

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Everyday Politics of Mobility: Translocal Livelihoods and Illegalisation in the Global South

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Abstract

This article contributes to migration and livelihood scholarship by reflecting on global and political dimensions of livelihoods and experiences of illegalisation in Central America. Based on multi-sited ethnographic research with Nicaraguan families and their migrant family members in Costa Rica, the article adopts a translocal livelihood perspective and uses the notion of everyday politics to explore migrants' mobility practices and nuance the role and reach of illegalisation in relatively accessible South–South migration. In conclusion, the article reinvigorates the notion of 'everyday politics of mobility' to incorporate the multi-sitedness, multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of translocalising livelihoods, offering a lens for future comparison of illegalisation within and beyond the so-called Global South.

Keywords: migration; mobility; translocal livelihoods; illegalisation; everyday politics; Nicaragua; Costa Rica

Introduction

About a year after meeting Pedro (30–35)¹ and his family in their village Muy Muy, Nicaragua, they took me for a walk across the lively central park of the Costa Rican town Nicoya. Like many compatriots, they temporarily entrusted relatives at home with their house, land and animals and left to earn much-needed money in Costa Rica. We ate ice-cream and strolled past the town's migration office. As migrant workers without a residency or work permit, Pedro and his wife Martina were supposed to pay for monthly stamps in their passport here, but they never did. I wondered about their ease and freedom of movement despite their lack of required documentation, but they reassured me that '*aquí no molestan*' ('here, they don't bother you').²

¹All names in this article are pseudonyms. I make use of age ranges of five years in order to most accurately reflect the ages of the research participants over multiple years of research. When referring to specific interviews, I also add their Nicaraguan or Costa Rican location.

²Author's notes, 20 Feb. 2011, Nicoya.

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When first looking into the role of migration in the livelihoods of Nicaraguan families, my initial research concern with the ‘illegality’³ of migrant family members abroad was shaped by its centrality in popular media, politics and policy, as well as in advocacy and academia across the globe.⁴ Processes of illegalisation associated with safeguarding state security and sovereignty on the one hand, and ensuing migrant vulnerability on the other, have been the subject of intense debate for at least two decades.⁵ But for research participants like Pedro, the ‘illegal’ sides of their migration never seemed their central preoccupation. This apparent contrast required further reflection on Nicaraguan families’ specific experience with (temporary) migration and the cross-border extension of their livelihoods – in spite of looming ‘illegality’.

This article starts from the notion of translocal livelihoods to enable such a reflection in two ways: it addresses the understudied global and political dimensions of livelihoods,⁶ and it considers often neglected experiences of illegalisation in the so-called Global South. First, livelihood research underscores the possibility that ‘local’ livelihoods include cross-border migration and sustained connections to various places, yet it has given less attention to the differentiations of these translocal connections.⁷ The practice of translocalising livelihoods through migration is not equally available or beneficial to all; rather it depends on, amongst others, historically shaped border relations and global labour markets as well as migrants’ nationality, ethnicity and gendered family obligations. These differentiations are part of the politics⁸ or power-geometries⁹ of people’s migratory agency.¹⁰ Looking at the differentiated ways in which people make use of migration and

³Following, amongst others, de Genova and Khosravi, I use quotes whenever I make use of ‘illegality’ and related terms, at least when directly referring to human beings, ‘to signify that I wish [the] reader to interrogate, rather than accept, their taken-for-granted character’. Nandita Sharma, ‘Travel Agency: A Critique of Anti-Trafficking Campaigns’, *Refuge*, 21: 3 (2003), p. 63; Nicholas de Genova, ‘Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31: 1 (2002), pp. 419–47; Shahram Khosravi, *Illegal Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁴Josiah McC. Heyman, ‘The Study of Illegality and Legality: Which Way Forward?’, *PoLAR*, 36: 2 (2013), pp. 304–7; Julia O’Connell Davidson, ‘Troubling Freedom: Migration, Debt, and Modern Slavery’, *Migration Studies*, 1: 2 (2013), pp. 1–20; Madeleine Reeves, ‘Clean Fake: Authenticating Documents and Persons in Migrant Moscow’, *American Ethnologist*, 40: 3 (2013), pp. 508–24.

⁵Cathy McIlwaine, ‘Legal Latins: Creating Webs and Practices of Immigration Status among Latin American Migrants in London’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41: 3 (2015), pp. 493–511.

⁶Leo de Haan, ‘The Livelihood Approach: A Critical Exploration’, *Erkunde*, 66: 4 (2012), pp. 345–57; Ian Scoones, ‘Livelihoods Perspectives and Rural Development’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36: 1 (2009), pp. 171–96; Sarah Turner, ‘Making a Living the Hmong Way: An Actor-Oriented Livelihoods Approach to Everyday Politics and Resistance in Upland Vietnam’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 102: 2 (2012), pp. 403–22.

⁷Philipp Schröder and Manja Stephan-Emmrich, ‘The Institutionalization of Mobility: Well-Being and Social Hierarchies in Central Asian Translocal Livelihoods’, *Mobilities*, 11: 3 (2016), pp. 420–43.

⁸Tim Cresswell, ‘Towards a Politics of Mobility’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28: 1 (2010), pp. 17–31;

⁹Doreen Massey, ‘Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place’, in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam and George Robertson (eds.), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 61–2.

¹⁰Uma Kothari, ‘Staying Put and Staying Poor?’, *Journal of International Development*, 15: 5 (2003), pp. 645–57; Joris Schapendonk and Griet Steel, ‘Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union’, *Annals of the Association of American*

translocalisation to improve their livelihoods ‘at home’ and in the future¹¹ contributes to moving livelihood research beyond a locally bound, largely apolitical and instrumental agenda.¹²

One of the most salient examples of differentiation in translocalising livelihoods across borders concerns migrants and migratory activities that are deemed ‘illegal’.¹³ Critical migration research has addressed the strategies, simplifications and marginalisations entailed in legal and illegal categories, culminating in a call to focus on illegalisation as a process.¹⁴ From this perspective, ‘illegality’ and related mechanisms to define inclusion and exclusion are not given but socially constructed and challenged by migrants, border authorities and other social actors.¹⁵ This also means that specific experiences of ‘illegality’ such as invisibility, discrimination and exploitation may be widespread but differ by social group and across time and space. Viewing illegalisation as part of translocal livelihoods enables a focus on how it evolves and materialises in the lives of differently situated people.

The second element of the reflection presented here holds that scholarship on illegalisation itself could be further enriched by studies of translocal livelihoods in the Global South. To my best knowledge, the proliferation of ‘illegality’ research and concepts has mainly revolved around what is deemed South–North migration, further reinforcing a general neglect of migrants and migratory dynamics within

Geographers, 104: 2 (2014), pp. 262–70; Mimi Sheller and John Urry, ‘The New Mobilities Paradigm’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 38: 2 (2006), p. 207–26.

¹¹Arjan de Haan, ‘Livelihoods and Poverty: The Role of Migration – a Critical Review of the Migration Literature’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 36: 2 (1999), pp. 1–47; Leo de Haan and Annelies Zoomers, ‘Exploring the Frontier of Livelihoods Research’, *Development and Change*, 36: 1 (2005), pp. 27–47; Frank Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, ‘The Institutionalization of Mobility’.

¹²Turner, ‘Making a Living the Hmong Way’. An exception in this regard is the attention to gender relations in livelihood analysis. See, for example, Elizabeth Francis, ‘Gender, Migration and Multiple Livelihoods: Cases from Eastern and Southern Africa’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 38: 5 (2002), pp. 167–90.

¹³Bridget Anderson and Martin Ruhs, ‘Guest Editorial: Researching Illegality and Labour Migration’, *Population, Space and Place*, 16: 3 (2010), pp. 175–9; David Kyle and Christina A. Siracusa, ‘Seeing the State Like a Migrant: Why So Many Non-Criminals Break Immigration Laws’, in Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 153–76; Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

¹⁴Heyman, ‘The Study of Illegality and Legality’. Rather than avoiding the word ‘illegal’ altogether, I join other scholars in focusing on illegalisation as a process, acknowledging the importance of the law in producing experiences of illegality, but also going beyond the law, to incorporate racialisation and other exclusionary practices and discourses that feed into ‘illegality’. See Nicolas de Genova and Ananya Roy, ‘Practices of Illegalisation’, *Antipode*, 52: 2 (2020), pp. 352–64; Caitlin E. Fouratt, ‘Temporary Measures: The Production of Illegality in Costa Rican Immigration Law’, *PoLAR*, 39: 1 (2016), pp. 144–60.

¹⁵Ronen Shamir, ‘Without Borders? Notes on Globalization as a Mobility Regime’, *Sociological Theory*, 23: 2 (2005), pp. 197–217; Corey Johnson and Reece Jones, ‘Rethinking “the Border” in Border Studies’, *Political Geography*, 30: 2 (2011), pp. 61–2; David Newman, ‘Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9: 2 (2006), pp. 171–86; Anssi Paasi, ‘Borders, Theory and the Challenge of Relational Thinking’, *Political Geography*, 30: 2 (2011), pp. 62–3; Henk van Houtum, ‘The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries’, *Geopolitics*, 10: 4 (2005), pp. 672–9.

the Global South.¹⁶ In the Central American context, a relevant exception to this tendency is Caitlin E. Fouratt's excellent study on immigration law and experiences of illegality in Costa Rica; however, this study is focused on *immigrants*, and restricted to their lives in one urban destination setting.¹⁷ The translocal livelihood considerations that are part of relatively accessible, short-distance and often temporary or cyclical South–South migration may add valuable insight into the illegalisation debate, especially during a time when South–North migration and settlement become less feasible for many.

