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## **Transnational transformations**

Coupling migration and change

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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## Abstract

In this paper, I propose an analytical framework to study the dual relationship between migration and change, addressing a two-fold question: what are the consequences of political developments on migration and transnational engagement, and what are the consequences of migration and transnational engagement on politics in the country of origin? I introduce two sets of theoretical debates that have dealt with the relationship between migration and change as building blocks to develop an actor-oriented analytical framework to study both outcomes and processes of becoming a migrant and transnationally active. The framework addresses the need in the migration and development debate to understand the heterogeneity of both processes, that allows us to see migration, integration and transnational engagement as different outcomes of these processes from above and below, while avoiding a loss of analytical focus. This framework has four main analytical benefits. First, the framework allows us to analytically disentangle the different dimensions of change, but also to study the process by which migrants *become* active agents of change, rather than essentialising this as fixed or static. Second, the cyclical structure of the framework addresses the need in the migration and development debate to understand migration and change as dynamic processes that are both steered from below and from above in an interactive process that changes over time and on all levels. Third, the interactions in the framework allow us to understand the heterogeneity of mechanisms and outcomes of migration-induced change (Burgess 2012). It highlights that migration-induced change is not necessarily democratisation and not always for the better (Portes 2009). Fourth, the framework allows for hypotheses on processes and outcomes of migration and change that centralises time and mobility in addition to spatial factors.

**Keywords:** migration, change, transnationalism, political engagement, framework

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# 1 Introduction

The discussion on the link between migration and development or change has received increased and ever-evolving attention since the conception of transnationalism. Transnationalism was defined in the mid-1990s as the process by which migrants develop and sustain multi-stranded ties and relationships across borders, linking their societies of origin and their societies of settlement (Basch et al. 1994, Portes 1999). The early years of research within this new paradigm focused on investigating the existence of these transnational ties as such. From the early 2000s, some of the focus shifted to investigating how migrants' transnational ties might lead to development in societies of origin. Although there was a strong policy agenda in establishing this 'migration-and-development nexus', an increased understanding of the complexity of these links led authors of the most recent years to highlight the need to look beyond the policy-driven categories of migration and development (de Haas 2014) and take a more holistic perspective that includes different forms of mobility and change. Research should not only focus on top-down mechanisms of how states are able to 'steer' migrants' actions, but also look bottom-up at migrants' agency (Castles 2007: 363, Raghuram 2009). Likewise, some stressed the need to not only analyse the outcomes but also the constantly changing *processes* of transnational engagement (Faist 2010), and to bridge the perceived analytical gap between integration and transnationalism (Van Hear 2010). But so far, most contributions fail to go beyond conclusions that merely highlight the complexity of migration (de Haas 2014). There is a need for systematic analytical tools that adequately address the complexity of migration as both a cause and a consequence of change.

The literature on migration and development is based on three assumptions or hypotheses (van Houte 2014b) that each refer to different processes of becoming agents of change. The first hypothesis highlights the self-selected process of migration, as people with more money, networks, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills are better equipped to face the costs and the risks of migration (Faist 2008, de Haas 2010, Van Hear 2014). The implication for development or change is that the departure of these migrants represents a loss of manpower, intellect and skills, in the form of a so-called 'brain drain', but also that the transnational involvement of these functional elites with their country of origin will be inherently good for the country of origin, as their 'brains' can continue to play a role through remitting money and ideas (de Haas 2010). This hypothesis would mean that the further afield migrants travel, the more skills and capital they possess, hence their potential for development would be greater.

A second assumption in the migration and change literature, covering the majority of migration and change hypotheses in the literature, is on any new capacities and desires migrants develop after arrival in the destination country, that they would not have acquired had they stayed in their origin country. Increased capacities may include education, work experience and savings, as well as knowledge about different political systems. The implication for development is that in combination with the assumption that migrants constitute the self-selected higher potential from a certain place, this could mean 'brain saving' rather than brain drain, because migrants' talents can be more effectively mobilised (Kim 2010). These enhanced skills are then also seen as a potential contribution to development. In addition to acquired capital, one of the main hypotheses in the migration and political change literature is that international migrants who come in contact with democratic contexts will adopt democratic political attitudes about rights and responsibilities, about equity and accountability, and implant new political identities and standards for performance (Levitt 1995). This hypothesis implies that migrants' development potential becomes bigger when differences between country of origin and destination are larger.

A third assumption in the literature on migration and change is inspired by the notion of migrants' transnational connections to multiple places, and assumes the ability of individuals and households to take advantage of geographical differences and transnational mobility to diversify, secure

and improve their livelihoods, support coping mechanisms and reduce vulnerabilities (Gardner and Grillo 2002, Cassarino 2004, Faist 2008). The implication for development and change is that the ‘in-between’ position of their multi-local ties makes them more independent from the constraints of structures, giving them the freedom to negotiate change and hybridity (Portes 1999, Sørensen et al. 2002, Brinkerhoff 2011). This hypothesis implies that migrants can be particularly strong agents of change for places of origin where freedom of expression or action is restricted by authoritarian regimes or strong social norms.

The nature of these hypotheses have inevitably focused research on the migration and development nexus on long-distance migrants, traveling from undemocratic and poor countries to democratic and wealthy countries, and the mode of development to more democratic, capitalist, modernist practices. But the literature on migration and development has also shown that migrants’ movements and their effect on change are much more variable than these specific assumptions would suggest.

To take a more holistic perspective, this paper will explore how we can analytically define change beyond the normative assumptions, in order to address a two-fold question: what are the consequences of migration and transnational engagement for change in the country of origin, and how does change lead people to *become* migrants and transnationally engaged? (Kapur 2014). In this paper I will introduce two sets of theoretical debates that have dealt with the relationship between migration and change as building blocks to develop an actor-oriented analytical framework to study both outcomes and processes of becoming a migrant and transnationally active. The framework addresses the need in the migration and development debate to understand the heterogeneity of both processes, that allow us to see migration, integration and transnational engagement as different outcomes of these processes from above and below, while avoiding a loss of analytical focus (Portes 2010). Having a better understanding of the processes of why people migrate and how they become involved in transnational activities, will also shed light on why some migrants have the potential to be actors of change, while others do not (Carling 2004, Cassarino 2004, Black and Gent 2006, Brinkerhoff 2011).

