

Why is the Transnational Paradigm Useful? Considerations Based on Ethnographic Research among the Croats in Sweden

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“Without enlarging the conceptual framework to include recognition of pluri-local social spaces, we will probably lose touch with a growing part of the reality of migration, and thus, be unable to sufficiently understand and explain it” (Pries 2004: 29, 31)

Introduction

The presentation will be based on my research into diasporic identifications, political attitudes and cultural priorities of both labour- and refugee-migrants from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina who live in Sweden. In that research, theoretical considerations of the notions ‘diaspora’ and ‘diasporic community’ have been important inasmuch they enabled an analysis of subjective differences between people who share ethnic affiliation (Povrzanović Frykman 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a). Equally important were ethnographic insights into their transnational connections (Povrzanović Frykman 2003, 2004b). In response to the invitation to the workshop, I will examine the analytical usefulness of transnational paradigm.

Discussing attachments to places, ethnic belonging and intra-ethnic differences among today’s immigrants would hardly make sense if their practices and identification processes were seen as only being embedded in events, encounters, places and institutions in the country of immigration. A transnational perspective is needed. In this paper, it is equated with recognition, description and an understanding of the reasons for, and the effects of, the existence of *transnational social fields* (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1995) or *transnational social spaces* (Faist 2000: 200). They denote dynamic processes of sustaining social and symbolic ties: social space and social action are inseparable. Transnational social spaces involve the accumulation, use and effects of various sorts of capital in cultural, political and

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economic spheres. They are established and sustained by *sets of practices* (i.e., *transnationalism*) related to cultural politics and representation, political attitudes and engagements, economic, social and emotional links and exchanges. Those emotional links – notably to extended family members – are often the main motivator of transnational practices, and do not necessarily bring about other types of transnational engagement.

Here, transnationalism is used in the widest sense, referring to the practices of connection ‘elsewhere’ that make a difference ‘here’, and affect people’s feelings and understandings of their own belonging. Importantly, they include both people who migrated and those who stayed behind. It does not imply that all migrants engage in such practices, or that everyone the migrants left behind in their countries of origin is affected by transnational activities. Yet, the phenomena of connection, mutual influences and manifold dependencies are so common that the creation of transnational social fields can be conceptualised as a distinct phenomenon, different from other patterns of immigrant adaptation. They structure everyday activities, social positions and identities, and simultaneously exist above and beyond the social contexts of national societies.

My paper addresses the dynamics of transnational relations on individual and family levels. It will thus not deal with migration regimes or diaspora-related political and institutional frameworks, but with some aspects of *transnationalism from below* (Smith and Guarnizo 1998) – grassroots activities and low levels of institutionalisation as part of people’s everyday life. ‘Everyday’, of course, does not refer literally to ‘every day’, but to the normality of regular activities, including those that may be happening only once a year (such as, e.g., family visits to the country of origin). The point is that such activities are not exceptional; they are seen as ‘normal’ by the migrants as well as by their transnational counterparts.

The transnational paradigm is useful precisely for capturing this perceived normality of practices of transnational connection and the related normality of multiple attachments and inclusions. It best succeeds in this task when making use of the ability of ethnographic methods to take into consideration concrete people with their concrete agendas, while obtaining a sense of common motivations underlying the variety of routes and practices on micro-levels of transnationalism.

In order to illustrate the processes of homing and re-grounding as well as the importance of personal travel and presence in particular places, I will present some examples (discussed at length in my contribution to the forthcoming Ashgate edited collection on Bosnian diaspora; Povrzanović Frykman forthcoming) of a transnational pattern connecting Sweden, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia, that is quite common among Bosnian Croats living in Sweden. These examples reveal positive feelings, but also reflections of intra-ethnic differences that are grounded in personal experiences of multiple locations.

In order to illustrate the presumed benefits of looking at the material layers of transnational practices, I will present my research project financed by the Swedish Board of Science in 2011-2013. Investigating the often overlooked material practices is supposed to reveal the differences between the migrants’ ways of transnational being and belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). In conclusion, the main theoretical benefits of transnational paradigm will be discussed in relation to the above mentioned ethnographic examples. Thirteen points are inserted in the following text, in order to highlight my main argument.

