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Transnational Belonging, Non-ethnic Forms of Identification and Diverse Mobilities: Rethinking Migrant Integration?

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Introduction

The integration of migrants[1] is a key topic in ethnic and migration studies in Western countries; it is also, of course, an emotionally charged and much debated issue in politics and the media. Since the 1920s, generations of scholars have elaborated sophisticated theories in order to provide a more detailed understanding of the processes by which migrants adapt to their host countries and have proposed different models and theories. Among these, (neo-)assimilation and segmented assimilation theory dominate the field in the USA (among others, Alba and Viktor 1997; Stepick and Stepick 2010) but are important in some European countries (for instance, Esser 1980; Nauck et al. 1997). Cultural pluralism models and multiculturalism are the prevalent approaches in Canada and England (Kymlicka 2010; Modood 2007), whereas in most other European countries, the idea of integration and social cohesion is most popular (Pennix et al. 2006).

In all these contexts, studying migrant integration has meant measuring the degree to which immigrant groups are integrated into the economic and social institutions of the host society, taking into consideration structural aspects such as educational achievement, access to the labour market and discrimination as well as individual factors (migrants' age, educational profiles, and so on). It must be emphasised that there are important differences between the aforementioned theoretical propositions as well as strong continental, even national traditions in tackling the subject. This has resulted in a lack of common theoretical and methodological concepts (for a pertinent discussion, see among others Schneider and

[1] In this chapter, I use the compound term *migrant integration* in a broad sense with the aim of subsuming the most important theoretical approaches.

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Crul 2010). Nevertheless, when it comes to cultural aspects and questions of belonging, I argue that these popular paradigms share some common ground in the sense that they suffer from the same shortcomings, necessitating further theorisation in three respects. First, these models largely neglect the intertwined nature of processes of *incorporation* and *transnational forms* of identification and belonging. Second, most theories are more or less blind to *non-ethnic forms* of identification because they use ethnicity as an unproblematic *explanans* for both describing and explaining processes of integration. Finally, they fail to take into account *all types of mobility* that go beyond migration-cum-settlement as a one-way process and have varied effects on migrants' sense of belonging and identity.

My arguments in this paper are focused primarily on conceptual inconsistencies in integration models. My purpose in this is obviously not to develop an alternative theoretical model of migrant incorporation – which would be overly ambitious and uncalled for – but to think about some of the theoretical and epistemological premises of existing theories with the hope of thereby advancing our understanding of the matter. The first section presents three short biographies of migrants. These narratives will serve as a "red thread" throughout the paper and illustrate my arguments. I then elaborate and discuss in detail the three theoretical shortcomings mentioned above. The conclusion aims at bringing together all three strands of my argument by proposing directions for future research and theory building.

Stories of Migration: Towards Social Diversification

In order to support and focus my argument, I shall introduce three short migrant biographies. I deliberately present only biographies of *first-generation working migrants* in order to establish common ground, leaving aside asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants as well as second-generation migrants. This is just to make an obvious point: Migration biographies are much more varied than what can be elaborated in three short narratives.

Mary Beans[2] is what today is called a highly skilled migrant: She holds a university degree and works in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, as administrative director of an important investment company active in the high-tech sector. Before coming to Switzerland 8 years ago, Mary held management positions in Cyprus and Germany. She has an English passport and was born in Cairo. Mary is divorced, has no children and has a companion who lives in Italy. That is why she often spends the weekends in Rome. Besides, most of her friends are spread all over the world. Mary does not consider herself to be "integrated" in Neuchâtel; in fact, she readily admits that she does not know a lot about the local population and local affairs. She feels that the world of multinational companies does not have a lot to do

with local life, and most of her friends and acquaintances come from backgrounds similar to hers.

Arben Berisha arrived in Switzerland in the 1980s as one of the so-called "*saisonniers*" – a temporary worker. He worked at a construction site, and his objective – at least at the beginning – was to earn money in order to overcome economic hardship at home and to return after a few years. However, from the 1980s on, the political and economic situation in former Yugoslavia in general, and in Kosovo specifically, deteriorated drastically. Confronted not only with economic hardship but also with increasing political unrest at home, Arben slowly abandoned his plans of returning and decided instead to bring his wife to Switzerland. Today, they live in Zürich with their three children. Two years ago, Arben lost his job; he is now unemployed and thinking about opening an Albanian Restaurant in Zürich with the help of family members living in Kosovo. His wife works for a cleaning company, and the children are all doing apprenticeships. The family's life is centred in Zürich. Nonetheless, they regularly send remittances not only to their parents but also to Arben's sister-in-law by his wife. They have a house in Kosovo and spend their holidays there, although their children would prefer going to the sea in Italy, Spain or Montenegro together with their colleagues. The parents cherish the dream that their children will one day marry someone from "home" – they would feel most comfortable with that – but know this might not happen.

