that species that are able to cross larger distances benefit from making use of this capacity, perhaps due to positive effects of drive for exploration and territorial expansion. In other words, neither in the transnational world nor at any other scale do humans move fundamentally differently from other species—the deviance is merely gradual and surprisingly predictable. This finding demonstrates that human cross-border activity is (still) heavily bound to gravitational laws that can be found in all parts of nature. As a consequence, it seems safe to say that its structure is also likely to remain regionalized in the decades to come.

With this last excursion—comparing human mobility to the mobility of various other animals—we connect to what has been described as the "animal turn" (Ritvo 2007) in the social sciences. In geography, for example, Hodgetts and Lorimer (2020: 17) have recently lamented the "inadvertent humanist bias in mobility studies" and argued for addressing it by "enlarging the taxonomic scope of studied lifeforms." Economists, too, have begun to compare humans to other lifeforms, finding striking similarities in the behavior of species that share the same environment (Barsbai et al. 2021). Here, we experiment with the question of whether a *non-speciesist sociology* is possible—a sociology that does not *per se* exclude certain subjects because they are non-human and that comparatively analyzes certain aspects of social life, in our case mobility patterns, across species. If sociology is the science of the social, shouldn't it be interested in *any* social behavior, not just in human social behavior? And isn't it even *necessary* to compare our social behaviour to that of other species to find out what is particular to ours and what, exactly, distinguishes us from other animals on this planet? Moreover, by arguing that geographic space and mere physical distance are pivotal structuring forces without which the transnational world cannot be understood, we are also close to a Latourian post-human perspective that considers non-living things to be in the realm of sociology: instead of thinking of the social world as separate from the physical world, as classic sociology has for a long time, we need to take the *associations* between the two into account (cf. Latour 1993). The structure of the social world cannot be explained without its spatial foundations.

We end with a final chapter that summarizes our findings, highlights the implications of this book, and closes with an outlook that puts the insights we gained in a broader perspective. The logical structure of the book is also illustrated in condensed form in Table 1.2. Two rows, titled "main question" and "short answer," evince that each chapter can be boiled down to a basic question and an equally straightforward answer, which in turn builds the basis for the main question of the subsequent chapter. At first sight, Chapter 5, with

its broad interdisciplinary (and even "interspecies") approach may appear to go beyond the scope of the Comparative Sociology of Regional Integration framework that is laid out in the preceding chapters. Yet, although it does not contain cross-regional comparisons, it provides the base for a *general* explanation of why transnational human mobility and communication tend to be regionalized. Moreover, it *is* keenly comparative in nature, contrasting activity types, points in time, species, and scales. Hence, this chapter is in fact strictly concerned with the issue of regional integration and fits well with the comparative-universalist part of our argumentation. Overall, then, it can be said that Chapters 3 and 4 explore and uncover *differences* between regions regarding their degree of regional integration and factors that may explain this regionalism, whereas Chapter 5 focuses on the *general picture*, explaining why, despite these differences, regionalism tends to occur in all parts of the globe and thus constitutes a quasi-universal phenomenon in the transnational world.

Before we embark on the detailed, actual analyses, let us briefly consider the question of what the added value of our enquiries may be, in practical, academic, or policy terms. In short: What may be gained?

What May Be Gained?

In his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*, Immanuel Kant famously argued that trade between countries would impede war, since war conflicts with capitalist self-interest. Yet, beyond this well-known argument, he also advocated a "right to visitation" for "men, as citizens of the world," which would lead to "intercourse with the original inhabitants" that in turn would ensure institutionalized peace: "In this way far distant territories may enter into peaceful relations with one another. These relations may at last come under the public control of law, and thus the human race may be brought nearer the realization of a cosmopolitan constitution" (Kant 1903[1795]: 139). Not unlike Kant, many post–World War II integration scholars (whose theories we will discuss in detail in Chapter 2) also hoped that increased transnational interaction and supranational integration would lead to a peaceful world. Shocked by the disastrous clash of nations that occurred twice in the first half of the 20th century and worried about the permanent threat of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War, they hoped that their analyses could help identify factors conducive to preventing conflict. Accordingly, Karl Deutsch and his colleagues (1957: 3) saw their inquiry "as a contribution to the study of possible ways in which men some day might abolish war"; Haas (1961: 366) trusted that increased integration "would contribute to world peace by creating ever-expanding islands of practical cooperation"; and for Etzioni (1965: xi), "the most compelling appeal of regionalism is that the rise of regional communities may provide a stepping-stone on the way from

a world of a hundred-odd states to a world of a stable and just peace." Today, this hope can sometimes still be found in the academic literature. Fawcett (2005: 21), for instance, sees "regionalism in broadly positive terms, as a 'good' that states and non-state actors desire and encourage, and one that merits promotion by regional and international communities." The same holds for the recent public debates on the influx of refugees in many countries worldwide. In Germany, for example, Reinhard Marx, Cardinal of the Catholic Church, has argued that "the more encounters there are between people, the less hate there is" (Deutschlandfunk 2015, my translation). This is, in plain words, also the position of (intergroup) contact theory (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Mau and Mewes 2007; Teney 2012). And yet, this position is not uncontested. Nye (1968: 856, 862–863), for instance, argued, on a more critical note, that regional integration

