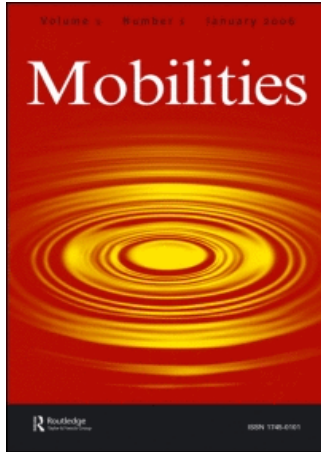


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Sustaining Livelihoods in Multi-local Settings: Possible Theoretical Linkages Between Transnational Migration and Livelihood Studies

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Sustaining Livelihoods in Multi-local Settings: Possible Theoretical Linkages Between Transnational Migration and Livelihood Studies

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ABSTRACT *Worldwide, an increasing number of people are diversifying their income sources through migration. This mobility in most cases involves only parts of the family migrating, and this results in people's livelihoods taking on a multi-local dimension. Scholars have been studying this increasing mobility and multi-locality by applying either a livelihoods approach or one of transnational migration, but they rarely combine the two. However, one major criticism of both approaches is that they do not make the link to other existing social theories and do not therefore permit any fundamental analysis of the relationship between the subject and society, the power relations within a society and the changes human mobility effects to power relations. To address this criticism, I shall discuss existing innovative research and propose Bourdieu's Theory of Practice as a means to fill this theoretical gap.*

KEY WORDS: multi-local livelihoods, transnational migration, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, South Asia, Central Asia

Introduction

Worldwide, an increasing number of people are being forced to diversify their sources of income to sustain their living. This often obliges some of the family members to migrate for work, resulting in a decomposition of households and multiple locations of families' sources of income.

That decomposition of households, increased diversification of sources of income and the emergence of multi-local livelihoods and social networks particularly through migration have been identified as the three major consequences of globalisation for local development and livelihoods by de Haan & Zoomers (2003). It is exactly these migration networks which provide the '... very connection of the – peripheral – locality to global space and its profitable livelihood

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opportunities at the next stage' (De Haan & Zoomers, 2003, p. 360). Hence, they argue, the future agenda on local development in development geography should include the study of rooted and dispersed livelihoods. Awareness of this increasing multi-locality has been a result of many detailed livelihood studies in developing countries using the livelihoods approach to identify the impact of migration on people's means of subsistence (e.g. de Haan & Rogaly, 2002).

A second perspective that can be adopted when looking at this multi-locality is the approach of transnational migration and transnational social spaces. This perspective is mainly taken by scholars of migration studies and focuses on the process of migration and the interlinkages between sending and receiving areas (Pries, 1999; Vertovec, 1999).

My major criticism of both approaches and of the scholars who apply these approaches holds that scholars from both subjects rarely refer to each other and only rarely make the link to other elements of existing social theory, resulting in only limited thought being given to the relationship between subject and society. The reasons behind migration, as well as the opportunities for and restrictions on it, are socially embedded and reflect power imbalances and roles related to gender, age, ethnicity and caste. These roles and power imbalances determine how much access and use of certain resources people have, the capacities and strategies of negotiation and decision-making they have, as well as who migrates and who does not. Migration and the resulting multi-locality of livelihoods are driving forces to challenge power imbalances. However, migration and multi-locality do not always generate greater equality but can also produce inequality and exclusion and do not therefore necessarily provide 'profitable livelihood opportunities' (de Haan & Zoomers, 2003, p. 360) for all.

Inspired by an ongoing theoretical debate in German publications (Dörfler *et al.*, 2003; Graefe & Hassler, 2006; Thieme *et al.*, 2006) as well as in English ones (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Kelly & Lusia, 2006; Navarro, 2006; Thieme, 2006; Herzig & Thieme, 2007), I suggest that we should apply Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) as one possible way of enriching research into the phenomena of migration. In summary, the aim of this paper is to bring together the perspectives of livelihoods and transnational migration in order to contribute to a better understanding of people's increasingly multi-local lives, as well as the attendant benefits and risks for migrants and non-migrants, who are similarly affected by migration. In order to respond to this criticism, I suggest using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice as one possible way of locating people's livelihoods within wider societal structures and as a means of considering specific migration dynamics such as the attendant multi-locality of households. I shall therefore first of all give a brief review of the livelihoods and transnational migration approaches, and show in which aspects the two approaches might benefit from each other. Second, I shall explain and apply Bourdieu's Theory of Practice to analyse various dimensions and impacts of migration using empirical examples based on research into labour migration in South and Central Asia. Research in South Asia has looked mainly at migration dynamics from the Far West region of Nepal to Delhi in India. A larger research project entitled 'Nature and Society' has focused on the living conditions and livelihood strategies of people living in the buffer zone of the Khaptad National Park in the Far Western Development Region of Nepal and has revealed that work in Delhi – and thus labour migration to India – is one of the major sources of income

