

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Visiting migrants: An introduction

Md Farid Miah¹  | Russell King¹ | Aija Lulle²¹University of Sussex, Brighton, UK²University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland**Correspondence**

Russell King, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.

Email: R.King@sussex.ac.uk**Abstract**

This paper offers an overview of the origins and dynamics of the concept of migrant visits and introduces the key contributions of the special issue. We highlight the significance of visits that criss-cross many forms of migration and centre on these visits' bilateral and multilateral nature. Furthermore, we emphasize emotional, sensory and bodily implications, which almost always shape encounters between migrants and others in such visits. The papers of this special issue contribute to a broad interdisciplinary agenda highlighting familial ties, networks and transnational spaces at the core of migration and mobility scholarship. Together, we offer new perspectives on the multidirectionality of visits and the role of relationships which drive, connect and diversify forms of migration and are facilitated by broader developments in technology, tourism and diasporic practices.

KEYWORDS

diaspora, migrant families, migrant visits, tourism, visiting friends and relatives

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VISITS

Traditionally, international migration was considered a one-way journey from an origin to a destination country, where migrants would settle and, over the longer term, become integrated/assimilated into the cultures of the host society. Return migration was regarded as a theoretical possibility but rarely studied in-depth. Shorter term migrant mobilities between countries and places – and the associated meanings and implications of such movements – began to receive scholarly attention following the transnational turn in migration studies in the 1990s (Portes et al., 1999), and then the mobilities turn in the 2000s (Urry, 2007). Although migrants' short-term seasonal and occasional home visits can be

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traced back to some of the literature on return migration (see King, 2000: 10–11), the pioneering study of migrants' home visits was written by Baldassar (2001). Her book, *Visits home*, on migratory visits between Australia and Italy, remains virtually the only in-depth study, supplemented more recently by a scatter of journal articles by scholars in transnational migration, diaspora studies, mobilities and tourism. Many of these papers are cited later in this editorial introduction and in the papers that follow in this special issue.

For migrants the world over, visits 'home' and being visited by relatives and friends are an essential part of the migration experience (Janta et al., 2015; King et al., 2013). Quoting Carling (2008: 1452), visits are part of 'the human dynamics of migrant transnationalism'. Such occasions are usually carefully planned, eagerly anticipated and the source of enjoyment and transnational family bonding. Sometimes, however, they can result in tension and disillusionment. Yet relatively little and scattered attention has been given by migration and mobility scholars to these visits, despite their importance to migrants and to sustaining transnational communities. This special issue is designed to help to fill this scholarly gap.¹

Visits are bidirectional and bilateral. Both migrants and their non-migrant friends and relatives switch roles as guests and hosts. Hence, the title of this special issue is kept deliberately short and ambiguous, with the word 'visiting' being used in both its verbal and its adjectival sense. Adjectivally, visiting migrants are migrants engaged in visiting home (or, possibly, other co-nationals or co-ethnics who are settled elsewhere). Verbally, we refer to the non-migrant relatives and friends who are visiting migrant co-nationals abroad (or, possibly, in a third meeting-up space elsewhere). Either way, we see visits as social and cultural encounters circumscribed by expectations, performativity and rituality (e.g. gift-giving, hospitality) in which transnational familyhood is reasserted and affective bonds renewed and strengthened (Miah, 2022). As short-term mobilities last a few days or weeks, visits are temporally enfolded within the longer time frames of migration and diaspora formation (King & Lulle, 2015).

