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Living across borders: The everyday experiences of Moroccan and Brazilian transmigrants in Belgium

ABSTRACT

Based on research amongst Brazilian and Moroccan temporary residents of the cities of Brussels and Antwerp (Belgium), this article engages with the changes in and current methodological approaches to migration studies. By demonstrating how the trajectories of many contemporary migrants are marked by ongoing mobility, it further complicates previous linear and unidirectional models of migration to move beyond a classical and potentially deterministic model of studying migrant trajectories. The authors illustrate how many contemporary migrants come and go, not always being sure how long they will stay in the different stopovers on their trajectories, when they will stop migrating or where they will eventually settle. Because of the temporality of their residence, many of these so-called 'transmigrants' are not only faced with the same problems and challenges as other migrants, arriving newly in another country and rebuilding social networks, but are additionally confronted with a number of risks that are related to their mobile lifestyle. Although globalization and the porosity of nation state borders facilitate transmigration, they result in juridical and practical complexities, reflected in transmigrants' everyday struggles. The authors explore these struggles and the difficulties and opportunities transmigrants encounter when they turn to their (transnational) networks to ask

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for support. Transmigrants' social life is not only oriented towards their country of residence, but consists of complex networks beyond boundaries. Through visits, telephone calls and the use of social media, many transmigrants create, sustain and (re)discover transnational as well as local social networks. While many address their transnational networks to partly alleviate their needs, the development of local networks still appears as indispensable.

The classical picture of migration as a unidirectional movement, whereby migrants 'uproot themselves, leave behind home and country, and face the painful process of incorporation into a different society and culture' (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 48), is no longer tenable today. Contemporary migration scholars have amply recognized that present-day migration takes place in a globalized world, characterized by the gradual development of 'economic, cultural, social and political interconnections and processes which routinely transcend national boundaries' (Yeates 2002: 4). Rapid technological development, interconnected trade relations and a revolution in communication are increasingly interconnecting individuals and places, giving a new impetus to human mobility (Audebert 2010; Bauman 2000; Castles and Miller 2009; Urry 2007). In this context, migration has come to be seen as an ongoing and complex process, whereby migrants remain connected to multiple localities, forging relations, spaces and networks that transcend the confines of local and national borders. This article engages with these changes in and current methodological approaches to migration studies. By exploring the narratives of Brazilian and Moroccan migrants in Belgium, it demonstrates how the trajectories of many contemporary migrants are marked by ongoing mobility. Not only do these migrants often cross geographical nation state borders, they must also negotiate a variety of other borders – geographic, racial, oceanic, linguistic, cultural, institutional and familial. Through an exploration of these people's lives across borders, the article further complicates previous linear and unidirectional models of migration to move beyond a classical and potentially deterministic model of studying migrant trajectories.

The mobile conception of migration has been captured by newly developed concepts, which stress the transnational character of migrant experiences and focus on the impact of ongoing mobility and border-crossing activities in migrants' daily lives (Adey et al. 2014; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2014; Cresswell 2006; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). In our research, we use the term 'transmigration' to distinguish our respondents as a specific group of migrants. 'Transmigration' is generally used to describe two characteristics of contemporary migration patterns. The first characteristic (also captured under the concept of transnationality) refers to migrants' maintenance of durable ties across boundaries, resulting in the establishment of transnational spaces, communities and networks (Faist 2010). Glick Schiller et al. (1995: 48) define transmigrants as those migrants who, in their everyday lives, 'forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement'. The maintenance of transnational connections is highly facilitated by advances in transportation and in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and by the rapid evolution of applications for using and accessing these technologies. Various communication modes, such as mobile telephony, the Internet (including Skype and social media) and digital broadcasts have become increasingly central for trans-border interaction (Schrooten 2012b).

A second important characteristic of transmigration is the multiple border crossings and permanent mobility of many present-day migrants who come and go, not always being sure how long they will stay in the different stopovers on their trajectories, when they will stop migrating or where they will eventually settle (Schrooten and Lamote 2013; Schrooten et al. 2015). Motivations for this temporality may be intrinsic (e.g. returning to the country of origin, joining relatives in another country, finding work in another country) or extrinsic (this includes legal barriers that only allow a temporal stay in the country, such as being on a student visa, rejection of a claim for refugee status or the granting of a temporary status). The term transmigrants can also be used to refer to transient migrants who follow an essentially linear migration trajectory with a specific destination in mind, but who for a variety of reasons spend some time in other locations before moving on to their actual destination (Van den Aemele et al. 2013). In sum, transmigration may be defined as ‘the lived condition of straddling borders, whether by choice or by necessity’ (Hunter et al. 2010: 223). It can be experienced by a wide range of migrants, either as a permanent way of life or as a passing or recurring stage in the life cycle. Transmigrants comprise a large variety of migrants, differing in their motives of migration, their residence statutes, the nature of their migration trajectories and the intensity to which they engage with their transnational contacts.

