

Living in two countries: Transnational living as an alternative to migration

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Abstract

After three decades of scholarship, transnationalism remains understood as connections between people who have migrated and people who remain in the country of origin. Such ties are important and prevalent. But perhaps a radical extension of transnationalism is also warranted: There are people who are neither ‘migrants’ nor ‘non-migrants’ but lead transnational lives that evade these categories. In such cases, transnationalism is not a consequence of migration, but rather a fundamental challenge to it. This article connects the established literature on transnationalism with this potentially significant perspective. We draw on the phrase ‘living in two countries’, which incorporates the tensions and contradictions that transnational living entails. Drawing upon diverse empirical data, we ask how we might identify lives that span two countries and, how such lives are differentiated, and why they are significant even if they are rare.

KEYWORDS

attachments, migration, temporality, transnational living, transnationalism

1 | INTRODUCTION

The understandings of ‘migration’ and ‘transnationalism’ have been tweaked and refined over the past three decades, but the conceived relationship between the two has remained constant. Transnationalism grows out of ties between people who have migrated and people who remain in the country of origin. We argue that contemporary forms of living call for a second interpretation. There are people who have neither migrated nor stayed but can best be described as living simultaneously in two countries. In such cases, transnationalism does not *result from* migration, but provides an alternative to it.

The counterintuitive idea of living in two countries raises a number of questions. What are the defining features of such a transnational way of life? What are critical dimensions of variation? And is this phenomenon socially and theoretically significant? These questions lie at the heart of this special issue. The introductory article introduces the concept of transnational living and locates it within the

broader literatures on transnationalism and migration. It provides an overview of the state of the art, connecting often-disjointed strands of research.

This special issue stems from the research project *Transnational Lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL)* and includes contributions from the project team as well as thematically related research carried out in other contexts. Taken as a whole, the articles advance the research agenda on transnationalism in two ways. First, the collection broadens the scope of relevant individuals beyond the category of migrants (Talleraas, 2019). Second, it narrows the phenomenon of interest to ‘transnational living’, which is less widespread than simply engaging in transnational practices. These two steps produce an innovative take on transnationalism that complements the tradition that grew out of the seminal work around the turn of the millennium, represented by, for instance (Guarnizo et al., 2003; Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Portes, 2001). We do not summarise the articles in this introduction to the special issue but engage with their respective

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contributions to understanding the temporalities of transnational living, addressed in a later section.

This introductory article gives primacy to conceptual discussion. However, we also draw upon empirical data from interviews with people who lead transnational lives. In this way, it is possible to address how the theoretical constructs can be applied in practice and to explore empirical specifications of transnational living. The interview data cover individuals and couples who split their lives between European countries or between one European and one non-European country. We have conducted semi-structured interviews with 100 individuals or couples who might be said to lead transnational lives. But instead of setting out with precise criteria for inclusion, we deliberately cast a wide net when we recruited informants. To this end, we foregrounded the roles of time and resources spent in each country, though without particular thresholds. Our intention was to let the contours of transnational living emerge from the data. Simultaneously, we sought to avoid reproducing findings from the vast body of scholarship on migrant transnationalism, which has evidenced and interrogated the ways in which migrants spend time in communities of origin during visits and across distance.

By design, all the informants have either Norway or the Netherlands as one of the countries which they were living in. The other country could be anyone. Our data cover people with attachments to 29 other countries throughout the world. We purposefully recruited interviewees from three broad groups: (1) immigrants to Norway or the Netherlands, (2) native-born Norwegians and Dutch and (3) mixed couples with one immigrant and one native-born person.

We aim to offer a theoretical frame for future analyses of transnational living. Simultaneously, we contend that sharpening the analytical precision of the use of the term 'transnational' in migration studies may serve empirical and theoretical ends, beyond the study of the phenomenon of people living in two countries. For instance, our concept of transnational living could enlighten the interface of migration and mobility and how we therein approach migration and residence when these are in a different relationship to one another, than the assumed, and indeed most common, where migration entails moving from here to live there instead, as mutually exclusive options of residence, sequenced in time (Erdal & Sagmo, 2017).

In this introductory article, we engage with established conceptualisations in research on migration and transnationalism that are relevant reference points yet describe different phenomena. We then juxtapose these conceptual and analytical insights with our own purposefully collected data in order to tease out the boundaries of transnational living. When we argue that 'transnational living' has not been properly recognised as a distinct phenomenon, the novelty lies in careful consideration of 'living' rather than a reinterpretation of 'transnational'.