This article aims to contribute to the interdisciplinary fields of migration and livelihood studies through a focus on the lived experiences of illegalisation in the Global South. It argues, first, that studying such illegalisation experiences is a useful strategy for addressing the neglected global and political dimensions of livelihoods and, second, that translocal livelihood research can usefully inform the illegalisation debate. To substantiate these arguments, the article builds on multi-sited ethnographic research, focusing on the translocalisation of Nicaraguan livelihoods through a selection of what I will refer to as mobility practices: the ways in which Nicaraguan migrants negotiate their migration to and within Costa Rica. These practices include how migrants cross the border legally, overstay their 30-day visa and perform paid work, and mould their Nicaraguan Otherness. The article makes use of Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet's notion of everyday politics¹⁸ to further detail and examine these practices, nuancing the role and reach of illegalisation in relatively accessible South–South migration. In conclusion, the article reinvigorates the notion of 'everyday politics of mobility' to incorporate the multi-sitedness, multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of translocalising livelihoods. This approach not only foregrounds global and political attributes of livelihoods but also allows for the comparison of illegalisation processes across a diversity of contexts, thereby strengthening migration scholarship.

The article continues with some theoretical, methodological and contextual considerations, including the sustained importance of migration for Nicaraguan livelihoods. After discussing migrants' mobility practices and analysing them in terms of everyday politics, the article offers concluding thoughts on the everyday politics of mobility, and a postscript referencing the multiple crises Nicaraguans have faced in recent years.

¹⁶Elena Fiddian-Qasmieh with Francesco Carella, 'The Position of "the South" and "South–South Migration" in Policy and Programmatic Responses to Different Forms of Migration', *Migration and Society*, 3: 1 (2020), pp. 203–12; Katja Hujo and Nicola Piper, *South–South Migration Implications for Social Policy and Development* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Some exceptions include Megan Ryburn, *Uncertain Citizenship: Everyday Practices of Bolivian Migrants in Chile* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018); Sofia Ugarte, 'Desired Formality Labor Migration, Black Markets, and the State in Chile', *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, published online, May 2021, pp. 1–14.

¹⁷Fouratt, 'Temporary Measures'. Another notable exception to mention here, though not primarily focused on migration, is Galemba's excellent study on the illegalisation involved with the smuggling of basic commodities, securitisation and neoliberalism in the Guatemalan borderlands. Rebecca B. Galemba, *Contraband Corridor: Making a Living at the Mexico–Guatemala Border* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

¹⁸Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, 'Everyday Politics in Peasant Societies (and Ours)', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36: 1 (2009), pp. 227–43.

Translocalising Livelihoods, Mobility and Illegalisation in the Global South

A recognition of the role of migration and, especially, durable linkages between people and places in the shaping of livelihoods is in line with transnational scholarship, which has enhanced the visibility and study of migrants' sustained cross-border engagements.¹⁹ While building on this legacy, this article follows recent livelihood scholarship and refers to the *translocality* of livelihoods to emphasise a possible diversity of migrations (both within and across national borders) as well as migration's anchoring in concrete local settings.²⁰ Traditionally, studies of livelihoods have often focused on 'the local', highlighting the context-specific diversity, adaptability and resilience of people's strategies to gain a meaningful living.²¹ However, when migration of family members becomes part of livelihoods, it offers an opportunity to study the ways in which local strategies are connected to broader, even global, dynamics²² as well as to other localities.²³

This translocalisation, understood here as livelihood diversification through migration and circulation of resources between household members in multiple places,²⁴ involves various actors that are differently positioned in the migration arena. Here, an explicit notion of mobility is useful: whereas migration can be seen as the act of movement, mobility refers to the disparate power to move and to decide where one lives and works.²⁵ Based on context-specific social differentiations including gender, ethnicity, nationality, age and class, mobility is stratified and can be considered a stratifying factor both within and beyond households.²⁶

¹⁹Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, 'Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration', in Steven Vertovec and Robert Cohen (eds.), *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 26–49; Nina Glick Schiller and Peggy Levitt, 'Haven't We Heard This Somewhere Before? A Substantive View of Transnational Migration Studies by Way of a Reply to Waldinger and Fitzgerald', Center for Migration and Development (CMD) Working Paper No. 06-01, Princeton University, 2006.

²⁰Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (eds.), *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak, 'Translocality: Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives', *Geography Compass*, 7: 5 (2013), pp. 373–84; Ben Etzold, 'Mobility, Space and Livelihood Trajectories: New Perspectives on Migration, Translocality and Place-Making for Livelihood Studies', in Leo de Haan (ed.), *Livelihoods and Development: New Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 44–68; Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, 'The Institutionalization of Mobility'.

²¹Anthony Bebbington, 'Capitals and Capabilities: A Framework for Analyzing Peasant Viability, Rural Livelihoods and Poverty', *World Development*, 27: 12 (1999), pp. 2021–44; Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity*; Scoones, 'Livelihoods Perspectives and Rural Development'.

²²Leo de Haan and Annelies Zoomers, 'Development Geography at the Crossroads of Livelihood and Globalization', *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 94: 3 (2003), pp. 350–62.

²³Norman Long, 'Translocal Livelihoods, Networks of Family and Community, and Remittances in Central Peru', in Josh DeWind and Jennifer Holdaway (eds.), *Migration and Development within and across Borders: Research and Policy Perspectives on Internal and International Migration* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2008), pp. 39–70; Ninna Sørensen and Karen Olwig, *Work and Migration: Life and Livelihoods in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁴Etzold, 'Mobility, Space and Livelihood Trajectories'.

²⁵Hein de Haas and Francisco Rodríguez, 'Mobility and Human Development: Introduction', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 11: 2 (2010), pp. 177–84. See Massey, 'Power-Geometry', for a broader discussion of the power-geometries of migration and differentiated mobilities.

²⁶Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility'; de Haas and Rodríguez, 'Mobility and Human Development'.

These differentiations are further shaped by macro-level dynamics such as labour markets and geopolitics. Although the spatial dispersion of livelihood strategies is generally viewed positively as an indication of people's resourcefulness, translocalisation through migration is not straightforward but shaped by multi-level power disparities.²⁷

Disparities of translocalisation become especially visible and urgent when migrants cross nation-state borders. Migration studies currently reflect a general concern with migrants that are not authorised to cross such borders and live and/or work in a particular country,²⁸ and a concern with 'illegality' in particular.²⁹ A broad range of scholarship on the illegalisation of migratory activities has challenged simplistic categories of the legal and illegal and has increased our understanding of the origins, functioning and influence of 'illegality' in the daily lives of migrants and their families. So far, the main foci within such 'illegality' scholarship have included instrumental border and migration management and the often-profitable state-created production of 'illegality',³⁰ the double-edged sword of criminalisation and victimisation,³¹ and the ambivalence of migrant status.³²

The latter in particular has sparked numerous discussions about migrant heterogeneity and agency, especially in the Global North. Although national discourses on international migration may present borders as set, omnipotent limits, the 'il/legality' of migrants and/or their practices is constructed and contradicted daily. Migrants may move in and out of the realm that is formally considered 'illegal' (for example, by combining legal entry with overstaying a visa, or legal residence with unauthorised labour). Benefitting from the mixed messages of government and employer practice, migrants may even regard the distinction between legal and illegal irrelevant

²⁷Etzold, 'Mobility, Space and Livelihood Trajectories'; Kothari, 'Staying Put'.

²⁸Although this is beside the issue at stake in this article, the share of these migrants is said to have been growing since the 1990s. See Anderson and Ruhs, 'Guest Editorial'. However, it remains difficult to estimate due to the obvious lack of (quality) data, resulting in Papademetriou's 'guesstimates' of, for example, 15–20 per cent of migrants in 2005. Demetrios G. Papademetriou, 'The Global Struggle with Illegal Migration: No End in Sight', *Migration Information Source*, 2005, available at www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=336, last access 13 Oct. 2022. This amount would probably be higher for 'non-rich' countries. For instance, Ghosh refers to estimates between 12.5 and 25 per cent. Bimal Ghosh, *Huddled Masses and Uncertain Shores: Insights into Irregular Migration* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1998).

²⁹Reeves, 'Clean Fake'.

³⁰Ruben Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014); Leo R. Chavez, 'The Condition of Illegality', *International Migration*, 45: 3 (2007), pp. 192–6; de Genova, 'Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability'; Itty Abraham and Willem van Schendel, 'Introduction: The Making of Illicitness', in van Schendel and Abraham (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things*, pp. 1–37; Anderson and Ruhs, 'Guest Editorial'; Stefanie Kron, 'Regional Responses to Transnational Migration'; Lilita Suárez-Navaz, *Rebordering the Mediterranean: Boundaries and Citizenship in Southern Europe* (New York: Berghahn, 2005).

³¹Laura M. Agustín, 'Forget Victimisation: Granting Agency to Migrants', *Development*, 46: 3 (2003), pp. 30–6; Bridget Anderson, '"Illegal Immigrant": Victim or Villain?', Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No. 64, University of Oxford, 2008; Abraham and van Schendel, 'Introduction'; Kron, 'Regional Responses to Transnational Migration'; Newman, 'Borders and Bordering'; Sharma, 'Travel Agency'.

