

Received: 22 January 2020

Accepted: 26 October 2020

DOI: 10.1002/psp.2414

SPECIAL ISSUE PAPER

WILEY

The emotion management of transnational living

Godfried Engbersen | Erik Snel 

Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS), Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Correspondence

Godfried Engbersen, Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS), Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
Email: engbersen@essb.eur.nl

Abstract

This article explores how individuals with transnational lives handle emotion management in the form of cognitive and behavioural strategies. Transnational living is defined as spending substantial amounts of time and resources in two or more countries over a longer period. We use data derived through the ‘Transnational Lives in the Welfare State’ (TRANSWEL) research project, for which we conducted 91 semistructured interviews with 85 individuals and six couples leading transnational lives. These respondents include immigrants living in Norway or the Netherlands as well as native-born residents of both countries who live parts of the year abroad. While the emergent literature highlights how migration and transnationalism generally evoke feelings of nonbelonging, loss, homelessness, sorrow and guilt, we found that for many respondents, transnational living has predominantly positive attributes and that they could manage the emotional challenges of a transnational life. These results can be explained by our respondents’ backgrounds, being relatively highly educated and embedded in an advanced welfare state.

KEYWORDS

behavioural strategies, cognitive strategies, emotion management, transnational living, welfare states

1 | INTRODUCTION

Abdelhamid arrived to Europe from Morocco at age 18. He came as a so-called guest worker, first to France and then the Netherlands. He held jobs typical for low-skilled guest workers such as that of factory worker and shipbuilder, though eventually established his own company. At 51, he became ill and stopped working. His wife, six daughters and one son first lived in Morocco, where he visited them each summer. Later, his family came to the Netherlands. Several of his children, he reports, are rather successful, having completed academic educations. Since retirement, Abdelhamid and his wife spend each year 3 to 4 months in his hometown in Northern Morocco. He owns an apartment and visits with relatives who still live there. Abdelhamid describes himself as very happy about his transnational life in the Netherlands and Morocco and wants to sustain this way of living in both countries as long as possible.

Alice is from England but lives in Norway. Her partner is Dutch and works in Ireland. She divides her time between the United Kingdom, Norway and the Netherlands. Alice moved to Norway because she wanted to experience what she calls ‘the Norwegian lifestyle’ and take advantage of the outdoor opportunities, especially to do winter sports. She is currently looking for a full-time job in Norway. She visits England at least twice monthly. Family ties are very important to her. She appreciates the English healthcare system and other systematic solutions in the United Kingdom, which is why she is keeping herself registered there as long as possible. She is happy with the cheap flights between Oslo and London, though finds it emotionally hard to go back and forth between countries and does not feel like she has what she calls a ‘proper home’. Though thankful that she can be so mobile, she is unsure what her future will look like.

These brief bios of Abdelhamid and Alice provide just two examples of the multitude of forms that transnational living can take.

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Abdelhamid is happy with his transnational life, whereas Alice finds it more difficult to strike the right balance in her transnational life. For both, however, giving shape to transnational living and coping with its emotional challenges are not self-evident. This article is about how ‘transnationals’—people who live partly in one country and partly in another—try to resolve their psychological well-being with transnational living. Our central question thus asks: What strategies do people develop to uphold a transnational life? Endeavouring to find answers, we first define what a transnational life is and then outline the concepts of emotion management and emotion work strategies that guide our empirical analysis. After that, we explain our data and methodology. We then outline our empirical findings. We pay attention to cognitive strategies, wherein transnationals change their views on situations, and behavioural strategies, wherein transnationals change the way they act in specific situations. We conclude with thoughts on transnationalism and advanced welfare states.

2 | CONCEPTUALISING TRANSNATIONAL LIVING AND EMOTION MANAGEMENT

2.1 | Transnational living

The transnational perspective in migration research emphasises that international migration is rarely only a linear movement from one country to another but rather something that results in sustained practices linking migrants with other people and organisations in their origin countries or elsewhere in a diaspora (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Carling, 2008; Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Vertovec, 2009). These practices are manifold and encompass cross-border economic, political and sociocultural activities. We use the term ‘transnational living’, which is conceptually both broader and narrower than the more conventional concept of ‘migrant transnationalism’. It is broader in the sense that people who are engaged in transnational practices are not only migrants but also non-migrants (Carling, 2008). Examples include cross-border commuters who live in one country but have a job in another; international business people who have a company in one country but reside and/or have their families in another; or so-called lifestyle migrants, among them many pensioners, who spend their leisure time in a second home abroad for parts of the year (Williams, King, & Warness, 1997; Williams, King, Warness, & Patterson, 2000).