Studies of visits and associated processes, practices and experiences transcend disciplinary boundaries. Sociologists, geographers and anthropologists are the main researchers on visits, but the topic also connects interdisciplinary scholars in migration, mobility and tourism studies. Tourism specialists tend to lay stress on the revenue-generating aspects of visiting, including spending on accommodation, shopping, sightseeing and other leisure-related activities (e.g. Backer, 2010; Backer & Richie, 2017). Studies of visits from a mobilities' perspective seek to comprehend the importance of physical proximity and intimacy achieved through visits in situations where family and social networks are spatially dispersed (see Urry, 2002; Williams & Hall, 2000). Transnational migration researchers consider visits to be a fundamental part of being a migrant and maintaining transnational ties with left-behind members of families, friendship networks and places of childhood memories (King & Lulle, 2015; King et al., 2013; Miah & King, 2018, 2021; Mueller, 2015). Visits enable migrants to be effectively both 'here' and 'there', exemplifying the spatial simultaneity of transnational life (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Their 'pilgrimage'-like status and rhythmic movements (King & Lulle, 2015) are an essential part of transnational migranhood, fashioning a mobile identity often inherited by children and grandchildren.

Visits home have significant emotional, sensory and bodily implications for migrants, allowing them to alleviate their homesickness and renew and reinforce their cultural and ethnic identities. As Baldassar (2001: 323) noted, 'the visit "home" is a secular pilgrimage of redemption in response to the obligation of child to kin, townsperson to town ... [it is] a transformatory rite of passage [which fosters] the development of ties to one's personal and ancestral past'. Migrants generally feel morally and culturally obliged to return to their hometown and, if necessary, provide care for their relatives by being physically present, at least for a while (Baldassar et al., 2007). Their visits are considered a repayment for 'the debt of communality' (Carling, 2008: 1458). Migrants' long absence from the home country means that their return visits are a moral entitlement for left-behind relatives and friends. The absence of visits is considered a symptom of distancing, a lack of care and thought and a sign of ingratitude. Relatives and friends in the home country reciprocate these cultural obligations by providing hospitality for the visitors.

Studies of visits in various spatio-temporal contexts reveal that they can vary in length from a weekend or a few days to more prolonged sojourns (see, e.g., Asiedu, 2005; Duval, 2004a; Humbracht, 2015; Mueller, 2015; Oepen, 2013; Vathi & King, 2011). Length of visit is often determined by geographical proximity. Within Europe,

where borders are easily crossed and air and land travel is quick and relatively cheap (compared to average incomes), migrants and their relatives and friends can visit one another frequently and usually for short durations. Intercontinental visits are likely to be less frequent, more costly, of longer duration and requiring careful preparation. Regardless of their frequency and duration, visits are not without tension and do not take place on a level playing field. The mismatch between expectations and actual experiences can be found in many contexts, particularly when there is a stark asymmetry in economic, social and cultural capital between host and destination countries and where the freedom to travel is dependent on citizenship and the type of passport held (Miah & King, 2021).

TYPES AND PURPOSES OF VISITS

There are several reasons for visits to take place. Although most visits are planned, some can happen at short notice or instantaneously in cases of emergencies such as an illness or death in the family. A wide range of purposes and practices can be found in the literature concerning visits in various geographical contexts. Amongst the scholars who have advanced typologies of migration-related visits – and the varied nature of practices and activities involved – are Baldassar et al. (2007: 139), Bolognani (2014), Janta et al. (2015: 587) and Miah (2022). Drawing on these typologies as well as on other related literature, we identify nine main types of visit, as follows:

Routine visits. Visiting the home country regularly is a fundamental part of the transnational way of life for many migrants. In many migratory contexts, routine visits are the most common type of transnational journey undertaken, especially by first-generation migrants to their countries of origin. For young professional European migrants, short distances, easy air, train and coach travel and freedom of movement facilitate frequent back-and-forth visits (Lulle et al., 2022; Mueller, 2015). Regular intercontinental visits to more-distant countries by first-generation migrants are also common, although they occur less frequently.

Ritual visits. These occur when migrants are strongly expected, if not required, to be physically present, through the 'rules' of kinship and cultural obligation, at key life cycle and home-community events, such as childbirth, weddings, funerals, anniversaries and community festivals. Migrants feel a moral duty to take part in these events and, in the case of hometown festivals, even to finance them (Smith, 2006). Ritual events are less frequent than routine visits. They are known and planned for well ahead and often coincide with official holidays so that the extended networks of transnational families and social networks can be there together.