(Müller, 2001; Kollmair, 2003; Müller-Böker, 2003). Based on this data, the author conducted research between 2002 and 2004 among 300 male and female migrants from four villages in the Far Western Development Region of Nepal in Delhi. The analysis focused on selected aspects of the migrants' lives, such as working and living conditions, management of loans and savings, and remittance transfer (Thieme & Müller-Böker, 2004; Thieme, 2006). Results from this research have led to a larger research project that is still ongoing (from 2006 until 2009) into the question of how people sustain their livelihoods in multi-local settings. The project especially draws on comparisons between South and Central Asia, where labour migration is an important social practice for many people. Thus the preliminary results of four and a half months of research into labour migration and multi-locality in Central Asia provide a second set of empirical examples. A case study was carried out in a village of Osh oblast in South Kyrgyzstan, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The results revealed that people work mainly in either the capital Bishkek in northern Kyrgyzstan, or in Russia and Kazakhstan. To explore the multi-local household settings, in 2006 the author travelled with migrants and interviewed them in Bishkek, Almaty, Kazakhstan and Moscow (Russia), as well as interviewing family members who remained in the village of origin. All this research forms part of the Swiss research programme NCCR North-South (National Centre of Competence in Research North-South) under the title of 'Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change'.

The Livelihoods Approach

The livelihoods approach is used to explain the diversity and complexity of the ways in which people make a living. It addresses the living conditions of poor people, their opportunities and capacities for well-being, their resilience and their resource base composed of various assets (Chambers & Conway, 1992). While the approach is widely applied in research (e.g. de Haan and Rogaly, 2002; Köberlein, 2003), it is also a means of analysing development problems and designing policies and programmes to meet the overriding goal of poverty reduction. It has therefore been endorsed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and put into practice by several other development agencies, such as CARE International, Oxfam, the World Bank and UNDP (Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002). Until recently, the approach has been worked on largely in the context of rural development, but it is now being increasingly discussed for urban settings (DFID, 2002). This is especially relevant for questions of rural to urban migration.

Livelihood strategies are strongly linked to livelihood assets or capital and these form the heart of the approach. These include social, human, financial, natural and physical capital (DFID, 2002). These assets are an antidote to a vision of poor people as being 'passive' or 'deprived'. The poor may not have cash or savings but they do have other material and non-material assets such as family, health, skills and natural resources. To understand these assets, one can identify the opportunities they might offer or the types of constraints that might exist (Rakodi, 2002).

The assets poor people possess or have access to, the livelihoods they desire and the strategies they adopt are all influenced by the context in which they live. This context has, broadly speaking, two dimensions: the first dimension is an overarching

structural context, including organisations and institutions such as rules, norms, policies and legislation shaping livelihoods. The second dimension of people's living context is vulnerability. This means the insecurity of people's well-being in the face of a changing ecological, social, political or economic environment (Rakodi, 2002). Livelihood strategies can be seen as a continuum that covers the range from a struggle to survive, security and growth. Livelihood outcomes are the achievements or outputs of livelihood strategies. They relate to both increased material and non-material well-being such as health, access to services and improved resilience to vulnerability, such as food security or sustainable use of natural resources (DFID, 2002). In analysing outcomes, a distinction has to be made between expected outcomes (or dreams and wishes) of migrants and their families and real outcomes. The nature of outcomes is diverse and their impact on the asset portfolio not always positive. Applied strategies can also be non-coping, erosive or inappropriate (Köberlein, 2003, p. 56). For example, migrants from the Far Western Development Region of Nepal decided to work in Delhi, intending to improve their own financial capital or skills and thereby alter the choice of livelihood strategies. Migration reduces their risks of seasonality, harvest failure and food shortages. Furthermore, due to a lack of health care services in the Far Western Development Region of Nepal, family members regularly come to Delhi for medical treatment and migrants cover their expenses for them. However, the job market in Delhi is highly organised since jobs are handed over and sold within networks. Through the need for substantial seed capital in Delhi, higher living costs, the pressure to remit money and the debts people already have, debt becomes a tool to manage their livelihoods. Migrants borrow from one source to repay the other, perpetuating debt and dependency with the result that they remain migrants for their whole lives (Thieme, 2006).

The Approach of Transnational Migration and Transnational Social Spaces

When analysing the 19th and 20th centuries, migration theory relied mainly on the emergence of strong nation states and nationalism, viewing a society as a 'national container society' (Lee, 1966). From this perspective, a certain physical place corresponds to a social space. Consequently, migration was mainly seen as a uni- or bi-directional movement brought about by emigration, immigration or return migration and caused by isolated factors such as political or economic motivations (Massey *et al.*, 1993; Pries, 2001). However, new information technology and a new division of labour are some of the interwoven, yet fundamental 'global shifts' at work in today's globalising world (Backhaus, 2003). Transnational migration has been described as a new field emerging at a global level and on a mass scale, mainly due to the intensification and the multiplicity of relations between countries. To grasp the dynamics of cross-border population movement, social anthropologists introduced the concept of transnationalism (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1992, 1999). The people involved live between two worlds: their new migrant communities and their home communities. Moreover, these transnational communities became characterised as de-territorialised and 'place-less' (Basch *et al.*, 1994).

Pries (1999, 2001, 2004) developed the concept of transnational migration further, pointing out that the intensity and the simultaneity of these cross-border activities led to the emergence of transnational social spaces. These are social spaces that have

a multi-local geographical link rather than an exclusive one. Work, housing, life trajectories and time horizons span different localities in different states (Pries, 1999, 2001).