Based on the conceptual and empirical analyses, we define transnational living as *having sustained and similarly significant attachments, interactions and presences in two or more societies separated by national borders*. In this definition, 'similarly significant' indicates a degree of balance while acknowledging that the two societies may play disparate roles. The series 'attachments, interactions and presences' point

to the combination of subjective and objective markers, and personal and collective elements, in ties to each society.

In preparation for our data collection, we had to find ways of explaining our interests and target group of respondents in a way that makes sense beyond academia. We started using the phrase 'living in two countries' to describe the project and recruit informants. This turned out to be a valuable construct, also for our own conceptual work. In fact, the phrase 'living in two countries' operationalizes a meaningful notion of truly transnational living. It seems to shed some of the implied directionality of most research on transnationalism: The two countries do not have to be thought of as an origin and a destination. The phrase 'living in two countries' also embodies some evocative friction because it almost seems like a contradiction in terms. How is it possible to live in two countries at once? This is what we explore, conceptually and empirically.

2 | CONCEPTUALISING CROSS-BORDER FORMS OF LIVING

Before developing the case for 'transnational living' as an empirically distinct phenomenon, we engage with four more established concepts in migration studies that capture some element of transnational defiance of migration from A to B: lifestyle migrants, expats, temporary labour migrants and international students. They contrast with each other, yet all potentially overlap with transnational living. In different ways, these concepts extend 'migration' from being a demographic event—defined by the transition from before/origin to after/destination—to being a sustained dual attachment. This extension of 'migration' is sometimes partial, implicit or correlational rather than an explicit defining element. These established concepts thus take us along different pathways *towards* transnational living, although our contribution is to cover the last leg and give meaning to the conceptual destination. We now address the four established concepts in turn.

Lifestyle migrants are defined by their choice about *how* to live as well as where to live (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016; Hoey, 2016; Korpela, 2019). This is true of much migration, of course, and 'lifestyle migration' is primarily distinguished by its connotations of relatively privileged mobilities. It is associated with mobility that often runs parallel to tourism flows, for instance, from Northern to Southern Europe, and many lifestyle migrants have made the personal transition from being tourists to being residents (Williams & Hall, 2002). In a widely used working definition, Benson and O'Reilly (2009) identified lifestyle migrants as 'relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life' (p. 609). The emphasis on 'part-time or full-time' speaks to the potential overlap with transnational living. Indeed, many lifestyle migrants are not 'migrants' in the conventional sense of having changed their place of habitual residence but lead transnational lives that challenge the notion of migration.

Expats have received increasing attention in migration research, with academics examining both the concept itself and the people who

identify or are associated with it. The current concept of 'expat' is the result of a dramatic transformation in meaning since the middle of the 20th century (Green, 2009). An 'expatriate' was previously a largely pejorative term for someone who had severed ties to their national origin. More recently, it has come to denote a privileged class of mobile professionals and their family members (Cranston, 2017; Habti & Elo, 2018; Kunz, 2016). Expats are typically associated with a lifestyle of cross-border connectivity combined with detachment from local society beyond the expat bubble (Fechter, 2007). Moreover, 'expat' is a potentially racialized construct, called out by Koutonin (2015) in her widely circulated text 'Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?'

Temporary labour migrants are defined by their mobility for employment and are either unable or unwilling to settle permanently in the country where they work. Temporary labour migration takes a variety of spatial and temporal forms; some are associated with specific labels such as 'circular migration' or 'contract worker migration', whereas other variants defy conventional classifications (Dauvergne & Marsden, 2014; Sarkar, 2017). The common element is the temporal rhythm or punctuation, often associated with a spatial separation of different spheres of life (Lulle, 2020). These spheres could be described as work versus leisure or production versus reproduction, the point being that they are anchored in different locations between which the temporary labour migrant is mobile. Such geographical disaggregation of life is, as we will return to, a common element in transnational living. Again, Europe is an instructive example because the financial, bureaucratic and logistical barriers to mobility are particularly low. Temporary labour migration in Europe therefore increasingly takes the form that Engbersen et al. (2010) refer to as 'liquid migration', distinguished by its transience, fluidity and complexity. Not only are aggregate patterns more difficult to distinguish, but there is ambiguity in when, how and where individuals 'migrate'. Such cases would often amount to what we describe as truly transnational living.

