New economics of transnational living

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This paper seeks to unpack what constitutes the economics of transnational living. Economics here involves people’s priorities, choices and decision-making about material living conditions and use of resources which they have access too. Transnational living describes a situation where individuals spend resources and time, in a sustained way, in two or more geographic contexts, across international borders. It therefore narrows down the focus from transnational practices broadly, such as remittances, to actual transnational living. But it broadens the scope from ‘migrants’ to those individuals who happen to lead transnational lives, regardless of other categorizations; therefore, a ‘new’ economics of transnational living. The paper builds on 101 interviews with individuals (85) and couples (16) who lead ‘transnational lives’. The paper draws on existing scholarship on economic transnationalism and remittances; transnational and mobile livelihoods and transnational social protection. Through analysis of these interviews I find that the economics of transnational living are constituted by six overlapping dimensions: livelihoods, housing, mobility, permits & institutional requirements, social protection, and brokerage. These are differently positioned in relation to motivations, reasons and desires for transnational living, which in turn are prone to change over time, at the individual, familial and household levels. Hence individuals’ evaluations of the (economic) returns of transnational living need not reflect initial motivations, reasons or desires.

Diversity of transnationality: Reflecting differences in cross-border orientations, relationships and practices among international migrants

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By focusing on “transmigrants” migration research perceives mainly a historically new type of migrant who is spatially highly-mobile between two or more countries and maintains regular and permanent ties across national borders. This contribution discusses the present notion of the “transmigrant” by arguing that not all contemporary migrants are to be understood as transmigrants. Rather, the diversity of transnational orientations, relationships and practices is highlighted. On the basis of empirical interviews with Turkish migrants in Germany, it will be shown that continuing physical movement is not a precondition for transnationality. Rather, Turkish migrants with different mobility patterns are involved in transnational practices. This includes, among others, completely immobile Turkish migrants who nevertheless have intensive transnational lives due to modern communication technologies. Moreover, transnationality reaches from occasional participation to a high degree of cross-border commitment. Thus, a high variation of transnational involvement can be observed among Turkish migrants. Altogether it is argued that transnationality is not a way of being of migrants but a recurring characteristic. Migrants are not to be seen at either transnational active or transnational inactive but transnationality can be best understood as a continuum from low to high. In cases of where transnationalisation processes are particularly intense, they can condense transnational social spaces.
The parameters of transnational living

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Transnationalism was originally conceived as ‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’. The concept of transnationalism has subsequently been refined and differentiated, but its conceived relationship with migration has largely remained constant: transnationalism has to do with the ties between people who have migrated and people who remain in the country of origin. Such ties are clearly important, and probably the core of transnationalism and a social phenomenon. But perhaps a radical extension of the term is also warranted: there are people who do not fit the categories of ‘migrant’ or ‘non-migrant’ precisely because of their transnational way of living. In such cases, transnationalism is not a consequence of migration, but rather a fundamental challenge to the idea of migration. This paper seeks to connect the established literature on transnationalism with this potentially significant radical form. I employ the concept of ‘living in two countries’, which was originally formulated as a way to describe the research topic to potential interviewees, but turned out to be conceptually productive. I examine the notions of ‘transnational living’, ‘transnational lives’, and ‘transnational life’ as potential entry points to the phenomenon of living in two countries and proceed to ask how we might identify lives that span two countries and how such lives are differentiated.

Fluid social protection assemblages throughout the life course: the case of Polish and British migrants in a changing European context

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There is a vast literature on transnational social protection and migration (i.e. Bilecen and Barglowski, 2015; Levitt et al. 2015; Mazzucato, 2011) which mainly focuses on South-North migration and explores migrant ways of responding to the vulnerability of their left-behind families and communities, and indirectly to their own vulnerability (Boccagni, 2015). Yet, this body of literature has overlooked the lived experiences of EU mobile citizens at times of ‘crisis’ in how they arrange their social protection across borders. This paper challenges some of the common assumptions in the field of migration and welfare scholarship in Western context, by looking at two groups of EU migrants that are rarely being compared taking the case of Polish and British nationals in Norway and the UK. In adopting a life-course approach, this article begins to tease out some of the diversities and commonalities within and between each group by examining how different profiles of migrants (youth, parents and retirees) build upon different ‘welfare repertoires’ across borders to tackle their own and their families’ social needs. We will demonstrate how different types of legal consciousness (Abrego, 2011; Kubal, 2015), access to social provisions and perceptions of welfare regimes in both destination and origin countries lead to ‘fluid’ (inspired by Bauman’s terminology) social protection arrangements characterised by specific mobility-mix patterns (Salamonska and Recchi, 2016). Accordingly, we will provide a nuanced understanding of complex transnational as well as immobile social protection assemblages throughout the life-course and how in fine it shapes migrants’ aspirations and decisions.
The in-betweens: Temporalities of separation in transnational families