Both concepts have initiated a wide debate among social anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and geographers (Portes *et al.*, 1999; Vertovec, 1999; Conway, 2000; Pries, 2001; Faist, 1999; Becker, 2002; Bürkner, 2005; Conway, 2005). Its application can mainly be found in South-North migration (e.g. Basch *et al.*, 1994; Pries, 2001; Voigt-Graf, 2004, 2005) and its application to migration among developing countries remains relatively rare (Nagar, 1998; Voigt-Graf, 1998; Herzig, 2006; Thieme, 2006).

Also in transformation countries, there is increasing evidence of transnational migration patterns. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and introduction of radical economic reforms, economic factors remain the driving force for migration, alongside the search for education and the wish to escape from traditional customs such as early marriage. Interviews (2006) with family members in Kyrgyzstan and their respective relatives who have migrated to Kazakhstan and Russia have shown that this relatively new form of transnational migration increasingly structures everyday practices, the social positions, the employment trajectories and the biographies of both the migrants and their family members who have remained at home. Whereas in the Far West of Nepal migration had a predominantly male face, in Kyrgyzstan young and middle-aged men and women migrate, alone or in couples, leaving their children with their parents or parents-in-law. Grandparents, teachers and the parents themselves all expressed their deepest concerns about what would happen to the children if the parents were to stay away for a large part of their childhood. However, while large amounts of remittances did not form the most significant transnational bond between the Far West of Nepal and Delhi, the case study in Kyrgyzstan proved that remittances, especially those from Russia and Kazakhstan, are certainly a major marker of transnational links and they are materialised in better housing, consumer goods such as TVs, radios and cars, and an increasing number of social events such as seasonal festivities.

How Research into Livelihoods and into Transnational Migration Has a Lot to Gain from Working Together

A major criticism of the transnational migration approach is the fact that it emphasises cultural categories more than economic ones (Bürkner, 2000). Though relevant migration processes do continue to be economically motivated, individual strategies of making a living and becoming socially integrated are mainly declared to be cultural rather than economic or socio-economic issues. Therefore, transnational migration is often seen as a cultural process that forms and differentiates social communities.

It is certain that, on the one hand, the social practices of migrants can be self-determined where migrants find their own autonomous niches between different societies and cultures (Bürkner, 2005). However, a livelihoods perspective will reveal that migration is, on the other hand, in most cases a necessary and enforced strategy to adapt to economic globalisation. Hence transnational migration studies tend to give little consideration to the characteristics, the amount and the impact of

economic activities on migrants themselves, as well as on their sending societies. The aspect that researchers from both fields of studies generally neglect is the impact of migration on receiving societies (Jones 1992, in Bürkner, 2005, pp.116–117). Furthermore, the economic activities of non-migrating individuals and groups have rarely been taken into account, despite the fact that they have a decisive influence on the economic success or failure of migrants (ibid.).

What is more, migration processes are usually divided into internal and international migration. The transnational approach thus stresses the importance of crossing international borders (Vertovec, 1999; Conway, 2000). The focus on the ‘nation’ implies that a ‘society’ or ‘nation’ can be perceived as a single unit. It implies that a society shares the same living conditions and has other things in common and that state borders are firm boundaries that separate very different worlds from each other. What the approach ignores is that social life only accepts administrative borders in a political and administrative sense (Becker, 2002; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002; van Schendel, 2002, 2005). Regions like South and Central Asia provide interesting examples of how borders are changing and how different migrants perceive international borders differently. Some centuries ago, Nepalese had already settled on Indian territory, but have maintained close social links across the border to India until the present day, providing us with an indication that these Indian Nepalese might in a not only physical but also cultural sense be closer to Nepal than they are to other parts of India – but they are still always considered as international migrants because they crossed a border.

Migration between what are now the independent states of Central Asia would, only two decades ago, have been ‘mere’ internal migration within the former Soviet Union. Kyrgyz migrants who are now working illegally in Russia or Kazakhstan were only two decades ago citizens of the same state. In former times, male migrants often even served in the Russian army.

Additionally, the focus on transnational border movements within the transnational migration approach does not pay sufficient attention to the range of types of mobility that are available to and necessary for individuals and families to be able to sustain their livelihoods. It ignores internal migration, which is, firstly, an important way of getting income and, secondly, often interlinked with international migration. Furthermore, many migrants migrate step by step. Either they migrate internally to the capital and later to another country or people migrate internationally and, if they have earned enough money, they will later invest in other parts of their country, both urban and rural. The categories of internal and international migration have become strongly interlinked, suggesting that moving from one country to another is only one dimension of creating new social spaces.

The Shortcomings of Both Approaches: the Missing Link to Other Social Theories

Both approaches – livelihoods and transnational migration – have been criticised for their lack of a social theoretical foundation. One of the values of the livelihoods approach lies in its ability to define the scope of and provide the analytical basis for livelihoods analysis (Rakodi, 2002). However, as components of the livelihoods approach such as capital, institutions or vulnerability reveal, it does contain many different approaches from the social sciences. Although, on the one hand, this is a

strength, on the other hand, the researcher is left in the dark as to what the precise approaches and theories of social science are that the livelihoods approach is based upon. This criticism goes hand-in-hand with another one, namely that livelihood studies in general suffers from a profound lack of theoretical foundation. While its empirical orientation and analysis form one of the strengths of development studies, development geographers have been especially critical of the fact that there has not been much attempt to aggregate and generalise findings and drawing wider inferences to come to a theory and meanings of place and space (van Grunsven & van Westen, 2003; de Haan & Zoomers, 2003). The livelihoods approach has also been criticised for being conflict-blind. The narrow conception of society does not allow any analysis of the relationship between subject and society, nor does it adequately consider socio-economic dependency and power inequality (Nujiten, 1992; Dörfler *et al.*, 2003; de Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Graefe & Hassler, 2006; Thieme, 2006).