International students have grown rapidly in number since the turn of the millennium and spurred theoretical debates about the implications for our understanding of migration and migrants (Findlay et al., 2017; Raghuram, 2013; Riaño et al., 2018). How do we define, describe and label people who are enrolled in education outside their country of usual residence? They are most often referred to as 'international students' or 'internationally mobile students' and regarded as an exceptional category of migrants—to the extent that they are seen as migrants at all. Yet, they often have social and family ties and economic activities that defy this exceptionalism (Collins, 2008; Findlay et al., 2012). One distinguishing aspect of student migration is its temporal framing. Mobility is often conditioned by institutionalised temporal units (semesters and degrees), typically all within a 'student' phase of the life cycle. Student migration is a global phenomenon, with the top three destinations (the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia) situated on different continents. Mobility within Europe is of particular interest in the context of transnational living, because the combination of free movement and government programmes have contributed to extensive and fluid mobility of students.

These four concepts share assumptions about mobility being combined with sustained attachments to more than one society. But in each case, it is rather the motivations for mobility and the conditions under which it takes place that are the defining features. In other words, established concepts—and the empirical realities they describe—lend support to the idea that there are diverse ways of transnational living. Yet, such a way of living is not the essence of any of the labels, nor does it accurately describe *all* individuals subsumed under each one.

A potentially more promising concept is *transmigrant*, which appears to focus squarely on the combination of migration and sustained transnational ties. The term was introduced in the early 1990s as part of the vocabulary of transnationalism. Schiller et al. (1995) claimed that 'increasing numbers of immigrants are best understood as "transmigrants"', which they defined as 'immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state' (p. 48). In other words, 'transmigrants' do not challenge the concept of migration from one country to another but are simply a subgroup of 'immigrants' who engage in transnational practices. In a later study, Pries (2004) sought to identify 'transmigrants' as one of five 'ideal types' of migrants. He saw transmigrants as people who 'can live for a longer, but indeterminate time in one country and then shift to another country without defining a long-term residential strategy or orientation' (Pries, 2004, p. 12). This understanding of 'transmigrant' comes close to our notion of transnational living as a challenge to migration. However, the term 'transmigrant' remains steeped in conceptual ambiguity and has had limited impact on the field. In recent years, it rarely surfaces in the migration literature. And when it does, it is sometimes ambiguous whether 'trans-' refers to transnational or transit (e.g. Campos-Delgado, 2019; Diego Rivera Hernández, 2020). The most unequivocal use of 'transmigrant' in the social sciences is as the designation of participants in Indonesia's state-sponsored *Transmigrasi* programme for internal migration (e.g. Barter & Cote, 2015).

Where does this review of concepts leave us? Empirical research confirms that there are people who in diverse ways and for diverse reasons 'live in two countries', but the literature has not pinned down these individuals with any pertinent concept. The practice of living across borders clearly belongs to the realm of the transnational. However, 'transmigrant' remains a conceptual dead end, and 'transnationalism' is a much broader phenomenon that, for the most part, concerns people who are settled in one country while they engage in cross-border practices.

3 | TRANSNATIONAL LIFE, LIVES AND LIVING

After the study of migrant transnationalism emerged in the 1990s, researchers have sought for concepts that enable targeted empirical analyses. These concepts typically combine the adjective 'transnational' with other words, thereby adopting a particular analytical take

on what it is, that is, transnational. Prominent examples are *transnational practices* (e.g. Ehrkamp, 2005; Itzigsohn et al., 1999) and *transnational social fields* (e.g. Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Stock, 2016), which we return to below. In the context of this paper, it is pertinent to first examine the potential of three specific constructs: ‘transnational living’, ‘transnational life’ and ‘transnational lives’. The differences between them may seem trivial, but a closer look brings out fundamental aspects of the social processes at work.

‘Transnational life’ has been used to describe a collective enterprise, parallel to, say, ‘academic life’. For instance, Robert Smith (2002) posed the question, ‘why and how would second-generation Mexicans in New York participate in transnational life?’ (p. 145). Used in this way, ‘transnational life’ is a social formation or arena, much like ‘transnational social field’. It is detached from ‘life’ as personal, existential and durational.

By contrast, the much more widely used ‘transnational lives’ connects with precisely these aspects of life. Moreover, it creates a dual notion of individual yet shared experiences. ‘Transnational lives’ can therefore be thought of as a social phenomenon, in the way that is also true for ‘transnationalism’. The individuals who lead transnational lives might be connected only in terms of broadly similar experiences. Therefore, ‘transnational lives’ does not amount to a social morphology (cf Vertovec, 1999). The phrase ‘transnational living’ is similar in this respect. But it differs from ‘lives’ because it implicitly emphasises current practice and has an ambiguous connection with the existential and durational aspects of life.