³²Susan Coutin, *Nations of Emigrants: Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in El Salvador and the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 102; O'Connell Davidson, 'Troubling Freedom'; Sharma, 'Travel Agency'; Suárez-Navaz, *Rebordering the Mediterranean*; Ellie Vasta, 'Immigrants and the Paper Market: Borrowing, Renting and Buying Identities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34: 2 (2011), pp. 187–206.

for a broad range of social interactions.³³ In line with this, scholars have questioned taken-for-granted terminology and reflected on labels such as illegal, irregular, unauthorised, undocumented and clandestine.³⁴ The limited explanatory power of these labels becomes clear when unravelling, for example, migrant counter-strategies³⁵ and migratory careers,³⁶ as well as ‘webs’ of ir/regularity,³⁷ and spaces of il/legality³⁸ and il/licitness.³⁹ Together, these reflections on migrant heterogeneity and agency have increased our understanding of the multi-faceted and ambivalent nature of illegalisation. But how does it play out in Global South livelihoods?

To answer this question, I suggest directing our attention to the process of translocalising livelihoods and the mobility practices involved. To further detail and examine these practices, I make use of Kerkvliet’s notion of everyday politics, highlighting migrants’ experiences with ‘illegality’. The article does not intend to swell an arguably overflowing illegalisation lexicon even further by introducing yet another term. However, in the quest for finding an appropriate framing to analyse migrants’ mobility practices, established terms like counter-strategies, migratory careers, and practices of semi-compliance seemed too caught up with strategic resistance, linear migration stages and flows, or the law itself. As we will see below, the empirical material presented here requires a term that is neutral enough to capture resistance as well as compliance; strong enough to convey the disparities that are at stake; and able to accommodate the multiple movements and multi-dimensional nature of translocalising livelihoods. According to Kerkvliet:

Everyday politics involves people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources and doing so in quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that are rarely organized or direct [...] [I]t involves little or no organization, is usually low profile and private behavior, and is done by people who probably do not regard their actions as political [...] Often it is entwined with individuals and small groups’ activities while making a living [and] raising their families.⁴⁰

³³Anderson and Ruhs, ‘Guest Editorial’; Dennis Broeders and Godfried Engbersen, ‘The Fight against Illegal Migration: Identification Policies and Immigrants’ Counterstrategies’, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50: 12 (2007), pp. 1592–609; Martina Cvajner and Giuseppe Sciortino, ‘A Tale of Networks and Policies: Prolegomena to an Analysis of Irregular Migration Careers and Their Developmental Paths’, *Population, Space and Place*, 16: 3 (2009), pp. 213–25; Kyle and Siracusa, ‘Seeing the State Like a Migrant’. See also Rocha on ‘civil disobedience’ and Rumford on ‘claims-making activity’. José L. Rocha, *Expulsados de la globalización: Políticas migratorias y deportados centroamericanos* (Managua: Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica de la Universidad Centroamericana (IHNCA–UCA), 2010), pp. 274–85; Chris Rumford, ‘Seeing Like a Border’, *Political Geography*, 30: 2 (2011), p. 68.

³⁴See, for example, Michael Bommers and Giuseppe Sciortino, *Foggy Social Structures: Irregular Migration, European Labour Markets and the Welfare State* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 18.

³⁵Broeders and Engbersen, ‘The Fight against Illegal Migration’.

³⁶Cvajner and Sciortino, ‘A Tale of Networks and Policies’.

³⁷McIlwaine, ‘Legal Latins’.

³⁸Anderson and Ruhs, ‘Guest Editorial’.

³⁹Abraham and van Schendel, ‘Introduction’.

⁴⁰Kerkvliet, ‘Everyday Politics in Peasant Societies’, p. 232. The everyday politics notion is partly comparable to, but more encompassing than, ‘slantwise actions’ as described by Campbell and Heyman, and ‘quiet encroachment’ as elaborated by Bayat. See Howard Campbell and Josiah Heyman, ‘Slantwise:

Everyday politics ranges from resistance,⁴¹ to modifications and circumventions of rules, to (apparent) submission to and support for the status quo.⁴² It is precisely the combination of these forms that characterises people's efforts to carve out their livelihoods.

A general notion of everyday politics has been used in a wide array of studies, often to signal an ongoing informal and asymmetrical negotiation over space, work and well-being.⁴³ In this article, however, it is explicitly used as an analytical strategy to unravel *mobility* as a resource, negotiated to make the most of migrations that are formally restricted yet often indispensable for sustaining and improving livelihoods.⁴⁴ Particularly relevant here is a recent study on urban street vending, in which the geographers Noelani Eidse, Sarah Turner and Natalie Oswin suggest we use the notion of 'everyday politics of mobility' to underscore the hierarchies of mobility in livelihoods built on informal mobile labour.⁴⁵ The empirical material presented below will help to further elaborate this notion, extending its focus to labour across borders, and establishing its usefulness for nuancing and comparing processes of illegalisation from a translocal livelihood perspective.

Methodological Considerations

The article primarily builds on seven non-consecutive months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork between 2009 and 2014, with *Muy Muy* as its base.⁴⁶ This fieldwork mainly focused on 26 core families and included interviews, participant observations and social-mapping exercises with different family members in Nicaragua and, to a lesser extent, Costa Rica (and Spain).⁴⁷ Although for practical

Beyond Domination and Resistance on the Border', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36: 1 (2007), pp. 3–30; Asef Bayat, 'From "Dangerous Classes" to "Quiet Rebels": Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South', *International Sociology*, 15: 3 (2000), pp. 533–57.

⁴¹See also James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁴²Kerkvliet, 'Everyday Politics in Peasant Societies', p. 233. See also Turner, 'Making a Living the Hmong Way'.

⁴³See, for example, Martha Luz Rojas-Wiesner and Maria DeVargas, 'Strategic Invisibility as Everyday Politics for a Life with Dignity: Guatemalan Women Migrants' Experiences of Insecurity at Mexico's Southern Border', in Thanh-Dam Truong, Des Gasper, Jeff Handmaker and Sylvia I. Bergh (eds.), *Migration, Gender and Social Justice: Perspectives on Human Insecurity* (London: Springer, 2014), pp. 193–211.

⁴⁴The everyday politics described in this article also extend to household decision-making about who moves, when and whereto, based on gendered carework considerations: Nanneke Winters, 'Responsibility, Mobility, and Power: Translocal Carework Negotiations of Nicaraguan Families', *International Migration Review*, 48: 2 (2014), pp. 415–41.

⁴⁵I would like to thank the reviewer who alerted me to this source: Noelani Eidse, Sarah Turner and Natalie Oswin, 'Contesting Street Spaces in a Socialist City: Itinerant Vending-Scapes and the Everyday Politics of Mobility in Hanoi, Vietnam', *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 106: 2 (2016), pp. 340–9.

⁴⁶Nanneke Winters, 'Contested Connections: Mobility and Migration as Development Experiences of Translocal Livelihoods in *Muy Muy*, Nicaragua', doctoral dissertation, Institute for Development Policy and Management (IOB), University of Antwerp, 2016; see also Vered Amit, *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁷In the course of the article I will also refer to a 2014 survey that was part of extended fieldwork. For all methods, see Winters, 'Contested Connections'.

reasons the on-site Costa Rican portion of the fieldwork was restricted to two weeks, the analysis presented here is based on sustained contact with migrants and their families, not only through face-to-face fieldwork but also via regular phone calls and text messages, some of them extending beyond the five years of research as can be deduced from the postscript to this paper.

In Costa Rica, I visited and interviewed 14 male and female members of nine families (that were part of previous research in Mui Mui) with whom they share an enduring connection and commitment. Our semi-structured interviews mostly took place at their homes but also at job sites and during leisure activities. The interviews focused on journeys between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, migration goals, and daily life abroad (including family dynamics, employment experiences, and relationships with Costa Ricans). In addition, I conducted five informal interviews with male and female Costa Rican academics and entrepreneurs.⁴⁸ These focused on the image of Nicaraguans, implementation of migration laws, and human rights. The visits and interviews took place in five diverse locations, ranging from the towns of Nicoya and Quepos in coastal tourist areas; to Alajuela, the second city of Costa Rica; nearby village San Isidro de Heredia; and the country's capital San José. The diversity of these locations resulted from the different places of (temporal) residency of the migrant family members who responded positively to my request to visit them.

They formed part of a global group of migrants whose lives have become trans-local.⁴⁹ At the same time, they shared particular context-specific characteristics: most lived with spouses and/or siblings while their children stayed with caregivers in Mui Mui. None of them had Costa Rican residency, except for one who obtained hers through a round of amnesty in the 1990s. All of them had a job. Men were mostly employed in construction and infrastructure maintenance, although some of them also had experience in agriculture, and women predominantly worked in small restaurants, hotels and domestic service. These occupations reflected general employment tendencies among Nicaraguans in Costa Rica.⁵⁰ In line with broader trends, too, the migrants were mainly of working age and urban-based.⁵¹ Finally, they were not directly active in migrant rights or labour organisations, and mostly interested in staying in Costa Rica temporarily to earn money for their families 'at home'.

The fieldwork used the research strategy of 'following' translocal connections in order to obtain an in-depth view of livelihoods across borders. However, the article will also reflect the limitations of this strategy, as I mainly restricted myself to a Nicaraguan family view at the expense of exploring in depth the individual characteristics of migrants as well as the specificities of Costa Rican localities and actors. Moreover, the migrants I was able to reach were those who had successfully

⁴⁸Throughout the article, however, when I refer to research participants, I refer to migrants and their families.

