TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES AND INTEGRATION MATERIALIZED: POLISH TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE WORLD OF GOODS

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ABSTRACT

Transnational Practices and Integration Materialized: Polish Transnational Migration and the World of Goods

The paper addresses the historical and class-contingent processes of transnationalism and integration mediated through material culture. I see the world of goods as a means to uncover the daily, potentially cosmopolitan, practices through which migrants (re)create the ties to their places of origin and destination and contribute to the transnationalization and cosmopolitanization of the subjectivity of the people with whom they interact: the Finnish "natives" and those who stayed behind. The analysis is based on my multi-sited ethnography conducted across Poland and Finland.

KEY WORDS: transnationalism, integration, material culture, Polish migration, Finland

IZVLEČEK

Materializirane transnacionalne prakse in integracija: poljska transnacionalna migracija in svet materialnih dobrin

Ta članek se ukvarja z zgodovinskimi in razredno pogojenimi procesi transnacionalizma in integracije, kot se kažejo skozi materialno kulturo. Svet materialnih dobrin vidim kot sredstvo za razkrivanje dnevnih, potencialno svetovljanskih praks, skozi katere migranti (po)ustvarjajo vezi do krajev izvora in destinacije. Tako prispevajo k transnacionalizaciji in kozmopolitizaciji subjektivnosti ljudi, s katerimi so v interakciji: finskimi »domorodci« in tistimi, ki so ostali doma. Analiza temelji na več-lokacijski etnografiji, opravljeni na Poljskem in Finskem.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: transnacionalizem, integracija, materialna kultura, poljska migracija, Finska

INTRODUCTION

Transnational migration is a paradigm which rose from the shortcomings of the unilinear assimilation theory. It undermined the assumption predominating for decades that migration is a one-way, straightforward act of resettlement from a country of origin

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to a country of destination. The ties to people and places left behind were to be lost along the way of merging into a "mainstream society." The redefinition of such interpretation, arguing for the continuity of transnational connections, also put forward a new explanatory framework for the process of incorporation. From the outset, transnational scholars have emphasized the theme of simultaneity. Transnationalism has been recognized as a process which takes place *within* and *across* national borders, entailing lived, often cosmopolitan, experience anchored in more than one society. Migrants engage in daily activities and participate in institutional frameworks of the country they "left from", and at the same build bridges across cultural differences, becoming a part of various segments of the country of destination. In this view, the transnational connections and assimilation, intertwined and concurrent, should be read not separately but in relation to one another (see e.g. Morawska 2003; Levitt and Schiller 2004). Still, as Peggy Levitt and Nadya B. Jaworsky (2007) noticed, although the above-described mutuality is habitually recognized, the stress is predominantly on the transnational ties. The modes of incorporation are looked upon as secondary. With this paper I wish to address both these dimensions and their actual simultaneity, taking as the point of departure material culture, defined as the people's relationship with the world of goods, starting from goods of the most everyday kind to grand architecture. I argue that a focus on how people use things helps illuminate the actuality of the transnational and integration processes, and uncover the subtleties of how people constitute themselves, create meaning and (re)produce and negotiate their various social relationships aimed at incorporation in new places and the perseverance of old connections. Those processes are enacted both across national borders and in geographically more concrete zones of contact, in which migrants' transnational and integration, Polish and Finnish social ties intersect and cross-cut each other. These intersections are rooted in and are negotiated through the myriad elements of material culture, leading to a potentially progressive and enriching, cosmopolitan encounter with the Other. At the same time I am attentive to the historically contingent power asymmetries pervading such social relationship and places of meetings. They are "ethnic" and "class"-based and are objectified foremost through hierarchically organized material consumption. The year 1989 and democratic transition in Poland mark the beginning of a significant reconfiguring of these hierarchies.