‘Transnational living’ is closely associated with a single publication: Guarnizo’s (2003) ‘The economics of transnational living’. Well over half the publications that use the phrase ‘transnational living’ cite Guarnizo. Guarnizo (2003) does not offer a single and succinct definition, but describes transnational living in several ways, as ‘a panoply of [...] cross-border relations’ (p. 667), as ‘a condition that implies’ such relations (p. 670) and as a ‘field of social intercourse’ (p. 670). This diversity perhaps weakens the theoretical potency of the term. But Guarnizo (2003) interestingly contrasts his term with ‘transnational life’, which, he says, suggests ‘a state or a condition that reaches a stage of consolidation and equilibrium before disappearing’ (p. 670) and with ‘transnational livelihoods’, which he interprets as instrumental and strategic.

The verb ‘live’ can take on yet another form that is relevant to the transnational: to *live in* a place, in the sense of dwell, reside or be

at home. This interpretation becomes explicit in the phrase ‘living in two countries’ but is also integral to our understanding of transnational living.

4 | TRANSNATIONAL LIVING IN THE TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELD

Transnational living can be seen as a particular phenomenon within a wider landscape that is dominated by migrants and non-migrants and their transnational practices such as remittance transactions and return visits. It is widely acknowledged that there is great variation in the *scale and nature* of migrants’ involvement in transnational practices (Guarnizo et al., 2003; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). Moreover, transnationalism is not simply the result of *immigrants’* actions, as the original definition suggests, but also reflects the agency of non-migrants in communities of origin, that is, the people who have stayed, whereas others have migrated (Carling, 2008; Guarnizo, 2003; Mazzucato, 2011). In communities of origin, like among immigrants at destinations, some people are deeply involved in transnational social fields, whereas others are not. If we simplify degrees of transnational engagement to a dichotomy, and think of migration from a country of origin (A) to country of destination (B), these observations result in a rough fourfold classification of individuals (Carling, 2008):

1. Non-migrants in A who are *not* engaged in transnational practices
2. Non-migrants in A who engage in transnational practices with migrants in B
3. Migrants in B who engage in transnational practices with non-migrants in B
4. Migrants in B who are *not* engaged in transnational practices

This simple framework serves well for examining transnational practices in the wake of migration. It provides an entry point to how these practices create social morphologies, sustain or transform inequalities and evolve over time. In line with the pioneer work on transnationalism (Basch et al., 1994), we can say that Groups 2 and 3 above are part of, and reproduce, the transnational social field (Figure 1).

Yet, such a framework remains wedded to the dominant conception of the relationship between transnationalism and migration: that

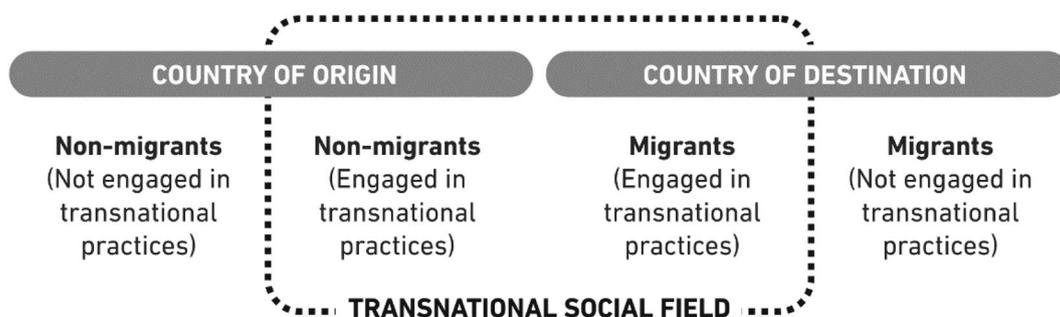


FIGURE 1 Schematic representation of the transnational social field (adapted from Carling, 2008)

transnationalism is constituted by ties between people who have migrated and people who remain in the country of origin. Such ties are clearly important and probably the core of transnationalism and a social phenomenon. But a radical extension is also warranted: There are people who do not fit the categories of ‘migrant’ or ‘non-migrant’ precisely because of their transnational way of living. In such cases, transnationalism is not a consequence of migration, but rather a fundamental challenge to the idea of migration. ‘Migration’ itself is open to different definitions but is generally understood as a change of habitual residence from one place to another, with the premise that a person can only live in one place at any one given time (Carling, 2017). The possibility of transnational living therefore calls for introducing a fifth group of individuals in the framework. They inhabit the transnational social field but are hard to classify as *either* migrants or non-migrants (Figure 2).

We mentioned initially how ‘living in two countries’ embodies an evocative self-contradictory element, because a person can only be physically present in one place at a time. Transnational is premised on an element of *simultaneity*, but this as a cross-border relational and interpersonal phenomenon (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Mazzucato, 2008; Tsuda, 2012). A single person's individual transnational living is inextricably linked to the division of time between the two countries. In the next section, we zoom in on the temporalities of transnational living. We build on the empirical material described in the introduction and investigate the varying temporal frames people employ when they lead transnational lives.