Our conceptualisation of transnational living is also narrower than the general broad category of transnational practices. Various authors have observed how transnational activities can differ in extent and intensity, and distinguished between degrees of transnationalism: ‘broad’ versus ‘narrow’, ‘expanded’ versus ‘core’ and ‘weak’ versus ‘strong’ (Itzigsohn, Cabral, Medina, & Vazquez, 1999; Levitt, 2001; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2012; Snel, Engbersen, & Leerkes, 2006; Vertovec, 2009). The labels ‘expanded’ and ‘weak’ evoke the occasional nature of practices many migrants are engaged in, such as origin country visits, following news in the origin country, and/or sending remittances to family ‘back home’. Here, we focus on

transnationalism that is considered narrow, core or strong. Something that all respondents in our research share is an investment of substantial amounts of time and money in multiple countries. Transnational practices constitute significant parts of their lives. Many live in multiple countries for several months of the year at a time or derived income from a country other than that of their residence.¹

2.2 | Emotion management

Although the emotional side of migration is still ‘relatively understudied’ (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 73), a growing body of literature addresses how emotions are related to migration in general and transnational attachments in particular (Baldassar, 2015; Escandell & Tapias, 2010; Plöger & Kubiak, 2019; Ryan, 2008; Svašek, 2008, 2010; Walsh, 2009, 2012). These studies show that migration is often accompanied by, and results in, mixed feelings of nonbelonging and not feeling at home. Migratory movements regularly result not only in emotional ambivalence, ‘emotional (dis)embodiment and (dis)embeddedness’ but also over time ‘in emotional re-embodiment and re-embedding’ (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 75). Migration may stir feelings of loss and guilt related to significant others left behind in the origin country and disappointment in the sometimes hostile reception in the host country. But over time, migrants often cope with the situation, finding a place in their new society and handling strained relations with and/or expectations from relatives back home (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). All these studies consider how migrants try to overcome the emotional complications or struggles that are characteristic of being embedded in a transnational social field.

In focusing on how transnationals—including non-migrants—deal with the emotional demands of transnational living, we build on the pioneering work of Hochschild (1979, 1983, 2003). Her work on the sociology of emotions provides relevant insights and concepts for the study of transnational lives (see also Escandell & Tapias, 2010; Ryan, 2008; Svašek, 2008, 2010). The ambiguities, discrepancies and/or uncertainties across situations in which people find themselves and their actual emotional experiences lead to their engaging in emotion management. Emotion management is aimed at reducing or eliminating tensions in social lives. People strive to resolve their psychological well-being and social lives. For this, they develop emotion work strategies, which aim at reducing tensions and contradictions related to specific social settings.

Hochschild mainly analyses occupational contexts and work environments, but her conceptual apparatus is applicable to other social spheres such as partnerships, friendships and family (see Layder, 2005) and is also highly relevant for studying transnational lives. Transnationals must deal with emotional demands, expectations, feelings and interests of significant others, partners, relatives and old and new friends. They additionally must fulfil their own expectations and emotional needs. Often, no clearly defined feeling rules or emotion scripts exist for transnational living. One explanation is that the situations in which transnationals find themselves are too singular. However, in her study of Irish nurses in England, Ryan (2008) cites

the existence of an Irish emotional culture with a strong emphasis on keeping up appearances, maintaining intensive contacts with family and conforming to the ideal of the successful migrant. Such a culture entailed great emotional costs for the nurses. Another example is a study on low-paid migrant men in London and transnational gender dynamics (Datta et al., 2009). These men present themselves as 'winners' who, despite huge hardship and suffering, will be able to return to their origin country as successful migrants. However, the 'masculine' emotion script they follow requires extensive emotion work strategies.

Our interviews revealed that psychosocial well-being is not always easy to resolve with a transnational way of life. Transnationals thus develop emotion work strategies, which can be cognitive, aimed at changing ideas, images and ideas in order to modify and alter feelings (Hochschild, 1979). The strategies can also be aimed at changing behaviour. Changes in behaviour may reduce unwanted feelings and evoke desirable feelings (see Turner & Stets, 2006),² as the aforementioned study of migrant men in low-paid jobs so illustrates (Datta et al., 2009, pp. 868–869). Imagining a heroic return to their origin country as a successful migrant is a cognitive strategy. Developing new relationships and new skills in London while maintaining ties with family members in their origin country is a behavioural strategy, and the approval received from relatives strengthens their social status. Both types of strategies make the hardships in London more bearable.

Along with this conceptual focus on emotion work, we also gain insights through power, status and stratification theories on emotions (Thoits, 1989; Turner, 2007). This broad literature shows that people in a strong social position (in terms of status, power and resources) are likelier to experience emotions such as satisfaction, happiness and well-being than those in more vulnerable social positions (see Barbalet, 1998; Kemper & Collins, 1990; Turner & Stets, 2006). The latter are likelier to experience emotions such as anxiety, insecurity, and resentment. These insights are also relevant to our study because differences in social position exist for transnationals. For some, leading a transnational life is a matter of choice; for others, it is a necessity (cf. Walsh, 2009).

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Research population and sampling

The data this article uses come from the Transnational Lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL) research project,³ which conducted semistructured interviews with individuals and couples who lead transnational lives. Transnational living was defined as spending substantial amounts of time and resources in two (or more) countries over a period. Many respondents actually lived in two countries during parts of the year; others lived and worked in one country while their families were still 'at home'; and others lived in one country but worked and received income in another country (for instance, cross-border commuters).

We conducted 91 interviews, 85 of which were with individual respondents and six of which were with couples. In total, we

interviewed 97 respondents, all of whom lived, at least part-time, in Norway or the Netherlands. Unlike other transnationalism research, which generally focuses on migrant transnationalism, our data included both migrants and native Norwegians or Dutch as well as 'mixed couples' (partners with different nationalities from each other). Most interviews were conducted not only in Norway or the Netherlands but also in Poland, Spain, Pakistan, Germany, Cape Verde and in some other countries (via Skype).

