

COMMENTS

KAROL'S KINGDOM

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“(…) We are like the Great Britain guys. We have our cup of tea together,” Karol explains, after his wife and one of his two sons back home in Poland have ended their daily talk on Skype. We are sitting in Karol’s room, which he shares with his colleague from the construction site placed nearby, just outside a middle-size town about one hour drive from Copenhagen, Denmark. The room forms part of a dormitory and is approximately 12 square metres, has two single beds, a toilet with shower, a fridge and access to a pretty worn-out, shared kitchen. Together with his colleague he pays 450 euro rent, and importantly this includes free Internet access. Still placed at the computer, after the Skype call has finished, I am trying not to look at the 44-inch flat-screen TV that decorates the wall. The Polish *Tvn* channel is broadcasting a show on breast enlargements, so the living pictures are rather eye-catching. Karol has invited us and obligingly he tells us about how he ended up here in Denmark as a foreman for a small team of Polish workers on a building project run by a Danish entrepreneur. Here he earns approximately twice as much as he could in Poland. Karol works 46 hours Monday till Saturday for three weeks and then he returns to his family in Poland during the fourth week. “Everything we need for our living is here. For existing. (...) It’s my kingdom,” Karol states.

While sitting there in Karol’s room, I cannot help pondering why Karol chooses this way of life. What does it take to break up from the well-known routines at home in order to live in a small, shared room in a dormitory without having the family around? What I learned from Karol is that it takes more than

one wo/man’s choice to make a migratory practice a reality. Rather, a whole range of heterogeneous entities, settings and devices are involved. As they are assembled in various ways they take an active part in rendering a migratory practice such as Karol’s both possible and desirable. Close allies are, for example, the specific means of transportation used when moving back and forth across the border; the social networks and networks of communication; the institutional as well as private actors facilitating labour migration across borders, such as recruiters and housing or estate agents; the specific regulations and tax allowances making working abroad even more financially attractive; the special agreements between employers, migrant workers, and the Danish trade union, which enables the pooling of working hours, not to mention the role of the family members, and their acceptance and active partaking in the migratory venture.

In order to grasp the character and various rationales of migratory movements it is necessary to put a human face on migration processes as suggested by Favell (2008, 2009). However, in doing so, it is also decisive to go beyond a frame of explanation that focuses solely on various acts of choice (cf. van der Velde & van Naerssen 2011). Overall, this special issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* on “Imagined Families in Mobile Worlds” is taking important steps towards a broader conceptualization of practice than one of rational choice-making. Further, in scrutinizing the emergence of new models of familiarity beyond the domestic unit in transnational space the articles avoid focusing on mobile individuals alone.

Outline

In this commentary I discuss how ethnology can contribute to the interdisciplinary field of international migration studies. Such a contribution, I suggest, can take the form of historically informed, materiality-oriented ethnographies which provide a basis for further examining the interrelatedness between migratory regimes and everyday life practices. Using examples from a current research project on Polish working migrants in Copenhagen,¹ I will offer a few reflections on the conceptual understanding of migratory practices. I propose a broad comprehension of such practices that can be seen as complex matters of feasibility as opposed to a rather reductionist question of choice. I am inspired by Maja Povrzanović Frykman's call for a "shift of ethnographic focus towards people's *practices* in connection with migration" (2008: 17, original emphasis) arguing that "only ethnographic methods can capture what migrants actually do – in the places of their everyday life, in the places they keep returning to and on the journeys between them" (ibid.). Further, I point out how the authors of this special issue raise important questions and provide new knowledge by paying analytical attention to practices of migration; their historicity and materiality/technology. I therefore, firstly, direct my attention towards migration studies and the need for including practice approaches in the rethinking of the so-called "mobility turn". Secondly, I look at the interrelatedness between migration and historicity, and thirdly, I pick up on the role of materiality and technology as co-constructors of migration practices. In conclusion I discuss how the scrutinization of interfaces between migratory regimes and migration practices can both add new insights to the interdisciplinary field of migration studies and develop new questions for future ethnological inquiry.

