**Transnational spaces of class. International migrants' multilocal, inconsistent and instable class positions**

**Abstract**

The sociological study of class, whether Marxist, Weberian or Bourdieusian, has discussed class systems, and individuals’ location within these systems, within the framework of the nation state and have largely ignored the presence of a growing population of international migrants in western societies. At the same time, the emerging literature on transnational migration has largely neglected the question of social class. In this paper, I argue that the simultaneous privileging of the nation state and the neglect of social class by these research traditions, respectively, has been unfortunate. Working from a Bourdieusian class perspective, the paper discusses how today’s enhanced international migration – whereby actors regularly cross national borders, physically and virtually, and live their everyday lives in multiple social spaces and class systems – produces class systems in which many actors hold multilocal, inconsistent and instable class identities. The discussion employs a mixed methods material from a community in Norway – which includes a large population of Eastern European labour migrants recruited by the fish processing industry – to illustrate some key problems with Bourdieusian (and other) class theories’ use of methodological nationalism as an analytical framework and to suggest how transnational theories might better incorporate class perspectives in their analyses.

**Key words**

Bourdieu, Labour migration, Social Class, Space, Transnationalism

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**Introduction**

In 1989, as the communist regime of Poland crumbled, and the incoming democratic rulers congregated in Warsaw, striving to begin their governance of the new state. Among their problems was that some members of the incoming government were stuck picking strawberries in Norway. They were doing the work most Norwegians avoided, but given the economic hardships in Poland, this was valuable work (Godzimirski, 2005: 111). When they finally boarded the plane home, the Polish seasonal migrant pickers rapidly switched their class status. They swapped their previous membership of the middle classes of the Polish social class structure – and for the moment, their position in the very lowest echelons of the Norwegian social class structure – for a newly-found membership in the elite class of the post-communist Polish society, which was on the road to a promising economic horizon. Their class location(s) were truly multilocal, inconsistent and instable.

Today, more than a quarter of a century later, the transnational complexities of class systems – the durable unequal distribution of power, resources and life chances – and of individuals’ locations in these, are more evident than ever. In recent decades, which Castles et al. (2014) have coined ‘The Age of Migration’, international migration has increased exponentially. Approximately 232 million people currently live in a country other than their country of origin, and the majority (approximately 150 million) have migrated for labour purposes (ILO, 2017). In many western capitalist countries, transnational migrants constitute significant minority populations and a substantial share of the labour force. For example, in the EU, foreign citizens made up 7.4% of the labour force in 2015 (Eurostat, 2017). When all immigrants and all workers born outside the EU, regardless of current citizenship, are included, the number increases dramatically. US estimates suggest that some 43.2 million people – a fourfold increase since the 1960s – of today’s US population were born outside the country (13.4%) (López and Radford, 2017).

Not only is the scale of the international migration phenomenon changing, so too are the qualitative properties. Faster, cheaper and safer travel allows for regular back and forth movement, and many contemporary international migrants engage in short-term or circular migration. Importantly, novel information and communication technologies, such as international phone calls and the internet, enable individuals to interact virtually across spaces, simultaneously investing their social engagement in different territorial spaces. Migrants interact with home communities even when away. The result are novel forms of social collectives and sociocultural practices, in turn providing novel contexts for the construction of the self. In sum, as suggested by Glorius and Friedrich’s (2006) model of transnationalism, physical mobility is accompanied by processes of transculturation and hybrid identity formation. People flow back and forth, literally and symbolically, between societies and between class systems.

On the other hand, the emerging literature on transnationality has detailed these mobilities in individuals’ everyday lives, which work to transgress national borders. Existing research has discussed the profound political, economic and sociocultural implications of these physical and virtual transnational practices. However, class constitutes one of the least discussed questions in the transnationality literature. Van Hear (2014: 101) claims that ‘even though class or socio-economic differentiation used to be mainstays of social sciences, they have arguably been underplayed in much of migration studies in recent years’. Similarly, Fresnoza-Flot and Shonozaki (2017: 871) note the ‘relative absence of systematic discussion around social class in the literature on migrant transnationalism’. Illustratively, in authoritative texts (Faist et al., 2013; Vertovec, 2009) surveying the transnationality literature, social class is hardly mentioned, not even featuring in the index.