We found our respondents by placing ads in newspapers, tapping our personal or professional social networks (established in part from previous research), getting referrals from colleagues and snowball sampling. Instead of statistical representativeness, we aimed at maximal variation in our sample, both in terms of countries of reference (the other country where our respondents live or work or is significant for them, besides Norway or The Netherlands) and types of transnational living. All in all, we interviewed many types of transnationals, including retirees who live abroad during parts of the year; former guest workers or mixed couples who spend time in their origin countries; circular labour migrants, and entrepreneurs working for foreign companies or officials from international aid organisations whose families were in their origin countries.

3.2 | Analysis

This study's interviews were conducted by TRANSWEL project researchers or their trained research assistants. Although carried out in different languages, they were all transcribed in English and coded using a joint codebook in NVivo. The interviews followed a set of agreed-upon themes, including experiences, joys and frustrations of transnational living—the topic of this article—and respondents' future intentions of remaining transnational or settling in one country or the other as well as experiences and encounters with welfare state institutions in one or more countries.

To describe and analyse the emotions of transnational living, we focused on the interview material that was coded in NVivo under the nodes 'transnational living', 'challenges and restrictions', 'emotions', 'home and identity' and 'conflicts'. In a subsequent round of coding, patterns in the data were further classified in relation to types of behavioural and cognitive strategies. Interview excerpts included in the next section exemplify these types of strategies. We used pseudonyms for all respondents and refer to their gender, transnational category, educational level, time spend both in Norway or the Netherlands and in country of reference. A number of other research ethics and precautions taken while conducting this research included obtaining informed consent, safeguarding confidentiality and adhering to best practices for data protection.

The next section presents our most important findings. First, we outline a profile of our respondents. Then, we analyse their emotion work strategies. We chose to make extensive use of the respondents' precisely transcribed and translated answers and avoided describing their emotions, challenges or strategies in our own words. The interview excerpts have both an illustrative and a validating function.

However, the strategies we describe certainly do not include the entire spectrum of strategies that respondents use, but they are, in our observation, the most common.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Profile of the transnationals

Norway was the main country of residence for almost two third of our respondents, whereas for the others, it was the Netherlands. We interviewed somewhat more males than females. About one fourth of the respondents were younger than 30, including among them several PhD students who lived part-time in countries other than where their university was based. More than one third of the respondents were between 31 and 45. The next age category, 46 to 60, was relatively smaller, and almost one quarter of the respondents were over 60 (see Appendix A).

When asked about transnational practices and engagement, one in eight respondents referred to a neighbouring country of either Norway or the Netherlands. Many were cross-border commuters living in either Germany or Belgium and working in the Netherlands, or vice versa. The largest subcategory, comprising almost half of all respondents, lived in other European countries. For instance, we interviewed several Central and Eastern European (CEE) labour migrants who regularly visited family living in their origin country. Several students belonged to this category of 'intra-European' transnationals, as did several retirees who spent parts of the year in sunnier parts of Europe. One in six respondents mentioned a nation in North or South America as the country of reference. This was a rather heterogeneous category, including some American citizens married to Norwegian or Dutch spouses who divided their time between both sides of the Atlantic. We also interviewed several adventure seekers who started their own company or did voluntary work in Central or South America. Some regularly returned to Europe to work, earning the money necessary to stay for the rest of the year in countries, such as Peru or Mexico. Finally, for almost one in four respondents, the country reference was in Africa, Asia or Australia. These included former labour migrants or their spouses from countries, such as Turkey, Morocco and Cape Verde, who spent retirement time there. We also interviewed several migrants from Pakistan who lived in Norway and had intensive contact with their families 'back home'.

Although we tried to assemble a heterogeneous group of respondents, the large majority was rather highly educated. Almost 60% completed an academic degree, and another almost 20% completed a higher occupational-educational college-level degree. A possible reason for the overrepresentation of the highly educated is that intensive transnational practices require resources. The remaining 20% of respondents completed an intermediate-level or a lower level educational degree. This last category consisted mainly of former guest workers or their spouses from Turkey, Morocco and Cape Verde.

We also asked the respondents how long they lived abroad. At 44%, a large minority lived outside Norway or the Netherlands for at

least 6 months of the year. Another 20% lived abroad for 3 to 6 months of the year. These were individuals with real transnational lives. They lived in different countries for prolonged periods of time or commuted between Norway or the Netherlands and other countries on a regular, sometimes daily basis.

Finally, we tried to reconstruct the main motivations for our respondents' strong transnational engagement and often long periods of transnational living. This was not determined through a specific question we posed, but by looking at interviews holistically, we distinguished several categories of transnational living. For one third of respondents (32 persons), having intensive family ties was the main motivation for transnational living. People were categorised as such when they spent a substantial amount of time and/or resources on family in the origin country by, for instance, making regular homeland visits or sending remittances. Younger respondents (up to age 45) notably belonged to this category perhaps because their families still remained in the origin country, for instance, in the case of several CEE labour migrants. For another one third of respondents (33 persons), work was the main reason for transnational living. This category included circular migrants and persons who commute across borders to work on a weekly or daily basis, as well as those who worked at or owned a company abroad while their family remained in their origin country. Retirees were a third category. We found retirement transnationals mainly in the Netherlands, comprising both Dutch natives and couples who spent parts of the year abroad and (former) labour migrants or their spouses who visited their origin country sometimes for up to 8 months per year. For five respondents, 'love' was the principal reason for transnational living. An example was a Norwegian who divided her time between Denmark, where she owned a house, and Greece, where her Greek boyfriend lived. Another was an American who worked in the United States some months a year to earn money and lived in Norway with her Norwegian partner for the rest of the year. The remaining 15 respondents fit none of these categories. Some were not themselves transnational, as could be the case, for instance, for one of the spouses in a mixed couple. For some respondents, transnational living simply meant taking (extended) vacations. Other less prominent reasons for transnational living were health issues or climate preferences.