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Does being transnational - in addition to being mobile between two or more countries – also include being mobile between multiple temporalities at the same time? Beyond its apparent cosmopolitan resonance, transnational family life incurs certain costs for the familial well being of migrant workers, especially for live-in domestic workers, whose rights to family life are structurally inhibited. This paper examines transnational family through the lenses of separation as a temporal concept. It asks what are the ways to compensate lack of shared physicality (in space) and to synchronize everyday family routine (in time)? Based on in-depth interviews with Moldovan female migrant domestic workers as well as content analysis of self-ethnographic material (diaries, blog entries, photos and letters), this paper provides insights into how mothers and wives compensate their physical absence at home with shared temporality even if at distance, even if with interruptions, even if mediated by communication technologies. Lastly, this paper inspects the ways transnational families renegotiate couple life and motherhood across borders, maintain togetherness or redefine it, keep in touch and re-synchronize daily routines.

Perceptions of welfare across life cycles: Privileged migrants in Turkey

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This paper aims to produce an analysis on welfare perceptions of EU-born migrants living Turkey. The literature shows that lifestyle migrants moving from a developed country into a less developed one would engage in transnational welfare practices in various ways. There is evidence that older age retired migrants elsewhere as well as in Turkey enjoy pensions who are paid in a more valuable currency. They make welfare arrangements in way to take advantage of their place of origin and place of residence. The case of privileged migrants from UK and Poland living in Turkey will help us to question when the need for transnational welfare practices arise for this rather advantaged group. We distinguish these groups of migrants and call them “privileged” rather than expats or lifestyle migrants and analyze their perceptions of welfare and the level of engagement in transnational practices from a life course perspective. The analysis will reveal their welfare arrangements, perceptions on the quality of life in different countries they lived, the level of engagement in transnational welfare practices over their life course. Due to the increasing instability in political context of Turkey, our analysis explores the impact of security perceptions on perceptions of overall welfare. The analysis is based on the empirical evidence derived from 18 semi-structured interviews with Polish and British migrants, living in the Turkey conducted within the context of research project Mobile Welfare.
Moving beyond the bi-national sedentarism of transnational literature? Illuminating instances of en route transnational phenomena in the lives of refugees on the move

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During the last decades, a number of new paradigms have emerged in social sciences and migration studies more particularly. Along with the rise of the transnational perspective in the analysis of migration and beyond, the mobility paradigm has also emerged in social sciences. However, these two different theoretical contributions have not been closely intertwined in the analysis of migration. By that I mean, that the analysis of transnational phenomena always involves the study of two (or even three) different places (country, society, city, locality etc.), the back and forth movement between them and the flows that emanate from them and allegedly connect them. In most cases, the study of transnationalism is characterized by a by-national (or even tri-national) form of sedentarism that only focuses on the geographical movement and flows between the two (or even three) significant poles of transnational theory: (spatialities of) the country of origin and destination. However, what is happening with movement at large and fragmented mobilities on the ground? Is there a way to make transnational theory more geographically dynamic able to take more seriously into account disjointed geographical movement and new forms of precarious mobility? This paper attempts to open a dialogue about a non-static conception of transnationalism by shedding light into the lives and experiences of refugees that became spatially entrapped in Greece, but continued to maintain dreams of reaching further into Europe; of people who led transnational lives on the move as part of a continuous yet fragmented mobility.