Yulia Margineanu works in Switzerland as a cabaret dancer. She is Ukrainian, 25 years old and holds a diploma as a primary school teacher. However, the economic situation in the Ukraine was so bad that, even with this diploma, her salary was so low that she was forced to accept jobs that did not match her qualifications. That is how she first started to dance in a bar in the Ukraine. Her parents (her father is a teacher and her mother an engineer) – as she herself puts it – also had barely enough money for themselves. A colleague later told her about the possibilities of working as a dancer in other countries. Yulia contacted a placement agency and has so far come to Switzerland three times, always to work as a cabaret dancer (it should be noted that her "dancer's permit" does not allow her to switch to another job). However, Yulia is quite a world traveller, having also been engaged in an erotic nightclub in Japan and once in Bulgaria. These jobs are always limited to a few months, and she goes home regularly to visit her family. In fact, she dreams of opening her own shop at home. Her main motivations for doing her present job are economic and affective – she wants to help her family and save money. These are also the reasons why she does things that are not covered by her work contract or are explicitly forbidden, but allow her to increase her income. Thus, she works longer hours, encourages customers to drink alcohol (she receives a percentage of the cabaret owner's margin on alcohol sales) and sometimes offers sexual services to clients. She has become quite an experienced dancer and can avoid being exploited by either cabaret owners or clients. Unlike many dancers just starting out, she knows the "rules of the game".

The three short biographies recounted above reflect not only that migration movements have multiplied but also that European societies are confronted with

an increasing number of multi-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified migrants. These three migrants have their origins in distinct parts of the world. From a socio-economic point of view, they also hold very distinct positions (highly skilled, unskilled-unemployed, precarious work in the sex industry) and have different working and residence permits (residence permit in two cases, "dancer's permit" in the third).

Without a doubt, the question of migrant integration gains new pertinence in such diversified contexts. More specifically, with regard to the topic at stake here, the twofold question is as follows: How are migrant belonging and identification shaped in such conditions, and can existing theories of migrant adaptation account for this diversification?

Three Challenges for Integration Theories

Incorporation and Transnationalisation: Towards Theorising the Multiple Articulations

My first argument is that theories of migrant integration still do not sufficiently take into account the complex and amalgamated structures that combine elements of *migrant incorporation processes* on the one hand and *transnational forms of identification and belonging* on the other.

Since the early 1990s, studies on transnationality have proliferated, and transnationality has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding contemporary practices that cross national borders. With regard to migration, a whole range of authors have brought to light the mechanisms behind the development and morphologies of long- or short-term transnational practices and of stable or occasional transnational fields linking migrants with their country of origin or a third country (among others, Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). In brief, most social scientists agree that transnationality can most broadly be understood as the multiple connections that migrants maintain simultaneously at different places across the globe and which result in *transnational social fields and spaces* (Faist 1999; Pries 2008) or *forms of belonging* (Hannerz 1996). This view suggests that to be *transnational* involves a mode of acting and performing (i.e. building up transnational social relations and practices) as much as it does thinking, feeling and belonging. In this approach, transnational subjectivities or transnational forms of identification come to mean the cognitive classifications of a person's membership and belonging in transnational space (Dahinden 2009: 1367).

For some years now, studies of transnationality on the one hand and of migrant integration on the other have developed in parallel, rather than in dialogue with each other. Recently, however, a vivid debate has been launched as to how processes of migration incorporation in the host country and the establishment of transnational spaces are related. Going back a little in history, one realises that transnational forms of identification and practice were either ignored by most assimilation theories or interpreted as a sign of non-assimilation. Assimilation

was seen as successful only when the migrant identified completely with the local (national) context and was successfully integrated into the national labour market (Gordon 1964), erasing everything that extended beyond national boundaries. This refusal to acknowledge the transnational aspects of migration, resulting in an explicit "either/or assumption", is explained by the "national-container-model" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) and by what has come to be labelled "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), on which assimilation theory is based.

