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STUDIES IN MIGRATION AND DIASPORA



# Trajectories and Imaginaries in Migration

The Migrant Actor in Transnational Space



EDITED BY  
FELICITAS HILLMANN, TON VAN NAERSEN  
AND ERNST SPAAN

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# Mobilities and Mindsets: Locating Imagination in Transnational Migrations

Kyle, David, Koikkalainen, Saara & Dutta Gupta, Tanaya

## Introduction

The notion of *migration as a process*, rather than as a discrete event, is intimately linked to one's capacity, and sometimes necessity, to imagine life in a different place and time. Before a physical move abroad happens, mobility is an experimental project of the mind. Furthermore, this mental relationship to far-away places continues to be a part of the transnational dimension of many immigrant lives. This socio-cognitive aspect of a mobility process is not only a forward-looking engagement with future times and places; our minds are actively involved in retrospectively reconstructing the immediate past as part of re-imagining those memories that align and reinforce everyday working beliefs as the referential measure and motivation of actively pursuing a "better" future. In this chapter, we explore how this imaginative dimension is a feature of any significant migration process, including those who seemingly "remain in place," and also examine the extent to which prevailing migration literature more broadly validates migrants' imaginative thinking to a creative, dynamic migration process. Finally, we offer some cultural and political logics for why the omission of the role of imaginative and creative 'mindsets' of certain migrant groups can distort our perception of their mobility, especially compared to their highly mobile, privileged counterparts—the creative class—benefitting from the opposite assumption in which their physical mobility is a sign of an imaginative, productive mindset and a marker of creative talent.

Migration scholars, and those attempting to manage migration, often label millions of people on the move across the globe based on categories with false precision, such as refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), labor migrants, undocumented migrants, and myriad other conceptual and legal boxes. These labels have very real consequences for those so labelled, even though the definitions may be based on quick, face-value assessments of the perceived or self-reported agency of the migrants, geographical scope of their mobility, and their desirability and manageability from the perspective of states and migration managers. This labelling process often leads to misunderstanding and underestimation of the complexities embedded in the decision-making mechanism prior to migration and the remaking of identities after immigrant

settlement. Moreover, such classifications suffer from the drawback of excluding the *non-migrants* or potential *would-be* migrants already involved in the act of imagining mobility. Therefore, one may argue that mobility cannot be fully grasped without recognizing the significance of the socially-mediated mental orientation, or mindset, of a migrant. In this chapter, 'mindset' is conceptualized as a particular attitude or orientation shared by a group of individuals, which may be influential in their decision-making process, though often in more covert, longer-term modes.

Building on a line of research on migration decision-making and imagination initiated more than 30 years ago (e.g. De Jong and Gardner 1981; Fawcett 1985, White 1980), the extensive literature on transnationalism (e.g. Kyle 2000, Smith & Guarnizo 1998, Carling 2002, Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004, Amelina & Faist 2012), and new findings from the cognitive social sciences, this chapter calls for the need to understand and explore socio-cognitive processes involved in migration and maintaining transnational ties. We highlight the role of imagination, and prospective, future-oriented thoughts and mindsets associated with transnational migration. The argument revolves around the conceptualization of two dominant and divergent types of mobilities that emerge from the interdisciplinary literature on transnationalism: the mobility of 'elite' or 'highly-skilled' migrants versus that of 'undocumented' or 'irregular' migrants.

The first kind of mobility is attributed to actors belonging to the so-called 'creative class' –typically epitomized as entrepreneurs and highly-skilled professionals who frequently travel across borders at will with the social, legal, and technological flexibility to work from anywhere. Not only is their mobility considered unproblematic and a desirable aspect of their socioeconomic status, their creativity is validated as an essential part of their identity. The second kind of mobility belongs to those actors whose migration is often viewed as a threat by states, migration managers, and local populations, and, thus, the target of much recent rabble-rousing in a resurgent nationalist bent in domestic and international politics. These transnational migrants are usually not constructed as *creative* even though they too go through the process of imagining their mobility before the actual physical journey. The academic literature on *transnational mindset*, a concept stemming from research on the cosmopolitan social class of entrepreneurship (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1989; Levy et al. 2007), rarely addresses the latter group of migrants. It is, however, important to note that these non-elite migrants, often moving through undocumented pathways, may be carriers of an *unrecognized cultural currency* (Lo 2015) or competencies that aid and inform their everyday resistance, resilience and creative agency. In addition, their mobility is also strongly associated with the capacity to imagine futures that are better and desirable in places they in most cases have never even visited before. Some key assumptions on the differences between these two groups are briefly outlined in the table below.