To delineate the scope of our research, we chose to include a third aspect to this definition of transmigration. This article therefore focuses on those transmigrants who find themselves in socially vulnerable situations. To this extent, we wanted to retain the ‘class distinction between “migrants” and “cosmopolitan nationals” or expats (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 11), whereby the latter – often higher educated and financially well-off – possessing more agency in their migration decision-making, are often actively sought after by receiving countries, and benefit from financial and residential privileges. We thus follow Pries (2004: 31) when he states that many transmigrants ‘are not the new sovereign cosmopolitans who move freely and voluntarily between different locales, places and opportunities without problems’. The transmigrants we examine have less agency and limited privileges.

This article discusses the everyday experiences of Brazilian and Moroccan transmigrants currently residing in Belgium, with a focus on their day-to-day anxieties and struggles and the strategies they use to meet their needs. It discusses how transmigration manifests itself in their migration trajectories, enquires into the increasing practical and juridical complexities resulting from multiple border crossings, and explores the transnational and local networks to which transmigrants turn to ask for support. The article draws on interview data collected during ongoing research on urban social work with transmigrants in Belgium. The research made use of a qualitative, mixed-methods research design, as this allowed for a profound exploration of individual transmigrants’ migration histories and experiences. From February to December 2014, semi-open in-depth interviews were held with 31 Moroccan and fifteen Brazilian respondents, in addition to sixteen interviews with Brazilian transmigrants that earlier took place for the Ph.D. research of one of the authors.¹ We selected respondents who were recent residents of Belgium (and who were within a maximum period of five years in residence), living in the cities of Antwerp or Brussels (two relatively large and diverse cities in Belgium). Topics discussed in the interviews concerned the respondents’ migration trajectories, the impact of multiple border crossings on their daily life and the

1. In-depth interviews were also conducted with fourteen Ghanaian transmigrants, but as the analysis of these interviews is still ongoing, they are not included in this article.

strategies they used to face their day-to-day anxieties and struggles, including the use of social media. In conjunction with these interviews, we organized focus groups with social work organizations and discussed their experiences with transmigrants. Brazilians and Moroccans form two markedly different migrant communities, each with a specific migration history in Belgium. Therefore, before discussing the results of our research, we briefly contextualize Moroccan and Brazilian migration to Belgium. Comparisons between these populations bring to light differing and corresponding patterns of transmigration and problem-solving strategies.

A FOCUS ON MOROCCAN AND BRAZILIAN TRANSMIGRANTS IN BELGIUM

Moroccans constitute the largest immigrant community in Belgium, with an estimated 429,580 persons of Moroccan descent (or 3.9 per cent of the total population) residing on Belgian soil (Schoonvaere 2014: 12). Moroccan labour immigration was formally organized by the Belgian government in the 1960s. The recruitment of foreign – Moroccan and Turkish – labourers was seen as a temporary measure to meet the demands of the booming industry in the 1960s. Temporary and circular migration turned into permanent settlement when in the 1970s European countries started adopting stricter immigration policies. Unwilling to return to unpromising political and economic conditions in Morocco, many labour migrants chose to settle permanently in Belgium. Although the so-called ‘migration stop’ decreed in the 1970s closed the doors to further labour migration, the Moroccan presence in Belgium further increased via family reunification and marriage migration (Reniers 1999; De Haas 2007). Since the start of the economic crisis in 2008, an important – but as yet unregistered – influx of Moroccans from Spain, Italy and Greece has been reported (Dierckx and Van Dam 2013). The number of South European Moroccans arriving in Belgium is yet to be captured in census statistics. Moreover, many of the emigrating Moroccans have obtained a European passport, which makes it difficult to ascertain how many incoming South Europeans were of Moroccan descent. Recent research, however, reveals that a significant number of emigrating Spaniards were born in Morocco (Van Duynslager et al. 2013).

