
Silke Mayer, Claudius Ströhle (Eds.):
Remittances as Social Practices and Agents of Change: The Future
of Transnational Society
Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, 465 p.



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Remittances have long occupied a central place in migration studies, development economics, and international policy debates. Since the 1990s, particularly in reports by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, they have been framed primarily as financial flows that promote development, alleviate poverty, and stabilize fragile economies (Ratha, 2005; de Haas, 2010). Within this predominantly economic paradigm, migrants appear chiefly as financial actors whose transfers compensate for structural deficiencies in sending states. Their social embeddedness, moral obligations, and lived experiences have often remained analytically secondary.

Over the past two decades, however, anthropological and sociological scholarship has increasingly challenged this narrow perspective. Influenced by transnationalism studies (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton, 1994; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) and by economic anthropology's longstanding critique of disembedded market models (Polanyi, 1944), researchers have demonstrated that remittances are not merely monetary transfers, but complex social practices embedded in kinship, morality, and power relations. Within this broader intellectual shift, *Remittances as Social Practices and Agents of Change: The Future of Transnational Society*, edited by Silke Meyer and Claudius Ströhle (Mayer & Ströhle, 2023), offers a theoretically ambitious and historically expansive intervention. The volume reconceptualizes remittances as socially embedded, relational, and morally significant practices that actively shape transnational social formations.

The book originated in a workshop initiated in 2017 and held in 2018, reflecting the collaborative and thematic nature of contemporary anthropological scholarship. What distinguishes the volume is the editors' comprehensive theoretical framing. Rather than simply summarizing the chapters, Meyer and Ströhle provide an extensive introduction that maps major debates in remittance research, ranging from development-oriented approaches to moral economy, and clearly situates the volume within these discussions. Each of the four parts is preceded by a concise overview, guiding readers through the contributions and reinforcing the conceptual coherence of the collection.

The editors structure the volume around four analytical approaches. The first part adopts historical and evolutionary perspectives. Contributions by Dirk Rupnow, Aleksandar R. Miletić, Ivana Bajić-Hajduković, Sara Bernard, Annemarie Steidl, and Marie Johanne Karner provide a *longue durée* view that demonstrates how remittances have long been embedded in institutional, familial, and imperial contexts. This historical depth resonates with scholarship emphasizing that transnational practices long predate contemporary globalization (Portes et al., 1999). For example, Steidl's analysis of the late Habsburg Empire illustrates how remittances functioned not only as economic support but as symbolic and relational resources sustaining family networks and social hierarchies over decades.

The second part shifts attention to collective dimensions. Chapters by Marta Bivand Erdal, Hasan Mahmud, Eveline Odermatt, and Eric Bayala move beyond household-centered frameworks to examine communal redistribution, diaspora engagement, and trans-local solidarity.

Such approaches build on studies of collective remittances and hometown associations (Orozco, 2005), highlighting how migrants act not only as family providers, but as political and moral actors embedded in wider communities.

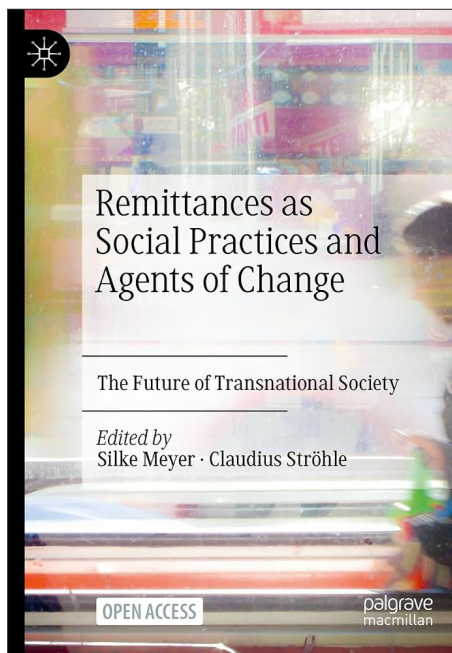
The third part focuses on materiality and symbolic capital. Contributions by Gökhan Mura, Claudius Ströhle, Stefanie Bürkle, and Rochelle Bailey emphasize that remittances include not only money but also goods, architecture, and other material expressions that acquire symbolic value. Here the influence of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and of anthropological theories of exchange (Mauss, 2000) is particularly evident. Through such practices, migrants negotiate status, respectability, and moral recognition in both sending and receiving contexts. Material remittances thus operate as visible markers of success and obligation, embedded in moral economies structured by reciprocity and expectation.