⁴⁹Brickell and Datta, *Translocal Geographies*.

⁵⁰Carlos Sandoval-García, 'To Whom and to What Is Research on Migration a Contribution', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36: 9 (2013), pp. 1429–45.

⁵¹Carlos Castro, 'The Quantitative Dimension of Nicaraguan Immigration in Costa Rica: From Myth to Reality', in Carlos Sandoval-García (ed.), *Shattering Myths on Immigration and Emigration in Costa Rica* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), pp. 23–42.

maintained translocal connections. I often use the verb ‘translocalise’ throughout the article precisely to emphasise that translocal livelihoods require sustained effort and cannot be assumed as a straightforward implication of migration. Still, even though those who do not succeed in translocalising their livelihoods do not explicitly figure in the article, through its focus on illegalisation the article does recognise the struggle that goes into translocalising livelihoods.

An Introduction to MUY MUY LIVELIHOODS AND MIGRATION DYNAMICS

The livelihoods discussed here originate in the village of MUY MUY, located at approximately 150 kilometres north-east of the Nicaraguan capital Managua, home to about 15,000 people at the time of research, and characterised by high levels of poverty.⁵² In theory, the area has much potential for developing secure livelihoods, boasting an abundance of land and labour supply and a favourable climate. MUY MUY is part of an important milk and meat cluster and has a relatively well-developed infrastructure of roads and collection centres for domestic consumption as well as export. In addition, both large farms and family households grow maize, beans and other crops. This combination of livestock and agricultural activities is complemented with a modest level of non-agricultural employment predominantly based in the urban centre. However, the ongoing neoliberalisation of the rural sector reinforces and re-creates concentrations of wealth, exclusion and marginalisation in MUY MUY.⁵³ Only a minority of its families can mobilise the necessary resources to overcome the entry barriers of the milk and meat value chains. The majority are only marginally integrated.⁵⁴ Faced with limited access to key resources such as land and credit, the livelihoods of most families are fragile and consist of a combination of small-scale subsistence activities and temporal and informal jobs with the practice of buying daily necessities on credit and other local forms of debt.⁵⁵

The lack of stable, well-paid employment and the seasonality of agriculture contribute to a variety of migrations.⁵⁶ This is reflective of Nicaragua’s rural population elsewhere, which has traditionally used migration-related farm and non-farm income to diversify livelihoods and solve cash needs.⁵⁷ Their cheap mobile labour constitutes a core component of Central America’s insertion in the global economy.

⁵²Arturo Grigsby and Francisco Pérez, *Programa RuralStruc: Estrategias campesinas frente a los efectos estructurales de la globalización en la agricultura y el desarrollo rural. Reporta de segunda fase* (Managua: Nitlapan, 2009).

⁵³See also Francisco J. Pérez, ‘Nicaragua: Without Structural Changes There’ll Be No Sustainable Reduction of Rural Poverty’, *Envío*, 358 (May 2011).

⁵⁴Nanneke Winters, Griet Steel and Carlos Sosa, ‘Moving Far Away to Stay: Translocal Livelihoods, Labour Migration Corridors and Mobility in Rural Nicaragua’, in Annelies Zoomers, Maggi Leung, Kei Otsuki and Guus van Westen (eds.), *Handbook of Translocal Development and Global Mobilities* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021), pp. 13–26.

⁵⁵Nanneke Winters, ‘Embedding Remittances: A Methodological Note on Financial Diaries in Nicaragua’, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic and Social Geography)*, 108: 2 (2017), pp. 175–89.

⁵⁶Pérez, ‘Nicaragua’; Winters *et al.*, ‘Moving Far Away to Stay’; Winters, ‘Contested Connections’.

⁵⁷Giel Ton, ‘Seasonal Migration and Peasant Livelihood Strategies: Migration of Nicaraguan Smallholders to Costa Rica’, in Ruurd Ruben and Johan Bastiaansen (eds.), *Rural Development in Central America: Markets, Livelihoods and Local Governance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 210–27; Marrit van den

William I. Robinson deems this rural population part of a 'global labour pool'.⁵⁸ Moreover, Abelardo Morales Gamboa sees the migrations that characterise Central America, including Nicaragua, as an intensification and diversification of historical trajectories that build on regional inequalities and interdependencies.⁵⁹ Of particular importance in these trajectories are developments in agro-export, industrialisation and infrastructure; displacements linked to socio-economic crises, armed conflict and natural disasters; neoliberal restructuring and the consolidation of regional labour markets; and shifts in gender and class relations.⁶⁰ In quantitative terms, and without counting Nicaragua's substantial internal migration, an estimated 13 per cent of Nicaraguans lived abroad at the time of research, mostly in Costa Rica, the United States, Spain, Honduras and Panama.⁶¹ A considerable share of these migrants sent remittances, mainly from the United States, Costa Rica and Spain. On a macro-economic level, these remittances have represented around 12–13 per cent of Nicaragua's GDP since the mid-2000s and have remained relatively stable compared to other income sources.

In comparison to these national statistics, government surveys estimated relatively low migration rates for Muya Muya.⁶² However, these surveys suffer from a rather narrow and static view on migration, downplaying its pervasiveness and complexity in the village. In a representative, village-wide survey that I conducted together with two local researchers in 2014, we used locally sensitive definitions based on prior qualitative research in an effort to more effectively capture migration dynamics.⁶³ This survey showed, for example, that almost half of Muya Muya households had experience with migration, either past, present or both. About 30 per cent received remittances at the time of the survey. In addition, more than half of migrant households mixed migration destinations (that is, one or more members in the past, present or both migrated to different countries). This incidence of mixing migrations had also emerged in the ethnographic fieldwork, which showed that 15 out of the 26 core families mix destinations. This being said, however, and in line with national

Berg, 'Household Income Strategies and Natural Disasters: Dynamics Livelihoods in Rural Nicaragua', *Ecological Economics*, 69: 3 (2010), pp. 592–602.

⁵⁸William I. Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change, and Globalization* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 82 and 204.

⁵⁹Abelardo Morales Gamboa, *La diáspora de la posguerra: Regionalismo de los migrantes y dinámicas territoriales en América Central* (San José: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), 2007). See also Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, 'Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis', *Latin American Research Review*, 26: 1 (1991), pp. 75–110; and Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM), *Perfil migratorio de Nicaragua 2012* (Managua: OIM, 2013).

⁶⁰Fouratt, "'Those Who Come to Do Harm': The Framings of Immigration Problems in Costa Rican Immigration Law', *International Migration Review*, 48: 1 (2014), pp. 44–180; Abelardo Morales Gamboa, 'Replacement Migration: New Poles of Exclusion in Transborder Migrations in Central America', in Sandoval-García (ed.), *Shattering Myths*, pp. 73–84; Sandoval-García, 'To Whom and to What is Research on Migration a Contribution'.

⁶¹OIM, *Perfil migratorio*.

⁶²See, for example, Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE), *Muya Muya en cifras* (Managua: INIDE, 2008), available at www.inide.gob.ni/censos2005/CifrasMun/Matagalpa/Muya%20Muya.pdf, last access 13 Oct. 2022.

⁶³See Winters, 'Contested Connections'.

tendencies – both among the core families and the survey respondents – Costa Rica represented the most prevalent and perpetual migration destination.

This migration can be considered a vital part of *Muy Muy* livelihood translocalisation, allowing family members to earn money elsewhere, thereby complementing existing activities.⁶⁴ Although earning money abroad is usually entangled with other reasons to migrate, such as experiencing adventure and escaping stressful relationships, most of the research participants are entrusted with family responsibilities that make money a key goal of migration.⁶⁵ This money is intended to be used for a range of purposes such as daily necessities, debt repayment and domestic appliances, as well as for larger livelihood investments in education and housing.⁶⁶ These investments are commonly accepted and sustain (temporary) migration to Costa Rica.

Nicaraguan Migrants in Costa Rica

After a sharp migration increase in the 1990s, in 2011 almost 288,000 Nicaraguans were living in Costa Rica, which equalled about 6.6 per cent of the total population.⁶⁷ Looking at illegalisation seems particularly pertinent in the Nicaragua–Costa Rica context because of the recent increase in ‘non-documentation’ of migrants in Costa Rica.⁶⁸ This increase is closely linked to the immigration law of 2010. This law has raised institutional barriers and made migrants responsible for a regularisation that has become increasingly complicated and expensive.⁶⁹ Another implication of this law is the internalisation of the border well beyond Costa Rica’s territorial limits. This internalisation not only includes increased policing, but also a dispersal of ‘comprehensive migration management’ across different public institutions in the face of the ‘security threat’ that ‘illegal’ migrants pose.⁷⁰ By far the largest migrant group, Nicaraguans are protagonists in Costa Rican discourses of migration security.

⁶⁴Although this focus on accumulating financial capital may seem to suggest otherwise, this article does not intend to adopt a simplistic perspective on livelihoods. Research participants use money as an entry point for (achieving) a broader ideal of well-being (which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article, but see Winters, ‘Contested Connections’). Earning money in different locations testifies to research participants’ desire to diversify and secure and hopefully improve their livelihoods, benefiting from the human and social capital of their families and using financial capital for covering mobility costs, other household expenses and, if possible, investing in assets.

⁶⁵Winters, ‘Responsibility, Mobility, and Power’.

⁶⁶See also Winters, ‘Embedding Remittances’.

