VIEWPOINT
Transnationalisation and Development(s): Towards a North-South Perspective

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Abstract

Public debates and research on the two-way relationship between migration and development has increased considerably over the past years. I argue that the current debates around the migration and development nexus should be approached from a transnational angle that is, looking at the emergence of a new transnational agent in development discourse – intermittently called "migrants", "diaspora", or "transnational community". National states, local governments, inter- and supranational organisations and development agencies seek to co-opt and establish ties to mobile agents who are engaged in sustained and continuous cross-border relationships on a personal, collective and organisational level. Also, and this is crucial for any kind of scientific endeavour, the emergence of this new type of development agent can be tackled by a decidedly transnational methodology.

Keywords: Transnationalisation; development; transnational methodology.

Introduction

Public debates and research on the two-way relationship between migration and development has increased considerably over the past years; it has experienced yet another climax after two previous ones, in the 1960s and 1980s. Yet there is very little systematic thought given to what is "new" around this time. I argue that the current debates around the migration and development nexus should be approached

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from a transnational angle that is, looking at the emergence of a new transnational agent in development discourse – intermittently called "migrants", "diaspora", or "transnational community". Increasingly, the cross-border ties of geographically mobile persons and collectives are taken to the centre of attention. And national states, local governments, inter- and supranational organisations and development agencies seek to co-opt and establish ties to such agents who are engaged in sustained and continuous cross-border relationships on a personal, collective and organisational level. Also, and this is crucial for any kind of scientific endeavour, the emergence of this new type of development agent can be tackled by a decidedly transnational methodology. Only then can we hope to look at what is usually called "development" in both North *and* South. What this could mean in terms of concepts and research strategies is open for debate.

What are the elements of the new enthusiasm?

The new enthusiasm around migration and development hinges on a number of strong claims which in turn raise serious questions. These claims can be summarized in the statement that the flows of money, knowledge and universal ideas – called remittances – can have a positive effect on what is called development. The first claim is that financial remittances carry a huge potential for poverty reduction and local investment, especially since remittances very often are resistant or even counter-cyclic to economic recession. The amount of remittances transferred to developing countries flowing through officially sanctioned channels such as banks or money transfer services are estimated to have increased sharply – at $167 billion for 2005, up from about $40 billion in 1990 (IOM 2005: 270). This is at least double the sum of the OECD's annual Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Second, despite the fact that financial remittances still stand at the core, in this new round of enthusiasm, indeed euphoria, more emphasis is placed on the transfer of human capital and social ideas and practices from North to South. Now the

perception of costs and benefits have changed with shifts in ideas, from "brain drain" in the 1970s to "brain gain" in the 1990s. Nowadays, we supposedly find more win-win situations for mobile persons, states and others. And even newer is the concept of "social remittances", the flow of ideas and practices which are "good" and to which nobody in his or her right moral mind would object: human rights, gender equity, and democracy – to name only the most obvious ones. Third, part of the "new mantra" – it has to be repeated a lot to be believed – is the desirability of temporary labour migration because of the hope that *temporary* migrants transmit a higher percentage of their income than permanent immigrants (GCIM 2005). Overall, these three broad optimistic claims are tied to migration control. It is the hope expressed by political institutions such as the EU Commission that, on the long run, economic growth supported by financial and partly knowledge and social remittances will reduce "migration pressure" in the sending countries (EU Commission 2005).

Even a cursory glance at this new enthusiasm raises a number of obvious questions which cast doubt on this optimistic agenda. First, the question is what is new and what is old about the new mantra on the migration-development nexus. Actually, after decades of research there is a consensus on the consequences of migration on development, at least among economists: whilst the economic impacts for receiving countries, mostly OECD states, are "clearly positive", for sending countries the benefits are less clear-cut and heavily contested. And most studies conclude that development in the countries of origin is not a result of migration and remittances and investments by migrants. Instead, development – or the right institutional conditions – is a prerequisite for migrants to invest and to meaningfully remit. Therefore, there is a dire need to historicize the discourses on the migration-development nexus.