4.2 | Emotional challenges and emotion management

The emotional challenges that respondents faced were multifaceted. They dealt with establishing a home or multiple homes, finding a sense of belonging, maintaining social ties and building new social networks. Some transnationals felt split or had the feeling of living between two worlds, whereas others had to deal with the social pressures of family and acquaintances. Again, others had to cope with feelings of loss, homesickness, loneliness, alienation and jealousy. In order to manage the emotional demands and challenges of transnational living, respondents developed particular cognitive and behavioural strategies (see Overview 1).

Overview 1. Emotion work strategies of transnationals

Cognitive strategies

- recalling positive emotions, for example, emphasising the beneficial aspects of having a transnational life.
- suppressing negative emotions and accepting negative aspects of a transnational life.
- not splitting oneself mentally, focusing on the country of residence and not constantly comparing countries.
- fantasising about an idealised home and keeping return options open.

Behavioural strategies

- managing social capital, maintenance or transformation of established social ties and building new social relations.
- managing mobility and finding a proper balance between travelling back and forth.
- developing a context-dependent approach for dealing with problems and playing different roles in different contexts.
- withdrawing from situations that generate negative emotions and being indifferent to or avoiding certain practices that evoke negative emotions.

4.3 | Cognitive strategies

We identified a set of four basic cognitive strategies. The first was to recall positive emotions, which included, for example, valuing habits and traditions from different countries, recognising the importance of learning and respecting a plurality of perspectives and enjoying the merging of different cultures. Many of our respondents emphasised, time and again, the positive attributes of transnational living.

This particular strategy speaks to the selectivity of the research population. Many respondents were rather highly educated, so for them, having a transnational life was rarely forced, but rather a conscious, free choice. In addition, many respondents had an exit option. If the sacrifices become too great, they could leave transnational living behind. Even if the respondents faced the emotional challenges generally related to migration and transnational living, they accentuated the enrichments of a transnational life (cf. Plöger & Kubiak, 2019, p. 312).

Yes, it's very enriching to be able to do so. I'm very happy that I'm doing this. Because it makes you put things into perspective, it makes you more open and world-wise, more open-minded. When you speak with people who never travel ... Well, you know, that Dutch complaining all the time about little things? Yes, I don't do that often anymore. Yes, you can compare with the situation in India, or Morocco, or Peru. And then you think: 'Yes, what's it all about?' (Marieke, female of

Dutch origin; work transnational; highly educated; living in Peru [5 months] and the Netherlands [7 months])

So yeah, we'll have a good mix, and we're incorporating a lot of Norwegian cultural traditions. And to the wedding, he's going to wear his *bunad* [Norwegian traditional folk clothing]. And my uncle plays the fiddle so he's going to play some Norwegian folk music. And other things, like I am not going to change my name, which I didn't want to anyway. But after moving here, I feel like it's very egalitarian here in regards to gender, and I feel that even more strongly since moving here, so that's something I feel really passionate about, keeping my own identity ... But I think we're just really trying to celebrate the merging of cultures. (Ada, female of US origin; family transnational; highly educated; living in Norway [11 months] and the United States [1 month])

Okay, we are always in the luxurious position that we can easily fall back on the Netherlands. That is also related to the opportunities of living in two cultures. Just try to see the good things in it. You have your own culture, but you come into a country with a different culture. Try to make the best of it, but adapt to it. And if you don't like it, you can leave again. (Reinier, male of Dutch origin; work transnational; highly educated; living in the Netherlands [2 months] and Ethiopia [10 months])

Although mostly articulated by highly educated respondents, this strategy was also applied by those with lower skills (cf. Datta et al., 2009, p. 868). A related strategy was to suppress negative emotions or accept that there are always negative aspects of transnational living. A respondent in a study by Walsh (2009, p. 435) on British migrants in Dubai speaks of a 'balancing act', whereby there is constant evaluation of whether the positives outweigh the negatives. Part of this strategy is recognising that the extent to which one can integrate in a new country has limits.

Well, I have been here for 15 years now, and if I am here it's because I have the capacity to accept what's positive and negative, the positives and the negatives exist in Norway and exist in Argentina ... (Patricia, female of Argentine origin; family transnational, highly educated; living in Norway [10 months] and Argentina [2 months])

I tried to assimilate, I worked so hard to assimilate and to fit in, and to sort of blend in to the culture, that I renounced a lot of American ... but it's a lot of me. Your culture shapes you ... I am never going to be a Norwegian, and I am perfectly okay with that.

(Mandy, female of US origin; family transnational; highly educated; living in Norway [12 months] and the United States [0 months])

In line with the previous strategy, respondents tried to not have their minds on two countries at once. They emphasised the importance of focusing on where they are at a given moment and not lose themselves in endless comparisons between countries. This was an important cognitive strategy that respondents developed over time. Constant comparison could evoke feelings of frustration and missing home.

