

# TRANS-WORLD: DEBATING THE PLACE AND BORDERS OF PLACES IN THE AGE OF TRANSNATIONALISM

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## ABSTRACT

In this introductory contribution to this special issue of *TESG*, we want to question the usual way of conceptualising places and borders in the debate about transnationalism. We argue, that in studies of transnationalism, on the one hand the idea of nation-states as spatial containers is overcome, but on the other hand also reproduces the same spatial containers. Instead we suggest the use of the term 'trans-world' to avoid any connotation suggesting spatial containers. In this framework, places and borders are instead seen as multi-dimensional and dynamic concepts which can be applied to almost any kind of relationships transgressing and reconfiguring borders and places at all scales. The papers which follow this introduction show how in particular situations and contexts, these transgressing and reconfiguring activities can be conceptualised in very different ways.

**Key words:** Transnationalism, place, borders, migration, trans-world

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## INTRODUCTION

It is almost a truism to say that the world of today has become increasingly interconnected. Capital, information, services and goods are crossing borders in an increasing scope and on an increasing scale. In a certain sense, as has often been argued, the world of travel, information, communication and migration has shrunk. It has become easier due to cheaper ways of transportation and communication to stay in close touch with the country of origin while being in the host country. Where human migration formerly often meant years of absence, today people can travel quickly and maintain contacts with several places at the same time. Mobility and migration typically

consists of an ongoing series of cross-border movements in which people develop and maintain numerous economic, social and cultural links in more than one nation. Generally, this phenomenon is described as 'transnationalism', thereby expressing that today's migration is more than moving from and to closed entities – the nation-states.

The fact that many mobile people and migrants have become trans-mobile and trans-migrants, hence that they find themselves neither here nor there, but in several places at the same time, has important consequences for spatial container concepts like place, nation and identities. It could be argued that increasingly national identities and national communities are in fact transnational identities and

transnational communities. To conceive of the world primarily in terms of the rationally organised hierarchies of sharply bounded territorial containers, which are sometimes – justly or unjustly – associated with classical modernity, is therefore increasingly no longer adequate, if it ever was (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002; Van Houtum 2005). That also implies that its borders cannot be understood as only dichotomous. The increased inter-linkages between places and people are increasingly loosening and dynamising the classic triangle of territory-identity-citizenship. What is hence emerging is a re-ontologisation of these inter-linkages between places, borders and people. Borders are increasingly carried around over space by the human body and mind. This means that in a given territorial entity many borders which are embodied in the temporary or not so temporary stay of migrants, tourists, entrepreneurs, managers and so on, will be co-existent. Put differently, borders increasingly are interfaces between people that show themselves and are represented contingently. That also implies that the still dominant representation of places and people as separate entities, and of borders, as two-dimensional lines on maps, is a rather naïve imagination and representation of its complexity and multiplicity. The tracing and tracking of who we are and where we belong, has, for many of us, increasingly become a question rather than a priori given. It is not without coincidence perhaps that in this time of high trans-spatial mobility that questions like ‘where are you from?’, ‘where are you now?’ are so often heard these days. These are surely interesting geographical times.

#### FROM INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TO TRANSNATIONALISM

Before we introduce the contributions to this special issue let us first take a step back and analyse when the seeds for the coming of the trans-world has begun. Transnationalism as a concept was most likely first coined by Bourne (1916) as a critique of the classic conceptualisation of international migration. While observing the realities of the American ‘melting-pot’, he noted that many migrants did not (fully) assimilate into their new country of living, but kept tight cultural connections to their former

home countries, creating a rich and diverse mix of cultures and an atmosphere of ‘cosmopolitanism’ in their new home. For him transnationalism thus implied something of an in-betweenness, the timespace between the culture of origin and the culture at the migration destination. With this new term he tried to overcome a crude and oversimplified ‘either-or’-thinking and tried to introduce a more nuanced conceptualisation of migration and migrants. Despite this seminal attempt, Bourne in the end could not escape being a child of his time. For, his conceptualisation of the in-between state of being was still grounded on and included rather spatially fixed and bounded categorisations. So, while Bourne was one of the first to try to think beyond and analytically look beyond patterns overcoming the idea of full assimilation in a new host culture, he still held strong the idea of homogeneous culture of origin as well as the idea of the nationally-rooted American cosmopolitanism as a typical cultural feature of American identity.