Existing research on Moroccan migration in Belgium often focuses on questions of integration and identification, enquiring into (changing) social, cultural and religious (Muslim) values among the settled Moroccan population (Smits et al. 2010; Timmerman et al. 2003). More recently, scholars have begun to explore transnational activities and identifications among Belgian Moroccans (Vancluysen and Van Craen 2011; Saaf et al. 2009). Nevertheless, the differing experiences of recent Moroccan immigrants to Belgium and the impact of multiple border crossings on their needs and well-being remain as yet largely unexplored.

Along with Moroccans, Brazilians constitute the second group we focus on in this article. Although Brazilian migration was for a long time restricted to internal, intra-continental and a few trans-continental destinations, starting in the 1980s, Europe also became an important migration destination for Brazilian migrants (Marcus 2008; Padilla 2006). Brazilian immigration into Belgium started in the 1960s with the arrival of a small number of political refugees who fled the military regime, as well as some artists, football players and students. Due to political changes in Brazil, many of these migrants returned

to Brazil from the 1980s onwards. The economic crisis in Brazil around the 1990s encouraged a second Brazilian migration wave to Belgium. This wave gradually intensified, possibly as the result of the changed immigration policies of the United States after 9/11 and, subsequently, of the United Kingdom after the terrorist attacks in London in 2005 (Góis et al. 2009; Rosenfeld et al. 2010; Schrooten 2012a).

The presence of Brazilian migrants in Belgium is facilitated by bilateral agreements between Belgium and Brazil, allowing Brazilian nationals to enter Belgium without previously having to request a visa. Many among them remain within the Schengen associated countries after the allowed tourist stay of 90 days. Although Brazilian migration to Belgium is relatively recent and much smaller compared to Moroccan migration figures, with an estimated 10,000 to 60,000 Brazilian migrants living in Belgium (Góis et al. 2009), Brazilian policy-makers, the Ministry of the Brussels capital region and the International Organization for Migration have all referred to this migration as an important trend (Pedroso 2011; Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest 2008; Góis et al. 2009).

TRAJECTORIES OF TRANSMIGRATION

Our respondents' narratives reveal the increasingly complex migration trajectories manifest in their transmigration experiences. Rather than following a linear trajectory from one country of origin to a desired country of destination, the majority had passed through other locations before arriving in Belgium. Their presence in third countries ranged from some weeks or months to numerous years. The reasons for this ongoing mobility were diverse. Although some transmigrants explicitly chose a mobile lifestyle, the patterns of transmigration in many respondents' narratives showed that transmigration is often an unintended process and a phase that might end, but could just as well start over, depending on their circumstances. These circumstances could relate not only to work, but also to financial, legal or social matters.

Among our respondents, numerous migration trajectories reflected the growing importance of internal movements within the European Union. Many of these movements were instigated by the economic crisis: for these migrants, who initially settled in Southern European countries, further migration was prompted by the need to seek better opportunities and life circumstances by a subsequent move further north. For many of them, this new migration was unintended, as they had lived in Southern Europe for numerous years and had expected to settle there permanently. The unexpected new migration to Belgium thus turned previously settled migrants into transmigrants, and their previous locations into 'transit places' (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). Several of the Moroccan respondents, for example, had left Spain, fleeing the devastating effects of the economic crisis. The Moroccan presence in Spain was largely initiated by geographic proximity and relatively easy access (visa requirements were not installed until 1991), making Moroccans the largest and fastest growing immigrant community in Spain. As the economic crisis worsened, they were also the first to be affected by the growing unemployment and poverty (Arango and González Quiñones 2009). Their ensuing move to Belgium was often influenced by the advice and promised support of transnational networks of family and friends in Belgium, thereby reinforcing patterns of family reunification and chain migration that have historically characterized Moroccan settlement in Europe (De Haas 2007).

Thouriya's story exemplifies one of the complex transmigration trajectories that numerous other Spanish Moroccans may experience. Thouriya emigrated as a young girl from Morocco to Spain, joining the increasing work force of female labour migrants employed in the Spanish service sector (De Haas 2007). After meeting and marrying her Moroccan husband in Spain, her stay there seemed to have become permanent, although she had spent her initial years as an illegal resident:

I was working as a nanny with a mixed couple, Arab and German. They lived in Morocco and I worked for them, I looked after the children. But every year they went to Spain, because he has a house in Marbella, on the beach. And I came with them. And I found a job in Marbella, and I stayed. I worked for them for nine years. And I stayed in Spain, I found my husband there.

(Moroccan woman, 42 years old)

Although Thouriya and her husband lived through the economic crisis in Spain relatively well – both were still employed – they moved to Belgium following the advice of her husband's relatives. For Thouriya and her husband, the decision to move was largely determined by the social networks they had in place in Belgium, which facilitated their settlement in the new country.