It's about being here when you are here, and not thinking too much about Norway because it will pull you away. That is why I don't read the news, don't want to let Norway take too much space, because it might make me miss it more ... And in Norway as well, when you have lived in Africa, I think you always think about it. But when you are in Norway, you do not think: 'Oh, I should have been in Kenya right now'. I think that's important, to be present where you are, not always think that you should be somewhere else. (Margrethe, female of Norwegian origin; work transnational with partner; highly educated; living in Kenya [10 months] and Norway [2 months])

No, no because I try to divide between the two. When I am in Norway, I am happy in Norway and I don't think about what the time is in Argentina. I don't think about what they are eating in Argentina, but more enjoy Norway. And when I am in Argentina, I forget Norway and I try to enjoy that, one can't be in one place and thinking about the other, it's not possible ... Yes, I think it's not good to compare things, I don't like to compare because situations are different. (Patricia, female of Argentine origin; highly educated; family transnational; teacher; living in Norway [10 months] and Argentina [2 months])

A fourth strategy was fantasising about an idealised home. For many respondents with a strong transnational life, defining a home base was difficult. They often referred to the existence of multiple homes and sometimes to an enduring search for a 'true' home. One way to cope with this was through fantasies. Various elements play a role in the ways transnationals construct their idealised home: geographies, physical places, people, things and identity (see also Duyvendak, 2011; Nowicka, 2007; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). A variant of fantasising about an idealised home is to keep return options open. There is the idea that one can leave behind a transnational life because elsewhere—one's country of birth, for example—is somewhere to always escape to. This return option functions as a kind of psychological safety net despite the chance that the fantasy will not be fulfilled.

It's actually very strange, but I have a piece of land in the mountains of Norway, no cabin—close to my mother's family though—and I kind of want to build a cabin there, and that would be like my home. So at the moment, I don't have something to call home ... We renovated the whole apartment in Greece and I caught myself saying 'home' a few times, so I feel at home, maybe that's just because of Greg, I feel at home with Greg. I don't know. But I am thinking that cabin in the future would be home, not a home that I would stay in, but just a base where I could have bookshelves with my books and my things that I bought over the last 11 years all in one place, where no one can touch it. That's my plan. (Aud, female of Norwegian origin; love transnational; higher educated; living in Norway [6 months] and Greece [6 months])

But by living here since 2004, I think I'm Irish in my heart and core ... It's near Ireland, it's easy for me to get back and forth. When we were younger, we had much less money and I couldn't. I found it very difficult, not to be able to get back to my home, even for a week or two. It was too expensive. There were also things and people I missed. Not so much anymore, it's much less. And as I just said, it's easier for me to think that I can go back tomorrow because I have a home. That's very reassuring ... Because I suppose I feel that, if I wanted to leave this country tomorrow, I could. And I can go back to my old country. Not that I want to, I mean, I'm happy here. But the feeling that I can go back of course is quite a different sense of freedom than actually not being able to go back, you know? (Eileen, female of Irish origin; retiree transnational; highly educated; living in the Netherlands [10 months] and Ireland [2 months])

4.4 | Behavioural strategies

In addition to cognitive strategies, our respondents developed various behavioural strategies. The specific characteristics of transnational living put limits on these strategies, particularly in terms of geographical distance and associated costs. Nevertheless, we distinguished four basic behavioural strategies that were developed by many respondents. A first was managing social capital. Leading a transnational life often required a proper balance between maintaining established social ties (with family, friends and acquaintances) and developing new ones. Or it required balancing social obligations and emotional needs that arise from having strong ties in more than one country.

Managing social capital was a crucial strategy for transnationals who left their homeland and lived in another country for the majority of the year. During the initial phase of settling, especially, maintaining

contacts with friends was crucial for maintaining one's well-being. Sometimes social relationships were also strategically kept up because they could be of help in the near future. In some cases, respondents did the opposite, dissolving their social ties because they stood in the way of building a future in another country.

The thing I miss the most is, like, Saturday or Sunday afternoon lunches with my family, like the whole family just meeting, like eating food, and just hanging out all afternoon and talking and gossiping and laughing. That's the thing I miss the most. And in terms of friends, it's not easier either because—I don't know how your experience [is]—but it's extremely difficult to make new friends in Norway, so I Skype a lot with my friends back home, actually. I think, like, my sanity has been kind of hinged on new technology that allow me to talk to my friends all the time ... (Malin, female of Lebanese origin; love transnational; highly educated; studying Norwegian; living in Norway [9 months], the United States [2 months] and Lebanon [1 month])

Sometimes I feel many people in India form a relationship with me because they feel that I can help them in case of emergency, so I understand it. Sometimes they need money, [saying]: 'Oh I have this problem, my mother is in the hospital, she needs a heart transplant, and I need this much money'. Even though I don't have the money, I borrow it from the credit card and I give it to them. I get it back, maybe in one year or a half-year, but at the time I have to help them, and that is because I want to maintain it. I could say, 'No, I don't have money', but then it's an impact on our relationship. Because then we are less important and I cannot call him when I need it ... (Martin, male of Indian origin; family transnational; highly educated; living in Norway [11 months] and India [1 month])

That's what I was telling my mother ... I try to explain that I want to focus on one country because I constantly feel that I have something down there I need to think about, which makes it difficult for me to focus on things here. There is always something happening there, or I have to ask someone to help me fix something, I want to get rid of that bond. (Leila, female of Portuguese origin; not transnational; higher educated; living in Norway [12 months] and Portugal [0 months])

It is also interesting how some transnationals are able to activate their social networks when necessary. Their international career has not only given them the opportunity to develop strong and weak ties but also latent ties—those that exist but have not yet been activated (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 385; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). This

strategy is illustrated in a quote from Mathilde, who lives in Norway with her partner and is self-employed. She was born in Ireland, worked for the UN and lived for many years in Africa. She is a person with a robustly developed international network, which gives her peace of mind because it makes her feel constantly connected to many other people.

