Living the Chilean dream? Bolivian migrants' incorporation in the space of economic citizenship

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ABSTRACT

As with most contexts of South-South migration, the Bolivian-Chilean case remains severely under-researched. Responding to this paucity of research, this paper addresses Bolivian migrants' inclusions in and exclusions from economic citizenship in Chile. Conceptually, the paper calls for a holistic and spatially aware approach to comprehending migration and citizenship, proposing the overarching conceptual framework of interacting *transnational social spaces of citizenship* representing its legal, political, social, and economic dimensions. It then focuses particularly on the *transnational social space of economic citizenship*, using this conceptual approach as a means to bring into better dialogue research on the migrant division of labour, precarious employment, labour exploitation, financial exclusion, and migrant citizenship practices. The analytical potential of the conceptual framework is explored through examining the specific geographies of the Bolivian-Chilean space of economic citizenship to reveal the reality of what is increasingly being referred to as the 'Chilean dream'. Drawing on nine months of multi-sited ethnography and 76 semi-structured interviews, the paper addresses migrants' economic situation in Bolivia before examining their changes in circumstances following migration to Chile, looking particular at the migrant labour niches of wholesale clothing retail, agriculture, and domestic labour. It explores the structural factors leading to economic marginalisation in Bolivia and labour exploitation in Chile. Additionally, it analyses the practices in which migrants may engage to challenge their exclusion from economic citizenship, and the role that migrant organisations play in encouraging, and at times constraining, such practices.

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1. Introduction

In a context in which migration from global South to North is in the headlines almost daily, it is easy to forget that there are also highly significant flows of people across borders within the global South. In the academic arena, South-South migration is severely under-researched, reflective perhaps of academia's Northern-centric bias, and the agendas of funding bodies and policy-makers within the global North (Hujo and Piper, 2010; Melde et al., 2014). With respect to Latin America, where flows from poor to middle-income countries are increasing, there is certainly a paucity of scholarly work (Martínez Pizarro, 2011). Chile is one such country where migration flows have augmented significantly – as people come in search of the so-called 'Chilean dream' (Cárdenas, 2015), migration to the country has almost quadrupled since

1990 (Departamento de Extranjería y Migracion, 2010; Martínez Pizarro, 2011). Yet to date, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Acosta, 2015; Stefoni, 2013), research has not kept pace with this important social and economic change.

The case of Bolivian migrants in Chile has been particularly ignored, despite their numbering at least 50,000 of a migrant population conservatively estimated to be some 352,000 (Martínez Pizarro, 2011). Moreover, Bolivians have been thought to conform one of the most marginalised migrant groups in the country (Cano et al., 2009). This paper is one of the first to discuss the Bolivian case, presenting empirical findings but also reflecting conceptually on the research on citizenship and migration, predominantly carried out to date in contexts of South-North migration. In so doing, it proposes a conceptual framework of *transnational social spaces of citizenship* for comprehending citizenship and migration. It focuses specifically on the *transnational social space of economic citizenship*, exploring the Bolivian-Chilean migration context in order to further elucidate the concept. The paper is based on nine months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, carried out across five sites in Chile (Santiago and Arica) and Bolivia (El Alto/La Paz, Santa Cruz,

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and Oruro) between August 2013 and May 2014. In addition to extensive participant observation with migrant organisations, at community events, and in migrants' homes and workplaces, 60 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with Bolivian migrants in Chile – 40 in Santiago and 20 in Arica – and 16 interviews were conducted with representatives of migrant organisations and the state across all sites.

Drawing on this rich data, the paper has three aims, expanded on accordingly in each of its remaining three sections. The first provides an introduction to the overarching conceptual framework of interacting transnational social spaces of citizenship – representing its legal, political, social, and economic dimensions – that has developed out of the research. This framework provides an innovative means of comprehending migration and citizenship more holistically, accounting for citizenship's multiple facets and the interactions between them from a spatially aware perspective. The second section introduces and defines in greater detail the transnational social space of economic citizenship. The third and final section explores the specific geographies of the Bolivian-Chilean transnational social space of economic citizenship. Thus the paper both contributes empirically to enhance understanding of a South-South migration flow, and also indicates potential pathways for a more comprehensive conceptualisation of geographies of migration and citizenship from an economic perspective.

2. Transnational social spaces of citizenship

Analysing migrants' lived realities through the lens of citizenship has proven a fruitful approach for comprehending the transnational inclusions and exclusions they face (Coutin, 2007; Isin and Nielsen, 2008; Menjívar, 2006; Ong, 1999; Reed-Danahay and Brettell, 2008). In particular, scholars of citizenship and migration have advocated a focus on migrant citizenship in practice in order to comprehend how it is actually experienced in the everyday as opposed to how it is normatively represented (Ho, 2008; Staeheli et al., 2012; Ferbrache and Yarwood, 2015). Such analyses have sometimes struggled, however, to consider holistically the 'formal' (legal status) and 'substantive' (social and political) aspects of citizenship (Holston, 1998) in such a way that accounts for: the interactions between them; how they are produced within and across nation-state borders; and the multiple ways in which migrants may be simultaneously included in and excluded from citizenship.