Today, most social scientists agree that integration processes and transnationality are interrelated and in no sense preclude each other. Several scholars therefore propose to analyse the social consequences linked with migration as the combined result of transnational and adaptation processes (among others, Bommes 2003; Morawska 2002): Empirical research has shown that transnational identification and practice can decline with growing adaptation in the host countries. In other cases, transnational spaces develop only once a certain degree of assimilation in the host country has been accomplished. In yet other cases, transnational identification may arise as a reaction to a negative experience of incorporation or as a result of discrimination or negative perceptions of the receiving society (Itzigsohn and Gioguli Saucedo 2005).

Let us now return to the three biographies in order to identify if and how the sense of belonging of these migrants is transnationally oriented:

When I asked Mary about her sense of belonging, she answered:

> I am a human being and a citizen of the earth. I feel myself Mediterranean and European. I am very German in my work and English in my way of managing things. In my personal relations I am very Mediterranean, very warm. Listen, with the years, I came to see that we are all human beings and that every human being feels the need to be the member of a tribe, so to speak. When you travel like me, then you belong to different cultures. [. . .] I do not belong to one single culture.

In her statement, she displays a kind of pluriculturalist cosmopolitan subjectivity that is strongly transnationally oriented. Mary Bean identifies with what she calls "different cultures", displaying a transnational form of belonging. Furthermore, both her personal and her professional network (among employees of multinational companies) are highly transnational. Mary belongs to a global elite that circulates and is integrated in transnational spaces rather than incorporated into the local structures of her city of residence. However, in light of the high cultural and economic capital at her disposal, it would be odd to consider her "non-integrated": Indeed, in this specific case, transnationality could be considered an alternative form of adaption.

Arben, as we saw from the interview, identifies with two places simultaneously, his sense and practices of belonging clearly influenced by both (Zürich and Peja in Kosovo). For instance, when it comes to ideas about the proper marriage partners for his son and daughter, he refers to norms of a transnational space in which Kosovo remains a powerful referent. He also uses his transnational relations to construct a more satisfactory professional identity and find a way of integrating into

the (Swiss) labour market: With the help of his siblings living in Kosovo, he has started to import foods in order to open an Albanian restaurant in Zürich. He hopes that this transnational ethnic business might enable him to gain an economic foothold in Switzerland. This case study demonstrates how the two contexts are intertwined and that both have to be taken into account in order to understand the outcome of integration processes. It sheds further light on the fact that the construction of transnational ties may well be concomitant with establishing roots in the host society and that such processes may be mutually reinforcing.

Yulia is a circulating migrant, and while she does not identify with Switzerland, she is integrated into the labour market in the sense that she has a legal contract and a working permit. She works in Switzerland, but wants to return home and sees her future in the Ukraine. However, in order to be able to maintain or improve her living standard at home, she has decided to circulate. In order to do so, she needs to develop a kind of "mobility capital" that involves, paradoxically, becoming "sedentarised" in Switzerland to a certain degree. It is only by becoming familiar with the context and by building up local resources (in order to know who the decent cabaret owners are, how to circumvent to drink alcolhol, etc.) that she is able to move back and forth between different countries. She needs these contacts to help her increase her income and to deal with her precarious living and working situation in the sex industry (Dahinden 2010). This case exemplifies another form of the interrelationship between incorporation and transnationality.

In sum, engaging in forms of transnational identification and belonging is an everyday fact in the lives of many migrants and can as such manifest a wide range of possibilities that I cannot cover here. I maintain, however, that we still need to theorise the articulation of incorporation and transnationalisation in more depth.

Ethnicity: Towards the Analysis of Boundary Work

Today, academics and politicians alike still draw an almost identical picture when describing diversified societies: Immigration contexts are generally conceptualised as composed of a mosaic of ethnically or nationally defined groups, each having inherent characteristics and its own dense fabric of organisation, with clearly demarcated boundaries. The question often posed, then, is how these ethnically defined groups incorporate themselves into "majority" society, thereby emphasising ethnic and national origin in both the description and the explanation of incorporation processes. What these theories share is the premise that ethnicity or nationality (and sometimes religion) is seen a priori as the most important criterion for questions of identity and belonging and hence the biggest obstacle to migrant incorporation. Other forms of identification, specifically those that go beyond ethnic or national categorisation, are ignored.

Straight-line assimilation models, and also the more sophisticated models of segmented assimilation or their European versions, not only reduce diversity to its ethnic or national dimension but also take ethnicity a priori as the relevant category

and *explanans* for identification and belonging. Consequently, investigations drawing on these theories invariably start from this underlying assumption.

