

Steering social fields of mobilization in global
cities: Latin American transnational political
engagement in Brussels

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Introduction

- Migrants are active agents participating in transnational social movements. They create, transform, and exploit transnational networks to engage in political movements in their homeland and in their hostland.
- Focus on the political interests and opportunities available to migrants at a national scale.

Research questions

How do global cities shape transnational fields of social mobilization?

What is the nexus between these transnational fields of social mobilization and access to welfare states?

Contributions

Theoretical

- Global city: innovative spatial level of analysis to unpack the dynamics and dimensions of migrant social movements
- “Social remittances” (Levitt 1998) to operationalize the practices sustained by migrants → Transnational social fields of mobilization

Empirical

- Two case studies: Latin Americans living in Brussels engage in political transnational activities to influence and shape the welfare-state and political systems in both their sending and receiving societies

Methods

Data

- Two doctoral projects conducted in Brussels
- Ethnography and participant observation as methods to follow in real time the processes through which migrants engage in politics (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).
- Life-story interviews: Micro level

Case studies

Project 1

Multi-sited ethnography investigating the global social protection arrangements of migrant domestic workers.

15 women selected through an analytical sample technique and 35 months in the field.

48 interviews have also been conducted with relatives of the participants

Project 2

Research on transnational political participation of Mexican migrants

24 participants and 16 months in the field.

Participant observation at 22 events

Structure of the chapter

- I. Global city: the unit of analysis to study the composition and dynamics of social fields of transnational political mobilization
- II. Brussels as a Global City and as a key arena for protest
- III. and IV. Areas of politics where Latin American migrants have shown interest in Brussels.

A. Scaling transnational fields of mobilization from a global city

Transnational social fields of mobilization

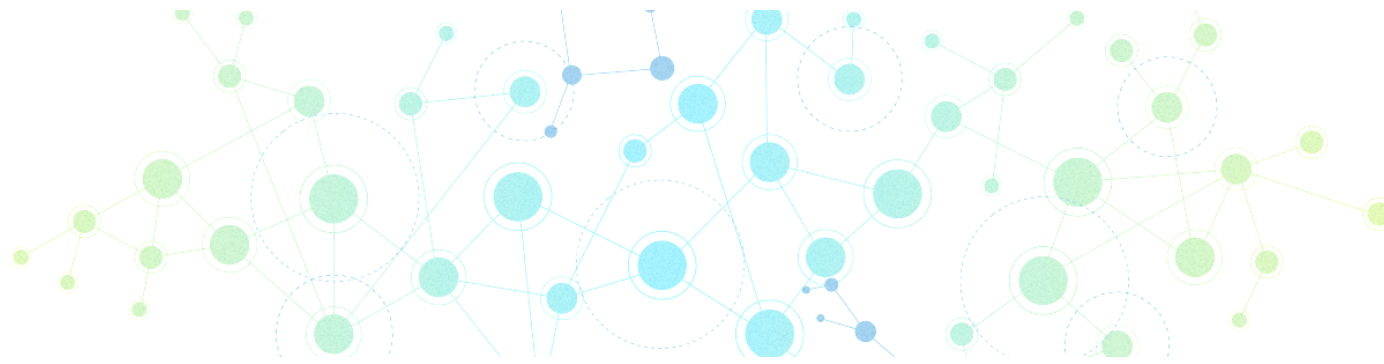
Multidimensional spaces where migrants:

- 1) find political opportunities and resources to protest;
- 2) develop networks and strategies of contention;
- 3) feed their ideologies, sense of belonging and grievances; and
- 4) boost their motivations and evaluate the outcomes of their political engagement.

Cities act as nodes where the signals and interactions originate, arrive, and are transformed.

Global cities

- Abundance of economic, political, social, and cultural capital.
- Poles of attractions for migrants, international actors, governments, and nationals from smaller cities (Glick Schiller and Cağlar 2011: 69).
- Highly dense and multi-cultural spaces.
- Positionality in the international regime (Sassen 2005).
- Politics of contention and strategies of political protest vary from global city to global city.



B. Brussels the Global City

- Brussels is a multicultural and bilingual city
- Hub for communication, technology and the seat of international institutions and corporations
- Different migratory status and migration policies over time



C. Challenging one's place in the Belgian Welfare State: From the Global City of Brussels

- Te la dejo a ti 😊

D. Constructing a transnational field of mobilization from Brussels: Mexican migrants engaging to change the political system in their homeland

- This section presents the impact of social remittances on the construction of transnational fields of mobilization in the case of Mexican migrants living in Brussels.
- The life stories narrated in this part show that Mexican migrants use the political opportunities and exploit the economic and social capital to organize their transnational political movements.
- Migrant's political behavior influenced by:
 - 1) Experiences and political ideologies before their arrival to Brussels
 - 2) Relations, and exchanges that they sustain with the people back in their hometown

Conclusion

- 1) Relevance to portray Brussels as a Global City: place where Latin American migrants have found social, economic, and political capital to develop their own strategies of political engagement.
- 2) Through social remittances, migrants remain emotionally attached to their hometowns and they receive first-hand information that triggers their will to participate in political activities.
- 3) Emphasis on the personal characteristics, ideas, experiences, and subjectivity of migrants shaping their strategies and repertoires of political engagement.