Traditional class theory, whether it is neo-Marxist (e.g. Wright, 1985, 1994), neo-Weberian (e.g. Goldthorpe et al., 1980) or Bourdieusian (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990a; Savage, 2000), has largely ignored the possible spatial dynamics of class systems and social mobility in contemporary capitalist societies. Class systems are generally conceived of as a property of one given social system, which is territorially delimitated, most often by the borders of the nation state (Sklair, 2001: 10). There is a British class system, a French one, an Italian one, and so forth. These may share key properties and possess similar structural features, reflecting their shared origins in industrialism, capitalism or some other common feature of modernity. They may also be interrelated, for example, as theorised by world systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974), where the development of one nation’s class structure is seen to result from its position in the global economy. Others have explored the appearance of a ‘transnational capitalist class’ (Sklair, 2001), which is not restricted by the borders of the national state, and enjoys ‘spatial autonomy’ (Weiss, 2005: 714). Nevertheless, in the study of social class, the core analytical research unit has overwhelmingly been that of the class structure of the nation state, even for theorists focusing on the global character of the economy or the occasional exceptions of transnational individuals. Thus, notwithstanding the many commonalities of class systems, the general idea is that the phenomenon of social class unfolds in spaces delimitated by the nation state. When international migrants are considered, they are commonly inserted into the existing national class structures, often with no further ado. Their history of migration become irrelevant. The blue collar worker is classified as a member of the working class, regardless of his/her position in the country of origin, his/her migratory biography or the continuous involvement with his/her homeland.

This is reflective of the assumptions of ‘methodological nationalism’, which were taken for granted by the founding fathers as well as key theorists in the post-1945 period (Faist, 2005; Wimmer and Schiller, 2002: 304). For instance, Weiss (2005: 712) states that ‘[c]lass theory after Marx has focused with a few exceptions on economic positions within the nation state’. In so far as transnational migrants are recognised, they are considered an ‘exception to the rule’ (Nowicka, 2013: 30) or ‘an anomaly, even a threat’ (Weiss, 2005: 708).

In this paper, I argue that such methodological nationalism provides for an untenable analytical strategy in making sense of the class systems of today’s modern societies. Reviewing the literature on social class and transnationalism, I demonstrate how, on one hand, the analysis of international migration is impeded by ignoring the class properties of international migrants’ everyday lives in sending and receiving social localities. On the other hand, I illustrate that the analysis of class is flawed by its ignorance of transnational actors’ movements between, and simultaneous presence in, multiple locational class systems.

The analytical strategy is to acknowledge the inherent multiplicities – the multilocalities, inconsistencies and instabilities – of transnational agents’ locations in the spaces of class and to provide a sketch of how to theorise the transnational character of class systems in contemporary modern society. As such, the paper strives to contribute to the literature on social classbypointing to the importance of the large number of individuals in the contemporary age of mobility, who are deferred to the traditional class schemes defined by the borders of the nation state. It also contributes to the literature on transnationality byemphasising the importance of class and class mobility as an integral aspect of contemporary migration and mobility.

**Bourdieu’s class analysis**

I have further chosen to employ the Bourdieusian approach to demonstrate the paper’s general critique of contemporary sociological class theories. Despite the popularity of ‘death of class’ (Pakulski and Waters, 1996) perspectives in the social sciences over the last decades, Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990b) insists that the class system, with its durable structures of power, resources and life chances – taking form as both objective social structures and agents’ subjective interpretations of these structures – is a key aspect of the contemporary world. Echoing key tenets of Marxist theory, Bourdieu theorises the social world and the everyday lives of its members as defined by class hierarchies, imbalanced structures of power, oppressive/exploitative practices and uneven distributions of resources. These resources are both material, *economic* capital – central in Marxist class theory – and non-material resources, forms of *cultural* capital, including educational credentials (e.g. diplomas), possession of cultural objects (e.g. paintings) and embodied affinities (e.g. manners) (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, Bourdieu emphasises *social* capital, the possession and mastery of social relations, as productive assets in the agent’s drive towards recognition in the social field. These forms of capital are unevenly distributed, generating social class hierarchies. The result is social inequalities, which the sociologist should work to unveil.

Echoing Weberian theory, and following from Bourdieu’s focus on cultural capital, the Bourdieusian approach emphasises lifestyle differences between groups as a key to understanding the class system. Lifestyle differences are not merely conceived of as reflections of actors’ mastery of various forms of capital, but have independent effects on the formation of class systems. Actors’ identities and everyday practices – as collective and individual phenomena – originate from their location in the social structure *and* serve as resources in their ongoing struggles to defend and possibly improve their positions in this structure.

These dimensions of class are synthesised in Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’. The habitus represents embodied societal structures, as each individual is the result and reflection of his/her position in the social structure. The habitus is ‘...society written into the body, into the biological individual’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 63). At times, the agent reproduces, while at other times, he/she slightly modifies and changes these societal structures. It is a ‘structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 170). The habitus literally comes to its embodied expression through agential practices.