In more recent years, there has been a focus on inter-national, and cross-border migration and relationships. Yet, it could be argued that already in its use of terms this focus reproduced bordered spatial containers (Hannerz 1996, p. 6). For, as has been argued by various scholars now, concentration on inter-national and cross-border continues to see international migration as substantially different from other forms of migration such as inter-regional migration or the movement from one locality to another within one nation-state (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, 1995; Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000; Sassen 2002; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2003; Ley 2004; Ehrkamp & Leitner 2006). It also distinguishes migration as a definitive relocation of place of dwelling from more temporary, virtual, cyclical and other forms of movement. It was only in the 1990s that this latter, more transnationalist view became a more generally accepted paradigm in migration studies<sup>1</sup> rejecting and bypassing the long-held notion that society and the nation-state are one and the same (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004, p. 1002).

This does not mean that the society of trans-world is without nation-states. A borderless and placeless world does not exist. At best our life world is, as Laclau (1996, p. 59) calls it, an

empty space which always will take a particular and concretely bordered shape. As such it will always carry its 'other' with it, and can only be conceived as permanently contingent, permanently open and permanently contested (Butler 1997, p. 252). As such, any concrete migrant necessarily exemplifies a multiplicity of identities and of different subject positions (Howarth 1998, p. 278). And it was exactly this insight that led to the formulating of the term 'transnationalism' by Bourne from the beginning.

This 'trans' perspective of our lives also applies to our specific conceptualisations of social practices. They will always fall short of the 'total picture' of a concrete situation or event. Also our conceptual positionings are, therefore, inherently contingent, for which the 'other' is already lying in wait. Every conceptualisation therefore bares its own critical stance, which can only be explained from its own concrete positioning in the pragmatics of the discursive practices. There is no overarching transnational rationale or essential trans-world. Thus, as also Khagram and Levitt (2008, p. 5) write, the term 'transnational' is not limited to the dynamics across or beyond nations, states, or within the (nation) state system, but rather denotes an optic or gaze that empirically examines the boundaries and borders that emerge at particular historical moments, and explores the possibilities of alternatives, and critically does not take its existence, or appropriateness for granted.

In their recently published reader on transnational studies, Khagram and Levitt (2008) have tried to typify much of the more recent debates and insights on transnationalism. In their opening essay of their reader they distinguish five intellectual foundations of transnational studies. The first dimension – empirical transnationalism – is rather descriptive, and mainly identifies, categorises, maps and quantifies cross-border flows of materials, products, people, ideas, information, fashions, money, social movements and other cross-border linkages. The second dimension, methodological nationalism, tries to do away with the methodological bias towards the nation-state and fixed national borders in most analyses, and instead designs and conducts research at different places, scales and with different scopes simulta-

neously, to stress and elaborate upon the inter-relatedness of the different processes involved (see e.g. Appadurai 1991, 1996; Marcus 1995; Sassen 1998; Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). This development is paralleled by the third dimension, theoretical transnationalism. By this is meant the developments of new theories and explanations for transnational phenomena, which partly also involve new ontological and epistemological assumptions. The fourth dimension they distinguish, philosophical transnationalism involves the assumption that social life by definition transcends and transgresses borders and boundaries, at all different scale levels and therefore those social processes which were traditionally assumed to be bounded and contained, are now assumed to be embedded and influenced by cross-border and cross-boundary phenomena and dynamics (Khagram & Levitt 2008, p. 8). Parallel to what has taken place in human geography in general, in transnational studies the 'local, regional, national and global are not automatic, taken-for-granted social arenas but categories to be investigated as constructed and often-contested social facts' (Khagram & Levitt 2008, p. 8–9). The final dimension of the transnational approach, public transnationalism, involves an open ethical, prescriptive and critical approach to scholarship (Khagram & Levitt 2008, p. 9). This means that to take a transnationalist view on social life is expected to create new spaces to imagine options for transformation and development, which would otherwise be overlooked, if one would assume borders and boundaries to be structural givens instead of dynamic social constructions and resources for social action.