**Table 1:** Managerial and Migrant Mindsets: Conventional Assumptions

| <b>Conventional Assumptions</b> | <b>Managerial Mindset</b>   | <b>Migrant Mindset</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Type of mobility                | Relatively free spatial mobility  | Restricted, problematic spatial mobility  |
| Motivation for mobility         | Career advancement<br>Lifestyle choices<br>Social mobility<br>Economic gain | Fleeing desperate circumstances<br>Remittances to kin<br>Social mobility<br>Economic gain |
| Migration trajectory            | Dependent on migrant choice   | Dependent on migration merchants; available routes  |
| Relative porosity of borders    | More porous   | Less porous   |
| Role of imagination             | Validated   | Not Validated   |

This chapter argues that the omission of the dimension of prospective thought and imagination, particularly its collective social nature, contributes to a myopic understanding and theorization of the process of migration. We first discuss the role of imagination and prospective thought for migration decision-making. Though some migration scholars have touched upon this connection (Koikkalainen & Kyle 2015, Benson 2012, Coe 2012, Baas 2009, Carling 2002), the relationship between mindset and mobility remains largely understudied. The second section reviews the existing body of literature on transnationalism to explore how transnational mobilities have intersected with mindsets that have been conceptualized mostly as motivational dreams of the future, part reality, part fantasy. For Appadurai, (2000, 6) imagination is a faculty that guides people in a myriad of ways and allows them to: "...consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress, and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national boundaries." Other researchers have focused on the influence of imagination and aspirations of particular groups in exploring the processes, patterns and trajectories of migration (e.g. Smith 2006; Benson 2012; Teo 2003; Czaika & Vothknecht 2012; Coe 2012; Schewel 2015). Stressing the importance of imagination as a key ingredient fueling migration, transnationalism, and work in the global economy, the final section of the chapter offers some empirical examples highlighting the mutual co-constitution of mobility-immobility dynamics for refugees, undocumented migrants, and elite professional migrants.

## Imagination, Prospective Thought and the Mobility Decision

Though we can be bodily present in only one place at a time, our minds have the power to be simultaneously 'present' in multiple places and times. This has major implications for the various mobility phenomena classified as internal or international migration. Namely, long before the actual physical move across any territory takes place, mobility as a process already *takes place* in the minds of individuals. This taking place both precedes and influences the actual bodily movements of those considering migration (Koikkalainen & Kyle 2015). Persisting socio-economic inequalities stratified along the lines of class and cultural capital of the migrants in this not so 'flat world' tend to foster different kinds of mobilities. These mobilities produce and are in turn produced by different mindsets or outlooks on life that develop in particular contexts. In this study, examining the mindset of a migrant is paramount for understanding the process of decision-making in migration.

In his article "Mind and Migration" Paul Tillich (1937, 295) proposed that there is an "(...) essential relationship between mind and migration, that mind in its very nature is migratory and that human mental creativity and man's migrating power belong together". Since Tillich's time social scientific research has explored the importance of imagination (e.g. Appadurai 1996a, 1996b, 2000, Smith 2006, Benson 2012) in migration, but so far without thoroughly taking into account the recent advances on research in psychology, social psychology, and other cognitive sciences focusing on the unique human capacity to imagine potential future scenarios based on our past experiences (Atance & O'Neill 2001, Szpunar & McDermott 2008; Szpunar 2010, Schacter et al. 2007). Thus the impact of imagined, transnational futures that are fueled by personal dreams, desires, anxieties and ambitions, remain largely unexplored in both migration literature and policy (Koikkalainen & Kyle 2015).