I shall not delve into further detail of Bourdieu’s social theory. Instead, I shall problematise his relative ignorance of *territorial* space in his class schemes and analysis. This is somewhat surprising, given that he often utilises space and other geographical concepts as key analytical metaphors in his writings. He conceptualises the social world in terms of ‘social space’, wherein groups of individual actors are located. It is possible to further define social space in terms of its ‘fields’. He also addresses social ‘mobility’ and actors’ ‘trajectories’ – still in the metaphorical sense – across social spaces.

Another important aspect of Bourdieu’s social theory is its implicit acceptance of the nation state as the analytical framework for class analysis (Weiss, 2005, 2006). Bourdieu regularly speaks of French society and the French class system. In fact, he has explicitly designated the nation state as his core analytical unit, leaving an open question (an empirical one) regarding the extent to which his class theory applied to other nation states. However, interestingly, the question concerns the transferability of the Bourdieusian class scheme across space (nation states) – not how to translate concepts across different spatial scales (Buchholz, 2016: 34). As Weiss notes (2005: 709), despite Bourdieu’s exhaustive works on globalisation, including on ‘transnational fields’ (Bourdieu, 2000), his methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002) remains evident.

***Class and the transnationality literature***

My claim is that the transnationality literature represents important insights that could add value to Bourdieusian class analysis. This theoretical potential has not been explored by social class theorists, and the growing literature on transnationality has rarely contributed to the study of the class systems of contemporary societies. As noted, neither Vertovec (2009), nor Faist et al. (2013) nor other authoritative texts surveying the transnationality literature accentuate class issues. In fact, Castles et al.’s (2014) authoritative overview of migration contains several references to ‘class’ (33 entries in the index), but class structures per see are never discussed in depth. In Van Hear’s (2014: 100) view, this reflects an unfortunate tendency in migration studies to focus on other forms of social difference than class, such as ‘ethnicity, gender, generation, and lately religion’.

This is not to say that the existing literature on international/transnational migration is bereft of important knowledge on the study of class. Manystudies have taken the individual’s strategies for upward social mobility as an explanatory point of departure for migration decisions. International migration is primarily motivated by hopes of economic betterment, and the literature concludes that migration careers tend to provide upward social mobility (Faist, 2016). According to Beck (2008: 21, quoted in translation in Faist, 2013: 1639), ‘the most important factor determining position in the hierarchies of inequalities of the global age … [are] opportunities for cross-border interaction and mobility’.

The literature further emphasises that international migration presumes access to ‘economic, social, cultural, and other forms of capitals in various combinations’ (Van Hear, 2014: 111), which are unevenly distributed across classes (Guarnizo, 1997), and that these forms of capital shape migration experiences. For instance, Portes and Zhou’s (1993) ‘segmented assimilation theory’ shows how class position in the country of origin define migratory experiences and class position in the US. Similarly, Guarnizo et al. (2017) demonstrate how class position impacts migrants’ transnational political involvement. However, the relationships between migration and social mobility may differ across migration contexts, and universal conclusions are difficult to establish, among other reasons, due to the many ways in which social class interacts with gender, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference and inequality (Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki, 2017).

Notably, the transnationality literature has rarely engaged with social class theory as such, only utilising fragments of these theories. On one hand, Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki (2017: 973) criticise the ‘tendency to either collapse or use interchangeably the concepts of social class and economic class’ and advocate for approaches that go beyond the economic aspect of class. On the other hand, many students of transnational migration have drawn on Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ and discuss the appearance of ‘transnational’ (Guarnizo, 1997: 311) and ‘transborder’ (Xu, 2017) habituses and the transferability of cultural capital across nations and/or in the transnational field (Erel, 2010). These studies are skewed in their focus on cultural and social capital and explorations of migrants’ lifestyles and do not engage with the wider Bourdieusian tradition of *class* analysis

Others have built on Bourdieu’s framework to detail what he never did himself: theorising the emergence of transnational social fields (Buchholz, 2017). For instance, Weiss explores the ‘transnationalisation’ of social equalities and argues that class positions (at least for the highly skilled migrants in her study) have genuine transnational properties (Nohl et al. 2006; Weiss, 2005, 2006). Relatedly, Nowicka (2013: 29) details the migration experiences of Polish migrants in Germany and advocates for ‘a new reading of Bourdieu’s work that is better adapted to the theoretical challenges faced by researchers who study people in transnational space. However, Nowicka and others who work on super-national patterns of social inequality have primarily produced a growing literature on ‘global inequalities’, not a sociological transnational theory of social class.