Migration Studies and the Mobility Turn

The growing fields of interdisciplinary migration studies, mobility studies and globalization studies often depict a world that has become more mobile than ever before. However, in a Eurobarometer survey conducted by the Dublin-based European

Foundation for the *Improvement of Working and Living Conditions* (of the EU) in 2005, data indicate that "EU-citizens who had ever lived in another EU member state amounted to 4% of the population" (Favell, Recchi & Kuhn et al. 2011: 21). Worldwide the numbers are surprisingly similar: only 3% of the world's population is living outside the country where they were born (United Nations 2009). These data together with results from similar surveys compel van der Velde and van Naerssen to state that, rather than mobility, "immobility is still the rule" (2011: 219). Such a statement is thought-provoking in an era that is frequently characterized as "an era of mobility" and in a space often referred to as a "borderless Europe" (cf. Andersen & Sandberg 2012). The question is, has the highly praised free mobility across the EU internal borders remained much more a "political dreamscape" (Löfgren 2008) than a reality of everyday life in Europe?

Migration and Practice

However, as recent discussions within migration and mobility studies have shown, the question of increased mobility needs to be rethought (Canzler, Kaufmann & Kesselring 2008; Favell 2009; Larsen, Urry & Axhausen 2006; Sheller & Urry 2006; Urry 2008). To state that either you are a migrant on the move or a stationary resident simply makes no sense. For example, not all East–West migrants of Europe seem to stay on a permanent basis in their country of destination. As shown by Pijpers (2007), it is very seldom that East–West labour migration is uni-directional, which means that it is inaccurate to characterize the 2004 EU accession countries exclusively as emigration countries. In several Eastern European countries the numbers of *return* migrants and *transit* migrants are growing. Within recent years a classical emigration country like Poland receives labour migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and other countries of the former Soviet Union which makes notions such as "chain migration" relevant to apply (ibid.). This development of new concepts for migration processes confirms the need to critically evaluate the analytical potential of thinking in commonsensical dichotomies such as mobility

vs. immobility, “the movers” vs. “the stayers”, the “sedentary” vs. the “nomads”, a point that was also made by the transnational approach migration studies already in the early 1990s (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1992; Düvell 2009). Various flows of migration take place in an “extensive system of mobilities” across and beyond EU borders which make dichotomies together with divisions of home/host or sending/receiving countries rather useless (Favell, Recchi & Kuhn et al. 2011: 22). We should therefore not forget the many different ways migration is enacted and made possible in practice (cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2008). When migration practices are put under empirical scrutiny, it is very unlikely that we will discover practices of either mobility or settlement. On the contrary, we might find complex *patterns* of mobility/immobility even within the same migratory practice.

Therefore I find this special issue on imagined families stimulating. In her article “Grounding the Family: Locality and its Discontents in Popular Genealogy” Elisabeth Timm convincingly argues for a relational complementarity between mobility and immobility. When analysing the role of locality in the use of parish registers in Austrian popular genealogy it becomes clear that “settledness” is not a given, and that ‘migration’ is not its Other”. Rather, “mobility and immobility can only be adequately understood as relational complements” (Timm, this issue, p. 39). Through three Austrian cases Timm illustrates the active role played by genealogies in the ideological forming of families. Further, Timm shows how a production of “settledness” has been tightly knitted together historically with the idea of family kinship as linked to territory (together with house, estate and property). This examination over time of the constant production and reproduction of associating kinship and “settledness” *within* a territory is thought-provoking and adds new insights to the mobility turn within migration studies (cf. Rolshoven 2007).

Migration and Historicity

Apart from the rethinking of the division between mobility and immobility a second point of discus-

sion within migration studies is the need for greater awareness of historical migration processes (cf. Favell 2008, 2009; Düvell 2009). It is often forgotten that waves of intra-European as well as extra-European working migrations took place also before the First World War (cf. Kolstrup 2010). Until the First World War Europe experienced a period of free movement of labour where passports and other kinds of entry documents were not even required (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). To display such historical continuities in recent labour migration movements of Europe is hence crucial.