Care visits. Sustaining transnational familyhood includes the all-important duty of fulfilling care obligations, especially to left-behind children and elderly or sick parents, by visiting in person. Caregiving activities are considered to be a fundamental feature of transnational family life (Baldassar et al., 2007). Digitally transmitted or delegated care and sending remittances can hardly replace hands-on care duties. Distant care cannot compensate for the co-present social interaction, body language and eye contact that are necessary for building and maintaining trustworthy, respectful, intimate and meaningful relationships. Besides, care visits can also bring opportunities for migrants to nurture their own personal care, for instance, by utilizing known – and cheaper – doctors and dentists in the home country, as well as seeing home visits as a way of enhancing their spiritual and mental well-being (King & Lulle, 2015).

Rights visits. Physical visits to the home country may be necessary in order to fulfil residential requirements for maintaining citizenship, renewing passports and qualifying for health checks and other public social services. They may also be required to reclaim territorial rights for business and land ownership and for buying and selling property. Resolving property disputes and ensuring inheritance rights may also necessitate in-presence visits to deal with personal and bureaucratic difficulties (e.g. Miah, 2021).

Economically motivated visits partially overlap with the previous type. It is not uncommon for migrants to develop business interests and other economic ties to their countries of origin and to nurture these through visits which are primarily economic in their rationale. Economic activities engaged in on such visits include sourcing goods for ethnic enterprises in the host country, scoping market opportunities for import/export businesses and initiating philanthropic activities, including charitable donations and helping to set up co-development initiatives and hometown associations.

Medical supplies, vehicles, computers, educational material, clothing and food items are some of the typical material goods involved in such developmental initiatives.

Visits for knowledge transfer also have an economic function but, this time, involving non-material transfers of knowledge and expertise aimed at building economic and cultural capacity in the country of origin (Kuschminder, 2014). Migrants undertaking these visits are often financed and logistically supported by national, non-governmental or international organizations to train and transfer their skills to 'locals'. They may be paid a salary or fee for such training visits or the visits may be voluntary, perhaps with expenses covered by the sponsoring organization. 'Diasporic volunteering' visits can also be undertaken by second-generation and other later-generation migrants to the ancestral homeland.

Roots visits also apply mainly to second and subsequent generations who are introduced to, or seek to recover, their family's ancestral roots (Wessendorf, 2013). Such visits often constitute a rite of passage of ethno-national reconnection to an otherwise historically (and maybe also geographically) remote homeland. The outcomes of such visits can be transformatory in terms of reshaping new forms of hybrid identities or, by contrast, may serve to reinforce their identification with the country where they live through an unanticipated experience of 'difference'. Shifting trajectories of identity and belonging across spaces, times and generations can transcend the binary combination of 'host' and 'home' society and culture.

Leisure visits constitute part of what Wessendorf (2013: 33) has termed migrants' 'holiday transnationalism', whereby migrants opt to take their vacations in their home countries. Leisure visits are instilled with place-bound consumption and typical touristic practices, including being by the sea, sight-seeing, boat trips, shopping and, especially for younger visitors, going to nightspots. Family holiday visits are often intended by parents to encourage their children to make connections to their parental homeland and have good memories which will continue to draw them back to enjoy the hospitality of their relatives and others. Leisure-oriented visits are also common when visits take place 'the other way', by non-migrants to their migrant friends and relatives in the host country (Miah & King, 2021).

Pre-return visits. Regular visits to the homeland can be a prelude or preparation for a subsequent return migration. Pre-return visits enable migrants to keep up-to-date with social, economic and political changes in the home country during their prolonged time away, including scoping the possibilities for employment, housing or, at a later life stage, retirement (Duval, 2004b). Moreover, migrant visits also serve as a substitute for return migration, when migrants come to the decision not to return permanently (e.g. Erdal, 2012; Lulle et al., 2019).