## 2 Theoretical building blocks

Two types of theoretical discussions have tried to address the relation between migration and change and form the theoretical building blocks for a comprehensive analytical framework: the distinction between structure and agency on the one hand, and desires and capacities on the other. I will first discuss them here before proposing an analytical framework that combines these two approaches.

### 2.1 Structure and agency

Changing theoretical paradigms studying change and migration have developed around shifting perceptions of the roles of *structure* and *agency*. Structure is a key concept in the social sciences (Sewell 1992, Hitlin and Elder 2007) and can be defined as the constraining or enabling forces in the political, institutional, economic, social and cultural context that are external to and have an impact on people. Some structures may intentionally relate to migration, such as migration management policies, diaspora or migration and development policies, including subsidies schemes (Lacroix 2009). Other structures unintentionally relate to migration, such as political regimes, conflict, civil unrest and climatic disaster in the country of origin and historical international ties (Carling et al. 2012, Boccagni et al. 2015).

Agency captures the notion that human action is not just determined by structures, but that humans have a certain degree of choice and control over their actions (Sewell 1992, Hitlin and Elder 2007). In short, agency can be defined as the self-perceived control individuals have over their actions,

and the choice they have to stay within or to reshape structures (Sewell 1992, Hitlin and Elder 2007, de Haas 2010). Agency does not equal action: It is about the self-reflective beliefs we have about our abilities and capacities (our self-efficacy) to act, which is analytically separate from our actual acts. Self-efficacy is argued to be the central aspect of agency, since actors who perceive themselves as having agency are more likely to persevere in the face of problems, and develop a sense of personal empowerment (Hitlin and Elder 2007). I argue that agency can be about control over physical, spiritual or virtual action. Translated to migration, agency can therefore both lead to migration *and* non-migration (de Haas 2014), and transnational engagement *as well as* disengagement.

The question of how structure and agency are related has been the basis for theoretical discussions in the social sciences across disciplines and over time. With regard to migration, a very long theoretical debate can be summarised as follows: The first theories that talked about migration and change in the late nineteenth century came from neoclassical perspectives and argued that migrants have full choice to do what is best for them and can also alter structures. From the 1960s, a historical-structuralist approach criticised such optimistic views, arguing that instead, structures constrain migrants' agency to enact change. Last, post-structuralist insights emerging from the 1980s onwards argue that it is a bit of both: structure and agency affect each other in a dual process. Based on these insights, most disciplines within the social sciences now more or less agree that a satisfactory theory of migration and change must take into account the *interaction* between the structural forces that promote or constrain these actions and the agency of the people to alter them (Bakewell 2010).

Structures are therefore dual in the sense that they not only define the boundaries of agency, but they are also shaped by agency (Giddens 1984, Sewell 1992). Structures not only constrain human actions, but also enable them (Sewell 1992). In this dual understanding of the relationship between agency and structures, it is argued that the more actors are embedded in structures, the more they have the agency to apply them creatively to unfamiliar or otherwise problematic situations. This also implies that actors have the ability to change structures to some degree (Sewell 1992, Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

This poststructuralist notion has inspired new hopes for migrants' contributions to change. However, the fact that structures are, by definition, subject to change or extension means that the agency to enact these structures is not entirely predictable and that the effect of these actions on the resources of the actors is never quite certain (Sewell 1992). Although many possible channels can be explored in which migrants' agency and structure relate, the relationship between structure and agency is hard to measure or observe: Although evidence shows that migrants' transnational engagements may reinforce already existing transformation processes, they are unlikely to remove structural development constraints or overthrow those structures (Levitt 1995). In fact, migration may actually contribute to development stagnation and reinforce the political status quo (de Haas 2012). The connection is also not likely to be very straightforward. The structure–agency connection alone cannot explain why some people living in the same circumstances migrate while others do not. Despite the major conceptual steps that the agency and structure debate has made in the understanding of migration and change, these contributions also show the abstract and slippery nature of the concepts of structure and agency, which have so far been unable to come up with concrete frameworks to conduct transnational empirical research (Hitlin and Elder 2007) or to inspire systematic analysis (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). This risks theoretical debates reaching the conclusion that migration is a complex process requiring a consideration of both structural factors and human agency (Easthope 2009), without contributing to concrete analytical tools to study these linkages.

## 2.2 Desires and capacities

Authors addressing the need for more practical analytical tools to empirically study the dynamics of transnationalism and mobility have introduced models that distinguish between what people *want* to do and what they are *able* to do. This divide is about what happens in people's experiences that can explain their choices, making it more tangible and observable in daily life. Al-Ali et al. (2001) introduce the distinction between actors' *capacities* or abilities, and their *desires* or willingness, to engage in transnational activities. They show these dynamics of transnationalism on different dimensions (institutional, economic, cultural and social). This provides a framework for a detailed analysis of transnational activities, including changes that may occur in each of these categories, and enables the identification of obstacles and opportunities for policy interventions (Al-Ali et al. 2001).

While Al-Ali et al. look at transnational activities of migrants, and refugees in particular, Carling (2002) and de Haas (2010) have developed similar models to analyse processes of migration. Carling's model distinguishes between people's *aspiration* to migrate and their *ability* to do so. He stresses that the observation that all migration involves both choices and constraints can incorporate the analysis of migration *and* non-migration, including involuntary immobility (Carling 2002). Similarly, de Haas sees people's propensity to migrate as a function of *aspirations* and *capabilities* (de Haas 2010). Finally, Cassarino developed a model to study return migration, distinguishing between *willingness* and *readiness*, which together create the *preparedness* to return (Cassarino 2004).