The same criticism is also true of the transnational migration approach. A full description of the reception and criticism of the transnational migration approach is beyond the scope of this paper. However, scholars increasingly demand and advance a better theoretical contextualisation of the approach and its attendant terms such as social field, social space or different kinds of capital, e.g. social capital (Bürkner, 2000, 2005; Becker, 2002; Conway, 2005; Thieme, 2006; Herzig & Thieme, 2007). Transnational migration research often remains power-blind and migrants often get treated as a single entity without any differentiation between social categories or any consideration of power relations (Bürkner, 2005). This idealisation of community can be explained by the fact that the transnational migration approach only rarely interlinks with social theory – and social theory would undoubtedly enrich the debate on migration in many ways.

Therefore what both approaches lack and rarely analyse is the relation migrants have to their sending region and the relation they develop to their receiving and new host countries. Also neither reflects power inequality (e.g. between/within communities or households; gender/age structures) and neither enables analysis of the relationships between the subject and society. Both approaches are blind to inequalities and unequal power relations in the migration process, as well as to the social and cultural differences between societies and the resulting respective (and conflicting) networks of migrants. In most studies, migrants are perceived as being one group, one entity, imposing an ideal image of community and celebrating the importance of social networks. With this aggregation of social networks, there is often reference to the very loosely defined term of 'social capital'. Social capital is seen as being essential to remaining in contact and to exchanging remittances between sending and receiving regions in transnational migration research (Faist, 1999). Although I do not deny the importance of social networks to shaping migration patterns and experiences, I suggest a more open analysis of migration and its embeddedness in people's livelihoods is necessary so as to allow it to be interlinked with existing social theory.

For this, I also rely on the theoretical debate mentioned above in which both development and migration studies researchers suggest applying Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) or at least parts of it (Dörfler *et al.*, 2003; de Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Graefe, 2006; Graefe & Hassler,

2006; Kelly & Lusia, 2006; Rothfuss, 2006; Thieme *et al.*, 2006). If the Theory of Practice is used, migrants do not receive preferential treatment from theory. Their situation is analysed with the same concepts as the situation of all other members of society. The Theory of Practice provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between individuals and society with its attendant power relations. It sheds more light on explanations of how and why migrants and their non-migrating family members may benefit from migration and of what sometimes prevents them from doing so; at the same time it shows the interlinkages between sending and receiving regions (Thieme, 2006).

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice: Habitus, Capital and Social Fields

Bourdieu's leading theoretical claim is that his work transcends the dualism between explanations that attribute social change and social reproduction to certain overarching structures and theorisations that privilege individual subjective intention and experience. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is a response to the dualism of objectivism and subjectivism and constitutes a dialectical relationship between social field and habitus, in which the social practice of an individual or a social group has to be analysed as the result of the interaction of habitus and social field (Dörfler *et al.*, 2003, Bridge, 2004, see also Figure 1). These two main concepts are supported by ideas such as strategy, struggle and various kinds of capital, which determine social practices, and shall be explained below.

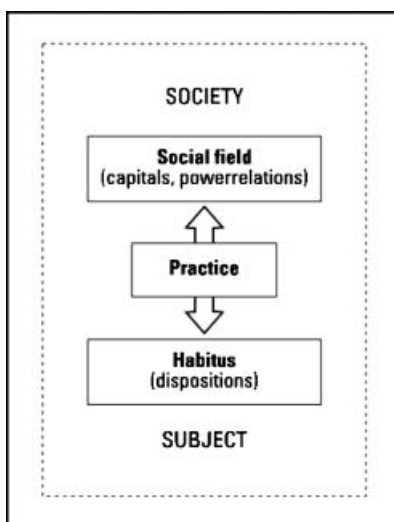


Figure 1. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. *Source:* Dörfler *et al.*, 2003, adapted by Thieme, 2006

Habitus

Habitus operates at the subconscious level. It is a socially and culturally conditioned set of durable dispositions for social actions, and thus a product of history. It describes the active presence of past experiences, which is represented by an actor's present and future perception, thinking and action (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 78–87; 1990, p. 53; also Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 61). Habitus is internalised and gives individuals a sense of how to act in specific situations, without continually having to make fully conscious decisions. It generates practice and limits people's possibilities at the same time. It is shared by people of similar status but varies across different social groups.

In Nepal and India, caste affiliation determines social and economic practices and excludes certain livelihood strategies. Ploughing is not appropriate for members of high castes for example. The forging of iron and gold, leather processing, tailoring and the playing of certain musical instruments are all activities evaluated as ritually 'impure', which only the low caste (Dalit) should carry out. Dalits should not touch high-caste people and they are prohibited from using the same water source. The patron-client system, which has existed between high-caste and Dalit households for generations, is based on this caste affiliation. Household members of the occupational castes provide services to the high-caste households and receive a grain allowance in return. The principle of ritual purity governs people's actions and enforces the discrimination of women, who, for example become 'naturally' impure through childbirth and menstruation. In this way, power relations, hierarchies and dependencies are ritually justified and manifested in daily activities (Cameron, 1998; Müller-Böker, 2003).