Clearly, visits can have many functions and are often undertaken with multiple purposes in mind. The papers that follow exemplify many of these types of visits described above, as well as representing the varied and intersecting temporalities of visits – short versus long, frequent versus infrequent, planned versus unplanned and so on.

THE PAPERS

Ten papers follow this introductory article. In the first one, *Loretta Baldassar* reflects on her four decades of research on migrants' visits. For Baldassar, the visit is 'a gift of self ... a moment in time ... [which opens] ... windows on relationships and identities at various scales'. She deploys a methodological approach described as 'ethnographic returning' – in her case, a reflexive revisiting of her earlier research which also mirrors her insider status as the Australia-born child of Italian immigrant parents. Her historically comparative paper focuses on two Italian migrant cohorts in Australia: the early post-war migrants, who were mostly labour migrants and who are now in their old age; and the much more recent migration of young, educated Italians. The analysis is built around the different types and meanings of these globe-spanning visits and on the links between physical and virtual co-presence, seen as co-constitutive in relation to each other, both as complements and as substitutes. Broadening her time frame to a century-long survey of 'visits over time', Baldassar traces the interrelationship between physical visits (expensive and time-consuming because of the great distance between Australia and Italy) and virtual visits, the latter evolving from the time-lagged 'scriptural visit' of letters, through telephone calls, to instantaneous digital visits on Skype, Facebook and other social media. She

notes how migrants have been early adopters of new communication technologies, both younger, tech-savvy migrants and also older migrants and non-migrants who can no longer travel such long distances. For migrants and their families, then, the technological turn results in a kind of 'digital kinning' which, of necessity, was given a further boost during the forced immobility of the Covid-19 pandemic.

From the *longue durée* approach of Baldassar's paper, Lauren Wagner focuses on just 1 day of a visit to Marrakech by a group of Dutch–Moroccan second-generation students. The short temporality of Wagner's ethnographic observation is amply compensated for by her paper's theoretical richness and her attempt (through her research participants' experiences) to question some of the standard tropes of migrants' return visits to the 'homeland'. In many respects, the students' visit to Marrakech exemplifies a paradox of visiting 'home', because none of them had family roots in this historic tourist city: they were thus 'both visiting home and not-home'. Their trip was, to some extent, a journey of 'diasporic belonging', in that they chose to go to Morocco – their parents' country of origin – but it was much more about the kind of leisure practices engaged in by typical holidaymakers. Taking a cue from Dahinden's (2016) plea to 'de-migrantize' migration research, Wagner uses assemblage theory to explore and interpret the practices and behaviours of the group of students as they navigate the final day of their Moroccan visit. Assemblage shows how space and time, and proximity and movement, can be expressed in both metric and non-metric ways, as a 'flat ontology' (cf. Jones et al., 2007). De-centring the assumption that the visitors are of migrant origin allows the author to have a more open mind in observing the visitors' banal but significant activities – going to restaurants and nightspots, lounging by the pool, getting a suntan, the girls having their hair done and a couple of troublesome encounters with the local police, for whom a mixed group of unmarried and unrelated young people enjoying a night out constitutes a cultural violation of Moroccan values.

Wagner analyses these homeland/holiday visit practices through the three interlinked dynamics of *attachments*, *embodiments* and *insulations*, which are posited as 'the entangled sides of diasporic engagement with the place of origin'. Yet the 'place of origin' has an ambiguous range of meanings: from the ancestral national homeland of Morocco to the 'home-home' of their parents' hometown (not Marrakech), to the 'elsewhere-at-home' of touristic Marrakech. In Wagner's closely observed empirical analysis, 'attachments' signify the choice of Marrakech and Morocco (as opposed to Barcelona and Spain) as the destination for the trip; such a choice is an expression of 'diasporicness' as opposed to pure tourism and leisure. 'Embodiments' consist of the typical leisure practices of young people on holiday in a place where they are both 'insiders' (having Moroccan heritage) and 'outsiders' (as tourists not conforming to local mores). The day consists of going shopping, eating pizza, visiting the hair salon, lazing by the pool and generally 'hanging out'. Finally, the word 'insulations' implies the bonds holding the group together, because the embodied enjoyments listed before are a shared camaraderie, reinforced by the intrusions of the local police into their holiday-visit activities.

