

**Thomas Faist, Professor of Transnational, Development and Migration Studies, Faculty of Sociology, University of Bielefeld, visited the Department of Social Anthropology earlier this year. He gave the lecture Social Inequalities: What Role for Transnationality?, as part of the Transnational migration seminar series.**

In an interview after his lecture, Thomas Faist explains that yes, transnationality do matter for the social position of migrants. "In the public debate it has been argued that transnationality is favourable as regards migrants who can choose to study abroad and establish the right kind of social connections. On the other hand, transnationality is seen as something negative when it becomes a sign of for example segregation among migrant groups. However, this approach is too one sided," he says. There are migrants who find themselves in between the two extremes. "Transnationality is not a polar thing, but rather a continuum among those who practice it," he continues.

Thomas Faist argues that migration studies have taken on a transnational approach. "Transnationalism is nowadays in the mainstream of migration studies," he says. "What is of interest is how researchers understand transnationalism, how we operationalize it, how the concept can contribute to future analyses". Everyday transnationality, to do with personal and social relations, is of particular interest. The main advantage of applying this approach, he argues, is that it allows for researchers to follow the actual practices of people at all times.

The challenges facing research about transnational migration and diaspora is not to lose sights of the distinctiveness of the approach, Thomas Faist continues. It is true that one has to regard borders and boundaries as something that is constructed and reconstructed all the time, yet, the idea of the transnational as something without boundaries can result in the study of "everything and nothing", he says. "It is therefore necessary to find a distinctive place for this kind of research, and distinguish it from globalisation studies which have a more top-down approach".

Thomas Faist often refers to transnational social spaces in his research, i.e. various social activities. "Transnational social spaces is an abstract term, it is not something analytical like the concept of the nation state. The way in which migrants entre into transnational social spaces differs from the way in which migrants entre into a "contract" with the nation state. What is interesting is how the nation state responds to these social activities, how it deals with a multitude of various networks and individuals' transnational ties? How do such spaces develop under different conditions?"

Many regard economic remittances as something like a win-win situation for migrants, the country of residence as well as the country of origin. But Thomas Faist argues that this puts too much emphasis on migrants as agents of development, leaving governments with little responsibility. "Remittances in the right kind of circumstances, family-to-family, can be a good thing, but collective remittances for example investments create different problems. They can only be fruitful if the government puts in place the right kind of policies," he says.

Thomas Faist's lecture was filmed and can be viewed [here](#).

Find out more about the Transnational migration seminar series.