There is obviously these stresses that come with moving, I never get nervous. Some of my friends back home would say: 'I couldn't do it, I would be terrified to go to a new place on my own'. And, I don't know, I guess I've done it so many times that I just don't get like that at all ... there's always friends of friends in places, so when I go to places now, I'm always connected to someone who I might not know but who knows someone, and then I meet people that way. (Mathilde, female of Irish origin; family transnational, highly educated; [8 months] and Ireland [4 months])

A second important strategy was managing mobility. This concerns the extent to which transnationals travel back and forth between countries. Social media plays an important role in maintaining contacts (Plöger & Kubiak, 2019; Walsh, 2009), but we also observed the enduring significance of face-to-face contact and interaction (Misztal, 2000). Our respondents echoed the needs to have physical contact with meaningful people in specific social contexts or to be physically present somewhere they feel at home (see also Baldassar, 2015). Distances and costs majorly impacted this strategy, as Gaia's quote illustrates. After a day's work in Brussels, her decision to take the Thalys, a high-speed international train, to her home in a city near The Hague, would not be affordable for everyone.

Oh my god, the Thalys is so expensive. Yes, I like travelling by train, I like travel. There is some ... I have to tell you, my Dutch house is my comfort home. When I feel frustrated, I want to be there. There were times that I was having a very hard day at work, I would finish from work at eight, and then I would just rush and pick up the train, and arrive here at eleven o'clock just to sleep there. It's my comfort home. (Gaia, female of Greek origin; work transnational; highly educated; living in the Netherlands (3 months), Belgium [7.5 months] and Greece [1.5 months])

But the majority of respondents sought the right mix of social media and face-to-face contact as well as the best possible balance of time they could spend in another country. This required financial sacrifices, especially if the countries were far apart from each other.

You know, we're really fortunate, because we are both coming from such great countries where we can have good jobs and a good lifestyle in both places. And so instead of choosing one country to really settle down

with our families as being so important, we just said: 'You know what? Let's make sacrifices in other areas in our lives'. So we spend quite a bit of money on going back and forth and less money on doing other vacations or whatever. We try to save so we can spend time with both families. (Malin, female of Lebanese origin; love transnational; highly educated; studying Norwegian; living in Norway [9 months], the United States [2 months] and Lebanon [1 month])

We live in Oslo, that's our home. He owns an apartment here so we live here, so our property is here. My parents still live in my hometown in the US, and I'm very, very close with them and my family. And it's also where I am from. It's a very beautiful place, it's very special to me. So I have a lot of expat friends here who just sort of moved here and that's it, and their new life is here. But I really still feel connected to home, and feel like both places are home. So I go back about two times a year ... I feel like when I go there, I'm still home. It's not like I'm visiting, you know? (Ada, female of US origin; family transnational; highly educated; living in Norway [11 months] and the United States [1 month])

These excerpts come from relatively young respondents, but their sentiments resonated with retiree family transnationals who travelled back and forth because they had ties in two countries. Some older respondents may have struggled to uphold this pattern, even though their travel was often limited to one annual round trip. Still, as Ekem's and Burat's quotes illustrate, it was also important for elderly respondents to keep to their transnational rhythm.

It's of course difficult for me. You then live in the first country, then again in the other country. On the one hand, this is good for me, but on the other hand, bad. Now that I'm older, it is getting harder to fly back and forth by airplane. I even think that in a few years, I will not be able come to the Netherlands anymore. I'm getting older, I think I will not be able to travel back and forth anymore when I'm around 80 years old. (Ekem, male of Turkish origin; retiree transnational; lowly educated; living in the Netherlands [3 to 5 months] and Turkey [7 to 9 months])

I think this is the most optimal division. Because I have family in both countries, I have to be present in both countries. If I were only in the Netherlands, I would feel that I would like to go to Turkey. If I would be in Turkey, I would feel that I prefer to go to the Netherlands. So I would miss both. I feel much more comfortable now because I can be present in both countries ... We feel Turkish and Dutch. That's why we love both countries and want to contribute to both

countries. (Berat, male of Turkish origin; retiree transnational; lowly educated; living in the Netherlands [9 months] and Turkey [3 months])

A third strategy was to develop differentiated approaches for dealing with problems and situations specific to the different countries. All respondents were partly living in advanced welfare states—Norway or the Netherlands—and partly in countries with less-developed or absent welfare states. Respondents reacted by using services such as healthcare in Norway or the Netherlands but not in the other countries. For most respondents, incomes acquired in Norway or the Netherlands (through pensions or temporary jobs) enabled them to live abroad during parts of the year. In general, transnational living required the ability to deal with differences in legal cultures, bureaucracies, and welfare arrangements (we address this issue separately in Paper presented at the TRANSWEL-workshop, 2018). We also saw how respondents tried to take advantage of each country's benefits, for example, one country's nature and climate and the other's quality of infrastructure and healthcare. Playing different life roles was also part of this strategy. A transnational life could sometimes free respondents from what would otherwise have been a fixed role in one country, thus allowing them to tap into other facets of their personality.

