

Migration, transnationalism and development on the Southeastern flank of Europe

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(final version received 08 April 2013)

The Southeast Europe and Black Sea region presents a fertile terrain for examining recent international migration trends. A wide range of types of migration can be observed in this region: large-scale emigration in many countries, recent mass immigration in the case of Greece, return migration, internal migration, internal and external forced migration, irregular migration, brain drain etc. These migratory phenomena occur within the context of EU migration policies and EU accession for some countries. Yet within this shifting migration landscape of migrant stocks and flows, the fundamental economic geography of different wealth levels and work opportunities is what drives most migration, now as in the past. This paper sets the scene for the special issue in three ways: first by defining the three key concepts of migration, transnationalism and development; second by setting the geographical scene, with the aid of relevant statistics on the migration, development and remittance trends in the various countries of the region; and third, by summarizing the highlights of the papers in this issue of the journal, which range in their coverage from Ukraine and Moldova in the north, to Greece and Albania in the south.

Keywords: migration; development; transnationalism; Southeast Europe; Black Sea region

[The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*; 18 June 2013; DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2013.802175].

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Introduction

The geographical area covered by this journal – especially the line of countries running from Ukraine and Moldova down to Albania and Greece – corresponds to the Southeastern flank of Europe and to a corridor of countries which have been witness to a variety of intense migration processes in recent decades. Some of these migrations – for instance those from Former Yugoslavia – have their origins in the European ‘guestworker’ recruitment of the 1960s; others, including population movements in ‘post-Yugoslavia’, are more recent flows of the 1990s and 2000s. The purpose of this special issue is to present a coherent but diverse set of papers which explore several aspects of the migration dynamics of this border zone.

The papers derive from a workshop entitled ‘Migration, transnationalism and development in the Balkans and South-East Europe’ held in Amsterdam on 29 August 2012 within the framework of the Ninth Annual IMISCOE conference (IMISCOE is a European research network on ‘International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe’).¹ Much of IMISCOE’s work to date has concentrated on the situation of migrants in the main European destination countries and has focused on such issues as the labour-market, citizenship, social integration, identity and migration policy. Our workshop was part of a recent initiative within IMISCOE to shift attention to some of the secondary countries, especially those positioned close to Europe, and to the interplay of emigration, return migration, transnationalism and development within these ‘borderland’ countries.

The call for papers yielded 33 abstracts – far more than we anticipated and far more than could be accommodated within our allotted conference time for one day. In the end we squeezed 13 papers into the programme: all had pre-circulated drafts to facilitate discussion at the workshop and rapid publication thereafter. The refereeing process honed the papers down to the nine included in this special issue.

The purpose of this introductory paper is threefold: to define the key terms of migration, transnationalism and development; to set the scene in terms of the wider phenomena of migration, geopolitics and development in the European arena; and to overview the papers that follow, highlighting their most significant contributions.

Migration, transnationalism, development

These three concepts and their interactions constitute the *raison d'être* of the collection. Although we never ‘imposed’ these definitions and understandings on the contributors, all of them subscribed to a more-or-less common interpretation, with only minor deviations, which are usually context-dependent. And all of the papers, each in their own way, address the triple nexus of migration–transnationalism–development.

For the purpose of the papers in this special issue, *migration* means *international migration*. In affirming this we follow the general tendency to equate migration with international migration evidenced in many recent textbooks – for example *The Age of Migration* (Castles and Miller 2009). But we are also conscious that this is an unfortunate elision which ignores the fact that, on a global scale, as well as in most of the countries within ‘our’ region, internal migration is on a larger numerical scale than international migration (King and Skeldon 2010).² All the papers which follow concern themselves with international migration and leave aside internal movements, except for the briefest mentions. Yet we also acknowledge that blurring the distinction between the two can occur. Movements within the European Schengen area are seen as ‘internal’ and are unfettered by border controls or even visible borders, yet such movements *do* cross international borders. In the case of the Former Yugoslavia, what was once internal migration has become international through the creation of new states and national borders, some of them, like Croatia and Slovenia, not so easy to cross.