This process of 'reorientation' (whereby migrants engaged in further migration across different host countries in Europe rather than returning to their homeland) also took place among Brazilians. A number of Brazilians residing in Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain or Italy) also chose to reorient their migration within the European continent, rather than returning to Brazil, while not having met their original goals (Fernandes et al. 2012). Another woman by the name of Aparecida, a Brazilian transmigrant living in Spain, posted the following comment in an online community primarily focused on Brazilian migrants in Belgium. The post is illustrative of the concerns she has in Spain around unemployment, which is also complicated by her anxieties about a possible imminent departure to Belgium to find job opportunities:

People, I would like to hear your opinion, you who are living over there ... This is what is going on; the only country I migrated to until now is Spain. I have been here for 8 years already, but I lost my job now, just like 5 million Spanish. Things are really bad over here now and I feel very discouraged. The thing is that I have the Spanish nationality and that I don't know if it will really help me to find a job over there, because I speak neither English nor French, and even less Flemish. Only Portuguese and Spanish. Do you think it is an illusion to leave Spain and try to find something over there without even knowing the language? Please, I need you to be realistic in your answer. Lots of thanks to everyone who will respond (Brazilian woman living in Spain).

(Schrooten 2012a)

Besides economic- or employment-related reasons, a migrant's decision to migrate can also be influenced by differences in national immigration laws. Other factors include the strength of a migrant's transnational networks, which may also guide choices to leave one destination and to resettle in another. Transnational marriage, for example, may prompt cross-border relations and activate stronger social ties between families and friends who

may, in turn, be located in different parts of Europe. Migration may also reflect a person's conscious strategies to avoid stringent laws on marriage and family reunification in EU-member states. As these laws may considerably differ between EU-member states, movements across nation state borders may form a solution when the procedures in one locality appear insurmountable. Until 2011, legalities around bringing family members from one country to another were less rigid in Belgium than in the neighbouring country of the Netherlands. In 2009–2010, the Netherlands introduced income conditions for marriage and family reunification (Pascouau and Labayle 2011). This encouraged a number of Dutch-Moroccan residents to move to Belgium where the facilitation of migration was less encumbered by such conditions (until 2011). This particular migration trend became informally known (somewhat cynically and facetiously) among Dutch-Moroccans and in political debates as 'the Belgium-route'.² This 'route' took the form of migration from the Netherlands to Belgium, with many Moroccans moving to Belgium as EU-citizens to marry a Moroccan partner (still residing in Morocco), who because of this marriage was allowed to live in Europe. Aya, for example, had migrated from Morocco to the Netherlands when she was fifteen years old but, following the advice of her Belgian nieces, decided to emigrate to Belgium to marry her future husband, who was living in Morocco. She states:

Actually, it was not my choice [to move to Belgium]. I was still studying in the Netherlands and we thought it would be easier through Belgium, because in the Netherlands there are a lot of rules, you really need to have a good salary to get your husband in. So me and my nieces, we thought to do it through Belgium, my nieces really helped me a lot.

(Moroccan woman, 24 years old)

Moreover, marriage migration appeared not to be limited to partners residing in Morocco. As the social and familial networks of Moroccan migrant families span the whole European continent (and beyond), marriage partners may often be found in other European countries. Transmigration thus may be the logical consequence of the transnational lifestyle of many present-day migrants, and reflect the intensive ties maintained across national boundaries. At the same time, many patterns of transmigration are often not that well planned. Transmigrants often combine different strategies, or sometimes settle 'by accident'. Their migration patterns are influenced by their social networks in Europe, and sometimes the decisions are less clear-cut.

I came to Belgium as an au pair. My sister lived in Spain, and I visited her when my niece was born. From Spain, I searched a job as au pair. I had selected several countries, like Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Austria ... [...] Actually, Belgium chose me. The family contacted me, I was speaking with an English woman, but the Belgian family already sent me the contract, they were faster. I hadn't even heard about Belgium.

(Brazilian woman, 24 years old)

I had been in Germany before. [...] Last year, I wanted to go to Europe for a longer time. I have a sister who was living in Spain then, and before she was in Portugal. She married a Brazilian with Portuguese residence status, they married and went to Spain, where they opened a bar. [...]