In the subsequent article, Michael Humbracht, Allan Williams and Scott Cohen also aim at conceptual innovation in their study of the intimate relations of highly skilled Italian migrants in London and their practices of maintaining family and friendship connections via visits and digital technologies. The authors draw on a multi-sited ethnography with migrants in London and non-migrants in Italy. A key aim of the paper is to question the simplistic moral dichotomy that views the separation and disconnection that migration entails as a 'loss', whereas connection, intimacy and belonging are considered virtuous. To nuance the dichotomy, the authors deploy Berlant's (2011) notion of 'cruel optimism' – an affective, psycho-cultural approach whereby optimistic ambitions for the 'good life' are based on ongoing intimate relations and a strong sense of belonging. Yet it emerges that those very attachments, responsibilities and obligations become an obstacle to obtaining the good life. Humbracht et al. reveal how the rhythms of visits and the use of digital technologies in migrants' and non-migrants' lives come into conflict through different intersubjective perceptions of what counts as real or appropriate forms of intimacy and connection.

The next paper, by Megha Amrith, shifts the geographical focus to Southeast Asia. Amrith examines the emotional complexity of Filipino care workers' visits home from their working lives in Singapore. The joy of these visits can be intense but fleeting and be subject, as Humbracht et al. pointed out in the foregoing paper, to divergent expectations between the visiting migrants on the one hand and different family members on the other. Both as professional carers in their precarious yet long-term work in Singapore and as visiting carers for their family members in the Philippines,

migrants' strenuous relational work emphasizes how gender structures all aspects of their lives. They embody multiple simultaneous roles: as breadwinners for their families, as sacrificing mothers, daughters and sisters and as loyal wives – a loyalty which is not always reciprocated. Their care labour is continuous across the spectrum of paid care work in Singapore and unpaid care labour for kin in the Philippines. Constrained initially by debt repayment and subsequently by ongoing contractual obligations and limited leave entitlements, visits home are infrequent, usually every year or 2 years for 2–4 weeks. Nowadays, the long gaps between visits are leavened by the widespread use of digital technologies which are equivalent, in Amrith's words, to 'virtual check-ins between physical, embodied visits'; however, in earlier times, contacts were more sporadic. Sometimes, visits can be longer, for instance, between employment contracts. In focusing on the emotionalities of care workers' visits, Amrith documents how happy times of unbridled joy – eating, singing and dancing together – can give way to episodes of boredom and frustration – and even nostalgia for the more cosmopolitan environment of Singapore. Visits can also be moments of rupture, when what were thought of as certainties become uncertainties, laden with disappointments, disillusionments, family tensions and worries about the future. Visits, along with other life-course events, thus re-configure migrants' gendered positionalities and subjectivities, forcing them to reassess the balance between their lives 'at home' and those 'abroad', which they navigate with multiple and conflicting emotions.

In her paper on second-generation Turkish–German migrants' experiences of visiting and being visited, *Nilay Kılınc* takes a broader spectrum of types of visit, based on her research on Europe's largest scale international migration, that from Turkey to Germany. Her research participants are 116 second-generation 'returnees' who have relocated to Turkey, the country of origin of their parents and, to some extent, their own affective 'homeland'. Kılınc presents a typology consisting of three forms of visit, varying by directionality and by the life-stage and family membership of the actors involved. These are, first, family-holiday visits to Turkey undertaken when the second generation was growing up in Germany; second, visit back to Germany as adults after the second generation has moved to Turkey; and, finally, being visited in Turkey by family members and friends from Germany. Each type of visit has different meanings, spatialities, relationalities and emotionalities, both for the visitors and for those visited. Summing up her findings, Kılınc points to the key outcome of each type of visit. During their childhood holiday visits, the second generation felt like 'guests' and 'tourists' in their parental homeland, both experiencing warm hospitality from their relatives and also expressing anxieties about the places and people visited as 'different'. Second, visits to Germany post-'return' to Turkey provoked disorientation and alienation, tempered by the positive experience of reuniting with familiar places and people. Finally, when hosting family and friends visiting from Germany, the second generation was made to grasp their own transmutation from 'guests' to 'settled dwellers'. Above all, for the second generation, meanings of 'home' become questioned and fractured, largely through a continuous comparison between 'here' and 'there', with a mix of positive and negative associations attached to both locales. This comparison is partly articulated at the national level, between the Turkish and German 'ways of life' and 'mentalities', and partly at the local level, where the place of their upbringing in Germany is revisited and reappraised in the light of their new lives in Istanbul, Antalya or wherever they have settled in Turkey.