Place and Belonging

The philosopher Edward Casey (1993) claimed that places direct, stabilise us, and identify us, tell us who and what we are in terms of where we are. Yet, there is neither a singular theoretical connection between place and (ascribed or self-ascribed) identity, nor between place and the subjective feeling of belonging. Ties to a place do not imply exclusive belongings; people can feel intimately related to, and have a well-developed sense of several places as ‘their own’. Migrants who engage in transnational acts of homing and re-grounding may attribute equally significant meanings to the material and social elements gathered in *several* places, and generate ‘small worlds’ that include *distant* places.

- 1) Migrants’ multiple attachments are not conceptualized as aberrant from the sedentary concepts of belonging, but as ‘normal’ in their own right.
- 2) Migrants’ belongings may be multiple, as may be their roles in (re)shaping, (re)forming, or (re)creating the places between which they move, and to which they have different kinds of relations.

Affective qualities of places cannot be separated from the materiality of streets, houses, and objects that make places familiar and perceived as one’s own. They are incorporated through *practices* (and not through discourses of identity and belonging) as the means of accomplishing inclusion in different locations. That inclusion equals *belonging* that is *rooted in sensual experiences, human interaction and local knowledge* contained in familiar places, and conditioned by social and psychological concreteness (Hedetoft 2004).

As meanings of places are endlessly constructed “in an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretative understandings of experience” (Gieryn 2000: 471), they are also about proximities, about the bodily co-presence of people who share the place or even participate in common activities. The importance of *being there*, especially in the culturally coded and socially significant moments of celebration or crisis, “makes travel desirable or even obligatory for some” (Hannam et al. 2006: 13), as it “may be necessary for enabling complex connections to be made, often as a matter of social, or political, obligation” (ibid.: 10).

So, if people live far away from ‘their’ places, to what extent are personal presence and involvement in social relations *in situ* crucial for someone’s sense of place – the meanings attributed to it? On the other hand, do they have to ‘prove’ connection and inclusion to the ones who stayed behind? Can belonging to a place, the sense of the ‘right to free access’ into a place not lived in on daily basis, be achieved by the means of building and owning premises? When and why exactly do people want to, or feel that they have to, travel to certain destinations?

Due to Croatia’s diaspora politics, and the legal option of dual citizenship available in Sweden since 2001, the Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina are entitled to citizenship in all those countries. More than 70,000 people originating from Bosnia-Herzegovina lived in Sweden in 2008. By 2008, some 20,000 had permanent residence permits, and more than 50,000 acquired Swedish citizenship while retaining the Bosnian one (*Pregled stanja* 2008: 58). Even for those with permanent residence, moving to another EU country does not affect the right to residence in Sweden. Bosnians with Swedish citizenship are free to move and live in any country of their choice (including Bosnia-Herzegovina), without

losing Swedish citizenship. Taking that into consideration, and knowing about the intensity of migrants' transnational connections, it is no surprise that only 149 Bosnians officially returned to Bosnia from Sweden in 2001–2005, notwithstanding the fact that Sweden implements 30 million Euro into different development programmes in that country, including the programmes facilitating the repatriation of Bosnian citizens (*Pregled stanja* 2008: 59).

A Story of Connection: ‘Own People’ or Good Neighbours?

To my question about the reasons for her and her husband's decision to return to Croatia after some years as refugees in Sweden, Dora, who left Bosnia in her twenties, claimed that they believe that “it is the most natural and the most normal to live with one's own people, if possible”.

Similarly to Mate's wife, Dora, with her first child, first came to her relatives who lived in Sweden, to embark on the refugee path only after she was joined by her husband who managed to escape the draft. After two and a half years in a refugee collection centre, and the starting difficulties, they eventually obtained jobs in a vibrant Swedish firm, and made quick advancements due to the recognition of their professional backgrounds and personal qualities. Dora and her husband had their children enrolled in the activities organised by the local (labour migrant-based) Croatian association, and are regular visitors of all the events happening there. They are also regular and visible members of the local Croat Catholic community, where Dora's husband has been especially prominent.