Second, as to sustained cross-border transactions the question comes up whose transnational ties and what kind of transnational ties are good for development? Lately, terms

such as "diaspora" and "transnational communities" are not only used by scholars, politicians and bureaucrats in both emigration and immigration regions. But apparently, some transnational transactions are usually seen as negative in public discourse. Just think of fundamentalist Muslims who do not want to become "like us", or think of refugee or diaspora warriors who want to establish new states by force. This is also the case for return migrants in regions such as Latin America or South Asia. For example, women return migrants may be perceived as threats to established patriarchal orders when claiming to acquire property and earn their own income (Dannecker 2004). In short, the new enthusiasm overlooks the renegotiation of boundaries and political conflicts associated with transnational transactions, such as class, professional, ethnic and gendered hierarchies. In order to do so, we need to take a closer look at the prospects of taking a transnational angle and deliberate transnational methodology.

What is "old" and what is "new"? The history of thinking on the migration-development nexus

Taking a time frame of about 50 years, the fundamental claims associated with the new migration-development enthusiasm are not so new. From a simple cost-benefit point of view the basic idea says that the flow of emigrants and the loss of brains are partly or wholly compensated by a reverse flow of money, ideas and knowledge.

The following three phases of the nexus can be distinguished (cf. Thomas and Znaniecki 1927 for earlier conceptualizations). It is interesting, yet not surprising, that the conceptualization of the nexus between migration and development mirrors the dominant economic development paradigms.

Phase 1: Migration and Development – Remittances and Return

In phase 1 during the 1960s public policy emphasized the "labour gaps" in the North and "development" in the South.

The latter was supposed to result from financial remittances, return migration and the subsequent transfer of human capital (Kindleberger 1967). This view clearly corresponded to overall economic modernization concepts and to a belief that state capacity could shape economic growth. Moreover, it was congruent with the economic textbook mantra which suggests that emigration of surplus labour from underdeveloped areas leads to a new equilibrium between capital and labour (see Lewis 1954): If labour goes North, labour scarcities in the South then create inflow of capital – and eventually economic development in the South (cf. Hamilton and Whaley 1984).

Phase 2: Underdevelopment and Migration – Poverty and Brain Drain

In phase 2 during much of the 1970s and 1980s the term development came to be replaced by "dependency" as a structural condition of the periphery dominated by a centre, and "underdevelopment" as its inevitable result. This period, in which dependency theory and later on world systems theory criticized modernization theory (Wallerstein 1974), the nexus was partly seen the other way around in terms of assumed causality, not from migration to development but from *under*development to migration (for an example, see Portes and Walton 1981). In terms of public policy, one of the central issues was not financial remittances – remember that most European countries stopped recruitment, closed their main gates and kept only side doors open for selected categories in the 1970s and 1980s – but the issue of "brain drain". In a dependency perspective underdevelopment led to the loss of highly-skilled who migrated from the periphery to the centres in the dependent world and above all into industrialized countries. This out-migration, in turn, was thought to contribute to even more underdevelopment and increased migration flows through asymmetric distribution of benefits and resources (cf. Martin 1991).

Phase 3: Migration and Co-development – The Celebration of Circulation

In phase 3, since the 1990s, the idea of co-development best describes the public policy approaches of immigration countries to the migration-development nexus, at least those propagated by several states such as France, the Netherlands, the UK and international organisations such as the World Bank. Originally the term described local level development activities but soon came to encompass a broader migration-development strategy. The term co-development connotes a reversal of the nexus and has led us back to a more optimistic view, akin to the 1960s. International migration is supposed to fuel development in South and East – the "Global South" – this time not only via financial remittances and human capital, but knowledge flows more generally and social remittances (Maimbo and Ratha 2005): There seems to be a belief that more circulation of labour fosters more development by the way of remittances, hence the policy recommendation of the Global Commission to increase opportunities for short-term labour migration (GCIM 2005).

As this short sketch suggests, different directions of causality within the migration-development nexus were emphasized in the three periods mentioned. Interestingly, none of these discourses took note of the most obvious linkage, namely the well-established economic relationship between economic development and migration, that is, that processes of Western-style industrial-economic development are usually being accompanied by emigration as a sort of inevitable by-product (Faist 2000: 160-162). Quite to the contrary, economic development, as measured in conventional terms such as growth in GDP, is likely to produce even more migrants on the short- and mid-term.