Transnational lives en route: African trajectories of displacement and emplacement across Latin America

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Recent discussions of migrant trajectories or journeys indicate that for understanding contemporary transnational lives, focusing on circumscribed origin and destination settings is not enough. The many migrants that are en route for extended periods of time, especially in the so-called Global South, and the recognition that their increasingly complex trajectories cannot be regarded as mere empty transit space, disconnected from life elsewhere, present us with the challenge to broaden the transnational scope. To do so, this paper draws inspiration from the recent increase in African displacements and emplacements across Latin America, which is the topic of new research that I am developing in collaboration with Heike Drotbohm. Whereas even the more sophisticated notions of displacement often evoke images of passivity and being ‘cut off’, recent articulations of emplacement emphasize how ‘the displaced’ also actively re-embed and re-shape their cross-border lives locally. Thus, in the (temporary) host localities of their trajectory, migrants engage in dynamics of smuggling, state surveillance, humanitarian assistance, daily consumption, employment, imagining and planning. To what extent are transnational lives made possible, lived, and contested in such contexts of forced semi-permanence or deliberate temporality? How does a transnational perspective help us understand the experiences of these migrants and the dynamics of these localities? And how does a focus on ever-evolving trajectories enrich our understanding of how transnational lives are shaped? The paper discusses how simultaneous articulation of displacement and emplacement through migrant trajectories allows us to acknowledge and unravel transnational lives as they ‘touch the ground’ en route.
Permanent migrants and temporary citizens: Multi-national Chinese mobilities in the Americas

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When does one start or stop being a “migrant”? How do we apprehend the transnational mobility of those who work and live in two or more countries, but rarely return to their country of origin? This paper examines the mobility and citizenship practices of ethnic Chinese who moved to Chile after having lived in one or more Latin American countries. Many have obtained permanent residency or citizenship in Chile. Yet, some are financing their children’s education and lives in the global North, while hoping to return to a previous country of residence in Latin America. These intra- and inter-continental mobilities and networks elude current transnational mobilities research. First, unlike pre-planned serial migrations of global elites or “step-wise” migrant workers, these multi-national mobilities are contingent on volatile Latin American political economies and migration bureaucracy in the North. While waiting to move to the North for education, retirement, or family reunions, they are also always prepared to stay, or move to a neighboring country in case of national/regional crises. I argue that erratic economies, discretionary bureaucracies, and ambivalent aspirations shape ethnic Chinese residents’ practices of temporary attachment and distance to Chile. Second, unlike transnational migrants who typically maintain links to “origin” countries, these ethnic Chinese seldom visit China/Taiwan. Instead, journeys to other countries in the Americas are more frequent, linked to business, familial, and other affective ties. These multi-national migrants highlight how economies, bureaucracies, and desires reconfigure migrant temporality, spatiality, and the geography of migrants’ attachments in the 21st century.

Meatpacking ministers and transnational class disorders: the empirical paradoxes and theoretical implications of simultaneous and contradictory socio-economic mobilities and of the production of class bi-polarity within the Liberian transnational field

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Drawing upon research within the Liberian diaspora I explore the implications—at the individual, social, and theoretical levels—of a highly significant, yet little-considered, effect of transnationalism: whereby particular social categories of individuals simultaneously experience upwards socio-economic mobility in one corner of a transnational field while experiencing downwards mobility in another, thus coming to occupy more than one socio-economic “class” at the very same time. Empirically and theoretically expanding upon earlier arguments for a more complex analysis of the interaction between socio-economic mobility, displacement, and trans-nationalism, this paper explores the paradoxes of “transnational class bipolarity”—focusing on the interdependencies between transnationally distributed forms of different class status—by which (for example) attaining ministerial level office in Liberia depends upon one’s earnings as a meatpacker in Minnesota, or an NGO directorship in Monrovia depends upon continued part-time employment as social worker in Amsterdam. This janus-faced experience of contradictory class status (whereby upward mobility in one’s “society of origin” depends upon subjection to social immobilization within the racialized political economies of “host” societies) generates forms of “structural violence” that powerfully shape transnational social practices, including return (and non-return), social and economic investment, and political engagement—albeit in socially differentiated ways, particularly with respect to gender. In conclusion, I draw comparatively on my own and others’ scholarship to a) suggest how “class” should be re-theorized in the analysis of transnational social fields, and b) challenge fundamental theoretical assumptions about the notion of “class” itself.
Gendering transnational migrations. Late-life Western migrants in Thailand

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This article aims to contribute to the scholarship on transnationalism by analysing how social locations of gender, class and race are embedded and re-enacted at different scales – the state, the family, and the individual – and across transnational spaces. To analyse how social locations organise and may be transformed in transnational migration, we draw upon Passer and Mahler’s ‘gendered geographies of power’ (2003). Empirically, we study the transnational mobility of late-life, retired migrants from Europe and North America and who spend at least six months of the year in Thailand. The main research question this article aims to address is: how do social locations of gender, race and class operate across geographic scales (state, family, and individual) in shaping Westerners’ opportunities and experiences of retirement migration to Thailand?