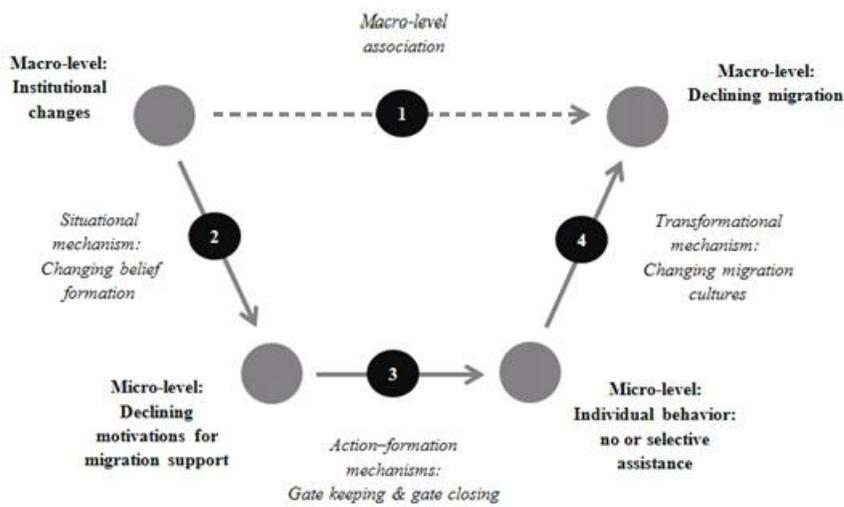
Capacities and desires are interrelated: increased capabilities can shape aspirations, and a more educated population leads to higher aspirations for career and wellbeing and ideas for an improved society (Carling 2002, de Haas 2014, Van Hear 2014). Although not everyone will want to migrate, and not everyone with a desire to migrate will have the capacity to do so, the decision to migrate can be seen as an attempt to match desires with capacities.

These models of desires and capacities and their equivalents have both advantages and disadvantages compared to the agency–structure model. Unlike the abstract concepts of agency and structure, these models provide more straightforward frameworks that enable empirical analysis of people's decisions to migrate and migrants' transnational behaviour. But although the analyses are useful to focus on migrant practices and experiences, they pay less attention to the transformation of structures outside the life-worlds of migrants (Faist 2008). Although structural factors are recognised as influencing capacities and desires, they remain largely outside these models. Where structural factors are included, it is not clear how they interact with desires and capacities (de Haas 2010). A more encompassing framework should therefore take into account that desires and capacities are influenced by structures, and that alterations in desires and capacities of certain groups or individuals can in turn affect agency.

## 3 A multidimensional framework to study change and migration

A few migration scholars have somehow attempted to combine the theoretical building blocks discussed above. First, Engbergsen et al. (Engbergsen et al. 2013, Engbergsen et al. 2015), apply the 'Coleman boat', a framework that aims to link macro-level mechanisms to micro-level mechanisms, to come to an analysis that explains changing migration patterns through time (see Figure 1). Their model entails three analytical steps: First, macro-factors shape and constrain individuals' desires, beliefs and motivations (macro-to-micro); second, individuals' desires, beliefs and motivations are related to their individual actions (micro-to-micro); third, individual actions interact and interfere with one another, leading to intended and unintended macro-outcomes (micro-to-macro).

Figure 1. Macro–micro–macro model

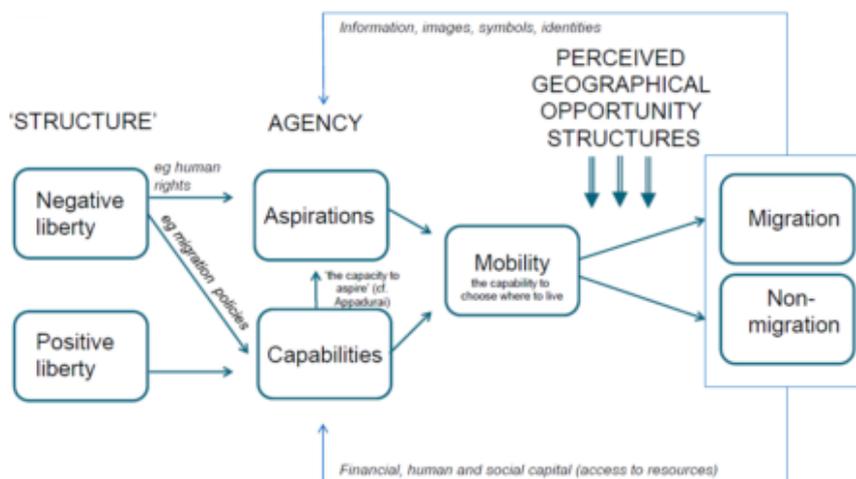


Source: Engbersen et al. 2013, 2015

The strength of this model is that it implies a continuous and dual process between macro-level structures and micro-level motivations and decisions. A caveat in this model, however, is the direct link between changing motivations and desires and individual behaviour – unlike the different literature on desires or aspirations and capacities or abilities, this model does not take into account the tensions between what people want to do and what they are able to do.

Alternatively, de Haas develops a framework to ‘develop a richer understanding of human mobility, while acknowledging the simultaneous role of structure and agency in migration processes’ (de Haas 2014). He sees ‘migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities to move’ (ibid). He then defines migration capabilities as depending on structural positive and negative liberties, and migration aspirations as a function of people’s general life preferences and perceived spatial opportunity structures: If broader processes of ‘development’ lead to increased life aspirations, and people perceive that their (new) subjective needs and desires cannot be fulfilled locally, this translates into migration aspirations. Altogether, he argues that this framework provides a more ‘refined view of the complex ways in which macro-structural change processes affect migration aspirations and capabilities’ (ibid).