⁶⁷Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC), *X Censo Nacional de Población, Costa Rica* (San José: INEC, 2011). Similar to migration estimates elsewhere I expect this number to be an underestimation of Nicaraguan migrants present in the country due to the irregularity and temporality that characterise this particular migration.

⁶⁸Sandoval-García, ‘To Whom and to What is Research on Migration a Contribution?’.

⁶⁹Fouratt, ‘“Those Who Come to Do Harm”’. See also Suárez-Navaz, *Rebordering the Mediterranean*, Chapter 4, for a discussion of the links between contradictory regularisation processes and continued illegalisation in Spain.

⁷⁰For example, through assigning the national healthcare agency a key role in migrant regularisation. Koen Voorend, ‘“Shifting In” State Sovereignty: Social Policy and Migration Control in Costa Rica’, *Transnational Social Review: A Social Work Journal*, 4: 2–3 (2014), pp. 207–25; Fouratt, ‘“Those Who Come to Do Harm”’.

The perceived threat and illegality of Nicaraguan migrants is intimately connected to persistent stigmatisation. Throughout various segments of Costa Rican society, notably those of media and politics, Costa Rica's 'unique character' has historically been constructed by contrasting it with a negative image of Nicaragua and Nicaraguans.⁷¹ The latter are generally perceived to be violent due to their history of political turbulence, while Costa Rica's longstanding democracy presumably equals peaceful citizens. Nicaraguans are also portrayed as poor and dark-skinned, and Costa Ricans as middle-class and white. Despite their contribution to the Costa Rican economy, Nicaraguan migrants are held responsible for much social instability, crime and disease in Costa Rica, engendering discrimination and exploitation.⁷² In short, they have come to represent an undesirable and threatening Otherness, which is compounded by processes of illegalisation.

Yet in my conversations with the research participants in Costa Rica, the issue of 'illegality' was less prominent than expected. A similar impression emerged in the results of the 2014 survey in *Muy Muy* discussed above. For example, in both reasons for returning and reasons for not migrating, the responses 'lack of documents' and 'deportation' figured relatively low.⁷³ To further reflect on this apparent contrast, I now turn to a selection of crucial ways in which Nicaraguan migrants negotiate their migration to and within Costa Rica. In the next sections, I will discuss these mobility practices of legal border crossing, overstaying and working, and moulding Nicaraguan Otherness.⁷⁴

Legally Crossing the Nicaragua–Costa Rica Border

In order to work in Costa Rica, Nicaraguan migrants first need to cross the territorial border between the two countries. Despite Nicaraguans' image as 'illegal' migrants,⁷⁵ most of the research participants normally cross this border with the required documents at an official border crossing. They arrange their birth certificate, passport and consular visa in Nicaragua and obtain a 30-day visa upon entering Costa Rica.⁷⁶ In early 2011, I travelled from Managua to Costa Rica via the main border crossing point of Peñas Blancas in the same way the research participants usually travel, by local bus. Judging from my observations of Nicaraguan travellers and subsequent interviews with the research participants, this way of travelling and the administrative procedures and actual crossing from the Nicaraguan to the Costa Rican side are considered feasible. Still, this feasibility does not entirely preclude border crossings through *el monte* (the more remote, less populated areas),

⁷¹Carlos Sandoval-García, *Threatening Others: Nicaraguans and the Formation of National Identities in Costa Rica* (Athens, OH: Ohio University, Centre for International Studies, 2004); Ignacio Dobles Oropeza, Gabriela Vargas Selva, Krissia Amador Rojas and Massiel Arroyo Sibaja, 'La inmigración y el poder legislativo en Costa Rica: Discursos y acciones políticas', *Revista Reflexiones*, 92: 1 (2013), pp. 97–108.

⁷²See, for example, Sandoval-García (ed.), *Shattering Myths*; and on Costa Rica as a welfare magnet for Nicaraguan migrants: Voorend, 'Shifting In' State Sovereignty'.

⁷³Winters, 'Contested Connections'.

⁷⁴In ethical terms, I do not consider this article to reveal sensitive information that may harm migrants and/or their livelihoods because these mobility practices are tacitly 'known'.

⁷⁵Sandoval-García, *Threatening Others*.

⁷⁶See also Kron, 'Regional Responses to Transnational Migration'.

intended to avoid border control at an official checkpoint. Describing some features of such irregular border crossings may further clarify the preference for legal entry.

A Costa Rican friend who picked me up from his side of the border could easily indicate a number of paths used for irregular border crossings. However, the research participants only consider this option in case of a lack of *papeles* (the required documents),⁷⁷ as it typically involves a ‘coyote’ (people smuggler) and higher costs. Eduardo (25–30), who has been working on and off in Costa Rica for more than eight years, provided an example of this type of crossing. He normally enters the country through Peñas Blancas, but once he crossed the border irregularly to accompany some friends without *papeles*. In Ciudad Quesada, north from San José, the Costa Rican police caught them. They were held for one night and let go the following day, ‘only to try again’ (February 2011, Alajuela). Not taking into account the costs of repeated tries, Eduardo estimated that an irregular border crossing can cost up to US\$300, while you pay about US\$60 for a legal crossing.⁷⁸ As legal entry is relatively cheap and clear-cut, it is the norm among research participants as long as their *papeles* are in order.

Just like the preference for legal entry does not fit the image of Nicaraguans as ‘illegal’ migrants, their perception of the risks of an irregular border crossing does not fit the typical perils of illegalisation that Central Americans elsewhere suffer, such as extortion, kidnapping and other types of violence.⁷⁹ This is not to say there is no threat of abuse by coyotes, law enforcers and criminal groups. However, this threat appears to be less immediate in this particular context, as even an irregular Nicaragua–Costa Rica border crossing is presented as relatively feasible. For example, Diego (20–25), who has experience as a seasonal worker in rural Costa Rica, once went by bus and on foot with a small group of Nicaraguans and the help of two coyotes. When I asked him whether he was scared, he admitted to the risk of snakes, but not to human abuse (February 2010, Muy Muy).⁸⁰ Diego’s account illustrates how, in terms of danger, the Nicaragua–Costa Rica border crossing seems almost incomparable to, for example, traversing the desert between Mexico and the United States, or the Darién jungle between Colombia and Panama.⁸¹

A relatively carefree attitude towards coyotes, who may be considered facilitators rather than possible abusers, further clarifies this point.⁸² For instance, the sisters Adriana (20–25) and Clara (15–20) trusted the coyote who accompanied them

⁷⁷See also Rocha, *Expulsados de la globalización*.

⁷⁸See also Kron, ‘Regional Responses to Transnational Migration’.

⁷⁹Wendy Vogt, ‘Crossing Mexico: Structural Violence and the Commodification of Undocumented Central American Migrants’, *American Ethnologist*, 40: 4 (2013), pp. 764–80.

⁸⁰Alvarenga wrote that avoiding border patrols means long walks, hiding, and enduring hunger; but also that, with experience, the journey does not have to be so troubled. Patricia Alvarenga, *Conflictiva convivencia: Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica* (San José: FLACSO, 1997), pp. 24–38.

⁸¹Although Diego did refer to snakes (and not as a metaphor for smugglers or other human actors), the natural environment of the Nicaragua–Costa Rica border seems much less dangerous than either the desert or the jungle. See Nanneke Winters, ‘Haciendo-lugar en tránsito: Reflexión sobre la migración africana y trabajo de campo en Darién, Panamá’, *Revista Interdisciplinaria da Mobilidade Humana*, 27: 56 (2019), available at <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-85852503880005613>, last access 6 Dec. 2022.

⁸²See also Wendy Vogt, ‘Stuck in the Middle with You: The Intimate Labours of Mobility and Smuggling along Mexico’s Migrant Route’, *Geopolitics*, 20: 2 (2016), pp. 366–86.

during their last trip to Costa Rica when, to benefit from a sudden work opportunity, they crossed the border irregularly because Clara could not arrange her *papeles* in time. Their coyote not only bribes local police but also transports migrants' newly acquired goods to their families in Nicaragua. According to the sisters, 'his services are expensive but secure' (February 2011, Alajuela). The price of a coyote's services, however, adds to other potential costs in case of an encounter with authorities. As in Eduardo's case, migrants who enter Costa Rica irregularly, get caught by law enforcers and are sent back to Nicaragua have to pay the expenses of a new trip and possibly a bribe. These additional costs of bribes or fines and future trips reinforce the research participants' preference for a legal border crossing.

Overstaying and Working

Once in Costa Rica, the research participants know they are supposed to go back to Nicaragua within a month or pay for monthly stamps in their passport, and they know they are not allowed to work. However, they usually choose to stay longer without paying monthly and work as much as possible, thereby becoming 'illegal' in Costa Rican legal terms. Overstaying, a well-known practice in the global migration literature,⁸³ and working without the appropriate documents may be a strategic consideration or else just something that happens, but it is often a consequence of administrative obstacles.⁸⁴ For most of the research participants, the process of obtaining stamps, work permits or residency is too expensive and complicated.⁸⁵

Furthermore, few of the research participants contemplate ways to remain or become 'legal' (again). This suggests they may attach little importance to il/legal categories⁸⁶ because an important part of their daily lives – their capacity for supporting their families in *Muy Muy* – remains relatively undisturbed despite being regarded as 'illegal' residents and employees. This attitude is reflected, for example, in the case of Pedro and Martina from the introduction. The research participants commonly use the phrase '*no molestan*' ('they don't bother you') to indicate that, generally, they do not fear being profiled, stopped and interrogated. In their experience, after overstaying, at the moment they legally exit Costa Rica and go back to Nicaragua, the migration authorities '*no dicen nada*' ('don't say anything').⁸⁷

⁸³Abraham and van Schendel, 'Introduction'; Broeders and Engbersen, 'The Fight against Illegal Migration'; Sarah S. Willen, 'Towards a Critical Phenomenology of "Illegality": State Power, Criminalization, and Abjectivity among Undocumented Migrant Workers in Tel Aviv, Israel', *International Migration*, 45: 3 (2007), pp. 8–38.