**Central and Eastern European labour migrants in Norway**

In this paper, I analyse qualitative materials from a particular Norwegian locality *Coastland* [1]. The Coastland case provides a good empirical illustration of the development of a high-mobility and multi-cultural society and the multiplicities of contemporary class systems, and represents an excellent illustration of the conceptual shortcomings of the literatures on social class and transnationality. Between 2005 and 2015, the community experienced an unprecedented increase in its immigrant population, whose share of the total population of about 9000 rose from 3.4% to 19.0%, respectively. This growth is primarily due to the booming fish farming industry in the community and the expansion of the local fish processing industry, which recruits low-skilled labour from abroad. While Lithuanians and Poles are the largest nationalities there, some 25 nationalities are represented in the locality. In addition, what used to be a traditionalist community has changed into a genuine multi-cultural and heterogeneous community in all other regards (see Rye, 2017). As such, the community is a fruitful ‘extreme’ case (Yin, 2009) for theorising how transnational practices challenge conventional assumptions of social class structures.

I draw on several material sources to analyse the complex class locations of the transnational migrants in *Coastland*, the core of which are qualitative in-depth interviews with labour migrants in 2012. In total, interviews with 11 CEE migrants working in *Coastland’s* fish farming industry were conducted: seven men and four women between the ages of 23 and 51 years and averaging 35 years. Most of the informants were in lasting family relations: eight were married and had children; two had life partners but no children; the last informant was single. Their children were of preschool or school age, except for one adult son. Interestingly, most informants described some elements of a divided family household, either by the spouse living in the country of origin, strong commitments (both emotionally and practically) to other family members and friends in the homeland, extensive circular movements and inconclusive plans for future relocations. On average, they had lived in *Coastland* for 4.9 years and originated from different CEE countries, mostly Poland and the Baltic states. The informants were recruited through work place networks, i.e. various fish processing facilities in *Coastland*, which constitute the entry points for most CEE migrants in the locality. The interviews were structured as life biography interviews (past, present and future) (see Sæther, 2016 for details) and conducted by a research assistant with strong biographical connections to the locality. The implications of the social position of the interviewer (race/ethnicity/nationality) are discussed at length in transnational migration research (e.g. Nowicka and Cieslik, 2014; Weiss, 2006). While there are no neutral positions, and qualitative material is always influenced by the research context, the presented material appears to provide a valid, reliable account of the informants’ experiences.

Further, I draw on qualitative in-depth and focus group interviews with 19 offspring (16–19-year olds) of labour migrants in the community: 7 boys and 12 girls. Some were interviewed individually (N = 9), others in follow-up focus groups (N = 12). Two informants participated in both (see Rye, 2016 for details). They were students attending *Coastland* high schools, and their migration careers mirrored those of the adult informants. A third source of data were semi-structured interviews with key informants conducted in 2012. This material consists of interviews with nine persons in leadership positions in the community: leading politicians and administrative officers, persons in key managerial positions in the fish farming industry and representatives of civil society.

In total, the analysis relies on a multi-method and multi-material approach, which provides for a thorough understanding of both the community-level class structure and the individual positions as well as their active positioning, consciously and tacitly, within this structure.

**Class positions – Past, present and future**

The analysis is structured around the biographies of *Coastland’s* labour migrants. It focuses on two dimensions that together generate the multiplicities of transnational migrants’ class locations and the class system(s) they populate: namely *space* (locality of origin/destination) and *time* (past/present/future). First, I discuss migrants’ pre-migration class location in the class system of the country of origin (origin/past). Second, I analyse how they relate to the class structure of the local community into which they in-migrate (destination/present), how the migration experience changes their standing in the country of origin (origin/present) and how they may develop transnational class strategies (present). Third and final, I discuss the scope of social mobility for the migrants and their offspring (origin/destination/future).

The informants’ class positions and social trajectories are illustratively presented in Figure 1. The figure is a stylistic reproduction of Bourdieu’s (1984) graphic representation of social space and (groups of) individuals’ location in this space. Its construction is based on the total volume of capital (vertical axis: economic plus cultural capital) and the relative composition of capital (horizontal axis: relative balance economic/cultural capital).

***Original class location in the homeland (past)***

Migration practices result from individuals’ complex and multidimensional motivations, which are informed and shaped by structural properties and cannot be reduced to a single-factor explanation or accounted for by a single migration theory (Massey et al., 1993). Nonetheless, the material clearly suggests that economic betterment is by far the dominant motive of migration for labour migrants arriving



Figure 1, caption: International migrants' multilocal, inconsistent and instable class positions and trajectories projected into the Bourdieusian model of social space (stylized version)

in *Coastland*. CEE unemployment levels have been and still are high, and labour is poorly remunerated compared to Western European wages. For instance, the mandated minimum hourly pay for workers in the Norwegian fish processing industry is about 50% higher than average wages for factory and manufacturing jobs in Poland, and even highly skilled workers in Poland are poorly paid relative to Norwegian low-skilled workers. As Karol neatly summarised, he and his countrymen are:

Looking for a better future. I left Poland for money. I think that is why most people are leaving from their country to Norway – for money.