It is self-evident that (international) migration involves crossing an international border; less straightforward is deciding on the amount of time that has to pass before a ‘visitor’ or ‘tourist’ becomes a ‘migrant’. Many authors defer to the United Nations’ threshold of 12 months, but this overlooks short-term migrations which are seasonal or temporary. Particularly around the eastern fringes of Europe, there are forms of cross-border movement, variously called shuttle migration, pendular migration, to-and-fro migration etc., which are constrained by the short time limits set on visitor or tourist visas, the only means of legal entry. Are these to be considered ‘true’ migration, or do they exemplify some other regime of hybrid

mobility? There are few widely accepted definitions or criteria in this area, and our reaction therefore is to promote a flexible conceptualization of migration (sometimes substituting the more apt terms ‘movement’ or ‘mobility’), and not to get too hung up on precise statistical criteria.³ Having said that, we can clearly distinguish between temporary and permanent migration, with or without return, even if what is intended as temporary migration often subsequently becomes permanent settlement. We also recognize the widespread diffusion, especially in many of the countries considered in this collection of articles, of back-and-forth migration and mobility – which leads us to the next term.

Transnationalism has come to be the defining optic in anthropological and sociological studies of international migration over the past 20 years. Although the term had early incarnations in international relations and in studies of multinational firms or ‘transnational corporations’, its main thrust came from grounded studies of migrants’ everyday lives that revealed, to quote a well-worn definition, ‘multi-stranded relationships – familial, economic, social, religious and political – that span borders and link societies of origin and settlement’ (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994, 7). The transnational paradigm was effective in countering a simplistic linear vision of international migration whereby migrants moved to another country where, over time, they integrated or assimilated, with some, those either who ‘failed’ to integrate or who achieved their ‘target’, returning to their home country at some point in their migration trajectory (cf. Cerase 1974).

Most literature on transnationalism has been crafted in the US context, via studies of Latin American or Caribbean migrants such as Peggy Levitt’s *The Transnational Villagers* (2001), about Dominican migrants, and Robert C. Smith’s *Mexican New York* (2006). These are studies of long-distance transnationalism where physical distance is a barrier to be overcome for migrants and their non-migrant kin – although recent advances in communication technologies help to overcome the frictions of distance and cost, for those who have access to them. Studies of migrant transnationalism have also been conducted in Europe (see e.g. Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Faist 2000); this special issue helps to enrich this field. Particularly relevant in the latter context is the aspect of physical distance between

the region under focus here and areas of destination in Europe, enabling travel over relatively short distances, reachable via cheap flights within an hour or two, or by low-cost coach trips of a day or so. Moreover, the possibility of cheap and frequent travel (except where irregular status or homeland conflict prevents this) gives rise to a greater range of intensity of transnational links, including those who do not move but are deeply imbricated in transnational relations. Brunnbauer (2012) endorses the utility of the transnational approach to the study of migration from and within the Balkans and Southeast European region, with the proviso that the term be used carefully since ‘nation’ and ‘state’, let alone ethnicity, are not synonymous or coterminous in this part of Europe (see also Povrzanović Frykman 2008).

Boccagni (2012, 297) has set out a useful typology of transnational links and activities. Economic transnationalism embraces the sending and receiving of remittances, both financial and in-kind (gifts etc.); investments in land, housing and businesses in the country of origin; and the trading and consumption of goods from the home country (whilst abroad) and from abroad (for those in the homeland). Political transnationalism includes patriotism, long-distance nationalism, homeland-related political activism, distant voting, and the exercise of dual citizenship. Social and cultural transnationalism comprises the largest list: nostalgia and identification with the culture and folklore of the homeland; the ‘myth of return’ (always waiting or intending to return but never doing so); visits to kin and friends left behind; various forms of non-corporeal communication (phone, email, Skype, Facebook etc.); participation in or support for a variety of civic, recreational, religious or cultural initiatives and events. It is worth noting that the transnational linkages can also flow in the ‘other’ direction, i.e. from homeland to migrants abroad. Examples are ‘reverse remittances’, the sending of ‘ethnic’ goods such as foodstuffs, visits by non-migrants to migrants abroad, and the ‘reversal’ of transnational links when migrants return-migrate and want or feel the need to keep in close touch with relatives and friends who are still abroad.

