

**To what extent does the experience of spatial mobility
represent an asset for the entrepreneurship of returnees?
Inequalities among Colombian *retornados***

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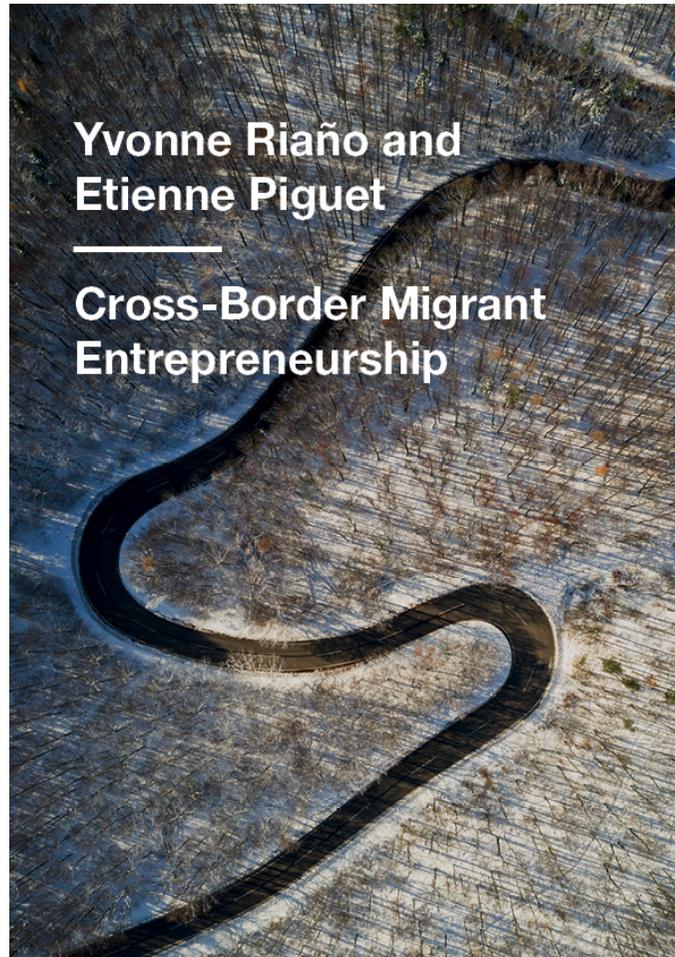
Yvonne Riaño

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P23, Migration and inequality: implications for development, research and
practice DSA, 17.06.2020

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Swiss National Center of Competence in Research for Migration and Mobility Studies "nccr – on the move2 (2019-2021)



Introduction

- Migrants returning: globalisation, economic downturn, strict immigration regulations
- Representing returnees as "agents of development" (Anwar & Chan 2016)
- Migrants accumulate capital abroad which they invest in businesses upon return (Marchetta 2012)
- Studying abroad opens the door to cultural capital in the form of a "western" degree (Thieme 2014), which is beneficial for the business ventures of returnees
- Returnee entrepreneurship can help transform "brain-drain" into "brain-circulation" (Saxenian 2015; Lianos & Pseiridis 2009; Liu et al 2010, Bai 2016)
- Returnee entrepreneurs increasingly move bodies, goods, capitals and ideas across national borders for business (Drori et al, 2009; Yeung 2009)

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Research gaps and research aim

- Diversity of cross-border spatial mobilities and exchanges created by returnee entrepreneurs not sufficiently understood.
- Scant understanding of to what extent spatial mobility experience represents an asset for the business ventures of returnees.
- Limited understanding of what kinds of inequalities emerge among returnees
- Few studies address the diversity of "return" situations (by coercion, by wish, return programmes, independent) & "return" migrants (lesser- or higher skilled).

Research aim:

Examine the potential of spatial mobility experience for business-making, and the social inequalities that emerge among returnees.

Hypothesis:

By using opportunities abroad, and by mobilising international spatial experience for business, spatial mobility can become a resource for returnee entrepreneurship.