Figure 2. Structure–agency–mobility model

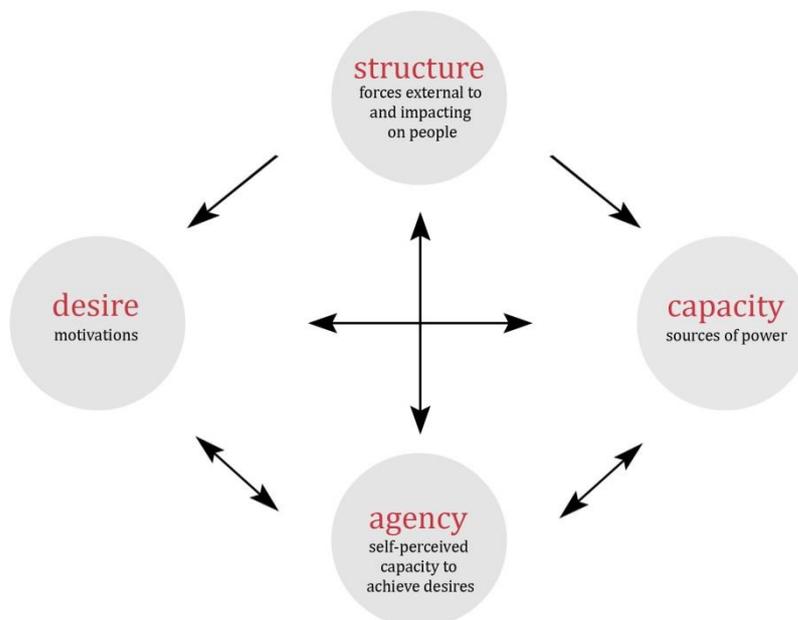


Source: de Haas 2014

What is compelling about de Haas' framework is the conceptualisation of human mobility as migratory agency: The notion that mobility can lead to both movement and non-movement (de Haas 2014), applies the general argument made by others that agency can involve both action and non-action to migration studies. But although de Haas aims to develop a conceptual tool that incorporates agency and structure and their interplay, thereby also taking into account how migrants alter structural conditions, this model only shows how macro-level structures affect aspirations and capabilities, which in turn affects people's mobility or migration decisions. The model does not show how mobility in turn affects structures.

Figure 3 shows my own actor-oriented framework to analyse the link between migration, transnational engagement, and change, taking into account both outcomes and processes of becoming a migrant and transnationally active. Originally designed to analyse return migration (van Houte 2014a), the framework addresses the need in the migration and development debate to understand the heterogeneity of both processes from above and below, while avoiding the loss of analytical focus. It shows that opportunities and constraints to migrate, integrate, become transnationally engaged and bring about change all come forward from the same mechanisms, which are interconnected.

Figure 3. Interplay between structure, agency, desires and capacities



Source: Van Houte 2014a

This framework relates theoretical debates that have been used in migration research: agency and structure on the one hand, and desires and capacities on the other. It conceptualizes these building blocks as each representing a distinct relation to the actor. Structures (defined as forces external to and impacting on people) affect both an individual's capacities (defined as sources of power that are available to, and can be contested between, people) and their desires (defined as an individual's internal intentions or motivations to act), which are in turn interrelated. Agency, defined as an individual's self-perception of their capacities to achieve their desires (Bakewell 2010), is determined by these desires and capacities, and is both shaped by and shapes structure. Agency can both result in action and non-action, which includes the decision whether or not to migrate or to become transnationally engaged.

Conceptually, these dimensions are clearly distinct, and it is helpful to distinguish between these four elements and all processes linking them. The arrows in the framework highlight that human behaviour, including migration and transnational engagement, is the result of the interaction between these dimensions of agency, desires, capacities, and structures, in a continuous process that transcends

borders (see also Van Hear et al. 2004, Portes 2010, Van Liempt 2011). I chose the terminology of desires and capacities to acknowledge the original concept by Al-Ali and Koser, and to follow them in their conceptualisation of transnational activities including migration, rather than focusing on migration alone. Nevertheless, I see no essential differences to the concepts of aspirations and abilities or capabilities by Carling and De Haas. What is new compared to these earlier frameworks is the explicit and complete inclusion of the multi-stranded and dual connections with structures and agency.

In the next two sections, I will go deeper into the workings of this framework as an analytical tool to study the relationships between migration, integration and transnationalism and change simultaneously. I will first use the analytical framework to disentangle the different ways migration and transnational engagement could lead to change, before highlighting how the framework facilitates a necessary focus on the process of becoming a migrant and transnationally engaged as an essential avenue to progress the migration and development debate.

## **4 Transnationalism and change**

This section gives a brief insight into how the framework can be used to analyse the impact of migration and transnational engagement on change. The study of transnationalism has always included all dimensions of life – economic, social, cultural and political – and we can identify agency, desires, capacities and structures on all these dimensions. The framework can shed light on intended and unintended consequences of people’s agency, while it also offers an explanation of its variety.

Mobility (and immobility) and transnational engagements (and disengagements) of migrants can both be seen as multidimensional expressions of agency. Economic agency means the outflow of manpower, intellect and skills. To an extent, this outflow leads to a permanent loss of lives in the case of risky journeys. But most migrants survive, and about half of them proceed to economic transnational engagements, which can be financial remittances and investments (Adams 2011). Political agency includes the exile or return of opposition or political leaders, while political transnational engagements includes voting of citizens abroad and the formation of lobby groups (Turner 2008). Socio-cultural agency includes migrating as a rite of passage (Ali 2007), and socio-cultural transnational engagement can include sending social remittances: flows of ideas and beliefs and practices (Levitt 1998). In the event of conflict, agency includes being able to flee to a safer place, and organising and returning in an armed rebellion from exile or becoming an actor in peace building (Kent 2006, Lyons 2007).

Following the body of research establishing all these transnational links, the transnational paradigm led to a renewed optimism about the link between migration and development (de Haas 2006, Skeldon 2008). Research carried out since the early 2000s, however, has shown the difficulty of establishing how these different forms of agency actually affect change in the country of origin. I argue that scholarship has either been too focused on structural change and thereby too narrow and one-dimensional, or, on the other hand, has recognised the complexity of this, but not made steps to analyse this complexity. The analytical framework I propose could enable a more holistic but systematic analysis, in which change can be defined as any change in structures, desires and capacities, on a micro, meso and macro level.

