

Global elite migrants and their transnational impact

Abstract

Irina Isaakyan, Senior Research Associate, CERC Migration, Ryerson University

Scholars note that migrants often carry with themselves various forms of non-financial capital and herein generate social remittances such as new norms and ideas, new socio-cultural practices and identities, and novel social connections (Levitt & Lamba-Neives 2012; Page 2003). The dynamics of social remittances is marked by a complex interplay between the migrant, the host society and the country of origin (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2010, 2011). The complex nature of social remittances is illuminated by the under-studied – yet rapidly increasing – phenomenon of the ‘operatic talent circulation’ as part of global elite migrations. This is particularly evident in the transnational mobility of opera singers from the former communist bloc. Social remittances generated through their socio-cultural transnationalism include the following forms of socio-cultural practice: change of community involvement (including formation of new transnational communities); reconsideration of homeland often with new transnational movements of co-nationals (Fargues 2012; Gansert 2012; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2010). The latter phenomenon is illuminated by the fans’ online transnationalism, related to various social media support groups and their expanding virtual public intimacy; as well as by aspiring singers’ and their fans’ traditional transnational movements across borders.

Migrating musicians actively shape new trans-cultures on the global scale because millions of their fans of various nationalities continuously follow their professional movements both virtually and physically, and adopt their new cultural practices in their home places. Within the current COVID environment, globally circulating opera singers often act as cultural ambassadors of new – more responsible - behaviors and shape their fan groups as global communities of civic responsibility and moral duty in a variety of ways. However, nuances and dynamics of the herein emerging agglomerate remittances remain unknown.

My paper seeks to understand the dynamics of transnationalism and social remittances of opera singers migrating from the post-Soviet republics to Europe through the mixed method of narrative-biographic interview with 60 migrants and netnography (or narrative analysis of their social media). Connecting the themes of ‘transnationalism’, ‘public intimacy’ and ‘soft power’; my findings show a complex interplay between global elite migrants’ transnationalism and the global and local cultures they shape. The paper also offers a typology of operatic migrants’ transnationalism and remittances, including new forms that develop within the coronavirus pandemic environment.