However, the informants did not stand out as particularly needy in their CEE homelands. They experienced economic problems, but less so than many of their countrymen. Many had had reasonably good job careers, for instance, as teachers, with some having held managerial positions. Thus, poor economic conditions in society, not individual misery, triggered their decisions to go to Norway. Joanna’s migrant career began when her husband started comparing his earnings at home with those of migrants in Western Europe.

There was an opportunity to get a little bit more money. Because he was… there he was a manager, but he didn’t get much money from this work in Poland.

The informants further possessed relatively high cultural and social capital levels in their homelands. They had completed secondary schooling, and all but two had started higher educational careers in their homelands, though with varying outcomes. Further, they had access to and were able to draw on migration networks, in which family and friends are crucial. These are often required to motivate and fulfil international migration projects, including finding work in the receiving country (Guarnizo, 1997). Jarek’s story about the recruitment process is typical of the networked and informal recruitment process in *Coastland*. His brother was already in *Coastland*:

…he called me and said they needed people in [name of company]. And I came; it was on a Monday, and I sat in the reception and [name] came and asked me, ‘looking for job?’ And I said ‘yeah (…)’. And I had an interview, and I got the job.

Thus, *Coastland’s* migrants adhere to findings in the transnational migration literature that, on average, migrants are those of relative capital affluence in terms of economic, cultural and social capital. In terms of objective class locations, they appear to belong to the middle classes in their CEE homelands. One of the key informants, a long-term politician in the locality, spoke admirably about the migrants:

They are the ones taking the giant leap into the unknown… My thesis is that they are not the losers, but the brave and competent ones (…). It is the resourceful ones that come, those able to create something for themselves, and there are opportunities for them here.

The informants’ self-presentation similarly reflects traditional middle-class values, with an orientation towards family life, work ethic and self-realisation. For example, they took great interest in healthy food consumption and leisure time activities in ways typical of the middle classes (cf. Flemmen et al., 2018), though they found this difficult/quite expensive in the *Coastland* society. For instance, Nicola, a trained sociologist now working at the fish processing facility assembly line, recalled her active middle class lifestyle at home and reminisced about travelling widely, practicing yoga and chi gongand taking pleasure in global food (‘I love Indian kitchen; I love Thai food’).

Their offspring gave off a similar impression of middle-class values, including valuing educational pursuits and middle-class career ambitions. Most of the offspring, and all of the girls, had chosen non-vocational specialisation programmes, which prepared them for higher education studies. Further, they took great effort in expressing their distaste for the local youth and their excessive drinking culture, which they associated with a working-class culture, to which they did not belong. One of the focus group interviewees, Nadia, expressed her disgust.

And they get started so early! Fifteen years. And their parents approve, it is too bad. Mom and Dad were shocked when we told them that all our friends are allowed to start drinking after their ‘confirmation’ [religious ceremony marking passage to adulthood]. They are just fifteen years. My parents would not allow us to start drinking before the age of eighteen (…).

In the Bourdieusian graphical version of the social class structure, the average informant would be located in the lower left quadrant: average, perhaps slightly, total capital volume and with a composite bias towards cultural capital (see Figure 1).

***De-classing in Norway (present)***

The majority of migrant workers from CEE countries arrive in Western Europe to work in manual and low-skilled positions. All informants started their Norwegian work careers as manual workers in the fish processing facilities. Here, they work on assembly lines where the fish (farmed salmon) are slaughtered, processed and packed before global distribution to customers. The work is physically demanding, monotonous and relatively poorly remunerated according to Norwegian standards. Workers usually start their careers as temporary workers.

Previously, the jobs in the fish processing industry were filled by the local ‘reserve army’, females, teenagers and others. In recent decades, these workers have found more attractive work, and today, assembly line jobs have a low status among locals. Consequently, the manual work in the fish processing industry has developed into an ‘immigrant niche’ (Friberg et al. 2017; Waldinger, 1994). With a few exceptions ‘the Norwegians are in the offices’, as one of the informants, Julian, noted. Accordingly, migrants’ wage levels are relatively low compared to other jobs in the region. CEE labour migrants are categorically among the least affluent in the *Coastland* community, and they appear to form a distinct lower tier of the working class in the local class structure.