Together, these interacting components of transnational studies lead to the reformulation of the original objective of transnational studies. Consistently and tellingly Khagram and Levitt formulate this objective in a more abstract and rather general way as the 'uncovering, analysis and conceptualisation of similarities, differences of and interaction between societal phenomena which are bounded across time and space' (Khagram & Levitt 2008, p. 10–11). But the term transnationalism perhaps still runs the risk of reproducing the essence of the nation by focusing all too narrowly on the desire to transcend the national scale. Maybe

we need to search for a term that is not necessarily only restricted at the national level. Until something better has been found, we propose to use the term 'trans-world', as this relates to the aspect of 'trans' on all spatial scales and comprising a more rich understanding of the relationship between the borders of the self and the environment or place of dwelling. Seen in this light, the 'trans' then becomes a fundamental way of understanding basic human activity of relating to the environment and the continuously transgressing borders between the self and the spatial environment (Ernste 2004).

### THE PLACE OF PLACES AND BORDERS IN TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES

Looking back, in the theoretical conceptualisation of transnationality we have moved from singular and homogenising narratives of international migration and of linear and containing understandings of time and space, of culture and modernity and of the economy and globalisation, towards a de-territorialised celebration of an anti-essentialising concept of subjectivity, that emphasises plurality, mobility, hybridity and in-betweenness. In this way theorising 'transnationality' emphasises thus, in a very general sense, relations between things and movements across things and forces us to rethink concepts like 'identity', 'subjectivity' and 'space' and 'time' (Mitchell 2003, p. 74). One can mention seminal contributions in this direction such as those of Appadurai (1988), Clifford (1992) and Bhabha (1994). This is largely in tune with the current post-structuralist thrust in thought, which favours the concepts of de-centred subjectivities, ambivalence, hybridity, plurality, liminality and cultural blending of various kinds (Hannerz 1996; Vertovec 1999). Related to the debate on migration research and comparably, the new mobilities paradigm (Cresswell & Hoskins 2006; Sheller & Urry 2006) synthesising the anthropological foundations of transgression (see also Ernste 2004), the geography of hybridity (Whatmore 2002), network theory (Granovetter 1983; Buchanan 2002) and relational geographies (Ahmed *et al.* 2003; Callon & Law 2004; Strathern 2004; Mol 2008), also challenges the static, 'sedentarist' tendency of

social scientific migration research. Or to quote Sheller and Urry: 'Sedentarism treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness' (Sheller & Urry 2006, p. 208). At the same time it is also a critique of an alternative grand narrative, namely that of mobility, fluidity and liquidity as is found in 'nomadic' theory (Braidotti 1994, 1999; Joseph 1999; Bauman 2000). It tries to account for both the need for transformation, transgression and de-bordering and the related fixities, exclusions, re-groundings and re-borderings (Ley & Waters 2004).

Seen in this vein, one could get the impression that we are not talking of spatialised social processes anymore, but of social relations and social interactions in a very general and de-territorialised way. The increased intensity of transnational studies in the 1990s might indeed very well be related to the broad scientific discourse around post-structuralist approaches in the social sciences in general during this same period and thus is itself perhaps less a representation of transnational realities than a product of power and fashion in scientific discourse. It has been repeatedly noted that this also bears the danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater (Mitchell 1997, p. 108). Some even argue that with the poststructural subtle theoretical finesse of infinite multiplicities the possibilities are also multiplied for the subject and the territory to disappear up its own theoretical subtleness (e.g. Mitchell 1997). In the same way Faigley (1992, pp. 43–44) remarks that 'power to fold language back on itself makes postmodern theory... an extremely powerful means for exposing the political investments of foundational concepts, but the same power prevents postmodern theorists from making claims of truth or emancipatory value for this activity'. So if the terms we used are increasingly deprived of meanings and are voided of explanatory power, dissociated from the original context and purpose of our research, this becomes theoretically dubious and politically dangerous. According to Faigley this has constituted the 'impasse of post-modern theory'. Also Lacan (2002) and with him also Žižek (1989, p. 155) argue that our conceptualisations are not endlessly self-referential, and that there is no language without an object<sup>2</sup> as a point of