What is new? Migrants as transnational agents – transnational methodology

While in phase one just mentioned policymakers and analysts only could think of remittances and return migration as a way of transferring resources across borders, in the third

period the landscape of alternatives has widened in an era called globalization, network society, or world society – an era of ever-increasing circulation. All of the new terms such as co-development point to the emergence of new transnational agents, that is, "diasporic" actors. Underlying this semantic change is the hunch that migrants and geographically mobile persons and those with whom they associate may be engaged in sustained and continuous cross-border practices. So the story is not simply about migration and development – but about *transnationalisation*.

Various agents have repositioned themselves locally in the global changes since the late 1980s. Both public policies and rhetoric changed. A prominent example for the transformed political semantics is the discursive and institutional changes the People's Republic of China has implemented. Discursively, the slogan to "serve the country" (*wei guo fuwu*) replaced the previous motto of "return to serve" (*huiguo fuwu*) (Cheng Xi in Nyíri 2001: 637). Such rhetoric has been complemented by public policy changes. Again, examples are easy to spot, including adaptations through mechanisms such as dual citizenship for emigrants and immigrants (Faist 2007), voting rights for absentees, tax incentives for citizens abroad, and cooptation of migrant organisations by local, regional and state governments for development cooperation. Instead of permanent return migration, temporary returns, visits and other forms of transactions have moved to the centre of attention. Thus, in recent years the notion of migrants' return as an asset of development has been complemented by the idea that even if there is no eventual return, the commitment of migrants living abroad could be tapped, not only, for example, through hometown associations but also through informal "diaspora knowledge networks" (Barré et al. 2003), that is, networks of scientists and R&D personnel, business networks of innovative start-ups (cf. Rauch 2001) and networks of professionals working for multinational companies (Kuznetsov 2006). States, development agencies and international organizations try to support the circulatory mobility of persons engaged. The keyword is

"temporary return": Examples are UNESCO's TOKTEN or IOM's Migration and Development in Africa (MIDA) programs, which send migrants as experts back to countries of origin for short periods of time. The examples suggest that states and organizations have started to build programs on obligations and commitments felt by migrants towards home institutions. To use Albert Hirschman's terms, socio-political loyalty is used after geographical exit to exert not economic and sometimes political voice (Hirschman 1970).

Much of the semantics focuses on community. The two most fashionable terms are "diaspora" and "transnational communities". There is an interesting difference: "diaspora" is used frequently in the development discourse, "transnational communities" in transnationalist literature. Both terminologies refer to "communities without propinquity" (Faist 2000). Such communities are not primarily built upon geographical closeness but on a series of social and symbolic ties which connect ethnic, religious and professional diasporas. Yet the notions of diaspora and transnational community need to be unbundled and even rejected in order to get closer to a systematic analysis. Rogers Brubaker cogently observed that the "universalization of the diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of the diaspora" (Brubaker 2005: 3). In recent decades there has been a telling change of meaning. First, in the "classical" meaning diaspora referred to forced migration and violent dispersal, nowadays it denotes any kind of migration, hence the talk of labour diaspora, trade diaspora, business diaspora, and refugee diasporas (Cohen 1997). Second, in the classical way diaspora implied a return to an imagined or real homeland, nowadays simply some sort of sustained ties back to the home country, and in post-modern usage even lateral ties – that is, ties not only from emigration to one immigration country but connectivity all over the globe. Third, in the old meaning diaspora referred to various forms of diaspora segregation in the immigration country, in the new meaning a sort of culturally pluralist boundary maintenance in the host country (e.g. Gilroy 1993). While these are interesting shifts

in meaning, the term diaspora – as well as transnational community – is too restrictive a term, which imagines a rather homogeneous cross-border social formation. It repeats the same mistake as much migration scholarship which assumes a rather homogenous national, ethnic or religious groupings.