> tends to have a positive evaluative aura about it which sometimes carries over into its analytic usage and obstructs clear theory. Too often, there is an implicit assumption that integration is a "good thing" *per se* or that more integration is always good for peace, prosperity, or whatever. Yet this is not necessarily true. [. . .] A case can be made, following Rousseau, that isolation is the best guarantee of peaceful relations between states and that proximity and interaction enhance the probability of conflict.[13]

One may add that *regional* (i.e., non-global) integration is inevitably linked to social closure that can perpetuate global inequalities. This is evident, for instance, in the much-quoted term "fortress Europe" (e.g., Geddes 2008) and potential equivalents in other parts of the world, all with permeable internal membranes and closed, heavily guarded external borders. The most dystopian fictional version of this problem has been laid out in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1987 [1949]), in which three macro-regions (Oceania, Eurasia, Eastasia) are perpetually at war.

These concerns about negative consequences of transnational mobility and communication (and their limited reach) also appear worth considering in the light of the recent backlash against the influx of transnational refugees and migrants around the world. In France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Poland, Hungary, and many other countries, nationalist parties have been on the rise, more or less openly promoting xenophobic politics. In the United States, President Trump pressed ahead with his efforts to reduce immigration by drastic means such as travel bans for several majority Muslim countries and separating families at the border. In Germany, attacks against refugees have been on the rise (Pro Asyl 2016). It appears that a growing number of people feel that "[c]ollective self-determination, to the extent that it existed a generation ago, is increasingly threatened by transnational developments"

(Etzioni 2001: vii). Whether this is just a temporary hurdle, a—potentially unavoidable—transition time in which traditional loyalties to the nation have lost their cohesive power, while cosmopolitan (or "regiopolitan") replacements are still in creation, is hard to say. Maybe contact simply leads to new conflicts *and* new sense of community at the same time, as Chicago School sociologists Park and Burgess (1921: 508) already suggested many decades ago: "Social contact, which inevitably initiates conflict, accommodation, or assimilation, invariably creates also sympathies, prejudices, personal and moral relations." Thus, the seeming contradiction between the idealist expectation in international relations that increased interaction results in peaceful integration and the sobering recognition that, in reality, it also spawns new societal conflicts—as visible in the current state of the world—can, to some extent, be resolved by entering a *sociological* viewpoint. Classical and current sociologists have repeatedly pointed out that, from a sociological perspective, even conflictive social relations are an essential part of integration (Simmel 2009 [1908]; Roose 2012; El-Mafaalani 2018). Thus, sociologically, both the increased interaction across national borders *and the resulting societal debates and conflicts* are signs of increased social integration beyond the nation-state. In any case, simply equating a transnational with a more peaceful, "better" society may be naïve. After all, transnational terrorism, neo-colonial economic exploitation, and the spread of contagious diseases across national borders are transnational events, too. But what then, if not a manual for a more pacific world, can we expect from a study that intends to describe and explain the structure of the transnational world?

First, we have already seen above that several of the most serious challenges that humanity is facing in the 21st century are heavily entangled with human cross-border activity, including the spread of contagious diseases, terrorism, global wealth disparities, and climate change. The increasing interconnection of the world may thus lead to the emergence of global systemic risks (Centeno et al. 2015). Indirectly, it affects many more areas of life: identities, school curricula, job markets, welfare-state functionality, and so on. Better information, including a more adequate picture of the structure and determinants of THA may thus be of help in the search for strategies to tackle some of these issues. Accordingly, a group of researchers has challenged the scientific community to get active and "to collect large-scale human mobility traces" (Hui et al. 2010). Finding ways to describe how people *typically* move across the world using certain mathematical functions, we may become able to model their spread—for instance, in the wake of a natural disaster—more adequately, even if precise information about their actual location is missing.

Another area where our analysis might be of use is the evaluation of regional integration projects. Many institutionalized regional integration

projects aim at fostering intraregional exchange and interaction between citizens. In Europe, promoting the "free movement of persons" has long been a central rationale of the European Union (Touzenis 2012); in Southeast Asia, citizens of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states can now proceed more quickly during immigration at the region's airports via "ASEAN lanes" (Parameswaran 2014); the African Union recently introduced the Common African Passport, with "the specific aim of facilitating free movement of persons [. . .] around the continent—in order to foster intra-Africa trade, integration and socio-economic development" (African Union 2016); meanwhile, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is advancing plans for a Latin American equivalent, aiming at "the promotion of the free movement of all South American citizens throughout the continent" (Ishmael 2016). Our conceptualization (Chapter 3) allows us to measure the density of human cross-border mobility and communication comparatively and could thus serve as a tool to study where specific regions stand with regard to their goal of strengthening integration through mobility. It enables comparisons across different points in time, across different regions, and across different types of mobility. Moreover, it allows us to look at the density of intraregional mobility both in absolute terms and relative to interregional mobility, thus providing a whole range of potential benchmarks.