⁸⁴See also Sang E. Lee, 'Unpacking the Packing Plant: Nicaraguan Migrant Women's Work in Costa Rica's Evolving Export Agriculture Sector', *Signs*, 35: 2 (2010), pp. 317–42; Khalid Koser, 'Dimensions and Dynamics of Irregular Migration', *Population, Space and Place*, 16: 3 (2010), pp. 181–93.

⁸⁵For a detailed description of the Costa Rican immigration system and the costs and complications it entails, see Fouratt, 'Temporary Measures'.

⁸⁶See Milagros Barahona, 'Estudio de hogares de trabajadoras emigrantes nicaragüenses', *Entre Redes*, 9 (April 2002), pp. 14–17. This attitude may also have to do with the perception that Costa Rican laws may change (again): see Fouratt, 'Temporary Measures'.

⁸⁷According to Abraham and van Schendel, the way people talk about those 'illegal' practices they themselves consider licit is meaningful because '[d]ecriminalizing such practices involves linguistic innovation'. The expression '*no molestan*' actually shifts responsibility from the 'illegal' Nicaraguan to the harassing migration authorities. And although the expression '*no dicen nada*' recognises the fact that something

Such experiences enable the practice of overstaying and working without the required documentation.

Despite the recent internalisation of Costa Rica's border as explained above, a relative lack of Costa Rican institutional capacity contributes to a relative lack of migrant 'bothering'. Although this may result in a normalisation of migrants' presence, migration authorities remain present and may become active in specific contexts.⁸⁸ This (strategic) ambiguity can be related to what Stefanie Kron calls 'tolerance levels', according to which 'certain actors, movements and practices of irregular cross-border mobility are tolerated while others are criminalized'.⁸⁹ The research participants indicate a number of moments and places with little tolerance, where there is more control and risk of getting caught. These include migration raids, (mobile) checkpoints along northern roads, beaches where much (migrant-dependent) construction takes place, and sites that are known for Nicaraguans congregating, such as La Merced park in San José. In this sense, the way in which the research participants carry themselves in different contexts becomes a matter of interest.

The research participants connect their minimal experience of law enforcement while overstaying with being as non-intrusive as possible. A common phrase to denote this is '*no andar vagando*' (literally, 'not to roam' or 'loiter'). *Vagar* refers to a range of negative public behaviour, from hanging around, making noise and being drunk to committing petty crime. Avoiding this type of conspicuous behaviour serves to limit experiences of scrutiny. Rosario (45–50), who has been going back and forth to Costa Rica for a decade, explicitly linked the ability to not attract unwanted attention with a decreased risk of getting caught by migration authorities: 'If you don't hang around, *la migra* doesn't bother you' (March 2011, Quepos).⁹⁰ This also goes for unwanted attention from people other than migration authorities. As Miguel (20–25), who has been coming to work in rural Costa Rica for several years, explained: 'I've never suffered discrimination because I don't hang around' (February 2011, San Isidro de Heredia).⁹¹ The research participants thus feel they can overstay and work without being 'bothered' as long as they remain relatively non-intrusive in the public sphere – in effect, an individualised coping strategy for dealing with structural exclusion.

Moulding Nicaraguan Otherness

Being non-intrusive, however, is only part of what it may entail to be Nicaraguan in Costa Rica, which is not only about behaviour but also about appearance and presentation. By entering, living and working in Costa Rica, the Nicaraguan research participants become 'Others', and an important aspect of Nicaraguan Othering

could have been said, it also downplays the importance of overstaying. Abraham and van Schendel, 'Introduction', p. 18.

⁸⁸Moreover, precisely through the internalisation of the border they indirectly make their presence felt at certain moments, such as when illegalised populations need healthcare. See Voorend, "Shifting In" State Sovereignty'.

⁸⁹Kron, 'Regional Responses to Transnational Migration'.

⁹⁰The Spanish quote: '*Si no andas vagando, la migra no te molesta*'.

⁹¹See also Alvarenga on migrants' internalisation of Costa Rican norms and their direct or indirect rejection of fellow Nicaraguans. Alvarenga, 'Conflictiva convivencia'.

concerns their supposedly distinctive looks.⁹² This is not lost on the research participants, as illustrated by the demeanour of the sisters Adriana and Clara during our interview in Alajuela's central park. Throughout the interview they pointed out fashionable bags, shoes and hairstyles of passing Costa Ricans, at the same time looking down on Nicaraguan passers-by as '*cholitos*' (a pejorative, racialised term sometimes used for peasant or Indigenous populations) because of their outdated style. They also commented on their darker skin colour, suggesting 'you have to protect your skin in order not to get tanned like that' (February 2011, Alajuela). Mirroring longstanding ideas about Nicaraguan Otherness, the sisters' comments show how Nicaraguans may readily become targets of scrutiny. This increases the need to mould appearance and presentation.

The research participants are familiar with adapting ways of dressing and speaking in an effort to avoid association with Nicaraguan Otherness as this may put their living and working in Costa Rica in danger. They may go to great lengths to fit in. When I visited Eduardo in Alajuela, only one year after seeing him in Nicaragua, he looked so different that I did not even recognise him at first. On the bus ride to his house I also noticed how his accent had changed and how he used *tico* (Costa Rican) expressions for certain things. Although Eduardo may have different reasons for changing the way he presents himself, which may or may not be strategically related to his Nicaraguan Otherness, his new ways of dressing and speaking help him to better fit in daily Costa Rican (work) life. At the same time, however, this practice may be ridiculed by fellow Nicaraguans. As Martín (25–30), who seems to blend in almost seamlessly himself, explained, 'there are also Nicaraguans that arrive in Costa Rica today and talk like *ticos* tomorrow. In Nicaragua, people will mock them.' Martín added for effect: '*¿Te enfermaste?!*' ('Did you get sick/crazy?!') (March 2011, Quepos). The moulding of Nicaraguan Otherness is thus an ambiguous process.

In fact, some of the research participants see room for capitalising on Nicaraguan Otherness in the job market. They indicate there is a possibility of displaying certain characteristics that are positively regarded, at least by Costa Rican employers, such as Nicaraguans' perceived docility and capacity for heavy labour.⁹³ Alba (35–40) emphasised this image when she told me about her experience as a domestic worker in Costa Rica and portrayed female Costa Rican housekeepers as rather careless and '*haragán*' ('lazy') (September 2010, Muy Muy). Cedro (25–30), who works in the construction sector of the Quepos tourist area, also underlined supposed differences in work ethic. He commented that in order to get and keep a job, and be able to send money home, it is important not to be '*respondón*' ('cheeky') like Costa Rican workers, who, according to Cedro, tend to 'talk back' (March 2011, Quepos). In the same vein, the owner of a hotel told me a familiar tale about the 'good' Nicaraguan workers, who '*trabajan como caballos*' ('work

⁹²Karen Masís and Laura Paniagua, 'Jokes about Nicaraguans in Costa Rica: Symbolic Barriers, Social Control Mechanisms, Identity Constructors', in Sandoval-García (ed.), *Shattering Myths*, pp. 287–302; Sandoval-García, *Threatening Others*.

⁹³Perhaps this can be related to the 'strategic visibility' of Salvadorean migrants in the United States as elaborated by Bailey and his colleagues: Adrian J. Bailey, Richard A. Wright, Alison Mountz and Ines M. Miyares, '(Re)producing Salvadoran Transnational Geographies', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92: 1 (2002), pp. 125–44.

like horses’) from early in the morning until late in the afternoon (February 2011, Heredia). By ‘*no vagar*’, fitting in and/or standing out in a supposedly ‘positive’ way, the research participants can try to mould their Otherness depending on the immediate context, in ways that best serve their immediate migration goals.

Migrants’ Everyday Politics

The mobility practices described above are part of migrants’ efforts to translocalise their MUY MUY livelihoods in a South–South border context and can be further detailed and examined as different forms of everyday politics, which, as mentioned above, may range from resistance, to modifications and circumventions of rules, to (apparent) submission to and even support for the status quo. Firstly, the research participants’ legal border crossing is in compliance with Costa Rican regulations. What is more, the very existence of a border maintains vast differences in (economic) opportunities between the two countries. In this sense, the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica represents not so much an obstruction but a possibility, a bridge or an ‘engine of connectivity’⁹⁴ that enables and normalises a viable route towards translocalising livelihoods. To make the most of this translocalisation, it makes sense to keep border crossing as cheap as possible. Because of the (economic) disadvantages of entering by irregular means, the research participants prefer to arrange the required documents and use these to enter legally. The mobility practice of legal entry, in compliance with the Costa Rican nation-state and generally perceived as unproblematic, reflects the normalisation of translocalising livelihoods.