## 4.1 Agency affecting structures

A classic perspective on migration and development or change refers to the question whether people's micro-, meso-, or macro-level behaviours are able to change existing structures in the country of origin (Kapur 2014). A macro-level perspective highlights the impact of migration stocks and flows (Beine and Sekkat 2013), through shifting demographic structures. Politically, mass migration flows, regardless of their motivation, inherently bring about shifts in the concentration of state power and authority (Vigneswaran and Quirk 2015). If a significantly large proportion of an area's population leaves, it forces authorities to adjust themselves to that in order to sustain their political sovereignty (Moses 2012). Economically, large scale migration stocks and flows can impact the environment as well as economic and productive systems (Portes 2010), as they may release or increase the demographic pressure on resources such as land and employment. In the same vein, massive flows of remittances may also affect a country's GDP and balance-of-payments (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003, Portes 2010), or its socio-economic power balances (Hyndman 2012, King 2012: 136). Such remittances are argued to postpone rather than facilitate political change and sustain powers that be by curbing forces of unrest (Hoffmann 2010, Burgess 2012). Culturally, migration may also alter the perception and value of certain places and of mobility, in the sense of a culture of migration (Easthope 2009). However, change based on macro-demographic qualities of migration flows is only seen in a small number of countries where migrants comprise a significant percentage of the population. In addition, their impact is often not intentional and hard to predict (Portes 2010).

A meso-level perspective looks at the impact of group or collective behaviour of specific groups of migrants, whether organised or not. Collective diasporic behaviour is often inherently political, although it may have social, cultural and economic features (Turner 2008). As certain political groups may be overrepresented in the migrant population, the potential effect of a large migrant electorate on national politics is substantial (Portes 2010), both through electoral political structures via external voting and party activism (Guarnizo et al. 2003, Burgess 2012), and non-electoral political processes through lobby, protest, or other forms of political pressure. These groups may target governments and civil society actors in the country of origin directly, or focus on actors in the country of destination, or international or third country actors to lobby for their engagement in the country of origin (Pedraza 2007, Hoffmann 2010). However, only very limited evidence is available to prove this direct influence and little is known that explains the success of such advocacy groups (Moses 2005, some exceptions are Omar Mahmoud et al. 2014). Last, it is unclear what the effect is of the selection of specific political, ethnic or socio-economic groups of migrants compared to the population.

Next to mass migration flows and collective or group behaviour, a micro-level perspective looks at how individual migrants' actions may affect local skills levels and power relations. Rather than their sheer quantity, it is argued that some individuals can control and change economic and political processes because of their influential status or their individual innovative, creative and improvisation skills to alter structures (Hammond 1999). On one hand, the discussion focuses here on the trade-off between the loss of highly-educated, talented and skilled people and the gains of their transnational engagement or return with new ideas and skills (Spilimbergo 2009, Goldin et al. 2011). Goldin et al. argue that although high-skilled migration can deprive a country of key visionaries and community builders in the short term, many great political leaders were educated and spent their young years abroad, which allowed them to later play crucial roles in nation building after returning home (Goldin et al. 2011). Spilimbergo finds that foreign-educated individuals promote democracy in their home country, but only if the foreign education is acquired in democratic countries (Spilimbergo 2009). But a challenge is to measure the influence of these migrants' activities on local democratic structures. No political elite would agree with structural (democratic) change that compromises their own position

(Guarnizo et al. 2003). Any direct influence migrants have on structures is therefore likely to be characterised as changes within the system, or cosmetic changes with essential structural mechanisms remaining in place, or by contributing to already ongoing transformation processes, for example by contributing to reinforcement of already emerging democracies, or to ongoing transformation processes (van Hear et al. 2004, Vertovec 2004, de Haas 2010, Burgess 2012).

The other discussion is about whether the departure of individual political heavy-weights can reduce or increase the pressure on the political status quo. On one hand, the departure of political opponents may strengthen or stabilise the position of the existing socio-political elite. On the other hand, such political opponents may take advantage of their relative autonomy and better opportunities to organise in exile to challenge the political establishment from abroad (Hoffmann 2010, Portes 2010). But even if this leads to regime change, the question is to what extent individual migrants can change the surrounding structural mechanisms that are in place: norms, values, institutions. In addition, this kind of change can only come from a middle and upper class of migrants, thereby ignoring the 'ordinary' migrants.

The finding that structural change resulting from migration or migrants' transnational engagement only happens in very specific cases has fuelled a new pessimism about the relationship between migration and change (de Haas 2012). Several authors point towards hidden political and economic agendas, distorting the debate by simplification and exaggeration and not being based on evidence (de Haas 2012, Gamlen 2014). However, the arguments for this new pessimism based on a lack of direct structural change are also too simplistic. The framework offers an additional, middle-level avenue for a systematic exploration of the variety of ways and channels through which migrants' actions affect the different dimensions of the transnational space (Boccagni et al. 2015).

## 4.2 Agency affecting desires and capacities

In addition to structures, migration and transnational engagement may bring about change affecting capacities, or sources of power, of people in countries of origin. Migrants *can reinforce* the capacities of their counterparts by sending remittances (money, but also information and knowledge), leading to increased access to capital, education and health care, and increased independence from local power brokers, for receiving households, as well as increased support for certain political or social groups. On the other hand, migrants' transnational engagement, such as remittances, may also lead to dependency on remittance senders, and consumerism, as well as a decreased political participation (Levitt 1995, Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2009, Burgess 2012). In a context of conflict, transnational engagement can feed the capacities of the warring parties, or create new tensions through unequal distributions of resources (Orjuela 2008). Socially, receivers of remittances may enjoy enhanced status, which for example changes their value on the marriage market (Ali 2007).