Even more consequential is their lack of the relevant cultural and social capital resources of importance in the *Coastland* society. Their educational credentials from the homeland are difficult to transfer to the Norwegian labour market. Language barriers are also significant and render most skilled work positions unattainable for the migrants. It is also difficult to integrate into other parts of the society due to the language issues and a shallow mastery of other elements of the local, regional and national cultures. Other cultural capital resources acquired at home are even less relevant in Norway. The same goes for social capital. Due to their recent arrival in the community, they often lack relevant contacts who can assist in their efforts in the social field of the receiving community. None of the informants referred to social contacts to powerful actors outside the migrant community. The immigrant minority is also heavily underrepresented in the local political and civil society environment. Among the nearly 100 members of the two municipality councils (including deputies), only a handful are of immigrant background. Similarly, leadership positions in civil society are filled almost exclusively by ‘locals’. A local journalist spoke of the problem of identifying informants in the immigrant communities, as they were largely invisible in the local public domain.

As a result, the international migrants in *Coastland* appear to constitute a ‘class apart’ in the local social structure (Kasimis, 2008: 513; Rye, 2014). Inserted into Figure 1, their location in the receiving social field would be low and to the right. Thus, the migrants’ traveling from CEE countries to Norway constitute social declassing. They leave their middle-class positions at home (cf. position #1, Figure 1) and arrive into the working class abroad (position #2) (cf. first trajectory in Figure 1: T-I).

Importantly, their position as manual industrial workers in *Coastland’s* fish processing industry has many attractive elements, at least in relative terms and compared to those of many other international migrant workers, both in Norway and abroad. For Despite sharing the characteristics of a secondary labour market (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Piore, 1979), these workplaces offer for instance the prospect of permanent positions and internal training. Also, in other ways, *Coastland* stands out from other localities hosting labour migrant populations. Nonetheless, the overall impression is that their migration implies a social declassing and is experienced as such by the migrants. Justina noted how her family’s middle-class traditions were broken.

The way it was back home has changed. Mom was a teacher, and Dad worked in house building. Now, it is all different; Dad works at the fish farming facility, and mother works at the kindergarten. It is not the same. If we had stayed at home, I would have planned to be a teacher as her. Now it is all different.

***Transnational class strategies (present)***

Thus, the migrant experience simultaneously represents upward and downward social mobility. According to homeland standards, they make more money and, at the least, improve their economic capital resources. However, they find themselves in the lower echelons of the class structure of the receiving country. This is what Nieswand (2014) refers to as the ‘status paradox of migration’, whereby the international migrant comes to occupy multiple class locations – and, consequently, class identities – at home and abroad. In the case of *Coastland*, the migrants are simultaneously members of the homeland middle classes and the Norwegian working class.

The multiplicity of class locations may embody ambivalence, uncertainty and role conflicts. The migration literature has produced a number of expressions that capture the migrant experience of belonging neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’, of households "living in limbo" (Castañeda, 2012) and migrants’ need to develop into ‘competent cultural navigators’ and ‘creative bricoleurs’ (Jacobsen, 2002, quoted in Prieur, 2004: 27). From a class perspective, however, the *Coastland* example, more than anything, demonstrates how migrants – in rather successful ways – negotiate these contradictory positions in two class structures by developing transnational social identities and practices.

The informants maintained, even emphasised, their primary belonging to the homeland social community. They may have moved away *physically* but were still at home *mentally*. This relates to Massey et al.’s (1993) general finding that migrants largely do not conceive of themselves as citizens of the receiving society but, rather, focus on how they have achieved social mobility according to the relevant references of the homeland culture. This is often expressed by the ‘dual frame of references’ (Guarnizo, 1997: 310; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995). The international migrant will, at least in a transitionary phase, judge his income, living standard and life in general in the receiving country as excellent when compared to standards at home, but at the same time poor when compared to standards in the host society. The actor may take this as an opportunity to draw benefits from both locations; benefitting from the material affluence in the latter and from an enhanced social status in the former.

The ‘dual frame of reference’, whereby poor conditions in *Coastland* are evaluated as acceptable, even attractive, in comparison to the homeland, works to mitigate dissatisfaction. Industrial assembly line work, which Norwegians hold in contempt, was portrayed as attractive by the migrants. In a lengthier quote, Nicola detailed her satisfaction with everyday life, ‘even’ if she is a factory worker in Norway.

So here [in Coastland], it’s okay, even if you are a production worker, you earn enough money to pay the rent, to pay the car loan and other loans. And if you’re not somewhat spoiled and you do not buy clothes every day, you can save some money.

In the interviews, the migrants further explained how they had invested wages in homeland con­sumption activities. This made them feel affluent; it actually did make them affluent, as they were now able to practice consumption practices unavailable to them in their everyday lives at home *before* migration and was still out of reach for their non-migrant fellow citizens.