Multicultural or cultural pluralist models thus reveal the same underlying epistemological assumptions. The problem as framed by them is how the cultural specificities of these a priori ethnically or nationally defined groups can be recognised and valorised in order to allow their full participation in national societies as cultural minorities.

We can detect the same tendency looking at present public and political debates about the so-called backlash against diversity (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009). What is at stake here is nothing less than the idea that our societies have become "too diverse" and heterogeneous in ethnic and religious terms and that such diversity poses a danger to social cohesion.

In other terms, these debates make the fatal mistake from a social science point of view of failing to distinguish between *community, ethnic group* and *culture*, assuming that the boundaries of an ethnic community, its identity and its culture all coincide in an unproblematic way (critically see Baumann 1996). This is what Wimmer (2009: 247) recently identified as the Herderian ontological trinity and the ill-conceived common sense approach of most migration research, namely, taking ethnic groups as self-evident units of analysis and observation, assuming that dividing an immigrant society along ethnic lines (what Brubaker (2004: 35) called "groupism") – rather than class, professional or other characteristics – is the most adequate way of achieving an empirical understanding of migrant adaptation.

This is not to say that ethnicity does not matter for migrant adaptation and questions of belongings. To the contrary, the nation-state and related ethnic categories retain considerable power to inflect hetero- and auto-identification processes in the modern globalised world (Calhoun 2007). Nation-states may be losing sovereignty with regard to their ability to regulate socio-economic realities or social networks, as some scholars postulate (Urry 2007), but when it comes to membership and identification, as well as access to territory and related rights, nation-states and ethnic categories still play a major role. For instance, nation-states have enormous influence on the ways in which migrants are categorised along ethnic and national lines. Immigration statistics in national surveys – of social mobility, of the school performance of pupils and of unemployment – generally follow this ethno-national logic. In other terms, the nation-state is an important actor in "doing ethnicity". However, ethnicisation processes vary in relation to social and historical contexts and between societies, which can be understood as the contingent result of the actors' struggles over the classification of "us" and "them". It follows that, instead of taking ethnic or national (and religious) groups as starting points for analysis, one could analyse either (1) how different actors (the state, the media, individuals in interactions) categorise others in ethno-national terms and under what conditions people identify themselves – or do not – with these categorisations or (2) which other categories of social hierarchy – class, gender, etc. – might be important for group formation, identity building and hierarchisation. This clears the path for considering ethnic and national groups as the specific *outcomes* of social processes that must be explained rather than as elements that pre-exist these

processes. Recently, the theoretical perspective of *boundary work* has been proposed by different scholars in order to overcome these shortcomings (Barth 1969; Pachucki et al. 2007; Wimmer 2008). By investigating which actors (nation-states, administrations, media, associations, migrants, non-migrants, etc.) contribute in which ways to the formation and crystallisation of ethnic and national groups as well as how the boundaries of these groups are maintained, transgressed, blurred, shifted or dissolved, we stand to learn much about belonging, identifications and migration incorporation, as has been shown by a number of scholars in the field (Alba 2005; Bauböck 1998; Duemmler et al. 2010; Zolberg and Woon 1999). Furthermore, such an approach also allows us to consider multiple forms of migrant identification.

Let us return to the three life stories told at the beginning and ask which categories are important for the sense of belonging held by these migrants and what role ethnicity plays in these processes. For Mary Beans, her English origins appear not to be crucial as a criterion of identification; her interview does not reveal an "English national consciousness". Instead, the main vector for her identity seems to be her socio-professional status, which affects her life decisions, her networks and social contacts. As we have seen before, she displays a strong cosmopolitan orientation.

The case of Arben Berisha is markedly different: When he first came to Switzerland, he identified as Yugoslav and was also identified as such by the Swiss – a Yugoslav guest worker. The political developments in former Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in open war in Kosovo in 1998, triggered new boundary demarcations along ethnic lines and led to the rise of an increasingly strong Albanian nationalism. While in the 1970s, the category "Kosovar" was as an ethnic category of secondary importance, ethnicity from 1990 on was the language and currency used to legitimate actions and identifications for the Berisha family as it was for many of their former compatriots. A new form of solidarity based upon ethnic criteria developed, culminating in the mass mobilisation of Albanian migrants in hometown associations, collective remittances and humanitarian projects – as in the case of the Berisha family – and resulted in the creation of a strong "ethnic groupness" (Dahinden 2008). However, this is only one side of the story of this new transnationally induced ethnic boundary work. Simultaneously, and following the logic of the always relational character of boundary making, it was at this moment that the Swiss side began to see the formerly invisible Yugoslav workers as not only "Albanians", but categorised them more and more as "problematic Albanians" associated with crime and a patriarchal culture and family structure that included violence against women. This new categorisation process culminated in strong discrimination against Albanians. This case illustrates the dynamics of ethnicity, clearly revealing them as the result of a relational and dialectical process between self-identification and external categorisation embedded in specific power relations.