Choosing a ‘transnational life’ as a strategy for wellbeing and a better life?: Aspirations, experiences and life course transformations of Thai-Westerner partnerships

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This paper examines “transnational lives” of Thai-Western partnerships. Our interest is in enduring partnerships, whether formal ‘marriages’ or not, because these are relationships where the individuals face and negotiate important challenges presented by high social and administrative barriers (social stigma; language; transferability of skills; immigration, residence restrictions; property ownership and health care rights etc.) to establish a transnational life. A specific aim is to determine the degree and forms of transnational and intercultural exchanges carried by this type of social relationship. The primary research is 40 semi-structured biographical interviews with Thais in partnerships with Western men ‘Farang’ (typically 15-20 years older). A partnership can improve life chances by providing a route out of poverty, or access to healthcare, but holds risks of domestic violence and exploitation. It also produces new ‘family’ structures that cut across generations, cultures and religions and builds transnational links. From a Thai perspective, we examine: life course events leading to a relationship; how a relationship works as a partnership (e.g., ‘care’ relations, financial exchange); the role of mobility in sustaining a relationship; what sustains wellbeing (social capital, friendship ties); and how the relationship provides opportunities for individual social mobility and supporting extended Thai families. A special interest is how the emotional and power balance in a couple’s relationship transforms over time due to: the specific forms of intercultural and transnational living that it engenders; ageing (especially of Westerner); and the enduring restrictions to mobility, property, health care, etc., that accrue from living as a ‘foreigner’.
‘How could I have been so blind?’ Narratives of love and money in transnational relationships

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Welfare differences between the Global North and the Global South can lead to frictions in transnational relationships. Especially when intersecting with other inequalities such as age and social class, men from the Global South are often accused of being in these relationships solely for money or residence permits. In beach resorts, people retell many stories about western women having relationships with local men leading to financial exploitation and, occasionally, even violence. In this paper, I will analyse such narratives of so-called Bezness or ‘false’ love in transnational relationships between Dutch women and men from the Middle East, particularly Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. Women in these relationships are often portrayed as lonely and slightly stupid. Blinded by love, they become powerless victims of cunning men. This positioning as a victim disconnects the women from the power they could normally derive from being the wealthier, more mobile partner. In these narratives, true love and material gain are framed as mutually exclusive. In this paper, I will critically analyse Bezness-stories. Using a variety of sources including interviews with women and men divorced from transnational Dutch-Egyptian and Dutch-Moroccan marriages, NGOs, and embassy personnel; media reports; online discussion forums; and “true story books”, I will show how the Bezness-frame is used to give meaning to experiences of loss and disappointment, as well as to warn European women away from such relationships.

Categorizing transnationally mobile people: Institutional negotiations beyond ‘migranticization’

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This article explores institutional negotiations and understandings of the category of people that are transnationally mobile. The contextual standpoint is that of the individuals working on ‘international affairs’ in the Norwegian welfare system, bureaucrats who deal with people who are attached to the welfare system and mobile across borders. The analysis reveals an inclusive institutional approach to transnationally mobile people, where increased cross-border mobility is understood as the norm. Negotiations on the category of mobile people move beyond ‘migrant’ stereotypes, and include ‘courageous workers’, ‘backpacking disability pensioners’ and ‘naïve natives abroad’. These findings illustrate why the ‘migranticization’ of migration and transnationalism studies can be problematised. Moreover, it questions the assumption that categories of practice and state institutions always are more erroneous than theory-oriented and analytic categories in migration scholarship.
Medical travel/tourism and the city

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Due to their high densities of people, infrastructure and diverse economic functions, cities are widely recognised sites within which advanced medical care concentrates. As such, given their centrality within regional networks, cities have long served as regional medical hubs for populations in their national hinterlands. In this paper, we look at how a growing number of cities around the world interact with and are articulated through transnational medical travel and tourism. We discuss the ways in which transnational patients; information, standards and social norms; and the financial capital undergirding privatised healthcare consumption assemble with and articulate themselves in unique forms in and with these places.