Habitus is also reflected in the practices of a patrilineal and patrilocal family structure in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Nepal. After a woman's (usually) arranged marriage, a woman leaves the home of her birth and moves into her parents-in-law's house. This patrilinearity and patrilocality means that women's skills and labour benefit the patrilineal household and do not contribute to their parents' livelihoods. This is one of the main reasons why families do not invest in girls' education or, at least, invest much less than in the boys'.

The patriarchal habitus is also one reason for gender selectivity in migration patterns. It is apparent in intra-household resource and decision-making structures, as well as in a socially determined and gender-segregated labour market (Chant & Radcliffe, 1992). Women bear the main responsibility for housekeeping, child-rearing, taking care of the elderly and carrying out agricultural work near the house. The man is seen as the main cash-income earner and consequently it is he who migrates for work, although these patterns are now changing.

Bourdieu's work on habitus seems rather pessimistic and does not present many options as to how habitus might change. However, this deterministic and reductive view does not hold, in my opinion, since the process of migration influences habitus and renders transformation and adaptation both possible and necessary. Transnational activities can influence the habitus of the migrants, in that traditional structures change and new moral duties arise, for example to family members back home. However, people who are left behind also experience changes in family and household organisation, and examples of this will be given later in this paper.

Capital

In any analysis of society, capital must be taken into account in all its forms, and not just economic capital, which is probably the best known. Bourdieu uses the economic term 'capital' to show that relationships and exchanges within a society cannot only be reduced to an economic rationale including the exchange of goods, material self-interest and profit maximisation (Bourdieu, 1986). There are as many interests and values to be maximised as there are social fields. Bourdieu therefore defines capital very broadly. Capital is accumulated labour and includes all material and symbolic goods that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation (*ibid.*). Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Economic capital is the ownership of monetary profit and can be cashed in, for example a house or livestock that can be sold. Cultural capital is the product of intellectual ability or educational qualifications. Social capital consists of a network of lasting social relations or an individual's circle of acquaintances. Symbolic capital is the recognition and legitimisation of other forms of capital, such as economic or social, which can lend a person prestige and reputation (Bourdieu, 1986; Schwingel, 1995, pp. 92–93). All forms of capital can be transformed into one another, not automatically but through transformation work (Bourdieu, 1986). In Kyrgyzstan migrants finance costly feasts and bring gifts of clothes, radios, TVs, cars etc. This has an important symbolic value in increasing the migrants' own honour and reputation (also Werner, 1997). At the same time, those migrants create social capital by maintaining social networks. For instance, relations in an extended family in South Kyrgyzstan cultivated through joint festivities such as weddings may one day be the collective provider of a loan to fund a journey to Moscow and thus the entry ticket for the Russian labour market. Constant acts of exchanges or of communication which result in a recurring mutual recognition and acknowledgement of relations are necessary. With this recurring acceptance, not only the sense of belonging gets reproduced but so too do the boundaries of relations to other groups (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 249–252). Another example is when Nepalis in Delhi use their social networks and mobilise social capital to form credit associations, which then provide them with access to financial capital to repay their debts and to finance daily needs (Thieme & Müller-Böker, 2004; Thieme, 2006).

There is a major difference here to the notion of capital used by the livelihoods approach, which is that not all forms of capital are fixed assets, nor do people simply own different kinds of capital. In Bourdieu's understanding of them, capital and power amount to the same thing (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). Therefore what are commonly termed as natural resources (such as water or forest) are not automatically capital. Bourdieu acknowledges that other forms of capital exist alongside the four types of capital he usually mentions. Resources are transformed into capital '... when they function as a social relation of power – or, in other words when resources are objects of social struggle' (Navarro, 2006, p. 17). Therefore, when forests or water are valued and an interest is manifested in them, these resources become capital – and could be called ecological or natural capital.

For Bourdieu, all forms of capital are dynamic. They can be transformed into one another, not automatically but through transformation work (Bourdieu, 1986).

Conceptually, capital might be quantifiable, because everybody owns capital to a greater or lesser degree. However, ultimately, the form it takes only receives a value if one enters a social field where it is valued (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 25). Capital is a concentration of force or power that operates in every social field. We can therefore consider which kinds of capital are important for the different types of migrants and in the different social fields of forces in which they struggle during their lifetime, which brings us to the concept of social field.

Social Field

Practices which are generated by habitus do not exist in a disorganised vacuum but rather within a structured framework, which Bourdieu conceives of as belonging to a social field. If habitus determines the subject's goal and internal constraints, the social field focuses on the objective goal and external conditions (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 78–79; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97, see also Figure 1). Every social field has its own rules which are neither explicit nor codified and which can, with caution, be compared to a game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). These principles constitute what is possible or impossible, and what is allowed and not allowed within the game. These constitutive rules are only very rarely explicitly formulated. Players consciously or unconsciously accept the explicit and/or implicit rules of the game (ibid., pp. 98–100). To overcome the rigidity of these 'rules of the game', Bourdieu introduces the term 'strategy'. Strategies are products of habitus and of practices adapted to a social field. They regulate most behaviour. Even if the interests of agents determine their strategies, this is not normally through a fully conscious and rational calculation of risks or resource deployment: it is determined more by a sense of reality. The choice and implementation of a strategy are part of habitus. They allow the agent to make a decision without consciously thinking about it. They can be seen as constraints, but they at the same time make a 'game' really possible. Each social field has its own respective social structure and social order. A social field is composed of the availability of multiple forms of capital that agents possess. They condition the position of an actor in relation to other social actors within a social field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 94–114; Mahar *et al.*, 1990). The position of an actor in a specific society and in a specific social field is never absolute, but relative. Inequality of and access to resources are the basis of how each field operates. Depending on their background, these may automatically be of advantage or disadvantage to individuals. Therefore, the notion of the field is not only defined by strategies but also by the struggle to occupy a particular position within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 100–104). The interlinking of habitus, field and capitals can be summarised as follows:

Individuals, by existing in social space, encounter fields but come with their own generating structures, inculcated in the process of their own development in the world. This *habitus* forms affinities and disaffinities with the structural relations, or fields, which surround them. As such individuals may be in, or out, and may or may not have the necessary pre-existing capital to play it to their advantage. (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 25, original emphasis)

Education, science, economy or politics are examples of social fields. The aggregation of social fields is social space, which can be seen as a synonym for the term 'locale'. Both are defined as encultured space and, as a consequence of social construction, a space where power relations are contested and conflicts and compromises are negotiated (Bourdieu, 1991). Migration then leads to the reconstruction of space. When people migrate from one place to the other, they leave the context, space or 'locale' in which their interactions are embedded (Giddens, 1992; Werlen, 1997; Weiner, 2005). In the new place, they find a different locale that provides a different framework for interactions, just as, for the people who remain behind, power relations and interactions change within transnational social fields.

Migrants' Social Practices as a Result of the Interplay of Habitus and Transnational Social Fields

In a receiving country, migrants have to act in different social fields to gain access to employment, shelter and loans or to remit money. Their different forms of capital are valued differently when they enter new social fields, and power relations change. One example is the social field of the global labour market. Following Bourdieu, this social field is segmented into sub-fields such as different sectors of work and the informal and formal labour markets. Labour markets in for example Delhi or Moscow can be perceived as additional sub-fields. Employers and customers have their specific demands, and migrants (as jobseekers) get engaged in this social field hoping to use their power to their own advantage.

Migrants often occupy a specific niche in the labour market. These network-driven opportunities for mobility have also been described as ethnic niches (Granovetter; 1994; Light & Karageorgis, 1994; Portes, 1994). They emerge when a group is able to colonise a particular sector of employment in such a way that members have privileged access to new job openings, while at the same time restricting that of outsiders (Portes, 1998), and this is often referred to as characteristic of migrants. By using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, the concept of ethnic niche becomes obsolete. The 'ethnic' character of occupying a specific job niche is now a result of the relation of specific kinds of capital and of the interplay of social fields and habitus. The overlap between culture and economy is no longer automatically classified as either anachronism ('tradition') or as crisis management ('regeneration'). Culture does not per se create differences, but it is possible to look at the different components of the 'ethnicity' of each society or economy. To avoid a reductive view of ethnicity the difference of a society is then not a premise but a result of analysis (Portes & Jensen, 1992; Timm, 2000; Diener, 2002; Herzig, 2004).

When migrants enter the labour market, they regularly face problems, such as the fact that cultural capital – education, general knowledge and abilities – that was important in the rural context of Nepal or Kyrgyzstan, is not valued in the new social fields of the urban (and often foreign) labour market. For example, agricultural knowledge is not important for survival in the city. Migrants in Nepal need instead to know how to ensure security in an urban neighbourhood as watchmen; women have to run a middle-class household as a domestic worker; and tailors have to be able to make fashionable clothes (Thieme, 2006). Professionally

trained teachers from Kyrgyzstan were not able to teach in Russia because they were not fluent in Russian, and their experience of working in rural areas was not acknowledged. They all lack the knowledge (cultural capital) about where to find information on job opportunities as well as the necessary documents to be able to work in their new destination.

All these examples suggest that moving from one country to another is only one dimension of creating new social spaces. Due to the cultural similarities that exist between Nepal and India on the one hand and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia on the other, it can even be argued that the change from a rural to an urban context has the same (or perhaps a greater) influence than does changing country. The differences peoples face in moving to an urban environment are just as great as if they shifted from geographically marginalised villages to a place with access to physical and social infrastructure. Therefore, although the transnational social space that can emerge as a consequence of migration connects different spaces, the spaces provide very different contexts for the migrants. Moreover, these spaces are also changing rapidly due to globalisation. Globalisation is another factor migrants have to cope with and it can produce anxiety or at least uncertainty (McDowell, 1996), as well as paralysing migrants in their attempts to improve their lives.

Therefore many migrants often have no other options of earning an income. Globalisation has contributed to an increase in informal and illegal sector activities. This is especially true of major destinations for migrants, such as urban centres. Large urban centres are characterised by increasing social polarisation and the domination of distinct labour markets by specific ethnic groups. Access to the formal labour market becomes restricted, and the informalisation of economic activities and the growth of the low-skilled service sector block migrants' social mobility (Bürkner, 2005).