2. The term 'Belgium-route' was first coined by the Dutch association Stichting buitenlandse partner (Association Foreign partner), which defends the right of Dutch nationals to marry a foreign partner and bring him or her unencumbered to the Netherlands. In 2005, the association first published a 'Handbook for the Belgium-route' on its website, specifying how Dutch citizens could facilitate their marriage with a foreign partner by moving to Belgium. The term was consequently adopted in political as well as popular discourses on migration.

I had already resigned from my job in Brazil, when she suddenly said 'I think we'll go back to Brazil [...] because there's a crisis in Spain and we'll have to close the bar'. And I thought 'Oh no, now what?' And then, I asked a Brazilian in Belgium if I could come there ...

(Brazilian man, 26 years old)

While most respondents had passed through (many) other locations before arriving in Belgium, their settlement in Belgium was not necessarily the end of the migration trajectory. Some respondents considered migrating to other destinations for a variety of reasons, such as seeking better opportunities if circumstances in Belgium proved too hard, or simply out of a sense of adventure and curiosity. For some, Belgium was originally just a country of transit on their way to the United Kingdom or another country. Nevertheless, staying in Belgium sometimes seemed a more attractive option to those who hoped to be able to finally settle down for a more stable life. Furthermore, the presence of children was a strong incentive to strive towards permanent settlement. Some respondents expressed being tired of migrating and hoped that Belgium could be their 'final stop'.

THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSMIGRATION ON EVERYDAY LIFE

Transmigration may give rise to a host of practical, administrative and juridical problems, which, especially for socially vulnerable transmigrants, adds more hardship and complexity to their migration experience. When asked about their day-to-day experiences, many respondents enumerated several difficulties they encountered, such as family separation, the difficult search for (official) jobs and housing, the barrier constituted by an unknown language, experiences of racism and discrimination, and, especially for undocumented migrants, the stresses and fears resulting from their legal status or lack thereof. They also faced additional difficulties related to their position as transmigrants. In this article, we highlight two key themes that our interviewees emphasized as sources of worry and anxiety, namely, the insecurity of their residence status and the juridical complexities related to their border-crossing trajectory. Both these themes were often intertwined.

Many of our interviewees discussed their residence status as a source of anxiety as they did not possess a legal residence permit. This finding corresponds with earlier research on Brazilian migrants in Belgium, which illustrates that the official census statistics largely underestimate the actual size of the Brazilian community, which is (unofficially) estimated between 10,000 and 60,000 migrants, compared to a population of 5324 officially registered as resident Brazilians in Belgium in January 2010 (Góis et al. 2009; Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2011; Universite Catholique de Louvain; Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebestrijding 2011). The number of Moroccans residing illegally in Belgium is equally difficult to estimate, but is said to comprise 'a few thousand' (Schoonvaere 2014: 23). The lack of a legal residence status makes it difficult for these transient migrants to find decent jobs, and gain access to appropriate housing, medical care and social support. Some informants also shared their fears about being arrested and deported.

Undocumented transmigrants have almost no social rights and support. Yet obtaining legal residence status does not automatically protect them from suffering severe hardships. Transmigrants moving from other EU-countries to Belgium often find themselves in a precarious legal and social position, due to

the peculiar status accorded to 'long-term residents'. Non-EU nationals who acquire a permanent residence status in EU-countries benefit from acquiring a 'free movement for workers', and this effectively allows them to settle in any member state on the condition they are employed or pursuing studies. However, depending on their residence status and the circumstances surrounding their social rights in the former country, transmigrants may be excluded from welfare and unemployment benefits in the receiving country. Some working transmigrants have found it difficult to obtain entitlements, such as unemployment benefits. This is because different national administrative bodies within a country require specific information about employment status in other countries and this may take time to obtain. As a result, EU-transmigrants who move to Belgium and who may, after a time, lose their job may find themselves in the unfortunate situation of being without any financial or social support. This was the case for Fouad who did not qualify for unemployment benefits in Belgium:

I have no unemployment benefit, no social support, no income. I get nothing. Nevertheless, I have worked in Spain for 15 years, here I worked 1 year and 2 months, and I get nothing. They said I need to work more. At first they gave me child benefits, and now they took that away too.

(Moroccan man, 50 year old)

The lack of formal financial and social support puts these transmigrants under pressure to find work and maintain their employment for a sufficient time in order to acquire an income and strengthen their social rights. Excluded from social services and provisions, finding a job and an independent income source is of paramount importance for transmigrants, yet simultaneously forms a source of incessant stress.