Transnational social formations and a systematic transnational approach is an alternative. Transnational formations – also: fields, spaces – consist of combinations of ties and their contents, positions in networks and organisations, and networks of organisations that cut across the borders of at least two national states. In other words, the term refers to sustained and continuous pluri-local transactions crossing state borders. There are various ways to conceptualize transnational social formations, which can be thought to be part of more general societal configurations. Two prominent ones are fields and spaces – the first one refers to the inner logic of social action and can be extended to systemic approaches, the second one to the spatial dimension of social life. A commonality is that they aim to overcome "methodological territorialism" (Scholte 2000: 56), that is, conflating society, state and *territory*. And they are meant to overcome also the conflation of society, state and *nation*, "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003).

The newest wave of the migration-development nexus raises a few of challenges to transnational approaches. Here, I want to sketch three challenges. First, we definitely need to include migrant organisations and associations (cf. Moja 2005), such as hometown associations. But we also need to look at the spaces in between associations, organisations and communities. Second, we can see a disjuncture between development studies on the one hand and migrant incorporation studies on the other hand, with the former emphasizing the South, and the latter being almost exclusively concerned with integration issues in the North. Third, while there has been some discussion on remittances alleviating poverty but strengthening overall inequality in emigration region, little

attention has been devoted to the public policy mechanisms which could contribute to equality and social citizenship.

(1) Methodological Rigour

Most empirical studies on transnationalisation and development from a sociological or anthropological viewpoint focus on association and organizations, a line of research which needs to be continued (e.g. Smith 2006). Such studies need to be complemented by those looking at the "spaces in between associations", that is transactions criss-crossing multiple associations, networks forming within associations, and non-organized engagement. Methodologically, the exhortation of transnational approaches "follow the flow of persons, money, ideas and so forth" has not really been taken very seriously, contrary to most announcements. A more systematic network approach, not only in the metaphorical sense is necessary. Taking multi-sited fieldwork seriously – that is, simultaneous research in locations – would mean to follow financial or other transactions in tracing lateral connectivities to other immigration and emigration regions (e.g. Mazzucato et al. 2007). In sum, exploring transnational connectivities through multi-sited fieldwork enables us to look at the great variety of societal forms. In particular, it allows us to trace the combination of a high degree of local clustering with a relatively low average path distance between nodes and hubs located in different states.

Networks can be built around various categorical distinctions, such as ethnicity, race, gender, schooling, professional training, political affiliation, and sexual preference. Ethnicity constitutes a particularly vexing issue in transnational studies. On the one hand a transnational approach should be able to overcome the "ethnic" bias inherent in much migration scholarship. The fallacy is to label migrants immediately by "ethnic" or "national" categories. Often scholars presuppose prematurely that categories such as Turks, Brazilians and so forth matter a lot, since they do in public discourse. On the other hand, methods should be able to trace actually existing ethnic social formations, such as networks of reciprocity,

which are of great importance, for example, in informal transfer systems of financial remittances. This means to turn the issue of the importance of ethnicity into an empirical question.

Under-researched are also linkages between informal networks and formal organisations. Sometimes, for example, village associations celebrating cultural practices from the "homeland" change function: In the case of Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia there are "old linkages, new networks". Village associations (*shetuan*) also function as an arena for businesspersons planning to invest in certain parts of China (Liu 1998). While Overseas Chinese entrepreneurs' foremost considerations in deciding on investment in China are profitability and economic opportunities available, it is in village associations that ties based on place of origin, kinship and dialect become useful as a foundation of establishing personal relationships (*guanxi*). Cultural affinities can facilitate effective personal and business relationships, and so do play an important part in directing a substantial amount of investment and charitable money to the People's Republic of China (*qiaoxiang*).

(2) Incorporation and Development

So far, incorporation and development studies are disjointed, even in transnational studies. Studies either take the perspective of the country or region, in which immigrants live, and deal from a transnational angle with issues of incorporation into labour markets, housing, education and cultural pluralism, but also social security, state security, wage differentials, and so forth. Or studies deal with the effects of transnational ties on home countries, villages, formations from which migrants originate, such as demographic dynamics, remittance flows, and cultural impacts and often involving an analysis of transnational flows. The former studies, preoccupied with effects on immigration regions, have entered into a dialogue with assimilation and multiculturalism perspectives, and the latter, focusing on emigration regions, with development studies. Yet the two

areas are awkward dance partners. For example, studies have found in the case of immigrants from Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Colombia in the USA that transnational immigrant organizations' members are older, better-established, and possess above-average levels of education (Portes et al. 2007). This could be interpreted, depending on one's conceptual predisposition, as transnationalism and assimilation not being opposites, or as a strong transnational orientation indicating a specific path of incorporation.