Research questions

- What kinds of transnational **mobilities** are developed by returnee entrepreneurs? (transnational perspective)
- To what extent can returnees make use of their international **spatial experience** to the advantage of their business ventures? (spatial experience)
- What **inequalities** emerge among returnees regarding their unequal ability to make use of international spatial experience? (social inequalities)
- What **strategies** do returnees develop to cope with the challenges they face in developing their business ventures? (agency)

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Conceptual approach



Spatial Mobility Capital

Comprises the different types of international capitals that a person accumulates during their migration & mobility trajectories, of potential utility for business ventures:

- ◆ Cultural capital (international education and know-how)
- ◆ Social capital (transnational networks allowing access to information, cooperation and funding)
- ◆ Economic capital (money and material assets acquired abroad)
- ◆ Legal capital (double nationality and/or enhanced international mobility rights)
- ◆ Spatial capital (knowing how to move and how to deal with space / borders)

Conceptual advantages:

- Expanding Bourdieu's theory to including the dimension of *spatial mobility*
- Addressing the study of capitals in an *integrated* way,
- Addressing the *unequal ability* of returnees to mobilise international capitals

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Case studies



Colombian returnees: Three types of "return" & "returnees"

Type 1: Trajectory of *repeated forced mobilities*, ranging from initial displacement(s) in Colombia, followed by emigration to Venezuela, and deportation by Maduro in 2015

16 Returnees (4 men, 12 women; primary to secondary education, some German support)

Types of businesses: hairdressing & nail repair, food shops, ice cream vending, shoe shops, hand craft vending, clothes shops, street vending

Type 2: Trajectory of *voluntary mobilities*, first emigrating to Europe to study at German & Swiss universities, and then physically returning to Colombia for an indefinite time.

13 Returnees (6 men, 7 women, university education, some with German support)

Types of businesses: renewable energies, orthopedic soles, micro power plants for hydroenergy, smart mobility, bamboo technology, healthy foods, social sustainability

Type 3: Trajectory of *voluntary mobilities*, first emigrating to Europe to study at German & Swiss universities, and then staying in Germany, with temporary returns to Colombia

2 Returnees (2 men university education, with German support)

Types of businesses in Colombia: power plants for hydroenergy, coffee export-import

Geographical location of returnees

Type 1: Colombia-Venezuela border



Type 2: Main cities

Type 3: Germany, temporary returns



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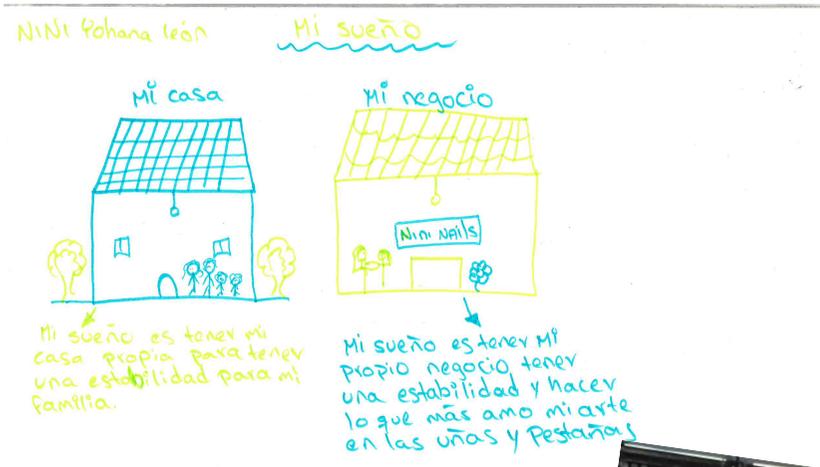
Methodology



Type 1: Access to the field and research methods

Access: Asociación Deredez – Víctimas de la Frontera

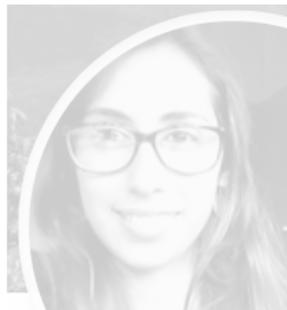
Methods: *Minga* workshops, mental maps, biographical interviews, ethnography



Types 2 & 3: Access to the field and research methods

Access: LinkedIn, Asociación de Investigadores Colombianos en Suiza (ACIS), German Centre for International Migration and Development (GIZ)

Methods: Biographical interviews (in person and by skype), mobilities on geographical maps