Our respondents also raised other administrative and juridical problems related to their voluntary or involuntary multiple border crossings. For example, transnational couples could face a range of juridical complexities as a consequence of differing matrimonial laws, which could impact on their circumstances differently depending on their nationality, the location of marriage and their place of residence (Sportel 2011). Paula, a Brazilian woman of 37, for example, had difficulties with her documents when she divorced her Swedish husband whom she had met during an earlier stay in Europe. They had married in Brazil but moved to Belgium because of a job opportunity he was offered:

When we came here, I had a residence permit on the grounds of family reunification. When I divorced my ex-husband, the city council refused to change my residence permit, although I had the right to obtain other documents. We had lived in other places as well when we were married and this complicated things enormously. It also resulted in many other problems.

(Brazilian woman, 37 years old)

This example illustrates how enduring links in other countries may produce additional problems. Transmigrants may be obliged to travel back and forth between countries in order to settle administrative issues. Noor, for example, lost a job in the process of doing this as she had to return to Spain to arrange her divorce.

Before, I was married with a Spaniard. The lawyer told me: 'Noor, on January 17, you need to be here to sign'. I paid this lawyer 1500€, and I wouldn't go? [...] My employer told me 'If you go, you will not return to your job here.' What could I do? I went, I signed, I stayed for five days. When I came back, I found out he had fired me.

(Moroccan woman, 40 years old)

Even after settling in a new country, transmigrants may 'commute' between multiple locations, which may sometimes facilitate but also complicate their everyday life.

FINDING SUPPORT

In our research, we asked our respondents about their transnational and local social networks, and the extent to which these networks could help them deal with their everyday struggles. In other studies on migration, social networks are generally considered an important form of social capital for migrants, allowing access to different types of information, resources and support (Ryan et al. 2008). While the temporality and insecurity that characterizes transmigration hampers the establishment of solid local networks, transmigration may also be an asset. For instance, in the absence of local resources, transnational networks can offer indispensable support and hence are considered an important form of social capital. It is not surprising, therefore, that many respondents referred to their transnational networks as an important source of support. Most of them had extended networks spanning national boundaries and maintained them through regular contact on (mobile) phones, social media or through visits (Schrooten 2012b). In many ways it could be said that this familial support was simultaneously distant and close. The use of media technologies at once assisted and strained the maintenance of transmigrants' social ties between geographically disparate families and individuals.

Of course, media technologies are a universal tool and not just confined to transmigrants' everyday uses. A study by Madianou and Miller (2012) demonstrates how parents and children who are separated, due to migration, use new media to maintain long-distance relationships (in this case between the Philippines and the United Kingdom). Amongst our respondents, transnational networks were crucial in times when emotional support was necessary. Our interviewees often expressed feelings of loneliness and homesickness. While communication and social contact through visits and on social media helped to ease these feelings, these networks were also a source of practical and financial support. Parents, siblings, relatives or friends represented important contacts as they were able to assist with handling administrative issues in the transmigrant's former country, including sending and delivering documents to relevant organizations. Paula, a 37-year-old Brazilian woman who faced many relational, financial and emotional difficulties in Belgium, relied on her friends and relatives abroad as a strong source of support:

In the beginning I mainly talked to them through Skype and I sent them e-mails. But now, I use Facebook. It's ridiculous. Every day, every day we talk. When I need emotional support, I get it from the people abroad. Not from the people here, but from abroad. And technology helps a lot. It's so easy, very easy, you can do it all on your phone. I received a lot of psychological help through the phone.

(Brazilian woman, 37 years old)

Transnational contacts were also significant for Moroccan migrants in Belgium. Vancluysen and Van Craen (2011) report that 46 per cent of Moroccan migrants have weekly contact with their family in Morocco by phone or Internet, and that 60 per cent return to Morocco for visits at least once a year. Most Moroccan respondents in our research maintained intensive contact with close relatives in other countries, making use of new technologies and social media like Skype and Facebook, or benefiting from the special offers of telephone providers in Belgium who specifically target the Moroccan population. Visits were also commonplace, but conditional on financial availability and whether their residence status permitted mobility. Despite these contacts, emotional support across boundaries also had its limits, as respondents were often reluctant to fully disclose the hardships they encountered in Belgium to prevent upsetting relatives or friends. Some claimed others would not understand their situation, and therefore they avoided such discussions. Research also suggests that the usefulness of transnational ties may be limited, as these connections ultimately cannot replace the 'practical, hands-on support and assistance', which only local networks can provide (Ryan et al. 2008).