Building on these foundations, we may reassert the central importance of imagination for transnational migration starting from the mobility decision and continuing to the ties that are upheld over time and place once the physical migration has taken place. The process of migration is a journey of the mind in search of something not found in any one place. It may, therefore, be argued that the transnational practices and ties associated with this mobility cannot be maintained without the aid of imagination and creative agency of a transnational mind and its mindset. Mental mobility as a form of mental simulation is a normal condition of our existence. Even if we may not imagine ourselves inhabiting a different place, we can naturally imagine ourselves to be in a different time and in our everyday life regularly engage in acts that Tavory and Eliasoph (2013) have called *future-coordination*.

Prospective thought on the future draws from *episodic memory* of our past experiences (Schacter et al. 2007). Hence, our potential futures and the ways in which we imagine that certain episodes are likely to proceed also differ. Those contemplating migration engage in *cognitive migration*, visualizing themselves in a particular, concretized future time and place prior to making the actual move (Kyle & Koikkalainen 2011, Koikkalainen & Kyle 2015). It is a phase of decision-making in which the experimental, narrative imagination is actively engaged in negotiating one's future social worlds and emotional states. That is to say, potential migrants imagine themselves socially and emotionally in a particular place in the future before they physically migrate. This mental time travel can take many forms, but the key factor is that it includes *affective forecasting* (Loewenstein & Lerner 2009; Dunn, Forrin, & Ashton-James 2009), trying out different situations or images that help us determine what our future self would feel in a given context.

Research in the cognitive sciences has revealed that when making a major decision, individuals often engage in *episodic future thinking* (Atance & O'Neill 2001), a type of mental time travel where one tries to pre-experience different future situations. This applies also to migration decision-making, which is a process rather than a single event (e.g. van der Velde & van Naerssen 2015b, van der Velde & van Naerssen 2011, Hagen-Zanker & Mallet 2016). Moving is an important, life-altering decision that has long-term consequences for the prospects of the potential migrant, as well as his or her family. It therefore includes contemplating many unknown factors, and the decision is often taken in the context of uncertainty and risk (e.g. Czaika 2015). Therefore, remembering a past and imagining a future is also being mobile (and creative) in some way, and through this mobility, we are continuously engaged in the act of creating our emergent present (Mead 1934). A number of models have been proposed as to how the process of becoming a migrant proceeds. Carling's (2002, 5) *aspiration/ability model* proposes that "migration first involves a wish to migrate, and second, the realisation of this wish". Stefanie Kley (2011, 472) has noted three distinct phases in the migration decision-making process: *the pre-decisional phase* (considering), *the preactional phase* (planning), and the *actional phase* (realizing migration). The threshold model, developed by Martin Van der Velde and Ton van Naerssen (2015b, 267–8, 2011) includes three somewhat overlapping thresholds that need to be crossed before mobility occurs: *the mental (indifference)*, *the locational* and *the trajectory threshold*.

The importance and role of imagination in the migration decision-making process varies by case, as diverse groups of potential migrants face different challenges, have varying resources, networks and opportunities for mobility. Refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants may be left with little choice about whether to leave their homes behind while privileged highly-skilled professionals or wealthy retirees can have the luxury of carefully planning their



migration trajectories. Yet all these migrants are in a sense dependent on their transnational mindset(s) and perform some form of mental simulation that involves imagining possible future scenarios in different locations. To learn more about how this process proceeds, researchers are responsible for reflexively thinking and asking questions such as: how do research imagination and expectations influence the framing of the queries and drawing of conclusions? Why are concepts like mental mobility and associated dreams, aspirations, frustrations and expectations of different transnational actors theorized in a particular way? Whose expectations matter and whose do not<sup>1</sup>?

In sum, deciding to migrate is, in essence, a process whereby one engages in cognitive migration and imagines a future in another location - a process heavily reliant on one's imaginative capacity mediated by the more social and cultural notions of a shared, inter-subjective transnational mindset. The challenge for future research lies in bridging the gaps between ideas and epistemology, broadening the definitions of concepts related to creative agency in migration to include all kinds of transnational actors, and building potential bridges across binaries such as mobility-immobility, trapped in categorical boxes that still have a significant presence in the literature on transnational migration.