I would like to emphasize the article by Karen Körber entitled “So Far and yet so Near: Present-Day Transnational Families”. Her historical comparison between labour migration within transnational families in Austria and Germany during the 1960s and 1990s respectively provides a fine illustration of how migratory movements have been facilitated and regulated differently by national authorities as well as EU legislation over time. In contrast to the present-day East–West migration of Europe, the labour migration of the 1960s was based on labour recruitment agreements between Western European countries (such as Germany) and South and Eastern European countries such as Italy, Greece, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. These “guest worker” agreements secured among other things work permits and the legal status of the migrants’ residential status in the country of destination. Due to special restrictive requirements introduced in most of the “old” EU member states the present-day East–West labour migration differs from the “guest worker” agreements of the 1960s. After the EU accessions of 2004 the “old” EU member states (with the exceptions of Sweden, Ireland and the U.K.) introduced special – and temporary – agreements regulating, among other things, the numbers of labour migrants and the issuing of work permits for the “new” EU member states (cf. Pijpers 2006, 2007). Consequently, as according to Körber, this type of regulation “limits in principle the right of people from Eastern Europe to move and reside freely and abolished the right to settle – with few exceptions – almost entirely” (Körber, this issue, p. 19). Comparing such dif-

ferences in legal conditions and special agreements among EU member states can shed new light on our understanding of current migratory movements as well as of those in the past.

The Materiality and Technology of Migration Practices

A third point of discussion, where I think ethnological approaches can contribute to international migration studies, is related to the attention towards materiality and technology of migration practices. In order to know cross-border practices better, we need to explore how these practices are attached to and receive backup from specific but heterogeneous assemblages of other actors and entities. We must therefore consider not only the practices and their variable differences but also take the settings, materials and devices that enable migratory movements into account. I would like to draw on the piece by Körber again, because she clearly shows how communication technologies are active allies in the production of family at and across a distance.

Positioning herself within the transnational research approach to family studies, Körber focuses not only on mobile actors, but also on family members that are “staying behind”, “at home”. The focus is chosen in order to analyse the nurturing of the social and symbolic family member relations that are indeed challenged by the migration process. With this analytical strategy Körber emphasizes the practices, strategies and negotiations through which family life is created across time and space instead of conceptualizing the family as a community consisting of individual units.

That there are intimate and intricate links between the use of new communication technologies and the specific production of familiarity is clearly illustrated in the case of Ingrida Einars presented by Körber. Einars is a woman from Kaunas, Lithuania, who labour migrated to Germany in 2004 leaving her teenage daughter at home with the grandparents. Körber shows how the initially troubled and conflict-ridden communication between the teenage daughter and her mother becomes improved through the use of emails instead of Skype/webcam. Without the

camera the typewritten contact provides a relieving space for communication that works well for the teenage daughter who dyes her hair and pierces her skin also without her mother’s approval. Likewise the communication becomes more relaxed for the mother who can momentarily focus on what the daughter writes, rather than her appearance. Hence, a virtual closeness is maintained between mother and daughter across borders. Körber concretizes the paradox pointed at by the editors in the Introduction to this special issue, namely that

despite geographical distance and the experience of dispersal, the very social group whose core elements include spatial proximity and direct community is capable of sustaining the family virtually as its principal point of orientation and reference. As such, it is proving both resistant and creative in the face of the new demands of globalized societies. (Körber & Merkel, this issue, p. 5)

From Matter of Choice to Matters of Feasibility

So far I have argued that the strength of ethnological approaches to international migration studies in particular lies in the depicting of patterns of mobility/immobility when analysed in practice, as well as in the incorporation of historicity and materiality/technology of migration processes. I would now like to return to the before mentioned focus on the migrant and the migratory process as a simple matter of choice. Following the argument of van der Velde and van Naerssen (2011) we need to broaden the explanatory figure usually called “the decision-making process” of migratory movements. Overall this special issue contributes to such broadening because it focuses on the family as an important co-actor in migration processes (cf. Kolstrup 2010). However, the article by Sabine Hess entitled “How Gendered is the European Migration Regime? A Feminist Analysis of the Anti-Trafficking Apparatus” calls in particular for a further discussion on the concept of choice. This contribution deals with the effects and implications of border regulations and migration policies within the area of trafficking.

Situating herself as a researcher *in medias res* among counter-trafficking NGO's, policy makers, women's rights movements, and feminist research agendas, Hess compellingly shows how anti-trafficking policies in fact contribute to a victimization or de-subjectification of migrant women. For example when official European immigration policies only grant residence permits as a result of marriage, heteronormative ideals of gender interdependencies and differences are reproduced, according to Hess. Appallingly such regulations resemble the mechanisms of the trafficking migration industry when trafficked women get caught in exploitative nets of (male) dealers and middle-men which yet again contribute to the reproduction of a gendered dependency pattern.