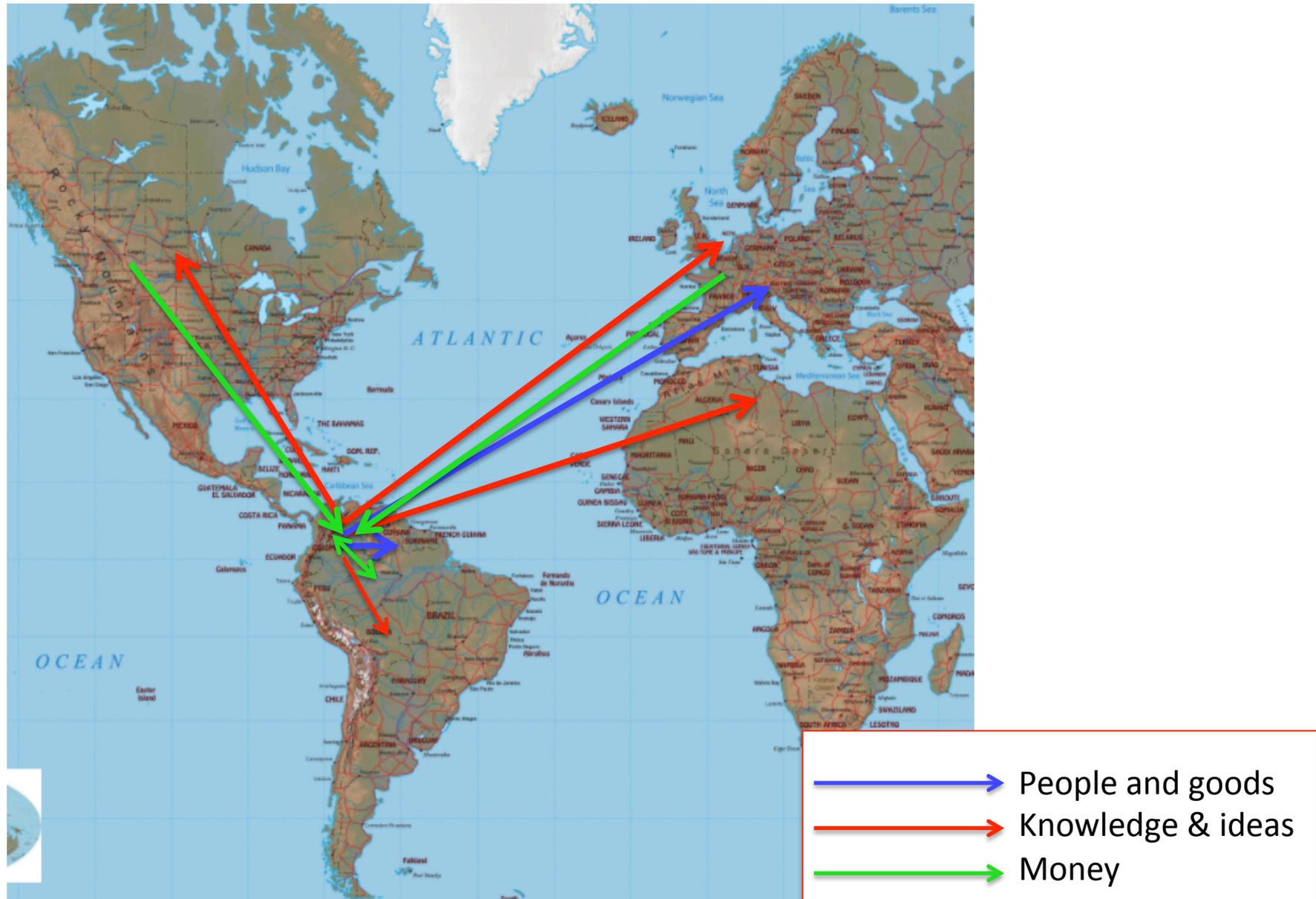


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Selected preliminary results



Transnational mobilities: South-North, South-South, North-South



Spatial mobility as an asset? Emerging inequalities

Making use of transnational social capital

Some returnees possess transnational social capital, which turns out quite beneficial, whereas others do not (depends largely on the country of emigration):

..the international cooperation is vital for me, that is, without their contracts, it is not impossible, but it would be very difficult for me to obtain national support... .. If I had not gone to Germany, my life would be very different, because my business venture would not exist.. these trips to Germany have helped me to meet people, to make my company known (AF, consultant on renewable energies).

It is very difficult to have Swiss cooperation funds for my business venture because they only fund academic projects.... .. and contracting with the Colombian State is pure politicking (JDV, consultant on environmental labelling)

The importance of local social capital:

Colombia is a difficult country and when you have been abroad for so long you lose many contacts, know-how and also patience (JDV, chemical engineer, EPFL)

Spatial mobility as an asset? Emerging inequalities

Making use of international cultural capital

All returnees face challenges in transferring their imported cultural capital to Colombia: the country's conditions are not favorable for doing so (limited openness to innovate, inadequate funding programmes, inadequate technologies, demanding tax system):

... this is a country that charges a huge amount of taxes to the employee, and to the small entrepreneur even much more, so that means that you, as a small entrepreneur have a double burden, pay your taxes and pay the burden of having a permanent employee, then you have to [employ people] as temporary service providers, which is a modern form of slavery ...

.... [milk cooling technology produced in Germany] ..so this technology really has to be adapted, it cannot be sold as it is, or try to do the same with national suppliers; you have to design something different and not put ice inside... (AF, consultant on renewable energies).