In the following, we use illustrations from our data and offer examples in support of the analytical refinements we propose to better understand the different roles of time and temporalities for transnational living. Our data set could have been mobilised to also shed light on other aspects of transnational living. However, for the purposes of addressing how it may be possible to live in two countries at once, the issue of temporalities merits particular attention. (See also Erdal and Carling, this issue, for analysis of economic aspects of transnational living, drawing on the same data.)

5 | TEMPORALITIES OF TRANSNATIONAL LIVING

In emphasising the temporalities of transnational living, we are consciously engaging the emerging temporal turn in migration research

(Collins, 2018; Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths et al., 2013; Robertson, 2019). Temporalities here refer both to the intuitive notion of chronological time, moving from past, to present, to the future, and to the philosophical idea of someone or something existing within and in relation to time (Griffiths et al., 2013). Furthermore, we recognise the continued salience of long-standing demographic engagement with time focusing on, among other, not only processual aspects such as age, life cycle stage and generation but also punctuations of time, such as birth and death (Amrith, 2020; Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Collins & Shubin, 2015; Gawlewicz & Sotkasiira, 2020).

We start by exploring the simple question of how our interviewees split their time between the countries they were living in. Thereafter, we continue drawing on our data to better understand three specific temporalities of transnational living, which were identified. For people leading transnational lives, different temporal frames concretely refer not just to the division of time, for instance, per year, between countries, but instead also to how transnational living is approached in relation to its existence as set within time, specifically as transitional, as temporary or as open-ended.

As described in the introduction to this article, our data explore the ways in which transnational lives interact with welfare states. (See also Erdal and Carling, this issue.) All our interviewees split their lives between Norway or the Netherlands on the one hand and one or more countries elsewhere on the other. They included retirees who spend half the year in Spain and half the year in Norway, as well as people who split their time quite evenly by commuting between Germany and the Netherlands. Others spend most of their time in one country. In fact, the interviewees are distributed across the entire range of possibilities from being only in one country to only in the other (Figure 3).

This distribution of how time is spent does not constitute meaningful data in its own right, because interviewees were selectively recruited and might, in some cases, not even identify with the notion of leading transnational lives. But it raises an important analytical question: How might other forms of attachment compensate for spending less time in each country? If a woman spends 10 months of the year in Brazil and 2 months in the Netherlands, for instance, what would it take for her to still be ‘living in two countries’? One possible compensatory attachment might be economic: If her livelihood is based in the Netherlands, then she might be ‘living in’ the Netherlands to a greater extent than the number of months would suggest. Perhaps, it also

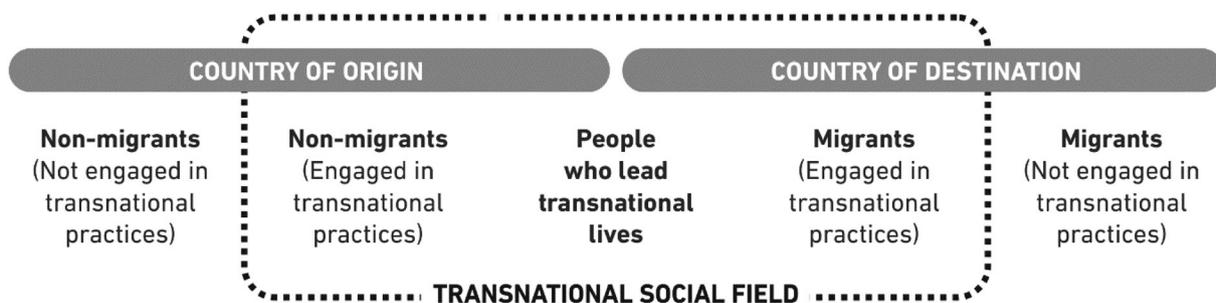


FIGURE 2 Schematic representation of the transnational social field, including people who lead transnational lives