Finally, turning to Yulia Margineanu, we see that ethnic aspects of identity are also secondary. In her everyday work, she tries above all to deal with the stigma of

working in the sex industry, adopting various strategies that allow her to distinguish herself from what she calls "prostitutes" and refusing to adopt the identity of a "prostitute".

Ethnicity may well play a role for belonging and identity, and thus ultimately also for migrant adaptation. However, instead of postulating a priori that this dimension is fundamental, we need to grasp not only the "how" of this ethnic identification but also the importance of other forms of classification beyond ethnonational criteria.

From Migration Towards Mobility

This need brings me to the last strand of my argument. Another aspect shared by theories of migrant integration is their view of migration as mainly a one-way process in which displacement is followed by permanent settlement. Meanwhile, research shows that there exist *diverse types of mobility* which have *varied* effects on migrants' identities and belonging. The three biographical accounts used throughout this paper reflect the wide range of such multifarious forms of mobility. Notwithstanding these empirical findings, migration adaption models in general take into account only one specific form of migration, casting the migrant as the well-known figure that Simmel (1992) called the "*'stranger', who comes today and stays tomorrow*". Manifestly, Arben Berisha and his family represent this type of migration quite well insofar as they are settled in Zürich, and it is not very probable that they will someday return to their native country.

Yet the economic and political transformations of the last decades, the weakening of the social state and globalisation processes in general have not only created a new demand for workers in different economic sectors but at the same time also new forms of mobility for women and men. These include the so-called modern nomads (Iredale 2001) who do highly skilled work and circulate globally from job to job, as Mary Bean does, and who do not settle down over the years. What is more, the demand for a female workforce in specific service sectors like childcare, care for the elderly (Hochschild and Arlie 2002) or the sex industry (Agustin 2007) has also created new forms of mobility that are not always followed by settlement, but can be described as temporary or circular migration. Cabaret dancers like Yulia correspond to such forms of circular migration. Yulia does not try to immigrate to another country permanently. Rather, she develops a form of circular migration and maintains her intention to return home. In other words, mobility becomes an integral part of the dancer's life strategy. She stays mobile in order to maintain or improve her quality of life in the Ukraine. This raises the following questions: How do we rethink migrant adaption under these conditions of enhanced mobility? What types of migration should be included when we think about integration? Who is excluded from this and for what reasons? Do we need alternative models in order to understand these phenomena or will we be able to find an overarching theoretical frame that allows us to include such diversity?

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to present some thoughts that I hope may allow us to advance our understanding of migrant integration processes under conditions of enhanced transnationalisation. I would like to stress, however, that I do not want to be understood as constructing a kind of opposition between these new ideas and currently predominant migration theories. On the contrary, the (maybe overly ambitious) objective is to reach a point at which the points I raised could be included within existing models.

First, the move to *transnationalise* assimilation theory opens up a series of interesting possibilities for how to analyse social structures which, under the conditions of globalisation, result in modified conditions for assimilation (see also Bommes 2003: 100). Conversely, transnational studies can profit from assimilation theory, in particular because the latter is in its essence a theory of social mobility and therefore seeks to understand social inequality. This makes it highly interesting for the transnational perspective, raising the following questions: How are social inequalities or unequal access to resources projected into transnational spaces? How to best grasp migrant integration under these conditions – not limited to the "national-container"?

Second, to address questions of local and transnational incorporation through the perspective of social inequality also opens up a wide range of ways to uncouple the models of migrant integration from their exclusively national and ethnic frames and thereby avoid the twin traps of "groupism" and "methodological nationalism". Adopting a boundary-work perspective allows us to investigate which categories (class, gender, ethnicity, profession, legal regulations, religion, etc.) become relevant in processes of inclusion and exclusion in diversified contexts as well as to identify the place that ethnicity occupies among them. In other words, the diverse classification processes that take place in the context of pluralistic societies have to be analysed, as migrant belonging is embedded in such processes of categorisation and boundary work.

Third and finally, I suggest that we "mobilise" migrant incorporation models by including different forms of mobility within their frameworks.

In sum, the effects of international mobility on belonging as such are and remain open to empirical fieldwork and theoretical models.

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