The analysis is focused on the Polish migrants living in Finland and their significant others both in Finland and in Poland.[2] Finland can be called a new gateway of migration in Europe. It is a terrain unexplored by transnational migration scholars, which due to its low numbers of foreigners (2.5 per cent of the total population) and their dispersed settlement

[2] The paper is a result of multi-sited ethnographic study on the transnational kinship conducted between 2006 and 2008 among Polish migrants living in the Southern Finland (both in the urban and rural areas), their children and kin in Poland. It encompassed forty cases. The ethnography involved interviews, informal meetings, talks and attendance of various events of the Polish community (the estimates of the population of Poles in Finland vary from approximately 6000 to 11000 persons). The research was funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the CIMO, the Tampere University Foundation and the Kone Foundation.

patterns provides an interesting site in which direct interactions with the natives and concurrent processes of transnationalism can be studied. In the case of Polish migration, it also gives a possibility to investigate what David Conradson and Alan Latham (2005: 229) called a "middling transnationalism", i.e. transnational practices of people holding a middle class or status position in the national class structures of their countries of origin and destination. Importantly, the specificity of the Polish migration to Finland is a relatively rare experience of occupational declassification. Yet, consideration of class in structuring the transnationalism and integration, including the emergence of a particular cosmopolitan subjectivity, demands taking into account the different reference points for the production of migrants' hierarchical locations.

Throughout the paper I use the term integration to denote it as subjectively perceived as a non-coercive character of migrants' incorporation, entailing a mutual adjustment between them and the "natives", who themselves become cosmopolitanized (Beck 2002) and transnationally active, whereas cosmopolitanism is read in terms of meeting and cooperation across cultural difference in the contact zones, between people who were previously spatially, historically and in the studied case, politically separated (Pratt 1992, cited by Tan and Yeoh 1996). I would like to start my investigation with a short vignette about a couple whose lives are an embodiment of the processes I want to focus on.

MATERIAL CONSUMPTION AND ITS ROLE IN MEETING ACROSS CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

I met with Hanna and Tadeusz,[3] a marriage of musicians, at a Polish Catholic mass in Turku. We were about to travel ninety kilometres to their house in Huittinen, a small rural town. They had resettled there from a major Polish metropolis in 1988. The local music school was looking for a music teacher and Tadeusz seized the opportunity. Because the couple wanted to introduce me to all the places meaningful in their lives in Finland, while driving to Huittinen we made a detour. It took us over two hours to get to the final destination. They showed me where they worked, dwelled, had friends, where their children played and went to school. Because it was the middle of winter, especially for my benefit, we drove across the frozen lake. During the journey they talked about the workings of Finnish society. Although they dreamt about spending their retirement in Poland, they still "cared about the direction in which this country is going". It was already dark when we arrived in Huittinen. Hanna prepared Polish delicacies: tripe soup (flaki) and pierogi. Being fresh from a visit to Poland (they were about to go there again next week), Hanna emphasized that all the basic ingredients were genuinely Polish. The Polish ham and cucumbers, along with Finnish "ruisleipä" rye-bread, and herrings were served for breakfast the following day. Apart from food, the couple also brought from Poland on a regular basis clothes, cosmetics, medicines, and even bed linen, which they

[3] All the names of people and places are fictional.

ironed in Poland. When they arrived in Finland they had only two suitcases. Thus every trip also added up to a more permanent interior of their house, filled with books in Polish, Finnish and English, paintings and family mementos. On the walls, pictures of Tadeusz's music master, Chopin; in the centre of the house a grand piano. I had brought wine, but we decided that the meal would be served with home-made beer. Its production was a legacy of years of impoverishment the family had experienced in Finland. The beverage was much preferred to Polish ones even by the visitors from Poland. Polish beers brought as a gift usually stood unopened. Afterwards we sat in the cosy entrance room to their sauna waiting for the sauna to heat up. We browsed through the family photos, Finnish newspaper clippings on Poland; Hanna showed me the illustrated album she was recently presented by one of the Finnish ladies who sung in the choir that she conducted. It commemorated a trip the choir had recently made to Poland. The trip was organized by Hanna. One of the pictures depicted the choir singing under Hanna's mother's balcony in her Polish home. We went to sauna a couple of times until 4 a.m. We cooled down by going outdoors into the snowy and serene winter night. Hanna commented: "The house has an excellent location, the best in the whole area." She also added: "a sauna will be the first thing we will build after returning to Poland". The next morning I accompanied Hanna in her daily walk through the neighbourhood. The place seemed deserted. Because it was freezing, she gave me a "historical" nylon track suit ("always on hand when a guest comes") – an already faded piece of clothing in which she whooshed down the slopes of the Polish Zakopane winter resort in the nineteen-seventies.