It needs to be acknowledged that the transnational paradigm has not been without its critics. This is not the place to enter into this wide-ranging debate with its merry-go-round of exhaustive citations. Key elements of the critique include a

tendency to over-extend the term to all international migrants (Portes 2003, 876 affirmed that ‘regular involvement in transnational activities characterizes only a minority of immigrants’); an over-exaggeration of the newness of the phenomenon (migrants were also transnational in the past, we just did not use the term); and a tendency to deterritorialize transnationalism and therefore the need to bring back space, place and territory (Mitchell 1997).

This last point is certainly taken on board in several of the articles that follow; moreover the papers also develop new elaborations on the transnational concept. Anna Amelina, in the next paper, extends the notions of transnational social space (Faist 2000; Pries 2001) and transnational social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) to arrive at her key concept of ‘transnational scientific field’ which she then applies to the mobile behaviour of Ukrainian scientists. In the paper that succeeds Amelina’s, Gabriela Tejada, Vitalie Varzari and Sergiu Porcescu talk about ‘scientific diasporas’ and ‘transnational communities of knowledge’ when referring to the Moldovan scientific and professional migrants studying and working abroad. In another article in the set, Eralba Cela, Tineke Fokkema and Elena Ambrosetti quantify transnational behaviour by a series of survey variables converted into a single index of transnationalism which is then correlated with different types and measures of migrant integration. And finally Ivaylo Markov points out the inappropriateness of the concept of transnationalism when applied to ethnic-Albanian migrants from the Republic of Macedonia, preferring instead notions of ‘translocality’ and ‘transterritoriality’.

Boccagni’s (2012) categorization of transnational linkages into economic, political and socio-cultural provides us with a bridge to our third key term: *development*. It is through transnational practices such as sending remittances to support family members, making business investments in the homeland, returning and developing an enterprise, or contributing new ideas and behavioural norms (‘social remittances’, Levitt 1998), that migrants have the potential to stimulate the development of their home communities and countries. But what, exactly, do we mean by ‘development’?

Traditionally, development was considered a purely economic concept and was therefore measured in strictly economic terms, using indicators such as per capita income and the growth rate in gross domestic product (GDP). The economic approach, however, paid no explicit attention to the distribution of income and resources within a country, nor to the broader social components of development such as health, education and other aspects of ‘well-being’. Increasingly, however, development *has* come to be conceptualized as a process which is much broader than economics alone – although economic aspects do remain crucial. Some 20 years ago the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), inspired by the work of ‘social economists’ Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, introduced the Human Development Index (HDI). The standard HDI⁴ is an amalgam of three elements: *a long and healthy life* (measured by life expectancy at birth), *access to knowledge* (school enrolment and literacy rate), and a decent standard of living (GDP per capita at ‘purchasing power parities’, i.e. adjusted for different countries’ costs of living). The HDI ranges from 0 to 1. A value of 0.9+ indicates very high development, above 0.8 is high, above 0.5 medium, and below 0.5 is low development (UNDP 2009, 15).