Despite their temporality, transmigrants often develop local social networks in their countries of arrival and/or transition. Studies point to the ways ethnic ties are considered an important form of social capital for recent migrants. In the absence of formal support, these local ties can become the most important form of social capital, as they provide access to necessary resources, advice and contacts (Ryan et al. 2008). For transmigrant Brazilians, the call upon informal networks of relatives or upon the larger community (cultural or religious) was quite strong. This call for assistance sometimes even started prior to arriving in Belgium. In their considerations to migrate to Belgium, many Brazilians used social networking sites such as Facebook to trace and make contact with other Brazilian migrants who were already in their new place of residence. Schrooten (2012b) describes how, in many cities all over the world with a significant number of Brazilian migrants, these migrants have formed online migrant communities on social networking sites such as Facebook. These communities often provide a variety of social capital, both online and offline, which assists in the process of transition to a new community. In online migrant communities, it is often recently arrived Brazilians who raise many of the forum topics about their circumstances and the challenges they are confronted with during their settlement in the city and their day-to-day experiences.

We found that the reality was starkly different for Moroccan transmigrant communities. Moroccan respondents' online engagement was practically non-existent. This was primarily suggestive of their contrasting circumstances to Brazilian transmigrants. Research indicates that Moroccan migrants' patterns of mobility can be categorized as a form of chain migration (Heering et al. 2004), referring to the social processes where families follow one another from one country to another, and whereby contacts are mostly pre-established with known relatives and friends. For our Moroccan respondents, we found that their local networks were restricted to a small number of acquaintances. This situation often underscored their vulnerable circumstances, particularly in cases where promises of support prior to their migration were then withdrawn upon arrival. As one research participant explains:

I wanted to stay in Spain, but my husband said 'no', because he has a [in Belgium] lot of family here. But when we arrived here, no family.

As long as we were there, they were like 'Come here, blablabla'. And when we came here, nothing. There's nobody to help you.
(Moroccan woman, 42 years old)

Both Brazilian and Moroccan transmigrants expressed ambiguous feelings about their ethnic networks in Belgium. On the one hand, these networks could offer different kinds of support, including financial, material as well as emotional. Assistance of a material nature, such as sharing a house, seemed especially indispensable for migrants who would otherwise be considered 'illegal' in the country and therefore without any form of residence status or social position. These migrants' exclusion from all formal sources of support and employment meant that they were forced to rely on the goodwill of family and friends. As one respondent describes:

I remember that the father of my daughter shared his apartment with three other persons. There were always minimum eight people sleeping there, because one always brought another one home out of pity. 'This one has nowhere to live, this one needs it.' [...] No Brazilian sleeps on the street, there's always someone taking him in.

(Brazilian woman, 37 years old)

Local networks were especially useful in the process of acquiring information and advice concerning administrative requirements, educational opportunities or employment. In this way, these networks functioned as social capital, allowing transmigrants to gain the necessary knowledge, connections and financial resources to meet their basic needs. Despite this assistance, however, solidarity within ethnic communities has its limits. This is because previously existing mechanisms of reciprocity among ethnic communities can also be placed under pressure. Such relations can be constrained by the rise in immigrant statistics and the associated welfare and social support services immigration necessitates. Dierckx and Van Dam (2013) argue that this burden on familial social relations is exacerbated by an increasing individualization and the disruption of traditional patterns of care and solidarity. The lack of support from ethnic networks was a recurring theme in the interviews, and the need for self-reliance was evident in many of the respondents' comments. Some of our participants also rejected the idea of receiving charity, expressing their desire to make it 'on their own'. Their sense of pride and self-respect prevented them from asking for help and from revealing the real extent of their problems within their social circles.

Moreover, we discovered that social relations with their peers (from a transmigrant's own ethnic group) may also be fraught with suspicion and distrust, and this finding is supported in the literature (Anthias 2007; Margolis 1993). In some cases, transmigrants discussed how they felt they had been exploited by people within their own ethnic social networks. These respondents had found employment with people in their ethnic community through their social networks, but faced long working days, and were paid low salaries or no over-time wages. They highlighted instances of insecurity and unpredictability, having to work in precarious environments, where guarantees of long-term stability were non-existent. Respondents also called attention to examples of internal ethnic prejudice, innuendo and discrimination in their social circles. These examples formed their justification for maintaining their

distance from specific networks and for limiting contacts to a restricted circle of acquaintances. In this way, Ryan (2011) has suggested how these ethnic networks may be viewed as 'truncated' and as an impediment, rather than as a form of support, for upward social mobility. A respondent describes what this process meant for her:

I used to be very involved in the Brazilian community, but I distanced myself now, because I didn't get any support. There's no use talking to them. [...] The European and the Belgian help you from the heart. The Brazilian wants money.