reference, and a place from which we speak. In the same vein, also Sayer (2008) recently argued that we should not confine ourselves to radical epistemological scepticism by celebrating deconstructive ambivalence and the plurality of possibilities, nor refrain from normativity or from favouring progressive knowledge. Hence, what a rising number of scholars argue is that instead of being satisfied with the soft critique implied by the deconstruction of post-structuralist conceptualisations as a 'critique of illusion', we should develop a strong critique of oppression, suffering and ill-being, also if we are aware of the contingency and non-essentialist character of this critique (Callinicos 2006). And as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have convincingly made clear, this might lead to another way of conceptualising subjectivity in general and the subjectivity of the researcher in particular (see also Torfing 2009). Relying on Derrida's (1980) notion of discourse as a free playing field of signifiers in absence of any organising, totalising centre, Laclau and Mouffe argue that discursive processes cannot be reduced to some discursive essence, as they are always open, contested and incomplete (see also Carpentier & de Vos 2001). Nevertheless, temporary articulations are possible, even if they are always contingent and unstable, incomplete and open to new articulations. Žižek (1989) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) therefore understand the discursive field in terms of a fundamental antagonism, with a certain pragmatic directionality. In this respect, research in the field of 'trans-world' thus could also be seen as an articulating practice (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p. 105) with which we contribute to the discourse about the basic transgressive and transformative spatial processes in our society (see also Hardt & Negri 2004). Hence, the argument is made that an academic contribution is not and cannot be a detached and neutral description of what is going on out there but a contribution to making sense of these practices and at the same time a normative intervention and interference in these discursive societal formations (Foucault 2002) and practices. It therefore overcomes the neo-structuralist tendencies of many post-structural approaches (Frank 1989) and re-introduces agency (Rickert 2007). 'Between the devil of the subject and the deep blue sea of structure,

falls a shadow [that] reflects on the one hand, the inability of structures to achieve final closure . . . and, on the other hand, the inability of the subject to be sovereign and complete with a closed identity . . . [T]his "never-closed-gap" is precisely the condition of the possibility of political life. It is here that we find the tension between agency and structure . . . which is the domain of the political' (Sayyid & Zac 1998, p. 253, as quoted in Carpentier & de Vos 2001, p. 9). From this perspective one could even argue that there is a great resemblance between this more nuanced post-structuralist kind of conceptualisation of the 'trans' and the conceptualisation from the perspective of other social constructivist approaches as inspired by a phenomenological action theory (Werlen 1992) and by philosophical anthropology (Ernste 2004). So the conceptual framework we suggest here is in itself a 'trans'-theory. In short, although the de-construction of the traditional terminology indeed opened up new and refreshing ways of looking at the issues at stake, at the same time it facilitates and enables an empowering understanding of subject and place as well as a normative framework that builds on the shifting of territories, identities and citizenships.

#### **INTRODUCING THE OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE**

In this special issue of *TESG* we want to explore, discuss and better understand these implications of transnationalism for the understanding of borders, identities and (local) places. More particularly, we would like to critically reflect on both the geographical complexity and multiplicity of the phenomenon under study and on the conceptual framework we use to describe and politicise it. The key question in this issue is: what is the political power of the subject and what is the position of place in current transnationalism studies? This overall-question leads to various relevant subquestions such as what is the place of place still in transnationalism? How to understand and analyse the new transnational ontology of territorial borders? And how to capture the multiple transnational lines and interlinkages between territories, identities and citizenship? Further, how

are transnational territorial home-making and breaking practices constructed and politicised? And related to that, how do different migration and border regimes influence migrants' transnational attachment to place, notions of community/identity and belonging? And finally, how do different border and migration patterns and regimes translate into (new) structures of home, belonging and opportunity? Given the apparently contradictory spatialities of borders, reflected in their capacity to articulate both transcendent closure and immanent openness, we may assert that attempts to border people are inherently partial, selective, and opportunistic, both in their representation as in the interests that they serve. In short, rather than to attempt to strategise on the national political issue of finding measures for increased assimilation and control, we wish to invert the question and take a transnational perspective, the perspective of the world as a whole, and analyse the many interesting rising patterns of openness of national borders for human mobility and migration in, the sometimes neo-nationalistic reactions of political governments on the rise of what we tentatively called, the 'trans-world'.

It is with this 'trans' perspective that we asked various human geographers, some already established, others still relatively new in the field, to contribute to a special issue on the 'trans-world'. Tracing the new choreography of the container-opening and ground-breaking trans-world, the contributors all address the 'trans' of the geography of today in their own way, and in their own frame of relevance and conceptual logic, as specific articulations of 'trans-world'.

Ludger Pries (this issue) starts off with an insightful description of seven 'ideal types of internationalisation' that are currently receding, interconnecting or expanding old concepts of container spaces. He distinguishes between re-nationalisation (at new levels), inter-nationalisation, supra-nationalisation, globalisation, and (as strengthening of relativist spaces): glocalisation, diaspora-internationalisation and transnationalisation. He shows that new politics of belonging, new logics of inclusion and exclusion are leading to new divisions of social segmentation and spatial segregation. In his view, space should not be seen as 'absolute' and that an end should be made of space

as a container: relativist space is increasingly important. In order to analyse the current internationalisation processes in his view absolutist and relativist approaches of social spaces have to be combined.