Gender is a key structuring and experiential element of all visits by, and to, migrants. This clearly emerged in Amrith's paper, summarized above, but is the more explicit focus in the paper by *Miah* and *King* on British–Bangladeshi. This case study illustrates how the intersection of gender and generation shapes the pattern of visits, in both directions, across this long-distance transnational space, more difficult to traverse than, for instance, from Turkey to Germany (Kılınc) or the United Kingdom to Italy (Humbracht et al.). Although things are changing, the patriarchal nature of Bangladeshi society, both in Sylhet (the region of origin of the British–Bangladeshi community) and in the Bangladeshi diaspora in the United Kingdom, fundamentally structures gender relations in all aspects of life, including visits. Older British–Bangladeshi men are keen to visit Sylhet, where they can reconnect with old (male) friends, reclaim their masculinity and respected status and check up on their houses and investments funded by savings from their work in Britain. Some older, retired men like to escape the British winter by staying several months on their visits, whereas a few contemplate retiring full-time to Sylhet, leaving their families in Britain. Older women are much less willing to visit, except for important family occasions like weddings and funerals; they prefer to stay close to their children and grandchildren in London and the United Kingdom. Some younger and second-generation British–Bangladeshi women, especially if they have professional careers and a more independent mind-set, are able to negotiate a measure of

freedom from patriarchal gender practices on their visits to Bangladesh. As with other transnational and diasporic communities, younger children visit Sylhet en famille but, here again, gendered attitudes and behavioural restrictions intrude. Young boys are given a lot of freedom and tend to be indulged and 'spoiled' by grandparents and other relatives; young girls are kept close to the family homestead and, beyond the age of puberty, are closely chaperoned on visits (see also Zeitlyn, 2012).

With the next paper, by *Dora Sampaio*, we move to a different geographical realm – Brazil and the United States – and also to a different theme, namely the combination of visits with paid work abroad. The protagonists of this phenomenon are Brazilian non-migrant older parents who, when visiting their adult children in the United States, engage in short-term paid work. Their stays are longer than 'normal' visits and shade into what might be called 'sojourns'; hence, the temporal variability (and possible limits) of visits is exposed, in a similar fashion to the older British–Bangladeshi migrants mentioned in the previous paper, who overwinter in Sylhet for periods of several months. There is a logical rationale for this kind of Brazilian non-migrant visit to US-based migrants. The migrants are 'immobilized' in the United States by their undocumented status (meaning that any return visit 'home' would be followed by a difficult, dangerous and expensive 'illegal' re-entry to the United States), whereas their parents travel to the United States on tourist visas which allow stays of up to 6 months. Like many of the papers in this special issue, Sampaio's research was multi-sited: She interviewed 33 older parents in Brazil (their average age was 71 years) and 38 adult children (average age 43) in the United States, where most of them were living with their children. The paper opens up a debate on the multi-functionality of visits, where emotional and material goals are profoundly intertwined and mutually constitutive. The long-stay visitors are able to combine unpaid care work for their children's families (the childcare of grandchildren and various household tasks) with paid work in the neighbourhood (babysitting and cleaning for other households, kitchen work in restaurants etc.). Crucially, the taking on of paid work yields two advantages: The income earned defrays the cost of the trip and enables savings to be created for the older visitor, and extra financial help is available to be passed to the migrant family members, who often live in precarious economic conditions. Such material support also means that the migrants' duty to send remittances to their parents in Brazil is lessened; in fact, when the visiting parents earn money in the United States to both support themselves and to help their children, the money can be regarded as a form of 'reverse remittances' (Mazzucato, 2011).