Moreover, like two sides of the same coin, the normalisation of extending livelihoods beyond Nicaraguan borders also routinises irregular crossings. Persistent marginalisation in MUY MUY combined with a burdensome bureaucracy of Nicaraguan institutions may make migration feel necessary and encourage its counterpart of ‘illegal’ migration at the same time. Diego told me that he did two (out of three) border crossings irregularly because his passport had expired (February 2010, MUY MUY). He mentioned that he did not go to Managua to arrange his passport and visa because he does not ‘know’ Managua. Although I am not familiar with the details, it is likely that Diego first managed to get a passport because he was accompanied by people who knew the ins and outs of the Managuan administrative labyrinth. Presumably, he was not in this position at a later stage. Although individual reasons for lacking the required documentation may vary, the confusing and time-consuming bureaucratic hassle of obtaining this documentation suggests that institutional deficiencies in Nicaragua limit legal border crossing options.⁹⁵ As Diego’s account indicates, potential migrants from MUY MUY may be more familiar with (and possibly more trusting of) an irregular border crossing than the passport and visa procedures *within* Nicaragua.⁹⁶ Given ample local experience with migration and translocalisation, however, these deficiencies do not necessarily stand in the way of the bridging function of the Nicaragua–Costa Rica border but rather

⁹⁴Rumford, ‘Seeing Like a Border’, p. 67.

⁹⁵Fouratt, ‘Temporary Measures’, pp. 149–50; José Luis Rocha, ‘La migración “ilegal” de centroamericanos, nicaragüenses y chinandeganos’, *Envío*, 382 (Feb. 2014).

⁹⁶This points to the possibility that ‘illegality’ abroad has its roots in a migrant’s country of origin. See Khosravi, ‘*Illegal*’ Traveller.

encourage migrants to deviate from formal regulations if need be. Here, engaging everyday politics as an analytical lens brings out simultaneous compliance and evasion and shows how illegalisation is part and parcel of an otherwise feasible legal livelihood translocalisation.

Secondly, overstaying and working without the required documentation are examples of evasive and deviant everyday politics that enable flexible translocalisation. Avoiding indefinite and insecure administrative procedures in Costa Rica⁹⁷ can save precious time, spending it instead on the much more urgent activity of earning money while staying on top of family matters 'at home'.⁹⁸ This is especially important given the volatility of labour and other livelihood strategies in Mui Mui, as well as changing life-cycle needs. Rosario referred to this in an earlier conversation about her off-and-on job as a domestic worker in Quepos (February 2010, Mui Mui). Rosario goes to Costa Rica when her household has specific needs, such as a graduation that is coming up. She can go back to Nicaragua whenever she is tired or misses her younger children too much. When her mother-in-law suddenly passed away, she was also able to travel home quickly, even though Quepos is located relatively far from Nicaragua. Having received the news of her passing in the evening, Rosario and a son that worked as a taxi driver left Quepos at midnight and arrived in Mui Mui late afternoon the following day. They were just in time for the funeral. Their attendance was only possible because border authorities did not make a problem of Rosario's overstaying, and the informal character of her job enabled a sudden leave (March 2011, Quepos). The practices of entering, overstaying and working are thus in tandem with translocal livelihoods, involving compliance, evasion and deviance simultaneously.

These mobility practices show how migrants capitalise on the contradictions of uneven government control and employers who do not care about migratory status, or who prefer migrants without working permits because they are cheaper and easier to fire. Evidently, this also means that an evasion of law enforcement by being as non-intrusive as possible may aggravate illegalisation-related vulnerabilities such as the lack of basic protection in terms of salary, work hours and social security. Still, the research participants tend to focus on the higher earnings in Costa Rica. For example, although Rosario does not intend to stay permanently in Costa Rica because of her children in Mui Mui, she continues to migrate because it enables her to keep up with the demands of her household. Like other research participants, she complained about the low salaries in Nicaragua, labelling them as '*maltrato*' ('abuse, exploitation') (July 2009, Mui Mui). For women with young children specifically, low local salaries can even be a reason to disregard jobs in Mui Mui altogether, as they simply do not seem worth the effort of making alternative child-care arrangements.⁹⁹ For example, as a domestic worker, a popular occupation for female migrants in Costa Rica, the research participants earn between three and ten times more than in Nicaragua. Even when taking into account the higher cost of living in Costa Rica, these earnings seem to make up for, or at least mitigate,

⁹⁷Fouratt, 'Temporary Measures'.

⁹⁸This also means, as de Regt asserts in her study on Ethiopian domestic workers in Yemen, that being 'illegal' is not automatically disadvantageous. Marina de Regt, 'Ways to Come, Ways to Leave: Gender, Mobility, and Il/legality among Ethiopian Domestic Workers in Yemen', *Gender & Society*, 24: 2 (2010), pp. 237–60.

⁹⁹Winters *et al.*, 'Moving Far Away to Stay'.

possible vulnerabilities and continue to make Costa Rica an attractive (temporary) destination. From a translocal livelihood perspective, immediate monetary gains carry more weight than social protection, especially when the latter is also scarce in Nicaragua. In rationalising illegalisation-related vulnerabilities, the research participants showcase evasive and deviant politics, necessary for maintaining productive cross-border connections.

Finally, the research participants display predominantly compliant everyday politics in the process of moulding their Nicaraguan Otherness. Regardless of their geographical, ethnic and linguistic proximity to Costa Ricans, the historically shaped ambiguous position of Nicaraguans urges the research participants to selectively present their identity to secure their presence and job in Costa Rica. The way in which they try to avoid stigmatisation as threatening Others can be compared to Barak Kalir's description of Latinos' practices in Israel.¹⁰⁰ According to Kalir, despite their 'illegal' status, Latino migrants try to and often succeed in 'passing as Israelis' because of their similar appearance. According to Patricia Alvarenga, the capacity for such 'passing' of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica not only depends on behaviour and appearance but also on experience.¹⁰¹ By practising '*no vagar*', fitting in and standing out positively, the research participants try to pass, if not as Costa Ricans, then at least as 'acceptable', unthreatening Nicaraguans that do not evoke images of 'illegality': relatively invisible, docile and hardworking.

However, such compliance may further reinforce the marginalisation of Nicaraguan migrants,¹⁰² as government and employer practices, Costa Rican imaginaries and pressing livelihood needs all work together to sustain stigmatisation. Despite the research participants' general view of Costa Ricans as *bien educados* (well-mannered), most of them have experienced racist and derogatory jokes and comments on the street and in the media (see Figure 1).¹⁰³ Cecilia (30–35), Rosario's daughter living in Quepos and the only research participant who benefitted from amnesty in the 1990s, illustrated this ambivalence. In her experience, 'here [in Costa Rica], the people are more civilised than in Nicaragua. I haven't had many bad experiences, and when it happens, I do not pay them any attention, it is pure ignorance of those who have not suffered and have never left their country' (March 2011, Quepos). The political, socio-economic and cultural factors that sustain Nicaraguan stigmatisation are pervasive and can emerge in the daily life of any migrant, 'illegal' or not, and in spaces as diverse as the workplace, the school and the home.

The latent presence of illegalisation may preclude a more outright contestation of Otherness. However, certain contexts provide the research participants with specific opportunities to 'be Nicaraguan'. For example, in San José, La Merced park and its surroundings are known for Nicaraguans carving out a space for themselves.¹⁰⁴ As can be observed, they gather there to socialise, enjoy Nicaraguan food and send

¹⁰⁰Barak Kalir, *Latino Migrants in the Jewish State: Undocumented Lives in Israel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

¹⁰¹Alvarenga, 'Conflictiva convivencia'.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³Masis and Paniagua, 'Jokes about Nicaraguans'.

¹⁰⁴Gabriela I. Horbaty Mejía, *Las redes sociales de la población migrante nicaragüense en el parque de La Merced en San José, Costa Rica* (Managua: Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), 2004). See also Rumford, 'Seeing Like a Border'.



Figure 1. The Text ‘Get Out Nicaraguans, Sons of Bitches’, Written next to a Public Telephone in the Bus Station of Nicoya, Costa Rica
Source: Photograph by author, 2011.

remittances from offices in its adjacent streets (see [Figure 2](#)). Perhaps being part of a larger group provides individual Nicaraguan migrants with a certain degree of confidence to reveal their identity, whereas this might be missing when they are alone, or face direct scrutiny from Costa Rican authorities. As even La Merced park is regularly patrolled by migration authorities, particular migrants may need to evade these places and controls to safeguard their presence and job in Costa Rica. Specific circumstances thus generate specific ways of moulding Otherness,¹⁰⁵ and the resulting configuration of everyday politics depends on a translocal balancing act between current and future needs in Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

¹⁰⁵In this sense it is also important to note that an increasing number of households in Costa Rica have members of both Nicaraguan and Costa Rican origin, which complicates Othering processes. See Castro, ‘The Quantitative Dimension’. In addition, although stigmatisation is pervasive, it is not stable and its shape and significance change over time. See Dobles Oropeza *et al.*, ‘La inmigración y el poder legislativo en Costa Rica’.



Figure 2. Waiting in Line to Send Remittances in a Side Street of La Merced Park, San José, Costa Rica
Source: Photograph by author, 2011.

