



Universität  
Basel

## Research Project

### Narratives of Identity, Multi-sited Biographies, and Transnational Life-Modes of Highly Qualified Migrants. Two Case Studies

#### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Narratives of Identity, Multi-sited Biographies, and Transnational Life-Modes of Highly Qualified Migrants. Two Case Studies

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Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Fachbereich Kulturanthropologie

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**Department**

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The migration of the highly qualified/skilled has recently gained recognition within migration studies after decades of being overshadowed by topics such as low skilled migration, push and pull factors, refugees, crime issues and legal restrictions. Research on skilled migration tends to focus on social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of knowledge-based societies within a globally multifaceted context. The focus on small diaspora communities within industrialized countries/regions is not fully recognized, though they deserve attention.

The aim of the project is to understand how or to what extent tensions emerging between different aspects of globalization shape the experiences and activities of highly qualified migrants. The empirical reality of globalization includes different elements such as movement of ideas, people and goods. Theories of transnationalism permit to examine different facets and processes of globalization. However, concepts of transnationalism seem to be challenged by streams of renationalization such as changing migration policies and discourses on national identities. Such contradictions may provoke antagonistic tendencies calling for research exploring the present situation of highly qualified migrants, which could offer specific findings and insights of great value. The phenomenon of highly qualified migration is a significant part of today's globalization. It creates the necessity to negotiate relationships across and within localities. Biographies and narratives of distinctive groups of highly qualified migrants allow us to analyse how life experiences and activities are shaped across a multifaceted context. Furthermore, theories of life-modes and justification serve as frameworks to position highly qualified actors within globalization processes and to explain their activities. This approach provides us with an opportunity to make sense of the events and actions highly qualified migrants live with; and to understand how they articulate themselves. It also allows us to understand how these migrants think they play a part in the structure of today's "glocalization".

The project consists of two subprojects focusing on distinctive groups of highly qualified migrants:

- Swiss in Israel and Israelis in Switzerland
- Swiss in Senegambia and Senegambians in Switzerland

The historical, sociocultural, political and religious characteristics defining the specific groups of migrants and their countries of origin and destination create a distinct profile. There are surprisingly many Swiss living in Israel and an important number of highly skilled Israelis living in Switzerland. The image of Senegambia migrants in Switzerland has long been negatively shaped by the low skilled migrants from the region who often come to Switzerland as asylum seekers. However, they are now beginning to be perceived as agents contributing to the development of their country of origin. The subprojects take up transnationalism as a theoretical concept and globalization as an empirical reality, both of which will be studied through the prism of the migration of the highly skilled. Simultaneously, the tensions and contradictions of arising nationalist or ethnic arguments on “culture” will have to be addressed. A transnational context produces what we call multi-sited biographies that are justified in the narratives of the protagonists. This represents a societal antagonism between high mobility versus the desire for settlement and stability; and between policies on migration and national profiling versus the demands for trained experts. We will explore how or to what extent globalization shapes life experiences, the justification of transnational activities amongst highly qualified migrants and how they position themselves within a globalized but localized setting. The sampled groups of migrants allow us to understand the precise role of attributions and labelling in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, profession, and religion within and across multiple locations.

The project uses qualitative methods and findings drawn from anthropology and sociology and informed by the concerns of African studies, Jewish studies, Near Eastern studies and European studies. The significance of carrying out such joint research is highlighted and recognized by scholars. Research on transnational migration tends to focus on a single group within a single locality. In contrast, we intend to grasp how different localities, surroundings and frameworks may lead to varying experiences and negotiations. We anticipate diverse outcomes and findings that could provide a way to understanding different groups of migrants within different localities. Historical, cultural, religious and visibility/non-visibility factors, etc. could have a major impact on life-modes, experiences and decision-making.

**Keywords** highly qualified/skilled migration, biography, identity, brain gain/drain/waste/circulation, globalization, life-modes, transnationalism, cultural narratives

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ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
3392002	Picard, Jacques	Macamo, Elisio Prof. Dr.	Zentrum für Afrikastudien, Universität Basel	01.03.2014	30.12.2017