The paper by *Gladys Akom Ankobrey* takes us back to the youthful age group as the protagonists of 'homeland' visits to Ghana from the Netherlands. This article has some similarities to that by Wagner on Dutch–Moroccan youth visiting Morocco, summarized before; Akom Ankobrey, too, focuses on the leisure activities of visiting transnational youth. However, the latter author's approach to data collection is different, and the thematic analysis is geared towards the creation of longer-term intimate relationships rather than the close-up focus on 1 day of intense ethnographic observation carried out by Wagner. Akom Ankobrey's 36 participants, aged 14–25, comprised first-, 1.5- and second-generation young (Dutch–)Ghanaians who were on visits to Ghana. The empirical part of the paper consists of three ethnographic vignettes, each illustrative of one of the key themes which the paper addresses: making diasporic friends, socializing with same-generation relatives in Ghana and flirting and developing (and resisting) romantic interests. Hence, these visits can also be seen as transnational social practices which help to contribute to young people's transitions to adulthood, with the focus here on affect, friendship and sociality rather than on education, the labour market and careers (cf. King, 2018). It should also be pointed out that the subsamples of visitors referred to in the paper are all females. For the first theme – meeting diasporic peers – Akom Ankobrey takes us to music festivals such as Afrochella and TINA (This Is New Africa) where Dutch–Ghanaians can enjoy the 'hype' around West African music and dance genres and meet young Ghanaian diasporans from other European countries in a vibrant multilingual encounter. The second theme involves the visitors spending time with similar-age cousins and siblings who are resident in Ghana and who act as 'partners in fun' and guides to the local leisure scene. Third, the visits often involved a romantic element: Flirting was one of the affective practices that the young people engaged in (cf. Wagner, 2017), although this could also generate too much unwelcome attention from local young men. On the other hand, marriage to a local person was also on the horizon for some participants, leading in future to a possible permanent 'return' to Ghana.

Baldassar's *Visits home* clearly indicates the directionality of the visits that she studies – from Australia to the migrants' homeland, Italy (see also her paper in this special issue). Visits in the other direction – by non-migrants to

their migrant family members and friends abroad – are less common in reality and less often researched (but see Miah & King, 2021; also Sampaio, this issue). This bidirectionality is not the limit to the spatial patterning of visits, which can also be made to a third location which is neither the ‘origin’ nor the ‘destination’ of the migration. In *Colleen McNeil-Walsh’s* paper, based on the visiting practices of skilled migrants in Abu Dhabi and their family members, we find examples of meeting up in ‘neutral’ locations which are neither in the country of destination (‘here’) nor in the country of origin (‘there’) but ‘somewhere else’. McNeil-Walsh thus introduces a multi-local geographical typology to the phenomenon of transnational visits. This is materialized in a key aspect of her methodology, which is to focus the interviews with each of her 40 participants around the creation and discussion of their ‘mobility maps’, designed to capture their ‘biographies of movement’ and their ‘uniquely spatial stories’. The richness of the spatial trajectories of visits is reinforced by the multiplicity of countries of origin of the skilled migrants – 15 in all, including (mentioned in the paper) the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, India, Lebanon, Serbia and Argentina. If the ‘meet-up’ destination is a third location, the neutral space selected becomes a physical hub of temporary connectivity and co-present togetherness without the ritual of playing ‘host’ or ‘guest’: as McNeil-Walsh says, it is a space of transience and freedom, without the hubris of ‘spatial ownership’. For the expats interviewed by the author in Abu Dhabi, typical meet-up locations for family-togetherness visits were the Maldives, Oman, South Africa, St Petersburg and Brussels, as well as a Mediterranean cruise ship – a visit on the move.