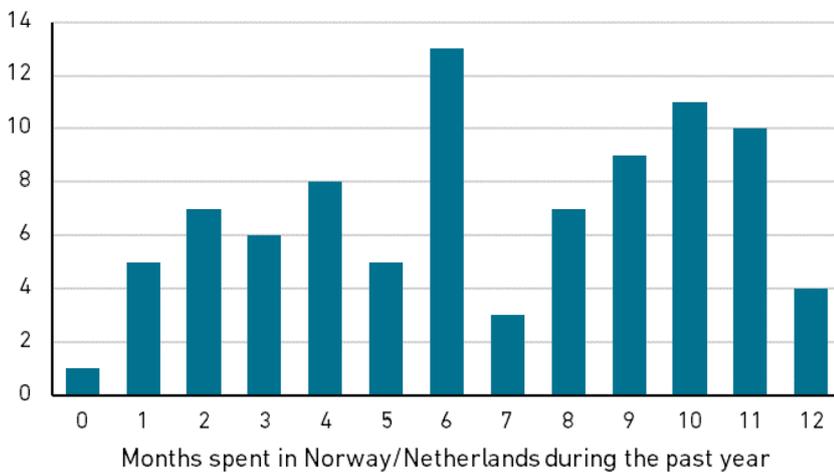


FIGURE 3 Division of time among interviewees

matters how people seek to shape the division of time between countries. If a person spends 9 months of the year in Norway and 3 months in Pakistan, but organises life around maximising the time in Pakistan, then perhaps the number of months accomplished does not appropriately communicate the significance of this attachment.

The notion of living in two countries has an implicit focus on the present. This is a feature it shares with 'transnational living' but which sets it apart from 'transnational lives'. Whereas transnational living might be a temporary arrangement, a transnational life, it seems, stretches out in time, over a life course, as well as in space. This is evident in a number of biographies that, in retrospect, use the characterisation 'a transnational life' about their subjects (Hodes, 2010; McCreery, 2008; Scully, 2010; Shoshkes, 2016). Leaving this holistic characteristic of an entire life aside, what are the relevant temporal frames of transnational living, foregrounding the present? Reviewing our empirical material, we find three slightly different temporal forms: Transnational living can be transitional, temporary or open-ended. We now elaborate on each and present empirical illustrations.

First, transnational living can be *transitional*: This entails that living in two countries can be a phase in the course of moving from one country to another or in the course of exploring a move before making a firm commitment. As Emil explains, transnational living may be a choice in a transition, for instance, starting a new job, perhaps considering whether or not to move with the whole family to a different country to live long term, it may offer time to assess and prepare based on gained experience. But transnational living as a transitional phenomenon may also come at a cost:

So that was okay for one year, but then it was really enough. Because also if you're then only at home, during weekends and then all week not. Yes, this for a while, that's okay but it gives a certain rhythm that's also not easy and nice. So, after one year, the whole family moved. Yes, and now good, we are all living in Aachen and I'm commuting everyday back and forth, but that is not an issue at all. I mean, it is only thirty kilometres. (Emil)

Transitional transnational living is found in our data among people across categorisations (e.g. migrants/non-migrants) but is in particular present among individuals or couples who are considering their options. As with Emil, transitional transnational living allows for actively pursuing a split of time between contexts to get to know one (or both) better to assess them in relation to decisions about the future.

Second, transnational living can be *temporary*, where living in two countries can be an arrangement that is adapted to a specific phase in life and expected to end. For instance, it may be influenced by the desire to establish a family, or to the age of children, or be expected to end with retirement, or indeed gain force with retirement. Transnational living may be temporary in the sense that an ideal scenario in the future involves something else, as Louise describes:

For the moment its quite ideal, since my partner has a permanent job in Gothenburg and I have one here in Oslo and it's not far, but ideally I would like to live [together], whether one or the other, doesn't matter as long as I can be with my partner, but that's a bit tricky to organise, so ideally I would like to not have to commute all the time and live in one place and settle down, but for the moment it's a great solution (Louise)

Temporary transnational living, as mentioned above, is often tied to life phases. Radmilo reflects on how the transnational living of today is something that for him is likely to come to an end at some point:

I think I will have multiple homes, so probably one in Serbia, one in Netherlands, one in US, one in South America. But kind of one place that will really be my home is something where I will start my family. So that's how I perceive that my life will probably be. (...) For sure I don't think I would continue too long with this. I think maybe for couple more years, but decreasing in intensity with at some point kind of having one

country as my home base and others, visiting, but more touristically than living. (Radmilo)

Third, transnational living can be *open-ended*, where living in two countries may be a way of life with no end in sight, perhaps because the factors that motivate transnational living are expected to remain constant. This might be the case if transnational living has been sustained over time, perhaps with a division of time, which has been seen as less than ideal in the past, but which upon retirement has become the perfect balance in terms of division of time between different places, such as for Meryem:

I live six months in Turkey, especially in the summer period, and six months in the Netherlands in the winter. I do this particularly because of the presence of the children here, but in the past, I've really worked a lot. (Meryem)

