

## — BOOK REVIEWS —

**Izabela Grabowska, Michał P. Garapich, Ewa Jaźwińska, Agnieszka Radziwinowiczówna (2016). *Migrants As Agents of Change. Social Remittances in an Enlarged European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 249 pp.**

*Migrants As Agents of Change* makes a significant contribution to the existing theoretical, methodological and empirical literature on social remittances. Several international conferences and workshops on social remittances have taken place in recent years, and this is currently one of the most fruitful areas of migration research. The conferences have been particularly exciting because they brought together researchers working on sending *and* receiving countries, or on both, as in the case of *Migrants As Agents of Change*. This is a welcome development in view of the frequent separation between the two halves of migration studies.

The monograph presents the results of a three-year longitudinal research project in Poland (Pszczyna, Sokółka and Trzebnica) and the United Kingdom (various locations). The project was funded by the National Science Centre (*Narodowe Centrum Nauki*) under the title *Cultural Diffusion Through Social Remittances Between Poland and UK*. Earlier in 2016, two of the authors, Grabowska and Garapich, published their argument in condensed form in an article in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Izabela Grabowska and Michał P. Garapich (2016), Social Remittances and Intra-EU Mobility: Non-Financial Transfers Between UK and Poland, *JEMS*, 42(13): 2146–2162). However, the article is not a substitute for the book, which affords space for the authors to weave a complex argument and to present their empirical material in rich detail.

Social remittances are sometimes seen as a catch-all category – all forms of transfer resulting from migration which are not strictly economic, including indirect social impacts such as changing gender

relations or new patterns of social stratification. Grabowska *et al.* focus on the type of remittance where one person transfers ideas and behaviours directly to another, which mostly occurs when a migrant returns to their place of origin, to visit or settle. They are particularly interested in social skills and also in ‘more nuanced and latent social remittances pertaining to attitudes to cultural diversity, value pluralism and civic participation’ (p. 221). As the authors write on p. 6: ‘Our book takes social remittances as a lens through which to examine grassroot, nitty-gritty relationships between migration and change. We focus on the micro and meso processes by which continuities and changes in personal and community lives are worked out across time, borders and transnational social spaces’. *Migrants As Agents of Change* provides many pointers as to how to research this type of social remittance.

First, it makes a powerful case for ethnography. The research project was based on a grounded theory approach: the interviewers went into the field with open minds and, rather than seeking evidence of specific types of remittance (and therefore missing others), took note of what was to be seen. This enabled them to find many types of remitting whose existence could not have been guessed, as well as numerous observations of potential remittances being blocked and resisted. Such non-remitting is clearly a significant part of the story. Attempts which fail, because the migrant, for example, is perceived as being pushy, shed light on why other transfers are more successful, for instance because they are subtler and arise from the sharing of opinions or activities, or the ‘social example’ of someone respected in the neighbourhood. Moreover, resistance appears to be very widespread. The authors speculate (p. 216) that ‘in fact, resistance to remittances may well be more common than acceptance, acting as a brake to homogenisation and overall globalisation’. As they further point out (p. 217): ‘The novelties, innovations and new ideas

that Polish migrants brought back from Britain were not that self-evidently superior and better. Indeed, for some Polish citizens they symbolised everything that is wrong with the urban or Western lifestyle’.

Second, the authors demonstrate the importance of investigating the specific transnational social spaces inhabited by their interviewees, of finding out about their particular social networks and the particular sites (especially workplaces) where migrants and stayers may pick up and transfer new ideas. The exact geographical locations are important, too, since different places have different migration traditions and cultures and this can make them more or less susceptible to migration-induced change. Since social remitting is all about connections between sending and receiving countries, it is particularly helpful to conduct research in both countries, even though this can be challenging methodologically. In many (I suspect most) cases, Polish towns do not have links predominantly to one particular location in the UK. The authors found that Sokółka migrants did mostly head for London, but that migrants from Trzebnica and Pszczyna were much more scattered. Migrants also have their own specific characteristics, and certain individuals have a greater propensity to succeed as agents of change, not just because of their personalities but also because, for example, they play a recognised socially useful role in the community, such as a nurse or pet-shop owner, and possess a network of local contacts.

Third (as also set out clearly in the *JEMS* article), it is important for the purpose of analysis to divide the social remitting process into stages. The authors turn their microscope on each stage of the process. Successful remitting depends on a migrant acquiring new ideas in the first place. In other words, upon coming into contact with ‘unfamiliarity and difference’, the migrant may imitate, or in some cases, creatively adapt the ideas they encounter. Upon returning to the country of origin, the migrant may be able to pass on this novelty to stayers. However, the transfer will only be successful if the stayers in their turn imitate or creatively adapt the foreign idea. In practice, the migrant is often shy about trying to diffuse new ideas for fear these will be rejected; in other

cases, the migrant makes the attempt, but fails. In cases where migrants have succeeded, their immediate associates should be putting their ideas into practice, and the project included interviews with ‘followers’ – stayers who had been impressed by the agents of change. One might assume that, in this day and age, face-to-face transmission of ideas had become less important, but the authors show convincingly that this is not the case. Hence ‘migrants may initiate bottom-up change processes’ (p. 215), although the authors are careful to point out that this is rarely conspicuous except on a very local level.

Overall, this is a very imaginative and scholarly book, which makes a substantial theoretical and empirical contribution to existing migration scholarship, and deserves to be widely read.

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**Anne J. Kershen (ed.) (2015). *London the Promised Land Revisited. The Changing Face of the London Migrant Landscape in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Oxford: Routledge, 237 pp.**

*London the Promised Land Revisited* (2015), edited by Anne Kershen, comes as a timely continuation of *London the Promised Land? The Migrant Experience in a Capital City* (1997), the first volume in the series on ‘Migration and Diaspora’, edited by the same author. This second edited collection continues to trace the impact of immigration on London by exploring a set of trends that construct the intensity and diversity of its contemporary landscape, this time relying on an almost completely new set of contributors. The prolific concept of ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007) forms the theoretical backbone of the collection, and its main themes – visibility and invisibility, integration and separation, transnationalism and location – provide the glue that attempts to link the thirteen chapters into a coherent whole. As Kershen notes (p. 3) super-diversity is not only the conceptual prism adopted here but also a characteristic that describes the diverse professional expertise of the contributors,