## Mental Mobilities, Mindsets, and Transnational Ties

In this hypermobile world of flows and networks, the *mantra* is to be connected, more mentally than physically, with other parts of the planet. Whether it is accessing news and information from around the globe with the touch of a fingertip, communicating with family members located in different time zones, finding career opportunities or recruiting the service of a migration broker to flee a war-zone, connectedness is the aid to survival and prosperity. To be connected is to also be mobile, to know and imagine localities and realities (both spatial and temporal) other than where one is present right now. Any discussion on transnational mobility is therefore not complete without taking into account the role of imagination in facilitating the migration process as a whole: how it impacts the mobility decision, facilitates contact across multiple countries and fuels networks that promote further migration.

The role of imagination in transnationalism has been acknowledged by several scholars as a key for the making and unmaking of migrant identities. As Golbert (2001) notes, even though transnational theorists such as Guarnizo and

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<sup>1</sup> See Porter and Randalls (2014) for an analysis of how expectations shape people's thinking and "play a role in bringing into being one future over another". It is important to not merely examine the expectations born out of a migrant's imagination and its manifestations in the form of transnational practices, but also to critically reflect on research expectations as well.

Smith (1998) have acknowledged that transnational processes might involve transactions “that do not include actual bodily movement” (Guarnizo & Smith 1998, 14), they only implicitly articulate the linkages between “such non-bodily and temporary bodily movement and the transnationalisation of local populations” (Golbert 2001, 725). Vertovec (2004) suggests that transnational practices and policies have been responsible for transformations in three distinct domains - sociocultural, political and economic, including the cognitive transformation of a migrant’s mind to be simultaneously oriented around more than one location (*orientational bifocality*), thereby producing ‘translocal’ subjectivities (see also Conradson and McKay 2007).

A similar argument was proposed by Faist (2000b) in his work on transnational social fields and spaces that acknowledges the contribution of both ‘movers’ and ‘stayers’ in the formation and transformation of transnational space (see also McHugh 2000). Amelina and Faist (2012, 1708) call for *methodological transnationalism*, which looks beyond the nation-state centered prism “(...) to consider the simultaneity of the transnational practices of individuals, organizations and institutions taking place in multiple localities”, thereby opening a dialogue between “(...) those who have migrated and those who have stayed in place” (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004, 1012). According to Golbert (2001), when a transnational imagination or orientation is extended to include the experiences of returnees and non-migrants, it stretches the boundaries of the current literature which still focuses on the process of transmigration.

Recent trends in transnational literature have attempted to bridge the mobility-immobility divide by viewing them not as binary opposites but as mutually constituent and complimentary concepts. Thus “(...) the full significance of immobility can be understood only when examined simultaneously with mobility” (Mata-Codesal 2015, 2275). Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) observe that the transnational literature is taking a turn towards acknowledging the fluid and multi-layered characteristics of transnational social spaces that are being continuously re-imagined through how migrants continue to maintain their ties and are embedded in multiple sites and societies. These spaces influence and transform the lives of both migrants and non-migrants as the “flow of people, money, and ‘social remittances’ (ideas, norms, practices, and identities) within these spaces is so dense, thick, and widespread that non-migrants’ lives are also transformed, even though they do not move” (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007, 132; see also Levitt 2001). Moreover, many of those left behind may be immobile against their will as they lack the necessary resources to make the move (Carling 2002).

The authors here are referring to a particular kind of *mindset*, a way of thinking or orientation of the transnational actors in question. What then is transnational mindset usually understood as? A review of the term in academic literature mostly in the areas of business studies and human resource

management reveals its application to a different kind of population than those described under the rubric of transnational migration. The concept of *transnational mindset* –sometimes referred to interchangeably with *global mindset* – was first used by Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989) expanding upon the construct of *geocentricism* in Perlmutter's (1969) taxonomy on Multi-National Corporations. They proposed that the key to a transnational firm's success lies in its global efficiency, local responsiveness and innovative capacity. In order to achieve this, the *managerial cognition* (Levy et al. 2007) of the senior executives of the firm must reflect a transnational mindset.