Unlike the majority of 1990s refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite having full employment and residence permit, they decided to return. However, ‘return’ meant resettling in a country in which they never lived before, in a small town in Zagreb region. They were offered jobs and were in the process of buying a house, but eventually became discouraged by the administrative obstacles and perceived personal animosities; so that they returned to Sweden. Dora said:

“Only the teachers in the local elementary school were really nice and helpful, all the rest simply worked against us. It was, like, what are you doing here, you from Bosnia? You are not normal, what are you doing here? We were not welcome. People live with a plenty of prejudices. Down there, people ‘know everything’; they don't need anyone [who could know better].”

After half a year in Croatia, Dora and her husband could return to their jobs in Sweden. Actually, Dora's husband was often called by his Swedish boss who wanted him to return. They did not own the house in which they had lived before the war (besides, it was looted and burned down in the war). In Sweden, with the growing number of children they were buying bigger flats; they changed the address three times, but stayed in the same town. The family is paying visits to Dora's parents who stayed behind in Herzegovina, but those visits last only for a few days. Her husband's mother was expelled from her Bosnian place and now lives with her other son in Zagreb; they visit them shortly, too, unless they meet in their summer-flat.

“We wanted to have something of our own. Wherever you come, you are (just) a guest. You have to have your own basis”, Dora explained. From that basis it is easy to travel within

the region and meet all the people one wants to meet. Having two high incomes, Dora and her husband were able to buy a nice flat in Dalmatia – found via internet, to which they travel by car once a year, for summer holidays. So, even if their children can be conceptualised as ‘refugee-children’, they had actually followed a ‘normal’ pre-war middle-class Yugoslav pattern of spending summer holidays by the Adriatic coast (and could enjoy it considerably longer than any other children whose families do not own summerhouses). When they were younger, the parents were ‘taking turns’ in Croatia, and the grandparents from Herzegovina would also take care of them in order to prolong their stays by the sea. “The children were made to feel at home there, they had friends; it was also important to us because of the language. It is nice both for the children and for us”, Dora said.

The choice of location was influenced by the fact that they had some friends in the vicinity. Eventually they gained very good neighbours there, also summer-visitors who own flats in the same set of summer-flat blocks. One of the neighbouring couples Dora by now sees as close friends. “That company we have there – they are all from Zagreb. We are more or less the same generation, and we socialise very nicely.” To my question about their contacts with the locals, she replied that they know some people, but are not socialising with them.

In 2010, Dora’s 19-year old daughter spent only a week with them in Croatia, and the son did not come there at all, since he had a student summer-job in Sweden. At the time of our conversation in September 2010, he was in Slovenia, being the witness at a wedding of his friend whose father, in his turn, was the witness at his own parents’ wedding. His sister was about to leave for Germany where she will start her university studies (her Swedish high-school profile allows her access to German universities).

A year earlier, she started to study in Zagreb; she strongly wishes to live in Croatia (“she *decided* to do so in the future”, her mother said). That, however, turned out to be an unpleasant episode, and her mother’s anger and disappointment was clear as she was telling me about it. The daughter was there as a foreign student from Sweden, but (since the programme was in Croatian) she had to do the regular entry exam together with 900 other Croatian candidates. She passed it with very good score, but she was still asked to attend a Croatian course before starting the programme:

“They do everything to *not* help you (*rade sve da ti odmognu*), and they say, your child comes from abroad, she would like to give exams without working for them? Well, it’s Balkan tricks... prejudices (*tako tih nekih balkanskih izivljavanja... predrasude, kao – hoće na lijepe oči*).”

Images of ‘deserving diaspora’ that helped the Croatian war-effort saturated the political and media space for a decade after the war. Several ministers in the independent Croatia's government were recruited from diaspora. Policy-incentives were established, in order to facilitate the return of labour migrants from Western Europe or people of Croatian descent living overseas, as potential beneficial economic actors that could help Croatia's post-war recovery and development. Policies concerning 'diaspora youth' allowed them access to educational institutions in Croatia in the frames of extra quotas. The girl in question was actually using another channel of institutional inclusion (as a foreigner), but as that channel is highly unusual for a Croatian-speaking person, she seems to have fallen in-between categories, and was framed as ‘diaspora Croat’, counting on (undeserved) privileges.

The summer before, Dora’s daughter attended a preparatory course for the entry exam in Zagreb. “Everyone told her: what are you doing here? What do you think – you came here

from Europe... How do you think you'll study here?" The teacher at the course was pointing to the flaws in her Croatian in front of the class, so she provoked him by asking if she could explain a mathematical solution in Swedish. Afterwards, the same problem occurred with a university professor who would not let her pass his exam because of the flaws in her written Croatian, even if her mathematical solution was correct.