The reconceptualization of development away from a concern only with economic growth and towards recognizing the social, cultural and human rights dimensions of life corresponds to a shift in focus from measuring the wealth and commodities owed by people in a country to evaluating the broader well-being and freedoms of people – ‘how human lives are going’. In the view of Dannecker (2009, 121), development is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic, multidimensional and multiscalar process whose progression is not ‘neutral’, nor indeed irreversible, but mediated and transformed by the several actors involved. What this view of development means in practice is expanding individuals’ opportunities to live long and healthy lives, to be well-housed, well-clothed and well-fed, to have access to adequate healthcare and education, to choose their own lifestyle (within socially responsible limits), to enjoy personal safety and to have the freedom to participate in public debate without fear of recrimination.

Where does migration fit in to the evolving discourse on development? First, we distinguish between three levels of interaction and impact: the *micro level* (between

migrants and their family members back home); the *meso level* (between the villages or hometowns of origin and the groups or associations of migrants abroad); and the *macro level* (country-wide effects activated by mass migration). These different contexts in turn shape ongoing migration processes, thus forming a dynamic, multi-level interactive system. For labour migrants coming from poor home-country backgrounds, migration can lead to two contrasting transnational family/household models, each with different effects on development. One is where the migrant leaves on his or her own in order to support remaining family members left behind. Remittances are the main transnational economic transaction, and through these, the migrants' spouse, parents, children and siblings in the place of origin can benefit not only from higher purchasing power, but can also afford better healthcare and education. The second model is where the nuclear family migrates as a unit (or achieves family reunification as a follow-on stage of the first model). When this happens the 'migration project' is geared towards making progress in the host society through integration and improved prospects for all concerned, especially the second generation. Remittances fall away, with transnational obligations limited to supporting elderly parents.

Whatever the scale of remittances, villages and towns of migrants' origin can benefit from the multiplier effects of such transfers; even more so if these are meso-scale 'collective remittances', sent as part of migrant hometown associations to improve community facilities such as schools, roads, clinics etc. Social remittances – skills, ideas, attitudes, behaviours etc. – are also potentially part of this 'development through migration' process.

The above picture of how migration can 'work for development' constitutes the positive scenario now in vogue in international policy circles such as the United Nations and World Bank (UNDP 2009; World Bank 2011). This is only one interpretation of what has come to be known as the 'migration–development nexus' (Van Hear and Sørensen 2003). Another one, diametrically opposite, and taking its inspiration from Marxist political economy and Latin American dependency theory, sees migration as *underdevelopment* locked together in a vicious circle: underdevelopment 'produces' migration, but this takes away the cleverest ('brain

drain') and the physically strongest ('brawn drain'), leading to the reproduction of underdevelopment in the emigration countries (Delgado Wise and Marquez Covarrubias 2009). De Haas (2010) has reviewed these competing optimistic and pessimistic scenarios and concludes that the jury is still out as to which bears the closest resemblance to reality. Both models – neoliberal optimist and neo-Marxism pessimist – involve some rather sweeping generalizations and assumptions as well as certain logical inconsistencies; moreover, empirical evidence is extremely mixed too. To the extent that access to migration and mobility has proved to be a route out of poverty for millions in different parts of the world, we endorse the more optimistic scenario and UNDP's arguments for 'overcoming the barriers to mobility' (UNDP 2009). But we should not overlook the harsh fact that we live in a very unequal world where inequalities, both between and within countries, are becoming more marked. Hence the structural factors which shape migration – the unequal distribution of wealth, capitalism's predatory tendencies, the retreat from state welfare provision, global geopolitics and the ability of some powerful countries and supranational entities to control migration – must always be appreciated. With this thought in mind, we turn to the region where the papers in this special issue are set.