Making use of legal capital

Those who acquire dual citizenship while living abroad (e.g. Colombia / Venezuela; Colombia / Germany), or have more facilities to cross international borders due to having studied in Germany, have an advantage over the others for their ventures.

Strategies to counteract lacking legal capital: Using informal strategies and mobilising spatial experience



Reciprocal social support across the Colombia-Venezuela border for buying, selling, renting, repairing, surveillance services.



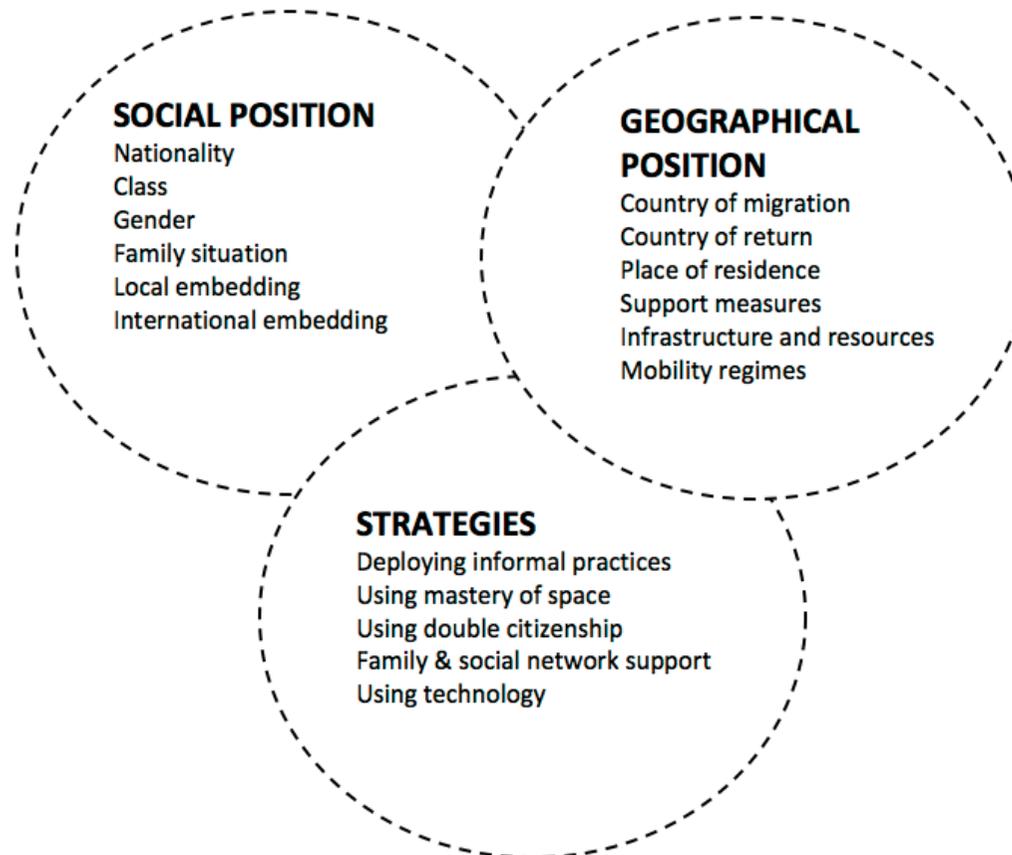
Knowledge of the Colombia-Venezuela border: Informal crossings across the unofficial border to buy and sell.

Preliminary conclusions

- *Spatial mobility capital brings some beneficial effects* to returnee businesses: international network support (money, training, reputation), legal capital (right to move across-borders), knowledge of how to deal with space / borders.
- However, *transferring international knowledge is difficult*: lacking local social capital (cf Thieme 2014) and the country's unfavorable framework conditions (inadequate funding programmes, high taxes, resistance to innovation) (cf Bai et al 2016).
- *Returnee's strategies* play a role in dealing with the challenges they face.
- *Challenging 'brain-circulation' and 'brain-gain' assumptions*: Not a 'smooth' transfer of knowledge from abroad. Not all countries are sufficiently prepared to value and promote the international capitals that returnees bring along (cf. Gribble 2008)
- Need to *move beyond the primarily optimistic nature of debates on return migration and development*. Necessary for migration-development policymakers to ask, who is in position to mobilise their international capitals, or not, and why, and devise policies that create favourable local conditions for them to unfold.

Preliminary conclusions

- Inequalities among returnees emerge regarding their ability to use their spatial mobility capital in favour of their business ventures. Why? Different *social position*, *geographical position*, *mobility strategies*. Promising avenue for future research.



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Thank you.