Several years ago, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (2003: 317–318) argued that the initial transnational studies overemphasized the emphemerality of movement and underestimated the tendency towards a more permanent settlement. In this, amidst all the multiple rooting of transnational migrants, the desire is inscribed for emplacement and corporeal security. Even if the migration strategy may be still focused towards returning to the home country at the end of their lives, for the time being migrants, to quote Hanna and Tadeusz "lead a normal life here", and "here" means the most ordinary and everyday reality of life in the place of destination. This cognitive recognition entails a particular social action: the attempts at institutional and informal integration, at the establishment of new supportive networks, in other words the cosmopolitan opening to the Other and the building of a "home away from home" (Olwig 1999: 73), simultaneously, however, it is often accompanied by the maintenance of transnational ties of some sort. As the above vignette shows, the most mundane and everyday manifestations of such processes can be found in the migrants' relationship with the material objects and the way they use them to construct their social selves and to relate to the Others across and within national borders. Imprinted in things is the story of migration, the actuality of "here" and "now", but also the past reinvented for the purpose of the present. In the case of Hanna and Tadeusz the meaning and utilitarian value of the worn-out piece of clothing in which I walked through the Finnish woods, or the home-made beer, was the result of the couple's intensive "work" of consumption and appropriation (Miller 1997) linked to the difficult but successful process of rooting in Huittinen, but it was also marked by

constant (re)connections to what in a most straightforward manner could be called the "Polish", transnational part of their biographies.

On the one hand, similarly to the couple above, many Polish migrants in their ways of eating, drinking, reading, dressing and decorating their houses were attached to what they knew from before migration, engaging in consumption directed practically and ideologically towards Poland rather than Finland. This could point to the migrants' exclusionary, anti-cosmopolitan politics of identity: unwillingness to accept the cultural novelty encountered in the place of destination, the creation of a hierarchy of difference in which Polish was "better" than Finnish. Indeed, Daniel Hiebert (2002) indicates that transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, even if operating through a similar logic of transgression and linking of various places, do not necessarily have to go hand in hand. However, the migrants' apparent closeness should be, in the first place, read in the context of unequal cultural encounter and the possibility the material culture offered to the migrants for the negotiation between coercive assimilation and integration, between the enforced and (relatively) voluntary acceptance of cultural difference. For the migrants the mere fact that practically the only way to consume Polish products in Finland was to actually go to Poland, that there were Finnish consumers who regardless of quality and price would always choose Finnish products, and that even after Poland joined the European Union little has changed on the consumer market, was yet another example of the pervasiveness of a hegemonic ideology of "Finnishness", the Finns' general closedness towards anything that foreign, and by the same token to the migrants themselves. Their transnational consumption practices, including their engaging in fervent shopping in Poland, were to work against those prejudices, subverting the established social order from the bottom-up. The material consumer culture was thus a politicized space allowing them to score "within the realm of the other" (De Certeau, Jameson and Lovitt 1980: 8), a space where small, everyday, seemingly most ordinary practices made up for the tactics of resisting the inequality. In this context Daniel Miller's (1997) argument that shopping is empowerment sounds particularly truthful.

Certainly the structural limitations by no means allowed for remaining impervious to various elements of the new material culture. Also, an increasing embeddedness into the Finnish social landscape and at the same time a curiosity about difference contributed to the gradual internalisation of various new tastes and the cosmopolitanization of the migrants' habitus. Importantly, however, consumption-as-integration was not tantamount to the migrants' straightforward assimilation. Apart from being selective in their consumer choices (to the extent it was possible), migrants were also quite successful at decoding the elements of Finnish material culture for their own use. The subversive appropriation regarded even the goods which conventionally function as the icons of Finnish culture: the apparently traditional Finnish sauna, which I got to visit in the home of Adam – one of the more affluent migrants – turned out to be built from high-quality timber unavailable in Finland, sent by Adam's brother who with Adam's help had established his own sauna-manufacturing company in Poland. Adam explained: "For generations Finns thought that timber was worthless and used it for lighting a fire in the fireplace. Only recently have

they come to their senses but the timber is already gone. Now they have to import it from elsewhere". Another relevant instance was the Finnish Christmas ham, which was brought to Poland every year by Hanna. The ham, taken out of its traditional cultural and spatial context and put on the family Christmas table in Poland, obtained new meaning, as it was enjoyed rather for its utilitarian ("We bring it because grandma likes it so much") than standard symbolic values (ham as a sign of Finnish tradition and continuity). Because objects offer a practically incessant possibility for encoding and decoding, the erasure and giving of new meaning (it is in this context that we can talk about "the social life of things" (Appadurai 1986)), migrants were able to produce material cultural elements which signified both various levels of incorporation to the Finnish society and the persistence of the transnational connections. They were the embodiment of the cultural "hybrid" in the sense of challenging the ideological representations of fixedness and unity from the society's margins (Werbner 1997: 22).