Over the last two decades several studies including some empirical research have been published on the concept of *global mindset* (Clapp-Smith et al. 2007; Kedia & Mukherji, 1999; Murtha et al. 1998; Kobrin 1994; Rhinesmith 1992) along with constructs such as *transnational mentality* (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), and *multinational mindset* (Caproni, Lenway, & Murtha, 1992) and *psychological capital* (Luthans et al. 2007), or *Psy-Cap*, described as the core latent factor that explains and influences positive organizational behavior (Luthans et al. 2008). In the domain of business studies, *Psy-Cap* has been characterized by attributes such as positivity (optimism about future), confidence (self-efficacy), perseverance towards goals (hope), redirecting pathways to achieve the goal, and the ability to bounce back (resiliency) when faced with adversity (Luthans et al. 2007). This definition implies that *psychological capital*, much like merit, is a desirable attribute inherent to some individuals and cultivated by others to reach the upper echelons of the hierarchical management pyramid of transnational corporations. In this way the concept is also linked to the vertical social mobility of such actors.

The term *transnational mindset* as used in the current study varies significantly from this literature in its content and scope. While previous literature on global mindsets do imply the significance of mental mobility, due to its origin within business and management studies, it has been restricted to only one kind of transnational actors occupying a position of privilege in the social mobility ladder –the top managers, entrepreneurs, business elites and their transnational firms. Notice also the temporal ordering of mindset to mobility among this group of actors: the dominant narrative is that the managers first develop a transnational or global mindset before acting transnationally. For example, Levy et al. (2007) find that there is a stream of literature on global mindset with primary focus on the *cognitive abilities* of managers which is considered as a prerequisite for the success of transnational firms. "Accordingly, these studies describe the properties of global mindset in terms of high cognitive abilities and information processing capabilities that help managers conceptualize complex global dynamics (...)" (Levy et al. 2007).

If the business high-flyers are selected for transnational careers based on their predisposition to think transnationally and aim for mobility, then how does

this relate to other, less privileged migrants? Are their aspirations and dreams of better futures less significant, or are they even seen as incapable of having a transnational mindset? Namely, does the reduction of freedom of mobility and status signify an equal reduction in the capacity to imagine transnational futures pre-migration, *en route* and post migration? And are the mindsets of migrants at all a subject of consideration for the states and migration managers involved in drafting and implementing migration laws and policies – especially as they often prove incapable of ending unwanted migration? It is our belief that a better understanding of the processes of mental simulation and the functioning of the transnational mindset can contribute to more nuanced analyses of what is entailed in the simultaneity of lives lived in several locations all over the world, as well as how migration as a phenomenon should be approached. In the following section we highlight this with the help of empirical examples.

## Why Mental Mobility and Mindset(s) Matter: Some Examples

Imagination is a faculty of a social mind, but it is also located in the body as *embodied cognition*, and, therefore, is bound to historical and social contexts and places (Smith 2006). Yet while imagination is an important factor in the fundamental human desire to aim to better one's future circumstances and, therefore, also a force driving migration, the capacity to realize these desires and future plans is dependent on "(...) access to economic resources and powers of symbolic legitimation, neither of which are distributed equitably" (Smith 2006, 54, see also Ong 1999, 10-11). To a large extent it is also dependent on the social resources available to the migrants, their *interpersonal trust networks* (Tilly 2007) and social support systems. Individuals seek maximum satisfaction in as many areas of value in their life as possible, but the simple desire to move does not equal real intentions as "perceived constraints intervene" and the intention to move does not necessarily result in actual migration, as "real constraints intervene" (Gardner 1981, 65-67). In short, for migration to occur one has to perceive better opportunities elsewhere, possess the capacity to aspire towards those opportunities, and have the capabilities to realize his or her aspirations (Carling 2002; de Haas 2011, Czaika & Vothknecht 2012).

In 2015, more than a million people traveled to Europe, sparking what is known as the 'European migrant crisis'. The Mediterranean Sea has become the world's deadliest migration route with more than 26,000 deaths recorded at sea between 2000 and 2015 (Fargues 2015). In 2015, many migrants chose the 'Balkan route' by way of crossing the Turkish-Greece seas border. Though the ongoing war in Syria, intensified after 2011, has been one of the major drivers of this migration, migrants from other countries such as Eritrea, Afghanistan and

Iraq also embarked on these dangerous crossings. The similarities in their migration trajectories can be explained by their common experiences of violence and poverty, together with dreams of a better life. The migration routes by way of Greece involved crossing several national borders and the destination for those traveling along this route may have changed several times during the journey (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett 2016; Mallett & Hagen-Zanker 2017 THIS VOLUME), a process which also relies upon mental simulation that adapts to changing situations and new information. Thus it is imperative to take into account the mental mobility of the migrants and the role played by imagination in decision-making that fuels their dreams of a better life in Europe and entices them into taking the risk of boarding an overcrowded dinghy to brave stormy seas.