As a result, in both India and Russia, male migrants were found to occupy a distinct niche in the low-skilled, informal labour market. In Delhi, as well as in other cities of India, many male migrants from the Far Western Development Region of Nepal work, regardless of caste, as watchmen and even hand down their jobs from generation to generation (Thieme, 2006; also Pfaff, 1995). In Moscow, Kyrgyz men are 'well-known' for working as street-sweepers. Social capital is essential for migrants to ease their lack of other capital and find a job. Jobs are arranged by or taken over from friends or fellow villagers. However, the same social capital can also exclude certain people if they cannot satisfy other preconditions laid down by their fellow villagers in order for them to get a job. For example, among men in Delhi, jobs are often 'bought' from one's predecessor for up to three times the monthly salary. Financial capital and social capital are therefore the major conditions for obtaining employment. The majority of individual migrants felt stigmatised by society in their urban working places as 'rural and low-skilled immigrants'. Many internalise and get used to the stigma, resulting in low self-esteem and in their feeling incapable of achieving a higher social position. They are scared of losing their jobs, feel unconfident because of their poor education and do not know their rights and possibilities. Migrants tend to accept occupational and wage discrimination, and they hesitate to ask for external help or to organise themselves. The intense commercialisation of everyday goods and services and the need to bribe people in order to ensure access to them add to migrants' daily costs and their need for

financial capital, as well as contributing to their social and economic exclusion. This discrimination means migrants are forced to stick to their jobs and to their limited social capital. They prefer to accept their situation and to earn a stable (though small) amount of money rather than to attempt to do something else and risk losing everything they have.

Relying on close kin or friends from a very similar background is therefore helpful as it provides emotional support while searching for employment and, in the best-case scenario, these friends are able to procure the migrants a job and access to economic capital in the sector they themselves already work in. However, this social capital carries no value in other sub-fields of the labour market, for example when migrants look for higher-skilled and better-paid jobs. Moreover, these migrants lack the skills and the necessary information to be able to do this on their own.

Another reason for migrants' limited social mobility is their migration pattern and the fact that they oscillate between at least two worlds or are involved in transnational social fields including home and away. Regardless of whether men or women migrate seasonally or spend the major part of the year in the receiving area, the majority of them have part of their families (wives or husbands, children and other close relatives) at home. Many migrants live under the illusion that they will be able to return home very soon. They dream of going back to their home country and never having to leave again, and this has an important influence on how they invest in or sustain their different forms of capital. If they think that they are only going to be working abroad for a limited time, they do not invest in their own cultural capital and choose instead to follow the easiest path, i.e. getting a job through their social networks. Furthermore, they do not build up more social capital but instead remain within their existing social network. They live for years with the psychological burden of being separated from their family members, although some do earn sufficient money and stay away long enough for their family members to join them, whereby the latter gain access to education, basic infrastructure and possibilities to earn an income. The family members who remain behind and those Migrants who want to return to their village depend on the cooperation of the agricultural community, on their caste and patron-client affiliations and on their neighbours and all other forms of social and symbolic capital to survive in society. Social ostracism is tantamount to social death (for Nepal, see e.g. Bista, 1999). These experiences also give us an insight into the heavy psychological burden migrants have to carry whenever they return to their villages. They wish both to go back from time to time so as to be able to cope with living away from their families for most of the year, but at the same time they have the stress of knowing that if they do not fulfil reciprocal obligations, their support networks and social capital might erode.

However, there are also positive experiences of migrants to contradict this, showing that customs or habitus can change over time and from one generation to the next – migration can support such movements.

In cases where women come from Nepal to join their husbands in Delhi, whether for a shorter or a longer period of time, the men are a source of both financial and social capital. Women respect the traditional patrilineal and patrilocal family networks through which normative expectations, such as kinship obligations, are reinforced. However, while keeping to these patterns, they can gain a new economic independence by finding employment through their husbands' contacts, earning their

own money and being able to manage their own financial self-help groups (Thieme & Müller-Böker, 2004; Herzig & Thieme, 2007).

The multi-local migration linkages between sending and receiving regions are inter-generational and reproduce power relations and habitus. But these can at the same time be transformed and merged with modern patterns. Whereas in the villages traditional elders – men and, in Nepal, the respective castes they belong to – are the leaders, in the cities people who were previously excluded from power have a chance to participate. Examples of this in India are the mixed membership of financial self-help groups or the fact that people work in the same job regardless of their caste. In Kyrgyzstan, an increasing number of women migrate alone or with their husbands to find work and contribute to the family's income. Nevertheless, case studies have also shown that it takes a long time to change social structures and that this change does not affect everybody in the same way. Personality and a sense of responsibility are important, be they for one's own life or as a leader of a group. Moreover, change does not take place at sending and receiving regions on the same timescale and is in different dimensions.

Empirical work in different parts of Nepal has brought to light some very controversial experiences of family members, especially those of women who remained behind. In some cases, women are challenging patriarchal structures and gaining decision-making power within the household and even at the village level. In other cases, women who have remained in Nepal do not gain more independence or bargaining power within the household. The family, especially the women, take on a greater workload in the villages to enable their menfolk to go to Delhi. Women take over responsibility for the house and child-care and might even lose their decision-making power if they are living with their parents-in-law. If the men do not come home for the harvest, then the women also have to take on the extra agricultural work or organise male help. They also depend on the remittances of the husband (Kaspar, 2005; Wyss, 2004). Migrants in Delhi revealed that caste restrictions in their villages in the Far West of Nepal prevent migrants of different castes from making common investments as this would demonstrate to the home villagers that caste rules are weakened in Delhi. If migrants were to invest together in community infrastructure, this would also mean that the ensuing property (temples, schools, water wells, etc.) in Nepal would have to be used across castes, and this is often not the case.