However, as a further point Hess shows that migrating women cannot be depicted as victims only. Her ethnographic analyses of everyday life migration patterns indicate that the destiny of these women in question cannot be judged solely as either initiated by force or as volunteered by choice. For these women, it is not a question of either/or, but rather a matter of both/and. Voluntary migration and migration by force cannot be divided into two neat categories. Rather, "voluntary actions and direct and structural violence intersect in contradictory manners and are judged and negotiated in myriad ways, both in migrants' interpretations and in their actions" (Hess, this issue, p. 56). This article therefore both constitutes a counter narrative to singularizing discourses of migrating women-as-victims as well as exemplifies how migratory movements cannot be reduced to a rational choice. It confirms the capability of ethnographic analyses of everyday life migration patterns to depict the various and often ambivalent strategies and negotiations among in this case migrant women.

Linking Migratory Regimes and Migratory Practices

Introducing the articles within this special issue, the guest editors emphasize that "by interlocking ethnographic and discourse-analytical methods and combining them with gender theory, they share a focus on the technologies, genealogies, policies, and regu-

lations that participate crucially in the construction of family, gender, and bodies" (Körber & Merkel, this issue, p. 6). No doubt these contributions give important insights into concrete experiencing and shaping of migration processes in practice. As a final point of discussion I would like to address two questions: How are such practices constituted? How are practices related to, involved in and presupposed by other practices? Indeed, as I have already argued here, practices do not unfold in a vacuum; they are made feasible by other practices, settings, materials, and devices. Within this special issue a common point of departure for a number of the authors seems to be the concept of *regimes*, such as the "European border regime", "European immigration regime", "security regimes" or regimes of free mobility across borders. Yet further questions arise, such as what constitutes one regime as compared to others? Where do the analyses of various regimes and their impact leave the migrants crossing the borders? Are migrants passive products of the regimes or how can regimes be resisted? Leaving the concept of "regime" to some extent untouched makes it easy to fall into an explanatory trap: either the analyses provide evidence of how migrants are subjected to various regimes or they seek to stress the agency of mobility across borders (cf. Favell, Recchi & Kuhn et al. 2011). The contributions show the potential of the concept of "regime", but I see an important future challenge in discussing more thoroughly what the notion of regimes entails and what it does to our understanding of the connections between practices of different kinds.

The Kingdom

As is evident from this collection of *Ethnologia Europaea* contributions, there are several practices and entities involved in past and current migratory movements across intra-European borders.

It is certainly not a one-man show to migrate. Family members who are staying at home take active part in decision-making processes and render the practices of mobility/immobility possible. The case of Karol has illustrated the importance of the support from his wife and sons who contribute to

rendering “Karol’s kingdom” feasible and desirable. The daily “five-o-clock tea” on Skype forms a particular assemblage of entities, devices and settings that seems to be in accordance with Karol’s idea of what a good family relation is. It is only in collaboration with a (nother) specific but heterogeneous assemblage of allies that Karol manages to remain attractive to the Danish job market by fitting in perfectly with the ideal migrant “flexi-worker” that is hard working, flexible, and mobile (Pijpers 2007). Finally, the historical fact that there have been working migrants before him, such as Polish rural workers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, also might influence his possibility to succeed. To explore patterns of mobility/immobility practiced over time thus constitutes an important task for further ethnological scrutiny (cf. Kolstrup 2010; Nellemann 1981). By paying attention to the historicity, materiality, and technology it becomes possible to depict the different ways Karol’s migratory practice of mobility/immobility correspond to his idea of the “good life”.

As I have argued here, there is a general need for greater empirical and historical awareness within the interdisciplinary field of migration studies in order to break out from reductionist explanation models of rational choice and to avoid that questions of mobility and immobility are turned into misleading terms of either-or. The need for empirically rich depictions of everyday life mobility and migration patterns calls for further ethnographic studies similar to those of the special issue at hand.

Note

1 The example derives from an ongoing research project on Polish working migrants in the area of Copenhagen, Denmark, conducted by Associate Professor Niels Jul Nielsen and Assistant Professor Marie Sandberg, at the Ethnology Section, the Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen (2011-).

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