But the enhanced capacity of certain groups does not say much about the type of investments, status changes or the colour of political participation that is changed through transnational engagement. In order to analyse the direction of influence, we need to have a look at how desires, ideas and norms are affected (Beine and Sekkat 2013). On one hand, migrants may try to affect desires in the origin society directly, for example by insisting on reinforcing democracy, and migrants can introduce significant innovations and infuse local economies with new dynamism (Portes 2010). In the context of conflict, migrants can have a moral influence on defining what is politically acceptable (Lyons 2007). However, the question of how ideas, norms and practices are being transferred is complicated. While some messages can travel 'light' because they are relatively close to the existing norms and are therefore easy to absorb, others travel heavy because they comprise tricky messages that are fundamentally

different and/or not evaluated positively by the local population, and therefore encounter resistance (Boccagni et al. 2015, de Haas 2010).

Desires may also be indirectly affected by changed capacities. Increased capacities may lead to desires of lifestyle, health care and education. Access to 'easy' money in the sense of remittances may change attitudes to work (Ali 2007). Mobility may become an instrumental desire to achieve these goals, but freedom to travel may also become an inherent desire (de Haas 2014). In addition, despite the general assumption that political change induced by migrants will be towards democratic change, migrants' support of certain leaders or policies may also perpetuate corrupt and/or exclusionary practices, or exacerbate ethnic, religious, or partisan rifts (Burgess 2012). Seen from the opposite perspective, new desires such as democracy may be met with cynicism and resignation if people do not feel they have sufficient capacities to do something about it in order to change political practices or punish corrupt leaders (Burgess 2012).

Changed capacities and desires may in turn indirectly contribute to changes in structures. The recipients of remittances are usually members of the same groups that are overrepresented in the migrant community, characterised by class, ethnicity, religion, or other identifiers (Levitt 1995, Burgess 2012). Remittances may contribute to the redistribution of political resources into more equal, egalitarian, or, in contrast, more stratified power in favour of certain groups (Lacroix 2009). Since migrants are not the poorest of the poor, any migration-induced redistribution of power sources is more likely to reproduce social inequality and pre-existing power asymmetries (Levitt 1995, Guarnizo et al. 2003). Politically, mobility can shift power relations between state and non-state actors. It can be seen as a way to deal with, or surpass, the restrictions imposed by structures (Hoffmann 2010), and can even contribute to 'unmaking' the state (Vigneswaran and Quirk 2015). Finally, changed desires for mobility and wealth can change socio-cultural and political norms and values of power relations, status, place and mobility (Ali 2007).

The multidimensional aspects of transnational agency and their potential effects on structures, capacities and desires are summarised in Table 1. It shows that the consequences of migrants' agency can be multiple and multidimensional. Some of them are anticipated by migrants themselves, such as increased capacities for their counterparts, but some are not, such as their changing attitudes to work. Similarly, some of these consequences are anticipated by migration and development or diaspora policies, such as a growth in GDP, but some are not, such as political protests and opposition. While policy-oriented research focusing on the anticipated consequences has not helped to understand why some perceived relations did not work, this more holistic approach to both anticipated and unanticipated consequences can be an analytical tool to look at the empirical reality in order to study the policy relevance.

Table 1. Multidimensional aspects of transnational agency and their potential effects on structures, capacities and desires

Agency	Structures	Capacities	Desires
<b>Economic</b> <b>Outflow of intellect:</b> brain drain / gain / waste / saving; <b>loss of lives</b> <b>Remittances</b>	<b>GDP</b> (grow, sustain, stagnate) <b>Poverty</b> ; <b>Inequality</b> ; <b>informal/formal; Political economy:</b> debt, fiscal policy	<b>Consumption</b> ; Education; Health; <b>Investment</b> entrepreneurship labour; Insurance;	<b>Risk-taking</b> Health / education <b>Investment / consumption</b> <b>Career</b> aspirations
<b>Political</b> <b>Voting</b> of citizens abroad. lobby of <b>interest groups</b> . Exile / return of <b>political leaders</b>	<b>State</b> outside borders Pressure on <b>resources</b> <b>Power</b> relations Pressure on political <b>elite</b>	Political <b>participation</b> / protests; <b>Access</b> to livelihoods – inclusion – <b>sources of power</b> ; <b>(in)dependency</b> on local power brokers / remittance senders	Political <b>rights</b> Political <b>power</b>
<b>Social-Cultural</b> Migration as a <b>rite of passage</b> Cultural and social remittances: <b>flows of ideas and beliefs and practices</b>	Culture of <b>migration</b> <b>Marriage</b> patterns- <b>gender</b> norms; <b>Status / Class</b> construction: birth vs achievement; Status / meaning of <b>places</b> <b>Work ethos</b>	<b>Status</b> for remittance-receivers enhanced <b>marriage</b> market value <b>gender roles</b>	<b>Mobility</b> Adventure Financial <b>security</b> <b>Lifestyle</b> Attitudes to work
<b>Conflict</b> Flight to safe place; armed rebellion from exile; Homeland-oriented <b>diaspora networks</b> as third actor	Globalization of conflict - <b>Location of the 'battlefield'</b> 'War' or 'peace' <b>economy</b> <b>Discourses</b> of war and peace; Non-homeland oriented <b>spaces of contact</b>	Capital / arms / manpower for <b>warring parties</b> Social groups / <b>inequalities</b>	<b>Moral beliefs</b> on reconciliation compromise, hostility; National <b>interests</b> vs <b>identity</b>

## 5 Processes of becoming a migrant and transnationally engaged

Although most research focuses on whether migrants contribute to outcomes of change (Portes 1999, Sørensen et al. 2002, Faist 2008), much less attention is given to interrogating these premises: why, and under which circumstances, do people *become* migrants and transnationally engaged? However, as outcomes of change seem to be increasingly heterogeneous, it becomes increasingly hard to grasp why some migrants may be agents of change, while others are not. To solve the puzzle that determines which migrants contribute to what kind of change, it is essential to know *how* capacities and desires, being shaped by structures, increase or decrease people's agency to migrate and become transnationally active, and thus marking the 'change potential' of these efforts. Looking at the framework, we can look at structures directly affecting people's agency to migrate and become transnationally active, but also at capacities and desires, developed within a certain structural context, affecting agency. In the analysis of how people develop agency, the same patterns apply to processes of migration, integration and transnationalism.