If I faced some challenges back in Pakistan, I would try my level best to approach my mother and brothers and would offer my help to them regarding the issue so that I get better understanding of what happened and how it happened and solve it as soon as possible. If I am in Pakistan and some problem arises back in Norway, I wouldn't worry much as I know that Norway possesses an excellent system for almost everything, and everything is running in smooth way. (Jawad, male of Pakistani origin; family transnational; highly educated, living in Norway [8 to 10 months] and Pakistan [2 to 4 months])

What I like most about Morocco is the climate. The weather is just lovely there. The landscape, the mountains. I don't know how to express myself: you feel there the way you should feel. The traditions, the habits, which clothes you wear. I wear a djellaba over there, a kind of dress. You have that kind of freedom over there, that you can wear such clothes ... Nobody looks at you and judges you. It is just right. Here everyone looks at you when you wear such a thing. You feel that. In this manner, I do feel at home over there.

Interviewer: And what do you appreciate most about the Netherlands?

The way the country has an infrastructure: the roads, the cycle tracks, hospitals. When you come to a hospital, you think you have arrived in a five-star hotel. That makes you happy, this is the way it should be. (Abdelhamid, male of Moroccan origin; retiree

transnational; lowly educated; living in the Netherlands [8 months] and Morocco [4 months])

The thing when you travel is that you can kind of tell one story to some people and one story to other people ... and they won't kind of like figure out ... It's not that you're lying, but you kind of change personalities when you travel, which I like ... It's just that I could play different roles ... but not because I'm schizophrenic ... It's entertaining ... so I kind of have different kinds of groups of friends which kind of don't get the whole story all the time ... (Aud, female of Norwegian origin; love transnational; highly educated; living in Norway [6 months] and Greece [6 months])

A fourth strategy was to withdraw from situations that could possibly stir negative emotions or to keep aloof so as not interfere with anything potentially problematic. That people were sometimes semi-integrated in another country could help. Respondents accepted the deficient bureaucracies in some countries or the corruption within certain institutions. They learned to live with the time-conscious and/or stressful way of life in Norway or the Netherlands, where social relationships were more impersonal. Sometimes they anticipated possible negative reactions from residents with whom they come into contact. Compare the following quotes.

[In Morocco,] I just stick to the rules, and then there is nothing that bothers you. The police almost never stops me. The rest of the government, you fortunately don't need them. The courts, for example, they are very corrupt institutions, but I don't have anything to do with them. I don't have a lot of interest in politics, you can't change anything about it anyway. Elections are a deception. Everything is handled from the top. Here [in The Hague], I always do vote. (Abdelhamid, male of Moroccan origin; retiree transnational; lowly educated; living in the Netherlands [8 months] and Morocco [4 months])

I think that according to the way you plan to live, you have to accept the limits. So in my case, I have to come twice a month. I have to accept speaking very bad Dutch, so as to miss a part of the quality of connection with the people here. If I could speak their own language, I think I would go deeper in the relationships. So you have to accept that you are not completely part of the daily life of the place. But if you accept it, there is no frustration. And then, there is something nice: you escape the bad things, because you just come for a few days and to do the work you're passionate about. So people are happy to see you and after you go, so you don't get involved in the daily routine and problems. (Laurent, male of French origin;

work transnational; highly educated; living in the Netherlands [1 month] and France [11 months])

So I bought this house [in France], and I thought, I don't care, I just want to have my self-fulfilling life. I'm not intending to socialise. If it's necessary, of course I would speak. But if those French people are not very nasty to me, they don't need to be friendly to me either, I don't care. I grow my tomatoes, etcetera, and that's it. But the biggest surprise was that my neighbours, everybody, was so friendly. (Minako, female of Japanese origin; highly educated; retiree transnational; living in the Netherlands [6 months] and France [6 months])

Our findings complement existing literature on the emotional dimensions of migration and transnational engagement. Previous research emphasises the emotional ambivalence of migration and transnational engagement: feelings of nonbelonging, loss, homelessness and guilt in relation to relatives left behind. But this literature also shows how migrants learn to manage these feelings. Our research overall focuses less on the uneasiness and more on the management of these ambivalent experiences, as is further discussed in the conclusion of this article.

5 | CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The emerging research on the emotional dimensions of migration and transnationalism generally shows that these phenomena are accompanied by and evoke feelings of nonbelonging, homelessness and frustration. It documents the emotional pain that migrants experience because their families, and sometimes partners and children, live at a distance. It also analyses the mixed feelings that arise from perceived obligations to relatives in their origin country as well as the host country's often disappointing reception. On the flipside, the research also shines a light on the resilience of migrants and their skills for coping with these emotional challenges (Escandell & Tapias, 2010; Ryan, 2008; Svašek, 2008, 2010).

This article explored the emotion work strategies (Hochschild, 1979), cognitive and behavioural, of individuals with transnational lives. Our respondents included immigrants living in Norway or the Netherlands and native-born residents of both countries who lived parts of the year abroad. Our overall conclusion is that our respondents are generally less ambivalent and more positive about their transnational living experiences than the picture that emerges from similar research of different migrant categories.

