

Global Nomads or Temporary Citizens

Transnational Mobility of ‘Middling’ Iranians

The aim of this research is to study the applicability of ‘nomadism’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, Barfield 1993, Ibn Khaldun) as a ‘transhistorical analytical concept’ (AlSayyad and Roy 2006) in explaining an increasingly important type of South-North transnational mobility. It will focus on a subpopulation of highly mobile young skilled Iranians in various geographical locations.

On a theoretical level this thesis will base its analysis on the similarities between a dimorphic structure (Rowton 1974 and 1977) – a dynamic mixture of nomadic and sedentary elements – that was mostly found in Western Asia and re-emerging in the transnational movements in the interstices of a network of globally linked cities (Sassen 1991 and 2002).

However, this global structure should only be seen as a ‘strategically selective context’ in which these ‘strategic actors’ roam (Hay 2002, Jessop 2007), which is why this research project will also focus on the way a selected group of respondents view themselves in this context and learn about the strategies they employ in order to survive and prosper. This dual approach is aimed at building a dialectical narrative linking structural conditions to agents’ choices. In order to make sense of the relations between agents’ strategies like network capital and mobility (Urry 2007) and their global context, this study will also use diagrammatic tools borrowed from Conradson and Latham (2005).

Keywords: Iranian transmigrants, nomadism, transhistorical analytical concept, network capital, mobility, dimorphic structure/societies, strategic relational approach