The informants’ material affluence is even more strongly manifested by practices of sending remittances to the homeland and helping out family and friends. For example, Darina regularly travels home to visit her retired mother. She said: ‘So she has less money than I have. When I am back home, on holidays, I leave some money’. Despite being in the lower echelons of the social structure of the *Coastland* community, they are certainly not so back home.

Thus, the geographical trajectory from CEE to Norway heralds concurrent processes: a downward social trajectory, from the homeland middle class to the Norwegian working class (T-I, Figure 1), and an upward social trajectory in the interpretative framework of the homeland class structure (T-II). Money earned in *Coastland* boosts their class positions, judged from the standards of the homeland society. The informants tended to focus on the second upward trajectory and downplayed the downward trajectory.

A quote from the interview with Nicola demonstrates both her awareness of her social declassing and how she manages to invalidate the negative status associated with factory work by emphasising the off-work qualities of her Norwegian life.

(Interviewer: What do your friends and your family think about you being in Norway?) They were laughing at me, actually. Because I never worked in a factory. But they said, ok, if it’s okay with me, they are also ok with it. And they envy the nature here. Because I am taking a lot of pictures, so they are impressed with the nature.

She decouples her identity from that of her work, which is in line with Piore’s (1979) observation that international labour migrants are among the very few for whom location in the economic societal structure does not reflect their social identities. For the international migrant, work is temporary and without significance to his/her conception of self. Work in the host society is nothing but a means to achieve goals in the homeland, which is most often monetary in nature.

***Upward intra- and inter-generational mobility in Norway (future)***

Another reason for migrants’ largely positive evaluations of their present position in the local societal structure in Norway is the prospect of employment careers in *Coastland’s* labour market. As noted, many are highly educated. Once they master Norwegian, they will be eligible for jobs with better wages and work conditions, as well as a higher social standing, in the *Coastland* community. The data contains several examples of CEE migrants who began as manual workers in the fish processing industry and now work in better jobs in the private and public sectors. Many of them had also replaced their initial temporary rental housing arrangements with permanent home ownership, which, in addition to other aspects of social mobility, were within the reach of local standards of middle-class living.

In other words, working-class stints at the fish processing facilities are not regarded as dead-end jobs, and the informants did not see themselves as forever confined to their present locations in the community. Rather, they expressed a sense of opportunity, partly reflecting their accumulated mobility/motility capital (Kaufmann, 2010; Kaufmann et al., 2004); because of their transnational migration careers, they had already proven their ability to navigate their lives in difficult times. It is impossible to assess the realism in the migrants’ ambitions for their own upward mobility – intra-generational mobility – as they have only been around for a few years. While many studies suggest that such mobility is low for most migrants in typical secondary labour market jobs, *Coastland* may present another pattern, and the migrants may actually be able to experience upward movement in the local social structure (T-III in Figure 1), or by investing their ‘post-migration capital’ (Moret, 2016: 1456) in other locations in Norway or abroad.

Equally interesting are impressions from the interviews with the offspring of the migrant workers in the *Coastla*nd area. They confirmed the downward social mobility of their parents. ‘Nobody thrives at the fish processing factory’, declared Dagmara in a focus group interview, which was supported by the other teenagers. Maria explained: ‘you turn insane there, you stand like a robot, very noisy, you need protection for your ears… and you just stand there, doing the same over and over…’. They expressed clear ambitions for a future life in the Norwegian middle classes. Alessandra was clear that a blue collar position at her parents’ workplace was completely out of the question:

If I were to work in a fish processing facility, it would have to be at the office or something like that. Because I do not want to work there… I do not want to be dealing with the fish directly, physically touching it.

***Upward social mobility in the homeland (future)***

Many migrants intend to convert the material wealth earned in Norway to a future permanent upper-middle-class position in their homeland (T-IV, Figure 1). They invest in houses or apartments or save funds to invest at home. In this sense, they are typical ‘target earners’; working-class work in *Coastland* is a means to achieving a middle-class lifestyle at home.

However, as emphasised by Piore (1979), international migrants tend to stay longer than planned. They become accustomed to the host society and its standards of decent living. Moreover, they invest – emotionally and financially – in the *Coastland* community. Karol reflected on his difficult choice:

I expected to come here, have money, and I would say ‘goodbye!’ but now, everything has changed. Because I never thought about buying a house here, I wanted to buy a house in Poland. A car…

Over time, the relative affluence fades in importance, and moving back to cash in their homeland upper-middle-class position does not look as attractive as it once did. For some, a position at the bottom of the more affluent *Coastland* class system looks better than a middle-class position in the poorer homeland society. The informants were, therefore, often ambivalent about the future. Karol elaborated:

I will sell everything that I have, and then I will go to [homeland]. In – I don’t know – 5, 10, 15 years, because I would like to go back. But every one of us says we will go back to [homeland], and then we stay longer, longer and longer here because it’s very difficult, very hard back in [homeland]. Because you earn here a lot more money, and in [homeland]… 3, 4, 5000 kroner every month, but here we have plenty. You live in other standards.