### 5.1 Effect of structures on agency

What are structural factors that affect people's agency to migrate and engage in transnational activities? The characteristics of governmental regimes, and the policies they put in place are believed to make a difference, although an increasing body of literature shows the limited direct impact of authorities' efforts to effectively manage or control migrants' actions. Border controls and increased visa requirements do not stop people from migrating (Vigneswaran and Quirk 2015). However, in more subtle ways, migrants do react to these policies in their choice of destinations and modes of transport, and after arrival define, categorise and discipline themselves (Turner and Kleist 2013). Although policies do not always meet their intended goals, they do have unintentional or unforeseen effects that affect social life and individual agency (Easthope 2009, Boccagni et al. 2015).

Aside from policy explicitly focusing on managing diasporas and migration, other structures also play a role. A change in the economic situation, or in political stability, or environmental hazards in a country does lead to changes in patterns of migration and transnationalism, but in diverse and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways. While poverty and inequality can be important drivers of migration, an increase in welfare provision in the country of origin initially causes a hike in outmigration. While a political, economic or environmental crisis leads to increased outmigration, a transition towards a more enabling, open and democratic state can also lead to an increase of outmigration. While this is a puzzling reality, the model presented here can show how structures affect migration and transnational engagement through indirect channels via desires and capacities. Using the model can show how these structures can potentially affect agency to migrate or be transnationally engaged and help to provide a more complex image.

### 5.2 Effect of capacities and desires on agency

Economic, social and cultural capacities determine who is able to travel and where (Van Hear 2014), and how migrants can become transnationally active. Desires to migrate and become transnationally active give direction to anything that can be accomplished with these capacities. According to Portes (1999), '(...) transnational activities must be in the interest of those that engage in them since, otherwise, they would not invest the considerable time and effort required'. Desires such as political change or rights, peace, belonging, self-worth, social and economic status and meeting social obligations have been named as important triggers to engage in transnational activities. They can thus be very personal, but also relate to collective goals (Turner 2008), and vary across contexts and change over time (de Haas 2014). In addition to instrumental desires to acquire capital and skills, people may also be

searching for more abstract things such as stability, identity, revenge, love or adventure. People's mix of desires may affect the choice to move or stay, to become transnationally engaged or not. Only by linking desires to capacities can we begin to understand how people's decisions to migrate and become transnationally engaged are shaped.

Desires and capacities are in turn both (and simultaneously) enhanced and constrained by structures in the country of origin and destination, as well as global norms and institutions and networks of other non-state actors. Whether capacities to become transnationally engaged are enhanced or constrained by the origin country depends on the extent to which origin and destination states think migrants can participate in, should be consulted about, and can be represented in home country affairs. This position can dramatically shift over time, fluctuating between, for example, disinterested and denouncing and selective and celebratory (Gamlen 2008, Boccagni et al. 2015), but is argued to be grounded in a fundamental mistrust towards their citizens 'outside the gates' (Skeldon 2008, Turner and Kleist 2013). More progressive regimes may be more likely to invest in the development potential of remittances. Policy structures can be developed to create an enabling environment to guarantee the flow of remittances (Itzigsohn 2000, Brinkerhoff 2012), while at the same time trying to manage diaspora engagement in such a way that it bolsters, rather than denounces, the ruling regime (Fargues 2011).

The literature on how structural factors in the origin country affect desires to migrate or be transnationally engaged is limited. The small body of refugee transnationalism research provides most insights, although with contrasting findings. Belonging to a group that is politically excluded from the institutional field, in combination with a longing for 'home', shapes desires to claim rights to political inclusion (Turner 2008). Conflict, state collapse and instability in the country of origin can create a strong desire, not only to migrate for safety, but also to provide income and support for those left behind and therefore to be transnationally involved and send remittances (Bloch 2008, Lindley 2009, Carling, Erdal, and Horst 2012). Furthermore, diaspora groups created by conflict and sustained by traumatic memories may develop uncompromising attitudes that strain rather than promote constructive conflict resolutions (Collier and Hoeffler 1998, Zunzer 2004, Lyons 2007, Bloch 2008), but can also increase the will to contribute to peace and change. Last, migrants from conflict areas can seek a sense of identity and belonging in the conflict (Shain 2002), in which exposure to danger can feel like a rite of passage (Van Houte 2014b). In cultural studies, it is recognised that existing culture of migration may increase individual desires to migrate (Ali 2007).

Structural circumstances in the destination country also affect migrants' desires and capacities to be transnationally engaged. The institutional and legal framework which regulates who is entitled to legal status or citizenship, is based on opportunistic selection criteria based on skills and normative priorities based on ethno-religious or political backgrounds (De Haas 2012). Wider constitutional debates on who is a citizen can take many different shapes that can increase or decrease the capacities of migrants to get into society. The conditions of inclusion and exclusion then can reflect research that shows that citizenship of the country of destination enhances the capacities to engage in transnational activities (Hoffmann 2010). In addition, arrival in an immigrant-friendly environment can make migrants' networks grow and include access to national and international politicians, policy makers and organisations to lobby for their political needs (Burgess 2012). Also, local infrastructure, affected by conflict or poverty, can affect their capacity to remit (Carling et al. 2012).