A spatial approach to citizenship and migration has been adopted by some in order to attempt this (Coutin, 2003; Goldring and Landolt, 2013; Isin and Rygiel, 2007; Lee, 2010; Menjívar, 2006) because, as Staeheli et al. (2012, p. 641) put it, citizenship 'is inseparable from the geographies of communities and the networks and relationships that link them'. Whilst making extremely important advances, I suggest that the complexity of inclusion and exclusion is not fully recognised by the frameworks proposed to date because spaces of citizenship have been conceptualised as binary (as spaces of citizenship/non-citizenship e.g. Isin and Rygiel, 2007; Coutin, 2003) or triadic (as spaces of citizenship/non-citizenship with a third space in between e.g. Lee, 2010; Menjívar, 2006). Where more intricate conceptualisations of space and citizenship have been proposed, the focus has often been on the politico-legal dimensions of citizenship (e.g. Goldring and Landolt, 2013) rather than its social and economic components, despite the latter being established as important for full participation in society (Lister, 2003; Riaño, 2011). This does not fully allow for the multitude of simultaneous in/exclusions from different aspects of citizenship that migrants may experience transnationally.

Responding to this, the concept of overlapping, interlocking transnational social spaces of citizenship is suggested to better represent the spheres in which migrants' relationships to legal,

political, social, and economic aspects of citizenship can be understood as occurring. This draws on the concept of 'transnational social spaces', developed since the 1990s (e.g. Faist, 1998; Jackson et al., 2004; Smith, 2005; Collyer and King, 2015). Synthesising scholarship on the topic, Levitt and Jaworsky (2007, pp. 131–132) define 'transnational social spaces' as 'arenas' that

> are multi-layered and multi-sited, including not just the home and host countries but other sites around the world that connect migrants to their conationals and coreligionists. Both migrants and nonmigrants occupy them because the flow of people, money, and ''social remittances'' (ideas, norms, practices, and identities) within these spaces is so dense, thick, and widespread that nonmigrants' lives are also transformed, even though they do not move.

Historical context is also important to the production of transnational social spaces, as is place, which both constructs and is constructed by transnational practices (e.g. Ehrkamp, 2005).

Reflecting an understanding of citizenship as a process of 'self-making and being-made' (Ong, 1996, p. 737), transnational social spaces of *citizenship* are produced through interactions between individual migrants and non-migrants, in addition to processes initiated by states and their actors, and sometimes interventions by international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation. Groups within civil society such as migrant organisations also play a role in their production. These interactions are influenced by history, and impacted by, and impact on, place. Thus the framework of transnational social spaces of citizenship takes a profoundly geographical approach to comprehending the production of citizenship across nation-state boundaries in terms of both structural processes and agentic practices. Furthermore, building on the intersectional perspectives already taken within the research on migration and citizenship (McIlwaine, 2015; Riaño, 2011), it is understood that individuals' relationships to these spaces are deeply influenced by their social identities, such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, and class.

The framework allows comprehension, then, of how at any one time a migrant may be positioned differently, and multiply, in each of a range of overlapping transnational social spaces of citizenship, reflecting citizenship's formal and substantive elements. She is neither entirely a citizen, nor a 'non-citizen', nor in a clearly delineated 'third space' of citizenship. Rather, there is an unpredictable quality to her experiences of citizenship across multiple dimensions. She lives uncertain citizenship. Perhaps she is on the very periphery of legal citizenship in one nation-state – holding a tourist visa, for example – whilst in full possession of legal citizenship in another where she does not currently reside. In terms of the political, she exercises her right to extra-territorial voting, and also is a grassroots activist in the country where she is living. With respect to social citizenship (see especially Lister, 2003), she had better access to healthcare in the country she has left than in the country where she lives at present. She has left one country because she could not find waged employment there, and is precariously incorporated in the space of economic citizenship in the other.

Almost all of these aspects of her citizenship could shift and change depending on both her exercise of agency through everyday citizenship practices (such as applying for legal residency, perhaps with support from a migrant organisation), and on structural factors (such as changes to immigration law, perhaps precipitated by recommendations from an international body). A change in one may result in a change in another, although not necessarily. Her different positions within these spaces are highly contingent on power relations and her social identities – both in terms of how she is perceived and how she perceives herself – and also grounded