Regardless of actual future outcomes, plans to return to the homeland may help mitigate migrants’ negative feelings and experiences abroad in the present. The option of returning provides for a back-up plan, though – as indicated in Karol’s reflections – the higher living standards in *Coastland* renders homeland standards less acceptable.

**Social class analysis: Beyond methodological nationalism**

In sum, the analysed material from the Coastland study case illustrates how transnational migrants occupy multilocal, inconsistent and instable locations in the class structures in their host community. These contraditions produce several trajectories over time, which include both upward and downward social mobilities. The logic is illustrated in Figure 1, where the agents’ positions and social trajectories are marked off.

The transnational character of many international migrants’ class locations has profound implications, both for the individuals and the meso and macro levels of society. Contemporary social class theories, neither the Bourdieusian approach nor its alternatives, adequately account for these due to their inherent national methodological biases. The paper, therefore, argues for a reconceptualisation of how social class systems are theorised in contemporary western capitalist societies. Admittedly, in principle, these challenges have been around for a long time. To some degree, migrants have always had multilocal affiliations (Guarnizo, 1997: 284f), and rather than ‘an offspring of globalisation, transnationalism appears as a constant of modern life’ (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002: 302). Moreover, the intensity of transnational practices varies across migrant groups; some have very transnational everyday lives, others do not.

Nonetheless, in today’s modern western societies, the presence of a large and extremely mobile global labour force and other international migrants appears stronger than ever. Their access to new, flexible and inexpensive communication technologies, both physically and virtually, allow them to maintain relations with their countries of origin. Consequently, more people live multilocal lives and cannot be ignored as an anomaly in the class system. In *Coastland* and many other local communities, transnational migrants account for a fifth of the population, other places even more.

Thus, the presented material illuminates the need for developments in Bourdieusian and other approaches to social class theory so as to better account for the implications of the highly mobile character of society in recent times. Such developments should account, in particular, for three aspects of transnationalism and its impacts on social class structures.

First, transmigrants’ everyday lives take place in more than one social class system; thus, their class locations are multilocal. Transnational migrants relate to several class structures simultaneously. They may and do travel back and forth between these class structures. Moreover, even while corporally absent, the other locality becomes important as they maintain virtual interaction. Second, the migrants’ class positions are often inconsistent; for instance, the middle-class teacher in Poland who works as an assembly line worker in Norway self-presents his/her improved economic position and future social mobility at home. Third and final, these class positions alternate and are inherently instable. The working class member of the *Coastland* underclass is simply a flight – or a Skype conversation – away from a privileged position relative to his/her homeland environment.

The multiplicities of class locations and identities are made even more complex as they penetrate the household, and even more so as families may be spatially distributed across different countries. The temporal dynamics, both within and between generations, add further complexities. Social class theory has discussed parallel challenges, for instance, the non-conclusive debate on women’s location in the class system (Baxter, 1988; Goldthorpe, 1993). However, the case of *Coastland* demonstrates how the transnational migration context introduces multilocality and a temporal aspect as multipliers of class locations and identities. As a result, CEE migrants occupy double and ‘contradictory class positions’ at home and abroad (Parreñas, 2001; see also Nieswand, 2017). Moreover, these positions change over time (Weiss, 2005), excellently illustrated in Nowica’s (2013) geographic tracking of the fluctuating positions in several social fields occupied by her informants as they migrate back and forth between Poland and Germany. More recently, the intersectional character of the migration experience has also been emphasised (e.g. Fresnoza-Flota and Shinozaki, 2017), demonstrating how class, gender, ethnicity and other dimensions of social inequality and identity generate the multitude of, often internally conflicting, experiences of the transnational migrant.

In consequence, the sociological study of class, Bourdieusian and other approaches, should abandon ‘methodological nationalism’ (Glick Schiller and Wimmer, 2002) and instead explore the multispatial and transnational character of social class structures in contemporary capitalist society. Moreover, transnationalism would benefit from a ‘rehabilitation of class in the study of migration’ (Van Hear, 2014: 101). While international migration has variously been discussed in relation to uneven (and unjust) distributions of resources and life chances, this has primarily been addressed as ‘global inequalities’ (Faist, 2016; see Weiss, 2017) and not in terms of social class. A more full-fledged class analysis of transnational migrants from, for instance, a Bourdieusian perspective would potentially enable a better understanding of their experiences and how their everyday lives are embedded in the class systems in which they are located.

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**Endnotes**

 1: The study locality and all informants are represented by aliases.

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