(Brazilian woman, 37 years old)

Yet, establishing ties with people outside of their immediate ethnic and social environment was difficult for some of our respondents. Language posed the most obvious barrier, but respondents also found it challenging to diversify their networks as they often lived in 'ethnic' neighbourhoods, or were simply too immersed in the struggle to find or keep a job. Contacts outside the ethnic community were therefore often non-existent or limited to superficial contacts with colleagues at work or co-students during educational activities. In addition, some respondents found Belgian people in particular an insular community and therefore difficult to approach.

In some instances, transmigrants turned to social welfare associations for support and advice. In the absence of well-developed local networks, local welfare associations functioned as key actors in promoting transmigrants' upward social mobility through the variety of support, resources and information they offered (Hunter et al. 2010). However, several respondents were often not aware of their rights to formal assistance, nor of the existence of the variety of (official or charitable) associations they could approach for support. Some interviewees discussed instances where they chose not to contact particular social services for fear of being turned down from welfare assistance, as well as on the basis of their personal negative experience with the service or based on others' hearsay. The lack of formal social support could sometimes be compensated by resorting to informal and ethnic associations. Some social service providers work outside of formal institutional frameworks, and many of these associations offer basic resources, like food and clothes, to those in need, sometimes acting as an intermediary between transmigrants and other institutions. A respondent explains their experience with one service provider:

These people [a charity association of Moroccan immigrants] visit me from time to time and they help me. They talked to the electricity provider, 'Please be patient, she has problems and will pay when she works'. And also at school, for my daughter, I have to pay a lot of money, they told them 'This lady has problems'.

(Moroccan woman, 43 years old)

While these associations are an indispensable source of support for those excluded from social support elsewhere, they are also under-financed, often overwhelmed by the demands of those most disadvantaged in society, and rely largely on the assistance of volunteers. Hence, they have been found to only partly and temporarily alleviate transmigrants' welfare needs (Dierckx and Van Dam 2013).

CONCLUSION: TRANSMIGRATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

This article discussed how the new reality of transmigration manifests itself in migration patterns and the everyday life struggles of Brazilian and Moroccan transmigrants in Belgium. Transmigration is characterized by the maintenance of durable social ties across boundaries, as well as by a condition of permanent cross-border mobility. Although transmigration can be a chosen lifestyle for some, numerous transmigrants exercise their choices within a macro-context of economic, political and legal frameworks, which shape their decision-making. Transmigrants may therefore be socially vulnerable, as temporality and mobility create additional complexities, compounding the 'classical' problems migrants experience in their day-to-day social realities. Migration trajectories are also shaped by transmigrants' embeddedness within transnational networks, which may guide migration decisions towards certain destinations and open up opportunities for support after resettlement.

For the Brazilian and Moroccan respondents in our research, transmigration was manifest in their unpredictable trajectories and unexpected migration, which often transformed their circumstances from relatively 'settled' immigrants in their own right into an alternative and distinct transmigrant relocation or reorientation. Despite their differing migration histories, transmigration affected both of these communities in unique ways. While Moroccan transmigration grafted itself upon established patterns of chain migration, Brazilian transmigration appears as a new form of migration flow that revealed their pursuance of better opportunities. Although globalization and the relative porosity of nation state borders – as exemplified by EU-regulations allowing for flexible movement across borders – facilitate transmigration, they also result in juridical and practical complexities, reflected in transmigrants' everyday struggles. While transnational networks can partly alleviate these needs, the development of solid local networks still appears indispensable. Formal and informal welfare associations, as well as the use of social media, play an important role in extending and diversifying these networks.

Transmigration is played out in a globalized context, in which European societies are rapidly transforming into 'migration societies' and cities emerge into 'majority-minority-cities' (Crul et al. 2013; Geldof 2013). Adding complexity to this increasing diversity, transmigration poses new challenges, not only for transmigrants themselves, but also for the societies which (temporarily) receive them. The reality of transmigration prompts questions around received notions of migration and integration. It also calls attention to how social service frameworks and social policies are being developed to respond to transmigrants' specific needs and experiences. As migrants (and citizens) are characterized by multiple and layered identities, transmigration adds multiple geographical spaces and networks to already established national and mainstream identities. In this context, transmigrants can be viewed as contemporary citizens of society, without as yet full and official (contemporary) citizenship to one.

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