Dora told me that this experience did not diminish her daughter's wish to settle in Croatia after completing her education. She knows that the children of Bosnian refugees to Sweden who study medicine in Zagreb in English, in a programme designed for foreign students, have "only the best of experiences". Dora's daughter, on the other hand, was framed as a 'diaspora Croat' who claimed (undeserved) privileges. This framing was intertwined with another perception widely spread (in Yugoslav times as well as today) among people in Croatia who have not been living abroad themselves, i.e., that 'is better abroad' – a perception that seems to be linked to a sort of diffused envy. It is therefore suspiciously strange that a 19-year old with an EU-passport would want to come to study economics in Zagreb. This girl's perception of the normality of the transnational presence was challenged when that presence bore claims to full incorporation. Perhaps her attempt to inclusion, along the parents' former attempt to settlement and employment, has to be analytically juxtaposed to the unproblematic, easily achieved informal personal forms of transnationalism based on regular visits and holidays spent in own premises. Even if the girl was positioned as a Swede/European and the parents as Bosnian Croats/Bosnians, their experiences of rejection were similar. So, while Dora's statement on 'naturalness' and 'normality' of living among co-ethnics may be considered ideological, her personal experience made her add "if possible" as a correction of that statement, pointing at the realities of (im)possible inclusions being based on a number of factors other than ethnicity.

Homing and Re-grounding

The never fully completed *Gastarbeiter* houses have been a standard sight throughout the Yugoslav successor states. In many places, houses erected some forty years ago stay empty not only as material expression of the hard-to-realise, or naïve, dream of return (multiple belongings established in the places of immigration came in between!). They are also a sign of economic success, often interpreted as directed toward those who stayed behind. They could also be seen as a material way of making up for the guilt of leaving: it is here that we place our major investment; we did not leave for good; we belong.

Bosnian Croats – 1990s refugees to Sweden – seem to 'know better'. Many sell the flats in the places from which they were exiled, and make efforts to buy property in Croatian summer resorts. We often talk about perfect holidays in places that I visited, too. Levels of local expertise are established by agreeing on favourite cafés, restaurants or beaches in such places. Proving rootedness by mentioning one's own address is common; as many formulate it: "It is important to have something of your own". Yet *where* does not go without saying; it can be in any of the three homelands these people may feel attached to – Sweden as the newly acquired one, Bosnia-Herzegovina as the original one, and Croatia as the one in which they never lived on daily basis, but with which they have a variety of old and new relations.

It is the activity of those who 'own' the place that gives it value. They 'own' the place, but at the same time 'belong' to it: the value of an inhabited place is embodied by the people living in it. Those who don't live in it permanently, but feel happy or obliged to return in

more or less regular patterns, try to embody their belonging by the means of personal presence and ownership.

“Complex interrelations between travel and dwelling, home and not home” (Hannam et al. 2006: 10) appear as even more complex in transnational contexts, where they depend on active efforts of spanning distant locales. My example illustrates the fact that inclusions in places and communities are constructed not only politically (legally) and discursively, but – importantly – through grassroots practices.

3) The focus on *practices* of homing and regrounding is necessary for an understanding of the (re)creation of *social spaces*.

The Importance of Travel

While sentimental geographies are built upon practicalities of travel that imply also burdens and difficulties (Povrzanović Frykman 2003), the normal, everyday character of travels between Sweden, Bosnia and Croatia shows how the refugees bridge some imposed ruptures and re-establish their lives. Both former and newly acquired assets and individual resources informed crucial differences in people’s experiences of exile and incorporations in new, Swedish, surroundings, but also in transnational contexts.

However, it is very important not to construe the migrants as only travelling between two, or, as in my example, three countries. Family members who visit each other may be scattered throughout Europe and sometimes beyond. Furthermore, people sometimes choose to spend holidays in countries other than their homeland (to have “real holidays”, they say, and avoid the social obligations of work, visits and presents). Many – especially the younger ones – are fully socialised not only in transnational connections between their different homelands, but also in the travelling routes of their peers of non-migrant origin. For leisure, studies and work, they outline their own generational and individual geographies of significant places, in which those in the parents’ homeland may remain firm spots, but not necessarily the most important travel destinations.

