

INTRODUCTION

*Gender, kin and generation in transnational spaces*Erik Olsson¹, Fataneh Farahani²¹Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, Sweden,²Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden

1. Introduction

While the impact of transnationalism and transnational practices in all societies and cultures is not a recent phenomenon the recognition of transnationalism as a conceptual and analytical tool within academic circles is still in the early stage of its development. The transnational approach in migration research is substantiated by a critical appreciation of the fact that much of conventional migration research is closely associated with the processes of nation state formation in the twentieth century, leading to a state of affairs where 'nation-state building processes have fundamentally shaped the ways immigration has been perceived and received' (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002: 301). This criticism of the 'methodological nationalism' could be conceived as a major rationale motivating many researchers' adoption of transnationalism as a relevant theoretical approach (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton-Blanc 1999). The authors of this special issue of *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* are not only all representatives of this ambition but also focus particularly on a set of comparatively less attended topics in transnational studies, namely gender, generation and kinship.

By examining the tensions, multiplicities, and relation(alitie)s that appear within transnational social fields, the authors identify not only the new and shifting forms of gender, kinship and generation but also describe how and in what ways they are generated within intersecting power relations and in ever-changing transnational contexts. This is a vital undertaking since these topics, in different ways and intersections are dynamic factors in the practices of people's everyday life. Moreover, it is also significant for the scholars of transnational studies to explore how these practices span beyond or across national borders and what consequences this could have. The theoretical development of the transnational approach needs,

however, to be grounded in empirical studies. Without careful observations and descriptions of how people engage in different social contexts we fail to understand how people's life also is subordinated with practices of domination and control as they transgress different social and national borders. Based on the variety of comparative empirical researches, the articles in this issue, explore not only the ways transnational practices develop in different spaces and with variety levels of social interactions but also demonstrate how they inform and shape each other. By focusing on the challenges involved in the adoption of a transnational approach on migration, this volume contributes with important theoretical and methodological insights within the field of transnational migration.

In a seminal contribution to this special issue Floya Anthias underlines the need for researchers within transnational studies to frame their research objects within a contextual, dynamic and processual analysis that recognises the interconnectedness of different social positions, identities and hierarchical structures relating to for example ethnicity, gender, kinship and generation. Floya Anthias' article is a fascinating demonstration on how an analysis with this ambition could be accomplished. While taking the often repeated exhortation to treat migration as a gendered phenomenon seriously, Floya Anthias identify a range of problematic issues in migration studies where the centrality of power and social hierarchy is a key-issue. To compensate for these flaws Floya Anthias suggests for analytical sensitivity where intersectionality becomes the heuristic device.

From a similar theoretical point of departure Fataneh Farahani provides a discussion on the gendered construction of masculinities and sexualities in different diasporic spaces. Her conclusion is that migratory masculine subjectivities are not only shifting and plural, but also reveal the multiple interactions of different factors such as for

* E-mail: erik.olsson@socant.su.se
fataneh.farahani@etnologi.su.se

instance race, age/generation and class in continuous negotiations of identity. In a study of domestic work and Swedish migrant women Catrin Lundström discusses similarly how transnational spaces are both gendered and racialised and how people navigate in these. Based on her empirical material, Lundström alludes how the reformist agenda of state feminist driven projects construct a national self-image which her interviewees claim to accomplish while they are profited by their class and race privileges. Lundström clearly demonstrates how these women negotiated their identities as a consequence of their migration and of the new-achieved role of both being housewives and employers in the household. Both Lundström and Farahani eloquently demonstrate the need to contextualise the analysis in different power spheres.

Also the remaining articles have applied similar theoretical departures in their analysis of empirical cases. Tineke Fokkema, Laurence Lessard-Phillips, James D. Bachmeier and Susan K. Brown discuss the magnitude of transnational practices in young people's life based in a statistical analysis of "transnational behaviour" of the children of migrants from Turkey in eleven European and two U.S. cities. From this study it emerges that transnational practices persist among a minority of the second generation which are less socio-culturally integrated but more economically integrated in the host country. Also the article by Catarina Lundqvist and Erik Olsson is to some extent an examination of how "transnationality" is expressed among young people within "transmigrant" families. The authors conclude that young migrants in Sweden, who all through kinship and network relations are engaged in transnational practices but who also in most cases are in a subordinate position in the Swedish society, are engaging in the transnational space by for instance monitoring the norms and expectations circulating across the different contexts in this. However, transnationality is also considered an asset in their compensating for a quite misery prospect in the Swedish society.