Some migrants who settled in Delhi with their families tried to return to the Far West of Nepal. Those of lower caste who tried to return to this part of Nepal came back to Delhi again because they felt paralysed by the traditional structures that marginalise them socially and economically in their home villages (Thieme, 2006).

Kelly & Lusia (2006) even propose a 'transnational habitus' through which the various forms of capital and their value should be examined. When people migrate, economic, social or cultural capital are not simply transferred to the new setting where they are then evaluated within a new habitus. Instead 'a process of valuation and exchange continues through transnational social fields well after settlement has occurred. Thus the habitus itself is transnationalised' (Kelly & Lusia, 2006, p. 837). However, when applying the concept of habitus, one has to be careful not to slip once more into generalisations about the household, family or community scale by treating migrants as people who share a common habitus. Other axes of social

differentiation such as gender, class, age, or status of migration might influence people's habitus instead (Anthias, 1998; 1999; Herzig & Richter, 2004; Herzig, 2006), just as migrants might change their habitus and attitudes while people remaining behind might not. If they earn enough money to invest, migrants might be tempted to do so in other towns or villages in their home country in order to escape from the conservative environment, weak economy, limited labour market and a lack of adequate social infrastructure such as schools and health care in their home villages. Migrants mainly invest in city centres in both Nepal and Kyrgyzstan or in the more fertile, more accessible Nepalese lowlands. However, migrants often lack the financial capital to be able to invest in land immediately. Therefore they do it step by step, which leads to an even more diverse pattern of internal and international migration. One part of the family works and lives in the foreign place, one part lives on the newly bought land and another part of the family continues to reside in the original village, making multi-locality an integral part of people's lives.

Conclusion

There are two major ways of approaching migration in research: first, from a livelihoods perspective with the livelihoods approach and, second, using the approach of transnational migration and transnational social spaces. Both approaches face a major challenge to enhance their theoretical foundation. This theoretical foundation is necessary for us to gain a better understanding of people's access to and use of resources, as well as of the relationship between subject and society, their socio-economic dependencies and to be able to extrapolate the results of case studies. In order to do this, I have suggested using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and illustrated my proposal with empirical examples from Central and South Asia.

According to Bourdieu, social practice is a result of interrelations between habitus and social field. Habitus is a system of lasting dispositions and an internalised behaviour. A social field is constituted by the position of different actors and the relations between them, e.g. between employer and employee in a job market, or between members of different gender and age in the same household. The relations between the positions constitute a 'social topography' in which some actors are more powerful than others. No actor's position within a social field is absolute. It is based on whether and to what extent they possess various kinds of capital, be it social, economic, cultural or symbolic. The key characteristic of all kinds of capital is that they can be transformed into one another through transformation work. However, what applies to all kinds of capital is that individuals only receive a value for it if they enter a social field where it is valued. Resource access and inequality are at the basis of each social field operation. Individuals will automatically be advantaged or disadvantaged depending on their background. Therefore, the notion of the social field is not only determined by strategies but also by a struggle for a position in the field. With the Theory of Practice, we are also able to consider changing power relations between migrating and non-migrating household members or between the individual and his community.

In the case of migration, it is not only those who migrate but also those who do not who are affected by migration, and this includes both the family members who

remain behind and the people in the receiving area. They all have to renegotiate their positions and needs; this can open up new opportunities but can also reinforce or create new power imbalances. The Theory of Practice does not just assess the valuation of various forms of capital therefore, but also explores how such valuations are reached (also Kelly & Lusia, 2006).

Migrants often lack power, and powerlessness is very closely linked to vulnerability. Despite the positive experiences and the possibilities they might have of earning an income, migrants also have to deal with risks. Although migrants are not the poorest of the poor and do not have to struggle for daily survival, they are vulnerable and seem to live 'on the edge' (Ellis, 2003). There is only a small distance between being able to survive and thrive and suddenly no longer being able to. For a majority of migrants, power relations within their group do change to a certain extent. Nevertheless, most of them lack the extensive social capital, as well as cultural and economic capital, to change their power relations as a group, safeguard their basic rights and protect themselves from exploitation and conflict. Migrants have found economic and social niches, but as the majority of them do not acquire new skills, it would appear that their marginality resurfaces.

Based on the conceptual thoughts above, the following are some suggestions for possible further research.

The major argument of the paper is that power relations and dependencies are central to understanding social practice. On this basis, one challenge for further research is to think about and understand these power relations not as fixed resources but instead at a symbolic level that requires concepts such as habitus and social field to be further operationalised. In order to better understand the relation between actors and their surrounding society, there is a need not only to research 'the' migrant and his household members but also non-migrating people being affected by migration through the fact that they live in the receiving place. Furthermore, it is important to consider migration as only one category of research, amongst many – it is always combined with other categories such as gender, age and ethnicity. All of them are fluid and only an in-depth analysis of power relations can reveal which category or categories are of importance for certain social practices. Given the increasing incidence of multi-local households, empirical research also has to be multi-local. A complete record of migration patterns and circuits reveals the possible linkages between internal and international migration as well as the linkages between different income sources in cases where, for example, remittances fund the purchase of land for agriculture and livestock breeding, small business creation or education. It can also give us an insight into how the power relations between people change.

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