Transnational lives within a changing socio-political-legislative environment on (im)migration: challenges, negotiations and opportunities

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The political and legislative environments around migration have the potential to have a profound impact upon the transnational lives of migrants and the nature of the relationship between migrant - country of origin - country of settlement. Increasingly-restrictive policies around immigration in general within a European context combined with the changing nature of state offers of resettlement for refugees can make for challenging ‘contexts of reception’ into which migrants are arriving, making lives for themselves and negotiating their relationships both with the original homeland and with the ‘new home’. How might such contexts of reception influence the development of transnational spaces in which migrants are living? To what extent do immigration policies shape the transnational dynamic? What kind of challenges are presented to those migrants living transnationally, which sort of negotiations are being made within the transnational space and what (if any) opportunities are presented? This paper explores how such political and legislative contexts around immigration in the UK has had and continues to have an influence over the transnational dynamic. The main context of the discussion is the findings of doctoral research (awarded March 2015) at University College London (Geography) into the transnational and diasporic experiences of migrants from the former Yugoslavia in Britain combined with more recent reflections on how policy positions around the issues of integration, assimilation and multiculturalism impact upon and interact with transnationalism discourses and in particular how the apparent ‘goal’ of integration is reflected within transnational lives.
National policies, transnational workers: bureaucratic encounters of Eastern Neighbourhood migrants in Bulgaria and Poland

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The paper aims to contribute to the understanding of how existing supranational and national structures, and the normative frameworks they create, influence migrants’ own desires and strategies to conduct their transnational lives. In order to do that it focuses on the implications for migrant workers of the legal and policy instruments aiming to foster circular migration developed at EU and national level. The paper takes a migrant perspective and analyses the desires and coping strategies of migrant workers from Russia and Ukraine as a response to the Bulgarian and Polish bureaucracies. The selected case studies illustrate two different approaches to circular migration: the Polish one allowing for migrant-led trajectories, in contrast to an involuntary circulation approach due to the restrictive migration legislation of Bulgaria. The research findings illustrate the great discrepancies between migrants’ realities and the pre-determined migration models envisaged by policy makers. The paper is based on legal empirical research gathered through more than 60 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders at EU and national level and nine focus groups with labour migrants from various skill level backgrounds.

Transnational bureaucratic encounters

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This paper describes the bureaucratic encounters of transnational living people. Existing research shows that immigrants often have limited knowledge of and find it hard to cope with the complex legislation and regulations of migrant receiving countries. This also goes for “transnationals”, individuals who live at least three months per year in another country or live in one country, but work and derive their income in another. They have to cope with the legislation and regulations of various countries. Our focus here is on agency, not on the legislation and regulations in different countries as such, but on how transnationals understand and cope with them. We distinguish two relevant dimensions: the level of knowledge and the level of compliance. The first is about to what extent and how transnationals understand the legislation and regulations concerning public provisions in different countries. The latter is about to what extent they comply with these regulations? We distinguish three different patterns: regular use, strategic use and improper use of social rights and provisions. Starting point of our study is the observation in previous research that immigrants (we assume this also goes for transnationals) often try to gain maximum benefit from existing social provisions in the origin and/or host country. Using qualitative interviews of transnationals, who partly live in the Netherlands, we describe their interactions is welfare state arrangements (or the lack of such arrangements) in various countries. We will focus on social security arrangements (including pensions and child benefits) and health care.
Transnational traders and bureaucracy in Burkina Faso: towards a new political management of extraversion