4) Transnational ties do not signal failed incorporation in the country of immigration. And *vice versa*, the multilayered incorporation in the society of immigration does not make people less interested in transnational links, especially not in those realized through personal travel. On the contrary, it may increase the propensity for it (as employment is most commonly a precondition for having the means to travel).

A typology of transnational migrants could be discerned in relation to the intensity of travelling, the means and the costs of transportation. Such a typology would not need to include the travellers’ ethnic affiliations.

Ethnicity and Beyond

As ethnicity paradigms concern boundary formation, social identity, the cultural contents of group identities and processes of inclusion and exclusion, they bring about the danger of ho-

mogenising ethnic groups, i.e., presupposing certain kinds of sameness between individuals constructed as ‘members’ of such groups. While not forgetting that politics and policies may turn people’s ethnic affiliation into a crucial political and social issue, and not denying the reality of subjective experiences of group belonging, the role of ethnicity should – in every research project anew – be turned into an empirical question. Even if overarching values and interests may be observable among migrants of the same ethnic affiliation, in research on transnationalism ethnic group is relevant first and foremost as an analytical concept. The importance of ethnicity should not be taken for granted as an explanatory ground to be prioritized over the influence of legal frameworks, migrants’ socio-economic background and current economic performance, gender, age, modes of incorporation in respective societies, or personal motifs for transnational practices.

If ethnicity is understood as “the sense of difference and the image presented to the outsider that may be either repressed or elaborated” (Okely 1996: 60), it is also relevant to ask questions that reach *within* ethnic groups. In the case of transnational social spaces or fields, these questions concern if, and how, people belong to places and if, and how, they create their social spaces in ethnic terms.

Even if individual motivations and enactments of transnationalism may overlap with ethnic affiliation and are facilitated by multiple national belongings, they are not necessarily an outcome of ethnic awareness or national ideologies. They may be an outcome of social needs and prospects on other, more personal levels.

The practices *per se* contain little ethnic specificity besides the obvious fact that the particular countries are especially relevant for the creation of transnational social spaces of the people in question. Seen beyond the very geographical locations involved, such practices probably look pretty much the same in a number of different ethnic contexts, given similar socio-economic characteristics and similar geographical distances. As love, friendship, family, and places of everyday life shape the deepest individual and experiential foundations of belonging, similarities among migrants’ of various class backgrounds are notable – and that is presumably also the case for migrants of various ethnic backgrounds (Povrzanović Frykman 2008).

That is in line with the recent critique of migration scholars’ reliance on the ethnic group as a unit of analysis: the pioneer of anthropological studies of transnational migration Nina Glick Schiller recently argued for the importance of examining *non-ethnic* forms of migrants’ incorporation and transnational connections (Glick Schiller 2008).

5) In contrast to the ethnic paradigm (‘ethnic lens’; Glick Schiller et al. 2006) which prioritizes migrants’ ethnicity when explaining their behaviour, the transnational paradigm – through a comparative analysis of transnationalism on micro-levels – can bring about insights into crucial similarities across ethnic identities and boundaries.

6) The transnational paradigm facilitates an understanding of the intersections of ethnicity, geography and biography in relationships and processes embedded in transnational practices.

7) Transnational practices depend on the relevant legal frameworks, but also on the location of homes in old and new homelands, on the available infrastructure facilitating connections and on the economic means at hand, all intersecting with age, generation, gender, family structure and the changing family circumstances.

Material Layers of Transnational Social Fields

In their considerations of the methodological implications of what they call “the transnational optic”, Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky (2007) propose that empirical research is conducted “at all sites of the transnational social field” (ibid.:143). They suggest that “the goal is a thick and empirically rich mapping of how global, macro-level processes interact with local lived experiences that are representative of broader trends” (ibid.).

In the context of the existing legal frameworks of border regimes and people’s different preconditions of dealing with those systems due to their different national inclusions – namely, the ownership of the passports that are easy or difficult to travel with within the EU – I am about to start fieldwork concerning the phenomenon of great quantities of objects transported in overloaded cars, buses, ships and planes that connect labour and refugee migrants’ homes in different countries. I will focus on objects that constitute people’s material worlds, yet via their transnational routes destabilise the commonsensical notions of ‘rooted’ cultures and localised communities to which they ‘belong’.