The final paper, by *Annie Evans*, reprises Baldassar’s (2001: 323) definition of the migrant visit home as a ‘secular pilgrimage’ but extends this to diasporic visits to holy sites which are thus *real* pilgrimages. Evans’ case study is of visits by Palestinian Christians living in Jordan to places of religious (as well as family-roots) significance in Israel and/or Palestine. Evans theorizes diasporic pilgrimage as a localized process which critically engages with translocal connections, place-symbolism and regular temporalities, as well as with the geopolitical and religious power geometries that operate across contested borders in the region. However, Evans is at pains to point out that ‘diasporic pilgrimages are not to be seen as one-dimensional religious journeys, where religion is the single motivating factor for visiting but, rather, as entwined within everyday life, relationality and life-course’. Her empirical data, drawn from 28 interviews, reveal the holy-site visits to be composed of mixed experiences and functions, combining religious sites and rituals with relaxed family time with local relatives and, in some cases, visits to places and dwellings ‘lost’ as a result of refugee displacement. Following Wagner (2015), Evans explores the ‘doing’ of visits as a haptic experience of the seeing, touching, smelling and handling of religious sites and icons and the purchase and possession of religious souvenirs, thereby mixing diverse modes of visit – as religious pilgrim, family visitor and tourist. The paper also reminds us of the lack of attention paid by social scientists to pilgrimage as a specific, yet important, form of human spatial mobility and of its connection to the literature on visits.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the papers in this special issue enrich our understanding of migrants’ visits as an important yet understudied global mobility phenomenon, interposed between the much more intensively researched fields of migration and tourism. The typology of visits set out earlier in the paper constitutes a robust template for empirical research, bearing in mind that many visits are multifunctional, are subject to a variety of motivations and constraints and result in a variable blend of positive and negative experiential outcomes. Visits are seen to be a vital element of the experience of being a migrant and crucial to the development and maintenance of transnational lives. They have social, cultural, economic and emotional resonance for all those involved – the visitors and the visited, as well as those not visited or left behind.

The papers in this special issue draw on a broad range of theoretical perspectives and offer a wealth of empirical evidence from several global spatial contexts. Methodologically, too, the papers exemplify a variety of mainly qualitative approaches, as well as different researcher positionalities. Yet much scope exists for further research, particularly in three main lines of investigation: on the way visits are embedded in transnational migranhood; on the links between visits and other forms of corporeal and non-corporeal mobility; and on visits as relational phenomena with

powerful embodied and emotional implications for relations between genders, generations and kinship and friendship groups.

For instance, behind the common role of visits as an expression of diasporic belonging and transnational life lie deeper emotional layers; following Sayad (2004), they are an attempt to assuage the suffering of migrants and their condition of absence. The temporally squeezed nature of visits tends to heighten the intensity of the emotional labour involved, from the intimate relations of 'kinning', caring and loving to the 'cruel' intimacies of tensions, ruptures and realizations of non-belonging. Finally, the distinctive spatio-temporal nature of migrants' visits (and of migrants being visited) opens up a variety of avenues for exploration. How, exactly, are visits spatially and temporally configured? What kinds of places are visited, for how long, by whom and for what purpose? How are visits set within the complex polyrhythms of working lives and transnational families in distant places, different climates and discordant time zones? The papers that follow provide some but not all the answers to these and other questions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest that could be perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

ORCID

Md Farid Miah  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4998-0527>

ENDNOTE

¹ Earlier versions of the papers in this special issue were presented and discussed at the Annual IMISCOE Conference, University of Luxembourg (held online), 7–9 July 2021, where the guest-editors organized a three-session panel on 'Visiting Migrants'. One of the reasons for organizing the panel at this time was to commemorate the 20-year publication of the landmark study *Visits home* by Baldassar (2001). Baldassar's presentation opened the workshop, and the next paper in this special issue is based on that keynote lecture.

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