Imagination plays a major role in the lives of migrants as they take a leap of faith and embark upon a risky journey that may not just physically take them to the other side of a border, but also alter their future in a significant way. Imagining a better future can lead to massive migration that are not limited to Global South-Global North flows. While there may not be a way to parse out and highlight the role of imagination in mass migration, what we are witnessing today is the emergence of creative pathways around continuous attempts by states and border control agencies around the world to stop or stem the flows. For example, as reaching Europe via the Balkan route became increasingly difficult after the EU-Turkey refugee agreement of March 2016 allowed Greece to return all new undocumented migrants arriving into its territory back to Turkey, the main focus of *migration merchants* (see Kyle & Koslowski 2011) and those wishing to reach Europe has changed into the longer and even more deadly Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy (UNHCR 2017). The important question to ponder over here is not how massive migration flows originate, but *why* do they sustain in the face of mammoth roadblocks such as border walls, fences, narratives of illegality, and negative press and public attitude criminalizing or victimizing those who find, forge or facilitate innovative, unconventional and high-risk routes across borders.

It has been estimated that over 15 million undocumented migrants from Bangladesh have been residing in India (Datta 2004), making them one of the largest groups of undocumented migrants in the world. A more recent estimate places the number of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants in India to be around 20 million (Hindustan Times 2016). Their migration is irregular, often seasonal in nature, and the move to the other side of the border is largely dependent on the intermediaries or migration merchants. An eight foot high barbed wire fencing project has been long under construction at this 4097 kilometers long porous border to control and curb 'illegal' cross-border movements of these 'unwanted' migrants. Far from being a "water tight" solution, this fencing of the border is not just expensive but also largely ineffective (Ramachandran 2017). However, the imagined better life on the other side acts as a strong motivator in the

development of a transnational mindset which will most likely continue to drive the migrants to other possible routes.

This situation is comparable to the U.S.-Mexico border and the looming promise of a “Wall” by the President Trump regime. While the futility of attempting to control immigration by building coercive border policies are well known (e.g. Massey et al. 2002), the narrative of building walls or fences along these borders carries an immense symbolic significance that stretches beyond the question of mere feasibility of such a structure’s construction and maintenance. The political and policy conversations around the “Wall” has far reaching implications, as it ceases to be just a physical entity erected on a border, but becomes an inseparable part of policies, legal definitions and mindsets of states and migration managers. It is therefore not just a brick and mortar structure, but rather a highly-symbolic social construction framing public attitudes and ways of thinking about undocumented immigrant ‘aliens’ by formally codifying and criminalizing their very existence as ‘illegal’ and ‘undesirable’. This, in turn, has an impact on how potential migrants south of the border view their prospects and on the futures they imagine.

The central role of imagination does not necessarily diminish at the end of the journey as migrants try to cultivate themselves a new life at the destination. Owing to a wide range of socio-political, material and psychological processes and patterns of alienation in exile, some of the displaced live in a *limbo of permanent temporariness* between two worlds (Holtzman 2004). This limbo may reach beyond being a mental state or feeling to involve the physical reality of being stuck *betwixt and between*. For example, while the residents of a reception center for asylum seekers have physically arrived to the country of destination in Europe, their journey has not ended as they do not know whether they will be allowed to stay. The processing of the claim for asylum, and the following appeal process in case of a negative decision, may take months or even years so the individuals may have to live in this *limboscape* (Van der Velde & van Naerssen 2015b; Brun & Fábos 2015) for a rather long time. Many have left their families behind in the troubled conflict zones and a working mobile phone is typically their most important property that facilitates daily contact to a different reality lived thousands of kilometers away. This contact in turn feeds the future scenarios that are imagined, depending on whether the temporary stay turns into a permanent reality and family reunification, or ends with deportation or onward migration.