In the same vein Ruben Gielis (this issue) makes an interesting attempt to create a cross-fertilisation of border studies and transmigration studies. In doing so, he contributes to a deeper understanding of the in-between spatial life worlds of transmigration by referring to short-distance mobilities in the German-Dutch border region. He illustrates how borders should not be seen as passive 'lines of division': borders play an active and constitutive role: migrant transnationalism is about experiencing the border (and experiencing the difference). At the same time – attachment to the nation-state still plays a role. Dutch migrants reside in Germany (to benefit from lower costs of living) but work and family life to a large extent still takes place in the Netherlands. Crossing the state border forms part of daily routines and is part of the transnational experience. State borders are 'active and polymorphous social constructions which are the outcome of people's need to make differences' (van Houtum 2005). Migrant transnationalism is thus, about experiencing the border, or experiencing the difference, in the playingfield of which migrants try to be continuously between here and there. People live in between the current and former country of residence and – by doing so – continuously experience the difference between here and there. Transmigration is incorporation into two nation-states – where people play an active role in shaping transnational space. The ways the borders play an active role in 'creating a trans-world' very much depend on the persistence of national states. The barrier function is low (it is easy for people to cross borders) – but still here borders are difference makers. Gielis's paper convincingly makes clear that the border is a space – and not a line. People make their own borders by paying an active role in ordering and othering. Borders should therefore not be seen as 'lines of division' but rather as 'lived spaces'.

Subsequently, Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (this issue) show that the conventional understanding of citizenship as an exclusively nationally based institution has

been challenged by four political economic developments at the global scale: first, there has been the historic growth in the absolute size of mass migration and spatial mobility. New patterns of South-North and North-South migration as well as North-North and South-South migration affect the meaning and practice of national citizenship in both the South and North because of the incorporation of newcomers to receiving localities, and also because of enduring transnational socio-economic and political relationships both poor and affluent migrants have forged with their homeland. Second, they point to the growing importance of transnational practices and discourses developed by international migrants and their networks which constitutes another driving force affecting the characteristics of national citizenship (creating informal global micro-structures) having significant transformative power over the localities. State restructuring is the third global development affecting the conventional framing of national citizenship – under neo-liberalism many states have reduced their role; the dramatic rise of the securitisation of national borders following 9/11 is a fourth development reshaping national citizenship. Given that nationhood, citizenship and loyalties are no longer linked, they stress the need of rescaling politics from the national to the urban spatial level. In current discourses on the ‘rights to the city’ (RTTC), it is proposed to valorise the power of all city inhabitants, independent of their national citizenship, to shape the decisions regulating the use of urban space-bypassing conventional regimes of national citizenship. According to Smith and Guarnizo, we can no longer view cities as localized solely within national territory; they must be examined in their relationship to the global economy. The RCCT movement seems to provide a mechanism for greater inclusiveness in today’s burgeoning multicultural cities, perhaps even offering the first step in the development a transnational form of multicultural municipal citizenship. At the same time, while stressing that old fashioned ‘national’ citizenship should be redefined into ‘urban’ citizenship, they also show that ‘localised rights’ are not necessarily right: urban ‘place makers’ are not an homogenous group – as they cannot be separated from global power networks.

Gertjan Dijink and Inge van der Welle (this issue) show how transnationalism has direct implications for issues of territorial sovereignty and loyalty. Whereas most literature on transnationalism focuses on how transnational migrants maintain their relationship with their home areas, this paper analyse the active role of home countries in controlling their citizens overseas and assess the implications for sovereignty and loyalty. Along with globalisation, where people have constructed new opportunities to accumulate passports, homeland governments are now increasingly involved in homeland politics. Dijink and Van der Welle criticise the idea that ‘trans-world’ – and new types of ‘flexible citizenship’ will attune the frozen world of territorial sovereignties and citizenship (the world is more frozen than adherents of ‘transmigration’ sometimes seem to suggest). They show how ‘the long arm of foreign governments’ play important roles; how diaspora involvement will not so much influence the individual life of transmigrants, but that this might reshape ‘trans-world’ by putting at risk ‘national autonomy’; the new sovereignty discourse fits into a neo-nationalist trend (also mentioned by Pries). The involvement of a diaspora with homeland politics and/or diaspora – host country relationship can generate tensions about sovereignty and loyalty as persons are forced to be accountable from two sides. They conclude that globalisation and transnationalism do not necessarily imply less state power (more specifically: governments force their citizens overseas to act according to the rules of the home country). Transnationalism is in their view firmly coupled with foreign control and closure. This recognition of (hidden) state control has important implications for current discussions about sovereignty and loyalty (in the case of dual nationality). However, Dijink and Van der Welle also show that the more successful integration is and the more migrants are actively participating in host country, the more extraterritorial political ties appear as dysfunctional.