Objects made or acquired in different locations that have significance for the migrants who carry, select, keep, adapt, cherish and use them, appear as one of the vital aspects of transnational social fields. They either want, or feel obliged to transport a variety of objects that have been purchased or received as presents, are industrially manufactured or home-made, and are of emotional or of practical value. In the places of immigration, some objects ‘from the old home’ are displayed as representations of ethnic and local identities; many others are used on daily basis for their practical value or consumed because they appeal to the users’ taste. It is similar in the places of origin to which migrants keep returning: while some objects from the countries of immigration represent connections with ‘the world’ and serve as a matter of local prestige for migrants’ family members who stayed behind, many more are, again, used on daily basis for their practical value and may significantly affect people’s agency and economic well-being.

A common way of reasoning about migrants and objects is that objects signal a person’s identity and aid memory. Thus they are interesting inasmuch they appear as matters of representation of – first and foremost ethnic – identities. In contrast, we can explore how objects constitute the world experienced by migrants in terms of its materiality. Here, objects do not only ‘express’, ‘symbolise’, ‘reflect’ or ‘reify’ social relations, they also *make* them. They are “enactments of strategies, and actively participate in the making and holding together social relations” (Pels et al. 2002: 11).

On the one hand, objects are central to the practices through which transnational social fields are maintained: one needs *devices* for communication and transportation! On the other hand, objects as ‘things to hold on to’ (to use in everyday or ritual contexts) do generate a sense of continuity between different locations.

With its focus on objects used in everyday life, this project differs significantly from ethnological studies that prioritise a discursive formation of identities and do not look beyond objects as representations. It is an exploratory ethnographic research grounded in and guided by objects that physically move within and constitute the materiality of transnational social fields.

8) It is anticipated that a study of ‘transnational life of objects’ – of how objects are used, sent, received, refused and struggled with in the realm of transnational social fields – would contribute to the *epistemological balance of understanding of people’s identities* as equally importantly positioned in *material and discursive* terms and equally importantly defined by *practices and representations*.

Migrants beyond Ethnicity

Here, again, one of the objectives is to produce *ethnographically founded knowledge about migrants as people whose everyday lives encompass locations in different nation-states*, and not as ‘bearers’ of ethnic identities. If we conceptualise migrants as ‘members of ethnic groups’, research is directed towards ethnic markers and the symbolic use of objects, not towards objects of everyday use in which nothing ‘ethnic’ can be discerned. If we define transnational social fields as consisting of combinations of social and symbolic ties and only look for the convertibility of various sorts of capital, membership of the homeland’s political party is of obvious relevance, but not, e.g., the modes of transporting objects across borders.

9) My research is directed not only towards ethnic markers and the symbolic use of objects, but also towards objects of everyday use in which nothing ‘ethnic’ can be discerned.

10) Research participants are immigrants of different origins, different socio-economic backgrounds, and different generations, living in Sweden; their non-migrant counterparts; Swedes who never moved but have family abroad. I conducted a pilot-study with a group constructed out of colleagues engaging in transnational social fields, who work at Malmö University. The same starting set of questions is posed to *all* research participants, such as:

Who carries which objects, where, to whom and why?

How are they received and used in different locations and how do they affect people’s agency?

Do they affect local relations and hierarchies?

How do they contribute to the place-making, the (re)creation of places?

What is the proportion between objects that serve as representation of ethnic and local identities, those that embody personal memories, and those that ‘lead transnational lives’ because people find them useful or simply are used to them?

Can objects replace personal presence?

What is it, for example, in a toy that a migrant mother sent to a child left behind, that cannot be contained in a phone-call?

Further, reconsideration of migrants’ *presupposed collective identities* is very important. In line with the warning against “locating ethnographic subjects in the comfortable familiarity of bounded ethnic categories of community and belonging” (Amit 2007: 56), collective identities must be assessed empirically. Identities are constituted through practices and are, to a great extent, dependent on material conditions. Along with ideas and discourses of belonging and integration, *practices and lived experiences involving objects* are important, through which migrants accomplish incorporation in different locations and in different networks.