While millions of bodies on the move make news as they flee a war-zone or cross borders by overcoming mortal threats, there are millions who either are stopped along the route or are forced to stay put in conflict affected areas owing to various perceived and real constraints. The limbo caused by *forced immobility* is a reality for both the migrants stuck in Turkey or transitional zones like Ceuta (Ferrer-Gallardo & Espiñeira 2015) at Europe’s door and to the thousands of

Rohingya 'boat people' from Myanmar and Bangladesh who remained stranded and afloat in the sea as governments of neighboring countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia denied them asylum (McKirdy & Mohsin 2015). Drawing from the context of civil war in Mozambique, Lubkemann (2008) argues that there is a theoretical invisibility in migration studies which runs the risk of only highlighting the experiences of migrants during a war, thereby trivializing the plight of those who have been "(...) 'displaced in place', *not as a result of their own movement but rather because of the war's immobilizing effects*" (Lubkemann 2008, 455, italics in original). It is difficult to overlook the presence of a significantly large population of would-be migrants across the globe who are rendered immobile by ongoing violence, and this complexity needs to be brought into the discussions on transnational mind and its mobility by addressing questions like: how do they imagine their futures in situations where migration would be desirable, but yet (at present) impossible?

Imagination can become a valuable lens for migration scholars in their empirical analyses to throw light on the fundamental question of not just why people move but also why they do not. Mobility and immobility generate different types of imaginaries and transnational mindsets. While the imagined futures of those who actually migrate influence their migration routes and destinations, those who stay in place, at least for now, are also influenced by the mobility of others, or by the requirements of work in the global economy. Globalization has created transnational career opportunities for highly-skilled elites who may choose in which country or city they want to work. This mobility has even generated commercial services, such as *Teleport*, which promises to assist your imagination in a move to the best place for you to live on the planet based on your lifestyle and personal preferences – a sort of algorithm for cognitive migration. Zygmunt Bauman (2007, 75) has argued that the real home of the privileged lies in the virtual domain and that the place where they physically live may be 'just one locality among many'. Yet expatriates living in global hubs such as Silicon Valley in the US have to constantly negotiate time and place in complex ways, while trying to overcome the problem of working with colleagues and clients who live in different countries and time zones (Kiriakos 2013).

The global workplace is also present in the call centers of India, where English-educated professionals are employed in voice-to-voice service work for transnational corporations in jobs where they have to highlight their *Americanness* while speaking to clients overseas. In this way they reconfigure their identities while engaged in mental time travel across several different time zones on a daily basis. Kiran Mirchandani (2004) explores the 'cracks' in the globalization process (Sassen 2001) through a study of call center workers in India who form an integral part of the 'newly emerging transnational labor force'. Other scholars like Varma (2007) and Patel (2008) have looked into what it means to work night shifts' in call centers as work hours are adjusted according to the American time. It is like

continuously living a different life without actually leaving as Varma (2007, 7) notes that "(...) In the call centre setting, employees are constantly asked to imagine the world outside India from the time that they are inducted." The creative dimension of their outward looking mindset, that is to be able to conjure distant imaginaries and adopt different identities while communicating with rest of the world has thus become a necessary condition for their job profile.

Contrasting the privileged mobility of global elites, labelled as transnational, creative and *the only truly accepted migrants of today* (Raghuram 2004) with the situation of 'unwanted' refugees and undocumented migrants, highlights the difference in the extent to which these groups are allowed to imagine transnational mobility. In addition to the desired / unwanted division lie a wide variety of factors that position the migrants along a hierarchy that either promotes or limits their movement across borders. Workers' applied use of the imagination as knowledge work is the criteria of categorization for some, leading to circular reasoning and entrenchment of negative assumptions about the enormous variety within both mental and physical frameworks of labelling. Even though they hail from widely different contexts and socio-economic backgrounds, in the end, their mobilities are primarily controlled and restrained by their 'national' identities and their passports; not by their creative flexibility to adapt to different temporal and spatial contexts.