Finally, the fourth part addresses future-oriented and transnational transformations. Chapters by Justice Issah Musah-Surugu and Samuel Weniga Anuga, Lore Van Praag, Rina Malagayo Alluri, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, and the editors explore climate change, conflict, mobility regimes, and academic economies as arenas in which remittance practices acquire new forms. Particularly compelling are discussions of diaspora engagement in climate adaptation and reconstruction, which foreground the transformative and political potential of remittances beyond development orthodoxy.

A defining feature of the volume is its sustained historical sensitivity. By demonstrating that remittances have long shaped migration processes and trans-local social relations, the contributors situate contemporary debates within deeper trajectories of mobility and exchange. This perspective aligns closely with ethnological traditions that emphasize everyday practice, social reproduction, and the embeddedness of economic action in moral worlds.

Theoretically, the volume advances the field by systematically integrating practice theory and moral economy approaches into remittance research. Remittances are conceptualized as relational practices structured by obligation, care, reciprocity, and power. Financial transfers, material goods, symbolic resources, emotional labor, and moral expectations form part of a single analytical field. In doing so, the book contributes to a growing body of scholarship that critiques methodological nationalism and foregrounds transnational social fields as dynamic arenas of negotiation (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Empirically, the collection spans West Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Oceania, and the late Habsburg Empire. Ethnographic, archival, and qualitative methods dominate, reinforcing the book's grounding in anthropological and ethnological inquiry. This methodological orientation addresses a longstanding imbalance in remittance research, which has often privileged quantitative macroeconomic analysis over locally grounded perspectives.



Throughout the chapters, remittances appear as morally charged practices embedded in unequal social fields. While they can strengthen solidarity and provide security, they also generate pressure, conflict, and exclusion when expectations remain unmet. Several contributions demonstrate how remittances may reproduce or even intensify social hierarchies, challenging celebratory development narratives (de Haas, 2010). Gender emerges as a particularly salient axis of differentiation: remittance obligations are structured by gendered norms of care and provision, yet they may also reshape household authority and power relations. These insights resonate with feminist analyses of transnational care chains (Hochschild, 2015; Parreñas, 2015). For scholars working in Central and Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, the analytical framework developed in this volume is particularly relevant. Post-socialist societies have experienced extensive labor mobility, care migration, and circular migration within and beyond the European Union (Okólski, 2012). A practice-oriented understanding of remittances enables ethnologists to move beyond macroeconomic indicators and examine how transnational exchanges reshape kinship relations, local hierarchies, moral economies, and community politics in sending regions.

In this sense, the volume offers a conceptual vocabulary that can productively inform ethnographic research on migration from Slovakia and neighboring countries and foster dialogue between international migration studies and regional ethnology.

Despite minor limitations, the volume's contribution is substantial. As is typical for edited collections, the degree of theoretical depth varies across chapters, and a synthetic concluding chapter might have further strengthened conceptual integration. Nevertheless, the editorial architecture successfully weaves diverse empirical cases into a coherent analytical framework.

Remittances as Social Practices and Agents of Change stands as an important contribution to the anthropology and sociology of migration. By centering practice, meaning, and moral embeddedness, it decisively moves beyond narrow financial interpretations and establishes a robust foundation for future interdisciplinary research on transnational social formations.

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Marja Tiilikainen, Johanna Hiitola, Abdirashid A. Ismail, Jaana Palander (Eds.):
Forced Migration and Separated Families: Everyday Insecurities and Transnational Strategies
 Springer, 2023, 225 p.



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It's not an exaggeration to say that international migration has been among the most pressing and important issues so far. Among all the types and different categorizations, forced and voluntary migration are the two overarching categories in international migration literature that encompass different trends and realities. Transnational families inherently place themselves as a reality in the literature of international migration with its special emphasis on the concept of the family. The book *Forced Migration and Separated Families: Everyday Insecurities and Transnational Strategies* edited by Marja Tiilikainen, Johanna Hiitola, Abdirashid A. Ismail, and Jaana Palander (Tiilikainen et al., 2023) therefore plays a much-needed role to delineate the interplay between forced migration and transnational families.

There are studies (Aden & Westphal, 2025; Kallio, 2019; Madziva, 2016; Urbańska, 2016) that focus on the transnational family and forced migration relationship, but they provide a limited perspective as they often portray explorative findings. This book elegantly discusses the gaps in the literature by centering on a human security perspective (Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016) through illustrating everyday insecurities. The book also contributes to the existing literature in transnational family dynamics (Baldassar et al., 2014; Baldassar & Merla, 2013; Hiitola et al., 2020), family reunification (Strik et al., 2013), forced migration (Bloch & Donà, 2018; Zetter,