11) The search for (imagined) communities of origin and ethnic affiliation should not hamper the perception of (real-existent) communities of practice. The relevance of ethnic categories is questioned in the analysis of the *motivations* for and the practices of migrants' multiple attachments. What exactly do they do *because of* their ethnic affiliation, and how does it differ from the practices of people who are ethnically different?

Ethnographic research into the interplay of sociality and materiality in transnational contexts can provide a solid foundation for the critical reconsideration of the presumed importance of ethnicity. If it is treated as an empirical question, and not as an assumed explanatory ground, a decisive step is taken beyond the ethnicity paradigm in migration research. It is a step towards research-based understanding of the multiplicity of migrants' positions, practices and identities (as noted under 2. above), the perception of which may be hindered by a sole focus on their ethnicity.

This is important in the wider socio-political context of Sweden as a country of immigration. The popular dissemination of the results of the research outlined here might be used for the purpose of 'de-ethnifying', and thus de-exotifying, migrants.

Being and Belonging

There is a "need to distinguish between patterns of connection on the ground and the conditions that produce ideologies of community" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1006). Such a distinction is critical to the development of methodologies for empirically studying transnational lives. In this respect, claims to and representations of belonging can be detached from the ways in which people actively – here, through objects – fashion their transnational social fields.

Thus, analytical separation of ethnic belonging and people's motives for engaging in some transnational practices may disrupt the rigid understandings which determine people's behaviour due to their ethnicity. Only ethnographic research can show what the notion of *process* means in terms of grassroots agency and identify the role of particular objects' changed circumstances both 'here' and 'there'. Only ethnographic research can, e.g., establish when a food item is brought from one place to another because of its unique taste, favourable price, or 'ethnic' nature, when it is simply enabling the normality of consumption, and when it is acquiring representative functions.

In conceptualising the simultaneity of migrants' lives in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) distinguish between *ways of being* – the actual social relations and practices in which individuals engage in their everyday lives, and *ways of belonging* – practices that signal or enact identity and demonstrate a conscious connection to a particular group. While *belonging* combines "action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies" (ibid. 2004: 1010), *being* in a social field does not necessarily mean that people identify with the labels, cultural politics or any representations associated with that field. One can lead a transnational life without ever signalling or enacting one's ethnic identity. Such migrants, however, fall out of the research frames defined by the interest in the expressions of belonging.

A praxeological approach to material culture elucidates the depth or various layers of the complex relationship between embodied material culture and representations (Warnier 2001: 20–21) – between being and belonging.

12) *ways of being* – the actual social relations and practices in which individuals engage in their everyday lives; *ways of belonging* – practices that signal or enact identity and demonstrate a conscious connection to a particular group

While belonging concerns the use of objects as markers of ethnic affiliation, the aforementioned intention to treat the importance of ethnicity as an empirical question clearly benefits from a pronounced interest into the ways of being. If people take things ‘home’ (in both directions), they not only do it because they want to or ‘have’ to, but also because they *can*. Even if their materiality often generates sweat (when carried) and extra costs (when sent), objects activate transnational ways of being in a taken-for-granted manner. Even if they oblige people to cope with border regimes and physical distances, they nonetheless help them to deny and overcome the segregation between different locations in the relevant social fields.

Experiential Continuity

13) Deconstructing the dichotomising ‘versus’ in pairs of opposites such as ‘here vs. there’, ‘new vs. old’, ‘host vs. home’ opens up a possibility of understanding the *experiential continuity* of transnational social fields.

Migrants’ experiences of being in transnational social fields are rendered more comprehensible if these analytical concepts are connected with ‘and’, rather than juxtaposed by ‘versus’. Here, objects are the material aspects of this ‘and’. If objects are the centre of attention (and they very often are for the actual migrants and their homeland-bound counterparts) they can reveal how this experiential continuity is emotionally and practically contained in their materiality. This is the case for souvenirs and practical objects alike, for family albums and food products, religious symbols and everyday garments. In research, the balance between representative and practical uses must be kept, and due attention given to objects that lack representative and ethnic identity-consolidating potential. By being used, or merely present, such objects bestow and ensure a multi-scalar continuity of practices and places. Indeed, their materiality is a crucial aspect of *being* in transnational social fields.

The *normality* of their presence confirms the ‘normality’ of transnational connections pointed out under 1) above. It defies the ‘im-migration paradigm’ as well as the ‘in-betweenness paradigm’.

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