In a study of the Somali diaspora in Sweden Ali Osman illuminates how transnational relations shape the onward migration of Swedish Somali migrants to United Kingdom and intervenes in their educational and labour market career. In addition, Osman points out how this migration pattern is contingent on the political, cultural and economic structure of opportunities in the transnational spaces the category is embedded in. A conclusion drawn by Osman is that the labour market positions of Somalis in Sweden, as well as the stigma ascribed to this national group is the engine driving even naturalised Swedish Somalis to migrate to a third country. Gurchathen S. Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert are in a similar way relating the formation of social capital among young Pakistani Muslim men and women in United Kingdom to their "imagination" of possibilities. In this a desire for social mobility and an ambition to overcome disadvantage becomes an emancipating tool. The articles by Lundqvist and Olsson, Osman and Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert all make observations that point to how people's aspirations are embedded in the context of families, kin and "friends" which are transnationally organised. A somewhat optimistic conclusion from this is that kinship relations in a transnational context could be an important resource and encourage the young people to imagine change in their everyday lives and situations. This is perhaps a positive side of being "transmigrants" (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1995), but, as Lundqvist and Olsson underlines; migrant families often live in conditions of limited possibilities and for that reason they become dependent on having a strong and supporting social network which could compensate their future prospects.

People, not at least migrants and their descendants, has to a large extent a life embedded in transnational relations. This will not

only involve several national contexts but also result in exposure to a variety of social complexities in terms of social norms, public expectations and scales of social hierarchies. In her article Floya Anthias decisively points out how social locations are products of particular constellations of intersecting ever-changing social relations which locate individuals within different spatial and temporal contexts (Anthias 2002). In the world of "transmigrants" these are contradictory and shifting; a subordinated position in one end of this transnational space could be exchanged to a more powerful position when performing in the other end, as Lundqvist and Olsson illuminate.

The articles presented in this volume address some of the fundamental categories shaping everyday life practices in migration contexts. In migration studies it has abundantly been underlined (nevertheless inadequately researched) the significance of gender relations in migration contexts. Scholars have also repeatedly pointed out that generational issues have a special significance in migrants' lives expressed in for instance "cultural ambiguities" in the young generation's social situation. The role of kinship within migrants' social networks has long been one of the classic topics in migration literature in forms of for instance encouraging chain-migration and channelling material resources. This volume examines these social categories as forms of identity, social positions and hierarchical structures intersecting everyday life. It demonstrates that the interconnectedness of these topics should be recognised not only by the emerging literature in transnational studies, but also by social analyses in general which need to take into consideration how the contemporary transnational spaces are cross-cut with shifting balances of control and power. The articles of this volume take some steps towards a deeper understanding of these intersecting and shifting complexities when norms, expectations and social hierarchies in everyday life transgress the borders of nation-states.

The special issue of the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (NJMR) presented here has its point of departure in an emerging research-group within IMISCOE – TRANSMIG – which has its main goal of being a platform for scholars with a dedicated interest for transnational practices in migration. The first two workshops within this initiative were organised by Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations (CEIFO) in Stockholm November 2010 and in May 2011. These conferences accepted and concentrated particularly on papers based on empirical research that addressed and analysed practices of transnational migration and how these were shaped by states and other powerful structures but also differently practiced and experienced with regards to gender, class and generation. It is to our pleasure here to present the first results from this initiative which gives hope for future as others will follow.

Erik Olsson is professor of International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Stockholm University and former director for the Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations. Currently Olsson is coordinator of the research-programme *Transnational Migration* at Department of Social Anthropology. His research is mainly in the field of transnational migration and diaspora as in *Transnational Educational Careers and Welfare Practices in Transnational Spaces*. His recent publications include, 'From Exile to Post-exile: Historical contexts in the Diasporisation of Chileans in Sweden', *Social Identities*, 15:5: 659–676 and 'Making the Final Decision: The Representation of Migration in Swedish Repatriation Practice', Prague.

Fataneh Farahani is an ethnologist and currently has a research position at the Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies at Stockholm University. Her research interest includes sexuality, diaspora, feminist postcolonial theories and Islam. Some of her publications are forthcoming book and article: *Gender, Sexuality and Diaspora* (Routledge) and "Iranian Born Men's Navigations of Race, Masculinities and the Politics of

Difference" in *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between and within Nations*. Two others latest publications are: "On Being an Insider and/or an Outsider: A Diasporic Researcher's Catch-22" in *Education Without Borders: Diversity in a Cosmopolitan Society* (2010), and "Sexing Diaspora: Negotiating Sexuality in Shifting Cultural Landscape" in *Muslim Diaspora in the West: Local and Global Perspectives* (2010).

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