Setting the geographical scene

Looking back over the six decades or more since the start of postwar labour migration to Western Europe, and paying particular attention to the countries featured in this journal issue, two major initiatives stand out as fundamental in shaping the migration patterns that subsequently unfolded. The first was the *establishment of the European Common Market* and the inscription into the Treaty of Rome (1957) of the principle of the free movement of labour (and goods and capital). Subsequently, of course, an ever-more 'integrated' Europe progressively enlarged from the original six countries to the current 27.⁵ The original intention in 1957 had been to facilitate the movement of poverty-stricken southern Italians to work in the booming industrial economies of France and Germany; but it became apparent that the economics of labour demand was the overriding factor, and the prosperous and fast-growing economies of North-West Europe soon put in place

bilateral labour recruitment agreements with a range of non-EEC Mediterranean countries stretching from Portugal across to Turkey as well as the Maghreb states. Two southeast European countries featured in papers in this special issue were drawn into this state-sponsored ‘guestworker’ system: Greeks migrated in large numbers to West Germany during the years 1961–73, whilst migrants from the Former Yugoslavia, who were free to migrate after the mid-1960s, went mainly to Germany and Switzerland (see Fielding 1993; King 1993 for details of this period).

The oil crisis of 1973–74 closed down this mass labour migration system, although family reunion and marriage migration enabled the flows to continue over the ensuing decades. Meantime, during the 1980s, the southern EU countries, with Spain, Portugal and Greece ‘joining the club’, started to transform from sources of emigration to countries of immigration, this immigration reaching mass proportions after 1990.

The second turning-point in the evolution of pan-European migration patterns came with the *fall of the Berlin Wall* and the ‘liberation’ of a whole constellation of Eastern European and Former Soviet Union states from the straightjacket of banned emigration. The problem was that the doors of the EU and other Western European countries were not open to them, except for some refugee flows from the wars in Yugoslavia (mainly Bosnians and Kosovans). Yet there are problems with the ‘Fortress Europe’ metaphor, which cannot overcome the myth of zero migration (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010, 376). In reality, migration continued to take place and still does, and several papers in this issue show the agency of migrants in rendering the borders permeable. A common strategy was that labour migration became camouflaged as tourist or visitor mobility, or took other irregular forms, at least until some of the former Eastern European countries became incorporated into the EU in the 2000s.

Let us now focus more specifically on the mosaic of countries that form the southeastern border zone from the Black Sea down to the Mediterranean: Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, the post-Yugoslav states, Albania and Greece. These are a group of mainly small-to-medium size countries which have experienced particularly intense migration flows in recent years – in most cases outflows but, in

the case of Greece, inflows.⁶ Table 1 sets out a range of data for the countries which are the focus of this special issue, although not all the countries listed are covered in equal depth in the following papers. The data refer to the late 2000s, more or less concurrent with the time periods of the research and field data included in the individual papers. In some cases more recent data are available (for instance the results of the 2011 Albanian census, which reveal a population shrunk to 2.8 million, making the scale of emigration even more dramatic), but the earlier data are used in order to preserve vertical consistency down the columns of the table.

Bearing in mind the earlier discussion on HDI and its components and thresholds, we note that the majority of countries in the table have ‘high’ development (above 0.8 and below 0.9), albeit towards the lower end of the band (except Croatia, 0.871). Two countries have ‘very high’ development (Greece and Slovenia), although again their scores are at the low end of the class (the migrant recipient countries of Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Italy are all higher). Two countries, Ukraine and Moldova, are at the top end of the ‘medium’ development category, 0.5 to 0.8.

If the overall figures for HDI for the countries in Table 1 appear somewhat higher than might be expected from the prior discussion, then two comments put the data in a more rational, relational perspective. First, the indices for less developed countries are much lower (e.g. Morocco 0.654, Ghana 0.526, Ethiopia 0.414, Afghanistan 0.352), whilst the top-ranking countries are a bit higher (e.g. Norway 0.971, Iceland 0.969, Netherlands 0.964). Second, the socialist history of most of the countries on the list has boosted literacy rates, health care and longevity so that, for example, countries like Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and the post-Yugoslav states are all ranked higher in global rankings on life expectancy and literacy than they are on per capita GDP.⁷

Moving across Table 1 to the migration statistics, several countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia and Moldova – have rates of emigration equating to between 22 and 45% of their in-country populations. These ratios are amongst the highest, not only in Europe, but in the world.