

A transnational sociological approach to migration and global inequalities

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Efforts to assessing the economic and social contributions of migrants and refugees are often framed by a country of arrival perspective. In order to consider (trans-)national communities besides countries of arrival the paper proposes a sociological and transnational perspective on capabilities. In this perspective, capabilities emerge in relation to a variety of contexts that may not always coincide with the nation-state frame.

The paper builds on innovative economic ideas addressing some shortcomings of country comparative research (Clemens und Pritchett 2008; Korzeniewicz und Scott 2012; Milanovic 2016), It offers a conceptual alternative by theorizing context relations in a more sociological approach (Weiß 2017; Weiß 2018). Since resources/properties turn in to capabilities in relation to the context in which the resources are put into use and since context relations may differ from the nation-state frame in times of globalization, the paper argues, that we must consider a plurality of socially differentiated, politically contested and territorially segmented context relations when assessing the capabilities of a person.

After introducing this theoretical framework, the following implications for research on the capabilities of migrants and refugees will be discussed.

Trajectory approach: Given the plurality and potential transnationality of context relations the resources and capabilities of a person must be determined in a transnational manner. One option is a trajectory/life course approach in which the trajectories of migrants are seen as a series of multi-dimensional status-passages (Nohl et al. 2014). Like sedentary people, migrants move between educational systems and labor market, between single life and close (family) relations. In addition, they travers nationally segmented institutions and migration regimes. The three dimensions interact and they are both institutionally framed and subject to agency.

The value of properties differs in relation to contexts and migrants adjust and/or move strategically in relation to national and transnational contexts. For example, a move towards a lower position in a wealthy country may result in loss of cultural capital which is not recognized there. It may enable a migrant to buy better education for her children in the home country and to achieve/uphold middle class status there. It thus is a viable long-term strategy for the migrant's family. Researching the institutional embeddedness of migrants' life courses with respect to multi-dimensional status passages is one way to understand relations between them, their resources/properties and various context relations.

Struggles about socio-spatial autonomy and strategic closure: Normative debates on migration tend to favor national self-determination over the political representation of migrants and refugees. In contrast, the concept of socio-spatial autonomy implies that the (mis-)representation of migrants and refugees must be addressed in a broader debate about post-Westphalian justice (Fraser 2008). Given the importance of context relations, socio-spatial autonomy must be seen as an important dimension of global inequalities. This implies that the contestation and governance of context relations is not only a matter of political self-determination, but also a struggle about property rights (cf. Shachar 2009).

Creating transnational samples: Given the selectivity of migration and the difficulty of transnational sampling, our knowledge of the co-evolution of migration regimes and migrants' life-course trajectories is limited. (Would-be) migrants who are delayed, deterred or channeled elsewhere are

not found in the sample of one nation-state. Data gathered within a nation-state tend to omit properties that are deemed useless there, but that could hold value in a different context. Building on existing transnational research designs such as ethnosurveys, I reference a panel on refugees that has just been started in Germany to show how the value of cultural capital could be assessed in relation to contexts that go beyond the state of arrival.

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