Meanwhile, we find that whereas both transitional and temporary transnational living appear more common in our data, and certainly more common in younger age brackets, and with couples who have or might expect to have children, open-ended transnational living also does exist. Furthermore, it is not only reserved to retired migrants who engage in extensive return mobilities to their country of origin, such as what Meryem's example reflects. Rather, open-ended transnational living is found across the migrant/non-migrant divide and across ages and life courses. However, the very idea that transnational living may be a form of living that is preferred and chosen, not for the time being or as a step enabling something else, is experienced as contested, as Suzanne elaborates:

And then it's also clear to the outside world. I've chosen the Netherlands or Mexico. And then it is maybe easier to accept? (...) Then I just can tell everybody: I chose this country and it's done. No nagging anymore, I've now chosen. Here I stay. But now, they just expect that it's a temporary ... they just think it's a temporary mood. (Suzanne)

These three frames do not amount to a clear-cut typology but may be a fruitful starting point for reflecting on the temporal frames of transnational living. There are also temporalities inherent to how transnational living is practised, for instance, in the frequency and seasonality of moves between the two countries, reflecting particular rhythms, and possibly a differentiated experience of time itself in each location (Lulle, 2020; Marcu, 2017).

The articles in this special issue relate to the abovementioned temporalities of transnational living in different ways. All focus on how the individuals they study divide their time between several countries—including all, or some, of the three temporal forms: transnational living as transitional, temporary or open-ended. Temporality is, as such, an aspect that influences the analytical considerations in all the contributions.

Three of the articles (Cojocar, Drotbohn and Winters and Mavrommatis) give specific attention to temporality as it is part of the theoretical underpinnings of these articles. Cojocar explores the timework done by labour migrants, analysing the temporal outlooks, resources and qualities of transnational living. Drotbohn and Winters theorise temporality by focusing on mobility and immobility in migrant trajectories, highlighting migrants' experiences of temporal embeddedness *en route*. Mavrommatis elaborates a non-static conception of transnationalism, as he focuses on how people lead transnational lives on the move, as part of continuous and fragmented mobilities.

Three aspects of temporality merit attention and are further developed in the collection of articles in this Special Issue. First, there is a difference between the imagined and the experienced temporality of transnational living. For instance, in Cojocar's article on Moldovan migrants in Italy, most interviewees initially expect to live transnationally for a limited period of time, though their projects generally turn into longer, open-ended stays. A parallel account can be read in Statham's analysis of Thai women who marry Western men: although these women mostly stay in Thailand, their transnational living becomes open-ended and—without knowing beforehand—they are left with few exit options to cease or change the enduring temporal form of their transnational living, due to their legal and socioeconomic situations.

Second, individuals' temporality depends on structural or external factors—which in general shape several aspects of their transnational lives. This is evident not only through the examples of Thai women and Moldovan migrants' economic dependency but also among more affluent individuals. For many of the interviewees in Erdal and Carling and Engbersen and Snel's analyses, motivations are not purely economic, yet structural constraints also influence the temporality of their transnational lives. Erdal and Carling, for example, highlight how factors such as legal status, social protection regulations and housing expenses influence—among other temporal aspects—the frequency of travel, length of stays and the general division of time in interviewees transnational living.

Finally, temporal forms and rhythms can form part of individuals' strategies for transnational living. For example, Cojocar focuses on temporal management as key to strategies for transnational living. Time is spent or divided in particular ways to overcome the feeling of isolation. Similarly, Engbersen and Snel discover that temporality—through keeping final return options open and finding a good balance of back-and-forth travelling—becomes part of people's cognitive and behavioural strategies to cope with the emotional challenges of transnational living.

6 | THE ESSENCE AND DIVERSITY OF TRANSNATIONAL LIVING

In the introduction to this article, we offered a definition of transnational living: *having sustained and similarly significant attachments, interactions and presences in two or more societies separated by national*

borders. It has guided us in our own work, and we hope that it can serve as a springboard for future research.

The conventional approach to transnationalism recognises that some migrants are more transnational than others. Is it then the case that those who 'live in two countries' are the most transnational of all? It would seem sensible to say so, yet there are different dimensions of variation at play. Individuals who lead transnational lives stand out by virtue of the difficulty of establishing unequivocally where they live and whether or not they have migrated. Such ambiguity could coexist with intense transnational practices—transferring money, sending goods, communicating with others and so on—but is not contingent upon them. For instance, having homes in two countries and spending half the year in each place might not require a particular intensity of transnational practices. If these practices are, to some extent, a compensation for physical absence, they could be less important for individuals who are often physically present.