Second, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in countries around the world, the inflow of asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants has led to societal polarization and new politicized discourses about integration and societies' capacity to incorporate people from other cultures. In these heated debates, politicians have used exaggerations, factoids, and sometimes blatant deception to appeal to people's fears and to politically capitalize on the situation. Another goal of this book is thus to disprove some of these statements through rigorous empirical analyses. We will look at some example statements and refute them in Chapter 5. Our hope is thus to contribute to enabling a more rational handling of the situation by providing an informed empirics-based analysis of how transnational activity is *actually* structured. This belief that facts, not fears, are the best base for informed political decisions is in line with recent calls for evidence-based policymaking (Straus and Jones 2004; Stoker and Evans 2016).

Third, it is not only statements by politicians in pursuit of their own agenda that are often misguided. As we will see in the course of the book, scholarly positions on the subject are sometimes also misleading or inadequate. Another goal of this book is thus to contribute to the academic literature on the topic, to enhance understanding, and to provide correctives where necessary. This will involve arguments in several fields of research. For example, we will criticize the "death of distance" hypothesis in globalization research, random search

optimization theory in natural-scientific Lévy-flight research, and the Sociology of Europe's oft-quoted idea that EU policies are *the* primary driver of intra-European mobility and communication.

Fourth, as mentioned before, we are interested in connecting a variety of fields. Some may argue that sociology should restrict itself to its core tasks, and that animal motion, for instance, is of no concern to a discipline that has since its formation in the 19th century been dealing exclusively with human social life. We believe that such a "none of our business" approach would be counterproductive. Rather, by following an inter- and transdisciplinary approach, we can gain valuable new insights, and formerly disconnected strands of research can enrich each other. This is truer than ever in the age of big data. Large-scale social networks are now increasingly being studied by computer scientists, physicists, and mathematicians (Watts 2011). And just as they had the curiosity and courage to look beyond the traditional boundaries of their fields and subsequently became interested in issues of social life, sociologists need to start looking beyond the traditional boundaries of their discipline. Otherwise, sociology, which has already lost prestige and voice in the public discourse to political scientists and social psychologists (Lewis-Kraus 2016), will risk losing further ground to other disciplines and miss some of the most staggering insights and discoveries that interdisciplinarity has to offer. Yet we strongly believe that sociology does have a lot to say about the interconnected, transnational world we live in today. In this book, we will follow this "Latourian" philosophy by treating the behaviour of non-human species and spatial restraints as relevant, highlighting them as central frames of comparison and conditions for human activity and societal integration.

Shortly before the turn of the millennium, Inkeles (1998: 4) argued that the need to understand the patterns behind communication and interaction across borders is "of such fundamental significance that our future welfare, perhaps our survival, will depend on our ability initially to understand and subsequently to guide the processes of change in which we are caught up." Half a century earlier, Allport (1954: 42) had even referred to the potential clash between the two outer circles of his concentric loyalties model, which, writing in the 1950s, he termed "racial stock" and "mankind"—but which could today perhaps be termed more adequately "regional" and "global"—as "an issue that may well be the most decisive in human history." These words may appear hyperbolic, but whether it is a guarantee of peace and unity or the source of new social conflicts and fuel to the climate crisis, one thing is clear: human cross-border activity is not irrelevant. If we want to understand the world we live in today, we need to study its transnational dimension. We need to start mapping the transnational world.

TABLE 1.2. The structure of the main part of this book.

	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	
Abbreviated title	Four paths to regional integration	Regionalization and globalization in THA	Why does regionalism occur in THA?	The spatial structure of THA	
Main question	What is the main gap in current research on THA?	Do regionalism and regionalization exist in all parts of the world?	What explains regionalism in networks of THA?	How exactly does distance structure THA?	How does this power-law structure relate to that of other species?
Short answer	Regionalism and regionalization	Yes, they do	Mainly distance	According to a power-law structure	Combined, they form the *meta-power-law of mobility*
Unit of analysis	n/a	38,220 country dyads	38,220 country dyads	38,220 country dyads	8 power-law scaling coefficients
Years	n/a	1960–2010	2010 (or latest available year where unavailable)	1960–2010	n/a
Method	Literature review, mapping in Gephi	Network analyses in UCINET and Gephi	MRQAP models in UCINET	Power-law analyses using curvefit in STATA	Meta-analysis/Power-law analyses using curvefit in STATA

Note: THM = Transnational Human Mobility, THA = Transnational Human Activity.

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