More difficult to establish is the main thesis of the migration and change debate, that arrival in the destination country alters political values, as has often been argued. Difficult opportunities to meet desires for socio-economic status and belonging can lead to desires to belong, seek social status and respect elsewhere (Van Liempt 2011). Levitt argues that in addition to democratic attitudes, migrants

can also adopt attitudes such as a culture of violence that they find in gangs, or notions of exclusion and inequality (Levitt 1995). Careja and Emmenegger find that although migrants from EU-candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe are more likely to trust EU institutions, they do not differ from non-migrants in their attitudes toward domestic institutions (Careja and Emmenegger 2012).

## 6 Discussion: hypotheses of time and mobility

After twenty years of debating the significance of migration and transnationalism for development or change, the debate has reached an impasse: despite revived hopes, few clear cut results show evidence of the impact of migration on development. Research has made clear that migrants include a complex and heterogeneous mix of people that do not all meet the three main hypotheses of the migration and development debate. Not all returnees are functional elites (Cochrane 2007, Binaisa 2011). Not all returnees benefit from their migration experience; on the contrary, the migration experience proves to work as a stratifying factor. Last, not all migrants can successfully negotiate belonging to or mediate between cultures and practices (van Houte et al. 2015). But despite these insights, too little has been done to systematically study this complexity. I have argued in this paper that scholarship has either been too focused on structural change and thereby too narrow and one-dimensional, or, on the other hand, has recognised the complexity of this, but has not made steps to analyse this complexity.

In the previous sections, I have tried to disentangle what are really ongoing interactive and circular processes of migration and change. While the classical hypotheses on migration and change mainly focus on what happens when migrants move from one place to the other, the analytical framework I propose brings to the surface two other dynamics: processes in time, and processes of mobility. Taking into account these processes may provide a way forward in research by formulating new hypotheses on the relation between migration and change.

The dimension of time comes forward as the framework represents mechanisms that can lead to a sequence of events – from the circumstances that lead to the decision to migrate (or not), followed by the decision to engage in transnational activities (or not), and the impact these have on the country of origin. The dynamic nature of the framework can therefore be used to observe change across historical moments, within migrant communities and within individuals (Pedraza 2007, Boccagni et al. 2015). Time can affect people of different capacities in such a way that it reinforces socio-economic differences. ‘Functional élites’ from a professional middle class, who are highly educated, relatively wealthy and strongly networked (Long and Oxfeld 2004, Zunzer 2004, Rostami-Povey 2007) tend to leave earlier and go further afield, where they can benefit from better education and invest in their skills and capital. Later ‘cohorts’ of migrants are normally people of more modest background who spend more of their savings and belongings on the journey, and follow in a more established chain of recruitment or smuggling networks (van Houte et al. 2015). They are more vulnerable to, although not inevitably so, ending up on the margins of society, where they are exposed to exclusion, crime, violence, impoverishment and frustration (Levitt 1995, van Houte et al. 2015).

Time therefore plays an important role in understanding the diverse effects of international migration and transnational engagement on change (Kapur 2014). With regard to migration and change, a hypothesis would be that early or pioneer migrants from a certain place, or early arrivals to a certain place, have more potential to contribute to change in the country of origin, compared to follow-up migrants and late arrivals. Likewise, change itself is temporal: the mode of change can be acute or more transitional. It can have an effect on the short term only, or it may be sustainable in the longer term. Effects of sudden, short-term action will be different from long-term engagement. In addition, transnational engagement can develop and increase or decrease over generations (Levitt 2009, Portes

2009). A hypothesis here would be that long-term migration patterns and transnational engagements will have more effect on durable change than one-off activities.

The dimension of mobility comes forward in the framework since, in both migration and transnational engagement, mobility itself emerges as a major desire and capacity determining people's agency to act. Rather than a practice as such, mobility emerges as significant as a possibility, a freedom to act (Lacroix 2009). Mobility may be the operative word for agency (de Haas 2014). For political figures and groups, it can provide an escape route, thereby contributing to their freedom to act. For more entrepreneurial counterparts, mobility can increase their business opportunities. The need for mobility may explain why legal status is an important factor to make a difference in transnational engagement, although a lack of legal status does not stop these transnational engagements. A hypothesis in relation to migration and change would be that the more mobile people are, the more they can contribute to durable change in the country of origin (see also Portes 2010).

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper I have proposed an actor-oriented analytical framework that enables a more holistic yet systematic analysis of migration and change. This framework has four main analytical benefits. First, the framework allows us to analytically disentangle the different dimensions of change, but also to study the process by which migrants *become* active agents of change, rather than essentialising this as fixed or static. Second, the cyclical structure of the framework addresses the need in the migration and development debate to understand migration and change as dynamic processes that are both steered from below and from above in an interactive process that changes over time and on all levels. Third, the interactions in the framework allow us to understand the heterogeneity of mechanisms and outcomes of migration-induced change (Burgess 2012). It highlights that migration-induced change is not necessarily democratisation and not always for the better (Portes 2009). Fourth, the framework allows for hypotheses on processes and outcomes of migration and change that centralises time and mobility in addition to spatial factors.

Building bridges between different research traditions that have been previously unconnected is necessary to advance the debate on migration and change. The framework allows a dialogue between top-down oriented and bottom-up oriented, and qualitative and quantitative work. The framework can be used by quantitative and comparative studies to uncover patterns and trends in the outcomes of migration and change. Large scale comparative research is needed to establish whether migrants can only contribute to change in an enabling structure, or that change can also be established in more 'difficult' structures. On the macro level, quantitative studies should establish to what extent large-scale stocks and flows correlate with political change in the country of origin, and over time. On the meso or micro level, the framework can be applied to large-scale surveys among migrants, to investigate which categories of migrants make a difference. In turn, qualitative, ethnographic and participatory methods can grasp the complex processes underlying these outcomes, and the abstract mechanisms, strategies and meanings that individual migrants ascribe to their migration using their own terms (Castles 2007, King 2012). While quantitative research will need to focus on certain connections, qualitative research should take into account the constantly evolving circulatory loop of the entire framework. Both qualitative and quantitative studies should furthermore incorporate the concept of time and mobility to identify the changes within people, within migrant communities and across historical moments.

## 8 References

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