Johanna Waters (this issue) aims at gaining a better understanding of the relationship between transnationalism, citizenship and spatial belonging over time by analysing the evolution of Chinese immigration in Canada focusing on their transnational relations with

Taiwan and Hong Kong, respectively. Waters examines Levitt's assumption that 'while many assume that transnational practices and assimilation are incompatible, others argue that long term transnational involvement and incorporation can co-exist and, in some cases 'mutually reinforce each other'. She shows the complexity of settlement experiences, and illustrates that the wealth Chinese immigrant experience in Canada very much depends on the personal circumstances – strategic and flexible intentions can give way to wholly unanticipated experiences. It is therefore impossible to 'read off' degrees of integration and belonging from the extent of transnational practices. Her conclusion is that transnationalism and local engagement can very much co-exist. In time, greater integration will not necessarily occur, and greater integration will not necessarily contribute to increasing loyalty and/or 'local' sense of belonging. In fact, she interestingly concludes, the opposite can occur.

Maggi Leung (this issue) examines the spatiality of transnationalism and meaning of borders in the tourism business sector operated by Chinese migrants in Europe. More specifically, she explores the transnational space between Mainland China and Europe – focusing on Chinese tourist operators in particular. Instead of serving simply as a bridge between their two home economies, migrants engaged in the tourism sector are active and innovative agents in crossing and redrawing the borders of different geo-cultural spheres they are embedded in, producing modified tourism landscapes that suit the desires of their compatriot travellers. The Chinese migrants (in their role as tourist operators) act as cultural adaptors, make their customers feel conformable and at home. Chinese tour agents, drawing upon their cultural capital, rechart the map of Europe and package the continent in compact tours. They are, in other words, innovative agents in poking the borders of different geo-cultural spheres, offering new types of transnationalised services, capitalising on the cultural distance between the two homes.

Migrants who are involved in travel business celebrate the weakening of borders as in the sense of increased mobility among Chinese people as tourists. But at the same time they maintain (sometimes also reinforce) and capi-

talise on the perpetuation of cultural borders between their compatriots from 'home' in China and the cultural tourism products available in their new 'home' Europe. In addition, Leung shows that 'transnational community' is not necessarily harmonious, but full of competition; she thereby also stresses processes of deversus re-territorialisation; and the importance of borders .

And finally, Lothar Smith and Valentina Mazucato (this issue) explore the meaning of transnational investments by Ghanaian migrants in houses in Accra by looking at both migrants' motivations to invest in houses in the city as well as urban actors motivations to be involved in these investments which cannot be reduced in simple terms of economic efficiency). Such investments should thus not be seen as an outcome of pure economic reasoning – it is also shaped by the cultural sphere. Their contribution interestingly illustrates ways in which the people in Amsterdam in the rural area of origin and in the capital of Accra are increasingly connected.

In sum this collection of papers of an international grouping of authors in this journal makes clear that the understanding of today's migrations and mobilities is no longer, if it ever was, to be found in their taken-for-granted territorial linearity and categorisability. It depends very much on the interplay and powerplay between activities and politics that transgress borders and those activities and politics that rechart and draw new lines in the sand what the outcome will be in specific places and for specific people.

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#### Notes

1. If we look, for example, at the collection of seminal papers in the recently published *Transnational Studies Reader* (Khagram & Levitt 2008), we see that of the 50 entries only five stem from the 1970s, three from the 1980s, 28 from the 1990s and 13 were first published since the year 2000.
2. It is to be noted that Žižek is not talking about an object that can be opposed to the subject and

therefore re-establishing the subject-object split, but rather about objects absent in language but as objectifications of language itself.

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