Our respondents predominantly reported the positive attributes of having a transnational life and suppressed negative emotions by, for instance, accepting that there are always negatives that come with a transnational life. They did not lose themselves in constant comparisons of different countries, which could evoke feelings of frustration and loss. Respondents also fantasised about an idealised

home. For some, having multiple homes in multiple countries was the ideal. For many, having the opportunity to return to Norway or the Netherlands was a safety net enabling their residence abroad during parts of the year.

Besides these cognitive strategies, respondents deployed several behavioural strategies to cope with the situation of transnational living. Several respondents mentioned the necessity of managing social ties and finding a proper balance between established and new social contacts. Another strategy was managing mobility by making use of new modes of transportation and communication (cf. Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). Our respondents also showed an ability to develop differentiated approaches for dealing with problems and situations in difference contexts. They tried to benefit from the good of each country and to withdraw from situations that could evoke negative emotions, such as dealing with corrupt institutions in their origin country.

Our respondents overwhelmingly portrayed transnational living as a positive life experience, with their cognitive and behavioural strategies contributing to this positive evaluation. This raised the question of why their reports were so different from those of migrants documented in other studies on migration and emotions. A first explanation is that most of these studies focus on vulnerable migrant categories such as forced migrants, irregular migrants and low-skilled labour migrants. As Svašek (2010, p. 869) observes in her study on Sudeten Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia directly after the Second World War, this experience resulted even decades later in 'emotional discourses that construct the "lost homeland" as an object of love, longing and suffering'. Migration may also be a painful experience for irregular migrants. Expected to move to 'rich Europe', they find themselves, after migration, at the bottom of the host country's social ladder and labour market. Low-skilled labour migrants—for instance, Polish workers in the United Kingdom after 2004—often struggle between loneliness and limited opportunities in their host countries and the obligations they perceive towards those left behind in their origin countries. These struggles are even more pressing for female migrants, particularly when they have left partners or children behind (Ryan, 2008).

Considering their personal backgrounds, we acknowledge that our respondents were also privileged (see Appendix A). Three quarters had an academic or higher educational background. Highly educated migrants (as well as Norwegian or Dutch natives who lived abroad part-time) had more resources to make themselves feel at home when living abroad than many low-educated migrants. This is in line with Plöger and Kubiak's (2019) study of highly skilled labour migrants in academic, IT and engineering functions in Manchester, UK. Our relatively few lower educated respondents, however, also seemed rather positive about their experience of transnational living.

This finding brings us to a second explanation tied to Norway's and the Netherlands' secure legal and social institutions. For many of our respondents, the social arrangements of advanced welfare states created conditions enabling transnational lives. For instance,

Abdelhamid, who was introduced at the start of this article, only had a state pension (known in the Netherlands as an AOW). And although he had a relatively low income by Dutch standards, it enabled him to live in his beloved Morocco during the summer. Because he received a housing subsidy, he could maintain his apartment in The Hague during the months he and his partner lived in Morocco. Finally, for Abdelhamid and most of our respondents, transnational living was rather risk-free. While living abroad, they always had the safe option to return to Norway or the Netherlands with their advanced social welfare systems. In conclusion, we could say that the selectivity of our research population, their relatively high educational background and their sound legal and social positions in advanced welfare states bring to bear a more positive perspective on the emotional dimension of transnational living.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank the editors of this Special Issue (Cathrine Talleraas, Marta Bivand Erdal and Jörgen Carling, all from PRIO in Oslo, Norway) for their inspiration and support during the process of compiling this issue and writing this article.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Erik Snel  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3808-9541>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Because of the focus on residing and working in different countries with different national institutions, we use the term 'transnational' and not 'translocal'. We are, however, aware that some respondents mainly moved between particular spaces and locations (thereby being considered translocal) (Smith, 2001).
- ² In this article, we follow Turner and Stets (2006) who, in their treatment of the dramaturgical perspective within the sociology of emotions, distinguish between behavioural and cognitive strategies. Hochschild (1979, p. 562) distinguishes between cognitive, bodily, and expressive emotion work. Our data did not allow us to analyse somatic or other physical symptoms of emotions, nor expressive gestures.
- ³ For an introduction to the 'TRANSWEL' research: www.prio.org/Projects/Project/?x=1660.

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How to cite this article: Engbersen G, Snel E. The emotion management of transnational living. *Popul Space Place*. 2020; e2414. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2414>

APPENDIX A: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

	N	%
Country of residence		
Norway	59	62.1
The Netherlands	36	37.9
Total	95	100.0
Gender		
Female	45	46.9
Male	51	53.1
Age		
<30	23	24.5
31–45	34	36.2
46–60	15	16.0
60+	22	23.4
Country of reference		
Neighbouring country	11	12.2
Other European	44	48.9
North and South America	14	15.6
Africa	8	8.9
Asia, Australia	13	14.4
Highest level of education completed		
Higher (university or college)	73	78.5
Intermediate	10	10.8
Lower	10	10.8
Months abroad		
<1 month	17	17.5
1–3 months	18	18.6
3–6 months	19	19.6
>6 months	43	44.3
Transnational category		
Family	32	33.7
Work	33	34.7
Retiree	12	12.6
Love	5	5.3
Other	13	13.7