

# THE BOUNDARIES OF TRANSNATIONALISM

THE CASE OF ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN  
MIGRANTS

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# BACKGROUND

- Transnationalism – return nexus
  - strong link
  - migrants returning under more disadvantaged conditions?
  
- Migrants returning with AVR programmes
  - restricted mobility
  - few resource and little capital
  - motives for returning: combine elements of compulsion and choice

# RESEARCH DESIGN

## *Transnational dimension in every day post-return lives of AVR returnees*

- transnational ties with host country
- perceived importance from the subjects' perspectives
- analytical framework (Boccagni, 2012):
  - Interpersonal ties
  - Institutional ties
  - Symbolic ties

# FINDINGS

# 1/ INTERPERSONAL TIES

- present and highly valued
- though limited
- no circulation of remittances or engagement in transnational practices

→ gap between their desires and their ability to maintain interpersonal ties

# 1/ INTERPERSONAL TIES

→ gap between their desires and their ability to maintain interpersonal ties

- financial, practical and legal barriers (e.g. internet access)
- face-to-face contact only possible when friends visit country of origin

*Some friends I have, they are already citizens in Spain. So they come for several days or several weeks here, and then, there is contact. When we are together at the table, sometimes we speak in Spanish and no one understands!*

## 2/ INSTITUTIONAL TIES

- Although desired – no institutional ties with host country

## 3/ SYMBOLIC TIES

- reminiscences
- preservation of artefacts
- stay informed – stay in touch – sustain language
- identification with and orientation towards Belgian values, norms and society

→ symbolic ties mainly affect (only) the lives of the migrants

→ does not contradict feelings of belonging to country of origin

→ gap between their desires and their ability to maintain ties and importance of symbolic ties:

- ‘myth of re-migration’



# DISCUSSION

- valuable framework
- adaption of framework to context of return migration
  - the impact of transnational ties on distant and nearby environments
  - partial focus on impact of transnationalism on countries of origin ↔ reciprocity of ties

# DISCUSSION

- (1) weak and limited ties, though valued highly important  
= *mismatch between returnees' desires and their abilities to participate in the transnational field*
  - access mediated by migration experience (asylum system), quick departure, constrained financial resources, host and home states' migration policy
  - barriers, restrictions and inequalities in mobility → create boundaries to transnationalism
  - selective, situational and stratified access to transnational social field ~ migration trajectory
  - transnationalism ~ return

# DISCUSSION

- (2) weak and limited ties, though valued highly important

→ ties - important symbolic and emotional value

- meets the need to stay connected
- meaningful symbolic capital, proof of migration experience → transnational ties form of capital
- contributes to sense of happiness and belonging

Importance of subjective and symbolic dimensions of transnationalism

Provable/tangible influence on others no precondition for qualifying a tie as 'transnational'

**THANK YOU**

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