However, if not carried onwards, such discussions miss the essence of a transnational approach, which is not only relevant for viewing incorporation in national terms. This is clearly visible in two-way flows. From an integrated North-South perspective one has to look not only at remittances but also at potential "reverse remittances." There are indeed empirical findings of "reverse remittances" or two way flows: They can be important especially at the beginning stages of migration of persons or groups, for example to help (undocumented) migrants to get papers and thus to legalize their stay.

It is questionable whether terms such as immigrant integration or incorporation are able to capture how two-way flows shape associational life in between emigration and immigration regions. They are valid perspectives, of course, centring on regions of destination and origin. Nonetheless, the in-between transactions constitute social facts *sui generis*. We have not yet found an appropriate terminology to deal with these social facts. Simply rejecting methodological nationalism is not enough.

(3) Public Policy, Networks and Inequality

Many studies look positively at remittances – financial, knowledge and social – because they may reduce poverty or even eradicate it and contribute to economic growth. However, there is almost no discussion of the mechanisms of how this may work – it is almost as if an "invisible hand" would transform remittances into poverty reduction and economic growth. Needless to say, this is a very myopic view of the

public policy relevance of remittances. If tying transnational migration to global social inequality, then remittances must be examined in their relevance for social policy. Seen in this way, they do not constitute explicit social policies, of course, but they form a basis for fostering social solidarity among citizens. This thought is not as farfetched as it may seem at first sight. Comparative historians of welfare states tell us that "late industrializers" in the sense of Alexander Gershenkron, such as the Nordic countries and East Asia (Wong 2006), developed more universal social policies than "early industrializers" such as the United Kingdom. Yet, in the recent past targeted in contrast to universal social policies were the foundation of policies which international organisations favoured in the case of developing countries. Such policies failed miserably, in particular structural adjustment policies and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). Therefore, the crucial policy question is how to fit remittances into universal social policies. How can remittances be factored into "developmental welfare" (UNRISD 2007)? Social policy and social rights are not something that might merely evolve after a certain level of development has been reached. Rather "social policy is a key instrument for economic and social development" (UNRISD 2007: 2). Since there is no simple remittance-development-nexus, we need to look at policies which can forge social solidarity and are thus based on social citizenship. All great theorists of societal membership – from Aristotle, Cicero, J.S. Mill, Hannah Arendt, T.H. Marshall – have agreed that in order to participate fully in public life, persons need to be in a certain socio-economic and political position – in Marshall's tradition we may call it social citizenship; more recently the term "capabilities" has been introduced by Amartya Sen to capture the same thought (Marshall 1973, Sen 1999).

Conclusion

To sum up, these introductory reflections represent a very preliminary overview of the issues involved. Occlusions and silences abound. For example, this overview has not dis-

cussed why the migration-development nexus and migrants as new transnational agents of development have been introduced now and how it fits into the changing paradigms and concepts of thinking on development. At least three topics are involved: first, the discursive constitution of the relationships between state vs. civil society and community and market vs. civil society; second, geopolitical changes since the end of the Cold War; and third, migration control as an implicit factor driving circulatory migration. Also, this sketch has barely mentioned the role of armed conflicts, civil wars and peace-building on political change. Also, we would need to discuss the different notions of development to be found among different categories of agents. Not only development experts are mobile and researchers who study migration and development – and looking around in this arena, obviously quite a few distinguished scholars belong to this circle – but also migrants themselves. And, perhaps most important of all, we need to analyze what one could call the symbolically highly charged numbers' game, which characterizes development cooperation. For example, we may ask: What is the significance of repeating the statement that financial remittances are x-times higher than the sums allotted to official development aid (ODA) – considering the fact that ODA is not really regarded as really successful in overcoming social problems such as poverty? Does the repetition signal the continuation of a logic which cannot be repeated in the case of ODA, for all the obvious and known problems discussed for decades? Why would the mechanisms underlying "development" change all of a sudden if we substituted bearers of hope such as political elites or women with migrants?

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