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Over the past twenty years, a multitude of new transnational traders have emerged in Burkina Faso. Their economic activities are characterized by frequent back and forth between the main international trading hubs and their country of origin. In many respects, this emergence illustrates a phenomenon of “globalization from below” (Portes, 1999; Tarrius, 2002) or “transnationalism from below” (Leclerc, 2013), in which international mobility no longer appears exclusively reserved for the elites. The reconfiguration of the social and economic hierarchies resulting from this increased access to mobility is particularly visible in the bikes sector, where these “small traders” have gradually compete with the big companies that dominated this sector since the 1960s. While the economic strategies developed by traders are crucial to explain their business success, the role played by bureaucracy is also a key element. Indeed, politico-economic alliances provide decisive advantages in competition. While such public-private relations already shaped the bikes sector well before the multiplication of transnational traders, the form of them and the level at which they now operate are radically different. Then, this communication supports the idea that the emergence of new transnational traders accompanies a multipolarization of the political management of the extraversion process (Bayart, 1999), marked by the growing role played by “social cadets”. In this respect, “transnationalism from below” appears as a growing force in the formation of African political economies in the globalization context. The data used here were collected during several field research carried out in Burkina Faso between 2010 and 2013.

Imagining Refugia: thinking outside the current international migration regime

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The international summits in September 2016 rounded off no less than seven major international meetings in 2016 that set out to address the ‘refugee and migrant crisis’ of recent years, resulting in the prospect of ‘Global Compacts’ for refugees and migrants by 2018. While the aims and sentiments articulated were worthy, many lack confidence that such summitry holds promise of real progress, or that the three traditional ‘durable solutions’ (local integration, resettlement and return) can address the challenge on the scale needed. This contribution takes as a starting point recent proposals that depart from the usual three ‘durable solutions’ and international migration architecture, and that think about alternatives. Strands to consider include charter cities, safe areas, and special zones for refugees and migrants. One attention-grabbing set of proposals explores the idea of new nations, cities or polities for refugees and migrants. These suggestions – particularly the idea of ‘refugee islands’ – have usually been dismissed as fantasies by the refugee commentariat. However, perhaps such seemingly outlandish proposals should not be dismissed out of hand. In this presentation, I explore the possibility not of a new ‘refugee nation’, but rather a new kind of transnational polity – Refugia – governed by refugees and migrants themselves, and which links refugee and migrant communities globally. I argue that such a transnational polity is imperfectly prefigured in many of the transnational practices that refugees and migrants deploy and the environments in which they (sometimes in alliance with sympathetic citizens) find themselves today.
Translocal belongings: the role of faith and religion negotiating refugee integration in South America

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In this paper I explore the role of religion and spiritual beliefs in the process of refugee ‘integration’ in Latin America. I do so by reviewing the experiences of Colombian and Palestinian refugees resettled in Chile and Brazil and how they negotiated their belonging between the places of origin, transit and host country. I argue that elements of spirituality illustrate that sense of belonging is multi-situated, collective and individual at the same time. Through the practice of their faith, refugees generated membership and self-identification not only with their religious communities but also with the rest of the host society. The discussion of trans-locality can be understood as a form of ‘grounded transnationalism’ that allows to explore local-local negotiations and relationships across different scales. In this context, the notion of translocal belongings not only enhances our understanding of transnational lives, it also allows a more nuanced perspective of how refugee integration is experienced.

Transnational habitus and sociability in the city: Zimbabwean migrants’ experiences in Johannesburg

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Drawing on field research and a survey of one hundred and fifty Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, this paper focuses on the role of digital technologies in aiding and thickening the transnational experiences of cross border migrants. I discuss the use of communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and WeChat in fostering transnational embedding of migrants within both the Johannesburg and the Zimbabwean socio-economic environments. I engage this migrant-embedding using Bourdieusian concepts of transnational habitus and transnational social field, which are migration specific variations of Bourdieu’s original concepts of habitus and social field. In deploying these Bourdieusian thinking tools, I observe that, for Johannesburg based migrants to operate within the socio-economic networks produced in South Africa and in Zimbabwe, they undergo certain processes that condition their lives in the city and create degrees of fit with the socio-economic environment. I argue that, migrants’ cultivation of networks in Johannesburg is instrumental, purposive, and geared towards achieving specific and immediate goals, and latently leads to the development and sustenance of flexible forms of permanency in the transnational urban. I further engage migrants’ transnational connections to Johannesburg, more specifically, the texture of their relationships and social interactions with the city in its physical and networked form as well as the diverse South African populations and migrant groups. I conclude that, the long tradition of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa entreats researchers to re-adjust the ways in which they conceptualise this movement and pay attention to their permanent presence as a nation-specific category in South Africa.