## Conclusion

The chapter focused first on imagination, mental simulation and mindsets as key aspects of cognitive migration, itself part of the socio-cognitive processes related to, and arising from, transnational mobility, and explored how it is perceived across unequal social locations and legal statuses. The individual's capacity to imagine transnational mobility is of significance in a thorough analysis of why some people move, while others in comparable situations do not. One cannot, therefore, fully address this fundamental question of migration research (Faist 2000a) without considering the critical role of imagination in migration decision-making. Second, the study also problematized two kinds of transnational mobility that are often found linked together in transnational literature by asking: why are some people on the move glorified as *creative* or *imaginative*, while others are seen as *problems* or *threats*? By raising this issue the hope is to encourage a broader field of inclusion in transnational literature of all those actors whose agentic mobility is viewed as a threat to be controlled or a problem to be managed from above. The role played by another kind of mobility must be included into the dialogue here, namely, social mobility and the associated question of status in



reinforcing stereotypes and widening the gap between these groups of transnational actors.

From our review of literature on transnational mobility, it's clear that even though there has been widespread criticism for viewing and representing subjects based on a nation-state oriented approach, transnational actors such as those discussed in the examples above still continue to be confined to discrete boxes with binary labels like creative/non-creative, skilled/non-skilled, migrant/non-migrant and so on. Brubaker (2005) warns us about this by stating that while on one hand terms like *transnational* or *diaspora* critique essentialized forms of belonging to territorially bounded containers or nation-states; on the other hand, "it can also represent a non-territorial form of essentialized belonging" (Brubaker 2005, 12). The politics at play here has far reaching consequences that could not only influence someone's imagination, but also the expectations arising out of that imagination.

The present study illustrates the role of mental simulation through examples of current migration processes of mobile groups placed at different, hierarchical levels of freedom and privilege: refugees and undocumented migrants versus highly skilled migrants on global career pathways. Mobility of the latter group of actors is seldom considered a problem, and they are celebrated as having truly innovative transnational mindsets and the right *cognitive complexity* to bridge the global with the local. While the transnational mobility of highly skilled professionals is strongly encouraged in the global *battle for brains* (e.g. Bertoli et al. 2012), the mobility of undocumented migrants and refugees is regarded as a problem various migration managers and even ordinary citizens. Far from being labelled as creative for their daily struggles and the ability to survive in an alien environment, the presence of these migrants on the 'wrong' side of the border is considered a serious challenge by the state authorities.

More research should be conducted on the multitude of ways in which these mobile groups imagine their futures in different locations during the migration decision-making process and continue to maintain transnational ties that draw from mentally creating a shared imagined reality. This may involve, for example, a diaspora spread in different countries or a migrant population in a specific destination country, those stuck *en route* towards that destination and their immobile kin, all sharing a transnational mindset that connects them across time and space. Also highly-mobile professionals and the physically immobile workers who work in global business processes in different parts of the globe may partake in such imagined realities: physically immobile call-center workers regularly engage in mental mobility and draw from their ability to creatively imagine and assume a different identity while speaking to clients overseas.

The extreme variance between the discourses describing mobile elites as imaginative innovators and, in contrast, millions of other migrants as lacking a

creative transnational mindset, has distorted both theoretical and political treatments of migrant narratives of action without agency and limited our understanding of how mobility decisions are made in different contexts.). The omission of the dimension of a specifically imaginative, transnational mindset for a particular group of transnational actors creates both scientific, political and policy oversimplifications, reinforcing narratives that not just privilege bodies over minds, but also validate the everyday creativeness associated with mobility of certain groups of actors over others. Hence, the inclusion of mobility-immobility narratives and the key role of imagination and prospective thought into the broader dialogues concerning transnationalism is imperative, not just for a deeper understanding of migration decision-making processes, but also for validating a place for a non-elite imaginative mindset as a driving force for creative transnational actions connecting multiple places and times. A renewed focus on this dimension, and its implications for recognizing immigrant creative talent is all the more imperative in light of global emphases in mobility and settlement policies on future potential and skilled talent above all else. The price of admission to many developed states is, indeed, “the imagination” itself; yet, we’ve constructed a world of binaries (quite unimaginatively) in which some are viewed *a priori* only in terms of their minds and others only in terms of their bodies. Both of these stereotypical poles need to be brought into balance in both academic and policy analytical narratives as they, in turn, are consumed by popular media and those with short-term political agendas.

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