Concluding Thoughts on the Everyday Politics of Mobility

The normalisation of temporary migration and the intentions and efforts to maintain links to ‘home’ in Nicaragua are part of an ongoing yet contested translocalisation of livelihoods, in which borders and authorities along with common Costa Rican imaginaries play an ambivalent role, evoking opportunities as well as vulnerabilities. Mixing ‘legalities’ and ‘illegalities’, migrants’ mobility practices testify to this ambivalence. The research participants prefer to cross the border with the required documentation at an official border crossing point, yet they do not present themselves monthly at a migration office to pay for the compulsory stamp in their passports. They work although they know they are not allowed to do so, but otherwise they avoid attracting risky attention. In short, and perhaps in a ‘moral claim’¹⁰⁶ to livelihood and a modest effort to ‘reposition the inequalities’ of their daily lives,¹⁰⁷ they follow the need to migrate and work elsewhere whereas the possibilities to do so are partially illegalised.

In the article, the notion of everyday politics has provided a useful lens to further detail and examine migrants’ mobility practices, capturing their compliance, evasion and deviance simultaneously. Based on the analysis, I suggest reinvigorating the notion of ‘everyday politics of mobility’, and placing it more firmly in the process of cross-border livelihood translocalisation, to allow for both the inclusion and the comparability of illegalisation. Doing so enables a substantial integration of global and political dimensions in livelihood research. Moreover, unravelling everyday politics of mobility as part of Global South livelihood translocalisation adds valuable

¹⁰⁶Kyle and Siracusa, ‘Seeing the State Like a Migrant’.

¹⁰⁷Turner, ‘Making a Living the Hmong Way’.

insight into illegalisation debates. To be sure, it is not the combination of 'legalities' and 'illegalities' in migrants' mobility practices that is new here. Although the everyday politics notion usefully allows for studying these as a complex constellation of compliance, evasion and deviance, they have been amply recognised in other literatures. However, it is the combination of these 'legalities' and 'illegalities' while taking into account several migratory contexts simultaneously that is innovative.

Options to settle in the Global North have become increasingly limited for many, and the extended journeys and illegalised lives of migrants have become a structural characteristic of societies across the globe. Here, a 'Global South rationale' of translocal livelihoods helps to understand and compare lived experiences of illegalisation beyond linear migration thinking. The everyday politics of mobility that are part of such livelihoods highlight the (temporary) adjustments to multiple locations and contexts, which produce specific socio-cultural forms of dealing with exclusion and exploitation, tied up with making a living across borders. They also highlight how migration concerns may not revolve around the legality of specific family members, but rather around a less-than-ideal yet common cross-border livelihood that incorporates different livelihood activities in different places, and that may or may not include permanent re-location. In short, by engaging the everyday politics of mobility notion, we integrate the multi-sitedness, multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of translocalising livelihoods. This allows us to compare illegalisation across wide-ranging contexts.

Such comparison is important as the specific characteristics of a location or a community, notably its urban or rural character and its own history of migration and migrant reception, can be expected to exert a substantial influence over illegalisation. Another defining aspect, which is beyond the scope of this article, concerns the learned and embodied interpersonal differences and social positionings that are likely to play a role in migrants' capacity for specific mobility practices.¹⁰⁸ For example, Cecilia's account above illustrates how, even when in possession of all the required documents, stigmatisation is evident in certain settings; yet she displays an ability or willingness to ignore provocation that may distinguish her from others.¹⁰⁹ Place-based, embodied and social differentiations influence the role and reach of illegalisation in translocalising livelihoods – including the extent to which it affects migrants' anxiety and overall health.¹¹⁰

Persistent poverty, socio-economic marginalisation and global inequality contribute to a contested normalisation of translocal livelihoods, in which neither 'the right not to migrate' nor 'the right to migrate' are respected.¹¹¹ This normalisation encourages mobility practices like those of Pedro, Martina and the other migrants described in this article. For them, the illegalised types of migration that are part of translocal livelihoods may result in conditions of 'permanent temporariness'¹¹² in a disparate, globalised Central American economy that strategically illegalises

¹⁰⁸Nanneke Winters, 'Beyond the Bird in the Cage? Translocal Embodiment and Trajectories of Nicaraguan Female Migrants in Seville, Spain', *Geoforum*, 116 (Nov. 2020), pp. 243–51.

¹⁰⁹For the importance of 'performance beyond documents', see also Reeves, 'Clean Fake'.

¹¹⁰Willen, 'Towards a Critical Phenomenology'.

¹¹¹Author's interview with Carlos Sandoval-García, 1 March 2011, UCR San José; Rocha, *Expulsados de la globalización*.

¹¹²Bailey et al., '(Re)producing Salvadoran Transnational Geographies'.

them.¹¹³ Although the research participants' mobility practices can be considered 'meaningful and manageable' for improving their livelihoods and future lives 'at home', their daily preoccupations seem to preclude collective action for social justice,¹¹⁴ rather reinforcing the exclusionary socio-economic and political mechanisms at the root of illegalisation. Whether these mobility practices can provide ground for broader resistance and societal transformations in the long run remains an open question.¹¹⁵

Even so, in-depth and comparable knowledge of migrants' mobility practices in the context of translocal livelihoods is valuable for advocacy as well as for migration scholarship. Initiatives concerned with migrants' rights and well-being may find it a useful starting point for supporting them in negotiating their migration, labour and experiences of illegalisation. It is expected here that more restricted and distanced South–North settings may give rise to different translocal ways of living. Scholars, then, may find it useful to further explore the relationship between livelihood translocalisation and illegalisation across space and time, by engaging the notion of everyday politics of mobility to incorporate, analyse and compare mobility practices within and between the Global North and South.

Postscript

Between fieldwork and finalising this article, much has happened in Nicaragua. The start of manifest social protest and political violence in early 2018, generating economic crisis and new refugee migration, and the Covid-19 pandemic have increased insecurity and state securitisation within Nicaragua as well as along Central American borders. In June 2018, I received a text message from Felicia, Pedro's sister-in-law, indicating she had fled Nicaragua with her two children and was now living in Nicoya with her husband León. León, Pedro's brother, has been working in Costa Rican construction for many years, regularly sending remittances and travelling home for special occasions. I called in July, and Felicia explained how León had deposited money so they could leave Mui Mui, because she feared the turmoil and the armed Sandinistas keeping guard close to her house, scared they would come to recruit their teenage son. With the money León had sent, she and the children walked across the border with a group of other Nicaraguans, '*mojados*' ('illegally') because it would have been impossible to arrange for *papeles* in such chaotic times. Felicia recounted that finding accommodation had been difficult at first, but after staying with a friend she knew from when she had visited León in Costa Rica a decade earlier, a Costa Rican 'angel' secured an apartment close to Pedro and his family. Her teenage son started working alongside León, and Felicia jokingly referred to his income as '*remesas estando aquí*' ('remittances while being here'), while León sent his share to his mom still in Mui Mui. In a later phone call, Felicia told me she earned some money as a cleaner, but their situation became increasingly difficult as fiscal reform strikes in Costa Rica left León unemployed for a month in October. She decided to return to Mui Mui for Christmas.

Felicia found temporary relief in Costa Rica, based on decades-old cross-border connections. León and their son continue to work in Costa Rica, this time amidst

¹¹³Fouratt, "Those Who Come to Do Harm".

¹¹⁴Bayat, 'From "Dangerous Classes" to "Quiet Rebels"'.

¹¹⁵Rojas-Wiesner and DeVargas, 'Strategic Invisibility as Everyday Politics for a Life with Dignity'; Vasta, 'Immigrants and the Paper Market'.

new pandemic insecurities and related border restrictions that complicate, but do not yet sever, their translocal livelihood.

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Política cotidiana de movilidad: Sustento translocal e ilegalización en el Sur Global

Spanish abstract

Este artículo contribuye a los estudios sobre migración y sustento al reflejar las dimensiones globales y políticas de los medios de vida y las experiencias de ilegalización en Centroamérica. Basado en una investigación etnográfica multisituada con familias nicaragüenses y sus miembros migrantes en Costa Rica, el artículo adopta una perspectiva del sustento translocal y utiliza la noción de política cotidiana para explorar las prácticas de movilidad de los migrantes y matizar el papel y alcance de la ilegalización en la relativamente accesible migración Sur–Sur. En conclusión, el artículo refuerza la noción de ‘política cotidiana de movilidad’ para incorporar la multisituación, multidimensionalidad y multidireccionalidad de los medios de sustento translocalizantes, ofreciendo un lente para la comparación futura de la ilegalización al interior y más allá del así llamado Sur Global.

Spanish keywords: migración; movilidad; sustento translocal; ilegalización; política cotidiana; Nicaragua; Costa Rica

Política cotidiana de mobilidade: Subsistência translocal e ilegalização no Sul Global

Portuguese abstract

Este artigo contribui para os estudos sobre migração e subsistência ao refletir sobre as dimensões globais e políticas dos meios de subsistência e experiências de ilegalização na América Central. Com base em uma pesquisa etnográfica multi-localizada com famílias nicaraguenses e seus familiares migrantes na Costa Rica, o artigo adota uma perspectiva de subsistência translocal e usa a noção de política cotidiana para explorar as práticas de mobilidade dos migrantes e matizar o papel e o alcance da ilegalização na migração Sul–Sul relativamente acessível. Em conclusão, o artigo revigora a noção de ‘política cotidiana de mobilidade’ para incorporar a multisituação, multidimensionalidade e multidireccionalidade dos meios de subsistência translocalizantes, oferecendo uma lente para comparação futura da ilegalização dentro e além do chamado Sul Global.

Portuguese keywords: migração; mobilidade; subsistência translocal; ilegalização; política cotidiana; Nicarágua; Costa Rica

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