Beyond the intensity of transnational practice, there are five dimensions of variation within the scope of transnational living. These reflect the diversity in our data and also resonate with the articles in this special issue.

- *Social integration*: To what extent is transnational living rooted in a transnational social field where transnational practices take place and where others might lead similarly transnational lives? In some cases, transnational living is set within the type of contexts that dominate research on migration transnationalism (e.g. Morocco–the Netherlands) or lifestyle migration (e.g. Norway–Spain). In other cases, the constellations of attachments are virtually unique. The social integration of transnational lives is then disjointed and separate, moored in each location.
- *Social organisation*: How is transnational living embedded (or not) in social relationships, for instance, with a partner, parents and children? A person can lead a transnational life, whereas their spouse, for instance, does not. Even if there is no separation of family members, the relative importance of attachments to the two countries can be experienced differently, not least by children and adults. Beyond the family, the social organisation of transnational living ranges from the improvised and flexible (e.g. for some mobile professionals or retirees) to the structured and institutionalised (e.g. for overseas contract workers).
- *Complementarity*: What are the aspects of each country that motivate or necessitate transnational living? In most cases, transnational living is a response to differently localised provisions of values such as financial resources (e.g. earnings or benefit entitlements), professional or educational opportunities, health and physical well-being (e.g. due to climate or health care) and proximity to others (e.g. family members, a partner). Enjoying location-specific values blurs with fulfilling location-specific responsibilities, for instance, to provide care or oversee property. Adaptations in the form of transnational living also reflect the governance of mobility, which can limit both presence and absence. For instance, a Dutch pensioner who wishes to spend more than 3 months in Ghana could obtain a visitor's visa extension from Ghanaian authorities but would not be allowed to leave the Netherlands longer than 90 days without a reduction in pension payments. It is in the interplay of characteristics, constraints and opportunities of the two countries that people adopt particular ways of transnational living.
- *Balance*: Within the limits of living in two countries, is there a structural imbalance in the attachment to the two countries, and if so, how? Much migrant transnationalism, in its conventional form, reflects asymmetries that motivated migration in the first place, such as international differences in welfare, security or employment opportunities. When migrants *partially* return and find themselves living in two countries, their transnational lives also span these divides. Similarly, the various complementarities discussed above often represent an imbalance in the sense that the two countries play fundamentally different roles. For some people, transnational living results from maximising their time in one of the countries while being subject to constraints that require time in the other. Within our data from the TRANSWEL project, we also had cases of more balanced transnational lives, for instance, among mixed couples who wanted to share their common life between each person's country of origin.
- *Rhythm*: How is transnational living punctuated in time? Across the different temporalities discussed in the previous section, transnational lives differ in how physical presence and absence are characterised with respect to frequency, duration and seasonality, for instance. In our data, some people lived transnationally by means of daily commuting, whereas, at the other extreme, there were people whose transnational attachments were balanced over a period of several years.

These five forms of variation attest to the diversity of transnational living. In some cases, transnational lives differ greatly from the contexts of migrant transnationalism described in the literature. Our argument is that, despite the diversity, transnational living constitutes a distinct social phenomenon. There is an obvious risk of elaborating sophisticated criteria for 'what counts' as living in two countries and ending up with a concept that is both empirically and conceptually inaccessible. It is worth remembering the definitional debates over 'diaspora', in which pedantic lists of criteria seem to undermine the usefulness of the term. By defining transnational living in terms of 'sustained and similarly significant attachments, interactions and presences', we recognise its subjective nature and fluid boundaries. Some people clearly 'live in two countries', whereas many others do so to lesser degrees and in diverse ways. And the vast majority of people—including those who are part of transnational social fields—live in one country. Transnational living is rare, but real.

Moving beyond definitions of the phenomenon, how or why it is socially significant that some people live in two countries? Several reasons have to do with the state, and perhaps especially the welfare state (Tallerås, 2019). The protection afforded to individuals is essentially based on an assumption of full and exclusive membership of a national society. Individuals who juggle relationships with several countries typically encounter a range of administrative challenges that result from violating the underlying assumptions of the state. These

frictions raise questions about how we should approach societal membership.

The study of transnational living also challenges our established ways of thinking about migration and migrants. People who lead transnational lives are distributed across the socio-economic spectrum and therefore inspire reconsidering a traditional assumption that marginalisation is the primary driver of transnationalism. Moreover, they can be found both within and outside the group that is thought of as migrants, fundamentally challenging the distinction between migrants and non-migrants. To put it simply, the shared characteristics of people who lead transnational lives have to do with what they do, rather than with who they are.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

There is no open data set to share associated with this article.

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