Another important moment when the simultaneity of the migrants' ties to "here" and "there" became materially objectified was during the visits of close ones from Poland to Finland. Such visits were extremely popular, lasting from several days to even a year or more, and functioned as complementary to the return visits paid by the migrants. It was during such stays that migrants were expected to "show" their connections to Finland, display their "cosmopolitan" competence and introduce the non-migrants to the "exotic" and unknown (from the Polish perspective) Finnish culture. The kith and kin crossing national borders were thus implicitly anticipating the experience of "difference" and "diversity" – nowadays a strongly aestheticized desire (May 1996) – and the migrants were in the position to provide those for them. They were the "experts", intermediaries and managers of meaning (Hannerz 1996) for the non-migrants, they were "one of us", but with the simultaneous intimate access to the "Other". Furthermore because the "Finnish" cultural difference seems to be still relatively little commoditized by the capitalist market, the migrants had arguably a lot of scope for its creative materialization. Therefore the engagement in "cosmopolitan" ethnic consumption by the visitors to Finland was to great extent mediated by the personal touch of the migrants who knew them intimately and who were tuned to their idiosyncratic tastes and concerns. The more "authentic" flavour of such encounters was additionally provided by the interaction with the Finns themselves, who at various points were included into the social circle of the migrants as neighbours, friends, family members and co-workers. With them, the non-migrants got to explore the "Finnish" consumption patterns of drinking and eating, the natural landscape and architecture of Finland, went fishing and mushroom picking, and finally went to sauna. Because the cultural things consumed and experienced during such visits were mediated by informal and interpersonal ties, and not by economic exchange on the market, and because there is nothing which functions as more "real" and "authentic" than the intimate and familial (MacCannell 1989), such meetings and exchange across cultural difference could be regarded as one of the most "genuine" experiences of the Other as the foreigner could be granted.

The functionality of the commoditized difference of the Stranger is in its accessibility

(and hence the danger of his/her trivialization, as scholars would argue). It also lies in its movability. One can touch it, smell it, taste it and bring it home. As such it helps give a visible, tangible expression of one's experience of other people and places. Unsurprisingly, by then transporting various goods back to Poland, the non-migrants were taking upon a similar role to that of their close relations in Finland, of being a vehicle of "Finnishness", intermediaries of objectified meaning and meaningful forms (Hannerz 1996) which were not readily accessible on the Polish market. Here, for example, a Finnish sour rye bread could be put on the party table to impress the guests with something "unknown" brought personally from Finland. I also noted the incorporation of transnational-Finnish goods into more everyday use. It could be argued that regardless of the spatial context of consumption, and despite its commoditized character, such instances suggest not simply aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which today may be accomplished even within the vicinity of one's household, but a more profound restructuring of habitus, based on the tangible and endurable personal links to elsewhere. The transnational goods consumed on a daily basis in Poland also represented another side of the exchange chain: the migrant and his/her multiple connections. This argument could be made even more strongly in the cases when the befriended Finns accompanied migrants on their return visits to Poland, or even more so when such travels were undertaken by Finns individually, and the kin of migrants in Poland hosted them during their stay. Again because of their intimate context, such contacts were *potentially* a realization of the "essence" of cosmopolitan encounter, going beyond simple flirtation with cultural difference. This time for the Finns it was a chance to explore the "back regions" of Polish culture, the messy and unexpected, unsafe and "unstaged" (MacCannell 1989). Additionally, the habitual exchange of gifts during such visits converted the Finns' transnational ties to Poland into more tangible, memorable and enduring ones, whereas for the migrants it directly or indirectly constituted a tangible proof of their social acceptance, embodied their "routes" and "roots"(Clifford 1997) and the intimate participation in multiple culturally diversified habitats. Another potential consequence was the development of independent transnational social ties, thriving regardless of migrants' personal involvement. All of the above is well encapsulated by the following quotation, coming from the mother of a migrant who became a successful doctor in Finland:

> Years ago Krzysztof [the son] called, asking whether it would be possible to put up some of his friends for several nights. One of them, Jukka, had helped our son a lot during his first year in Finland. We agreed. Jukka came with two men. He spoke a bit of Polish, so we managed to get our messages across. I rose to the occasion and made a hearty dinner. We sat around, Jukka was shining, stirring the conversation and serving as a translator. They came with gifts; he took perfumes, chocolates, some headscarves out of the suitcases for me. They were taking pictures. Jukka stayed at our place upon several other occasions. It was then that I got to know about the tribulations of our son in the initial stages of his life in Finland, problems he had never mentioned. [...]We still exchange Christmas cards with Jukka, because I was

> touched by the warmth and friendliness he showed to Krzysztof. Whenever I came [to Finland], he was stopping by to say hello, he threw [me] a party. I remember when Alina was working and there was no grandmother [to baby-sit], Jukka's wife stayed with the kids. So I am grateful to him for all this.

CLASS, DISTINCTION AND PERCEPTION OF "THE OTHER"

The goods which were consumed across and within borders were a more or less conscious expression of the migrants' (and their close ones in Poland) multiple cultural belongings and the cosmopolitanization of subjectivity, which in the discussed cases was commonly mediated through participation in various informal social groups, particularly kinship. The traffic in goods was also the manifestation of a classed character of the human body, its position in the social hierarchy of difference, which again was reproduced locally and transnationally and which affected how the difference of the Others was experienced and evaluated.

In transnational migration studies, a common proxy for class is occupation, interlinked with the race/ethnicity categories in the destination country. Contemporary debates in sociology and anthropology however attempt to go beyond this conventional idea. The trend is towards abandoning the essentializing, causal model in favour of a more culturalist, processual, and individualized approach. Instead of "categorical, explicit, and collective," class is nowadays "relational, tacit, and hierarchical" (Bottero 2004: 993). This means that the focus is placed on the everyday practices of construction of hierarchical differences (Devine and Savage 2000). In a transnational space these practices are structured by the multiple socio-economic and political contexts. Until very recently the prevailing number of migrants arriving in Finland originated from the intelligentsia. It was a social category which had survived along with the peasants and workers, although not without transformations, from before World War II. In a politically regulated "organized disorder" (Domanski and Rychard 1997: 10–11), in which economic differences were minor and education had relatively little power in comparison to material welfare, the intelligentsia managed to retain its traditional, symbolic distinction and prestige.

It continued to constitute the nation's moral conscience, a group with "a mission" to serve the common, national good (see e.g. Mach 2007). The distinction of the group was reproduced through a specific, embodied habitus which was linked to the education acquired at home and in academia. The intelligentsia ethos had much in common with that of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) intellectuals, and as I observed, despite the necessity of having to respond to different cultural and political forces working in Finland, also retained much of its characteristics after migration. Most saliently it was always the domain of the intelligentsia to participate most actively in high-brow culture, including the consumption of objectified cultural artefacts. In a transnational context, this (not necessarily conscious) means of distinction was reproduced through the intensive flow to Finland of high-end goods such as books, paintings, quality newspapers, and classical music recordings. The

objectified cultural capital of previous generations was also received or brought personally: antiques, decorative elements, art, which by default were recognized as the source of highest refinement and excellence, a "social power over time", (Bourdieu 1984: 71) the greater that persisted even against the adverse communist politics aimed at the eradication of Poland's "bourgeois" heritage. The intelligentsia ethos was furthermore inherently cosmopolitan in the most profound sense of the term: a willingness and competence to experience cultural diversity, an interest and openness towards the Other (Hannerz 1996: 102–111). Constrained by the material and political conditions of the regime, such disposition could objectified fully only in a system of democracy and open borders. And contrary to those less equipped with the relevant cultural capital, the intelligentsia already at the start had all the resources needed to succeed on the Finnish capitalist market, to become a "middle" or "upper" class, and therefore to gather appropriate economic recourse to travel and enrich the cosmopolitan experience beyond Finland.

In recent years scholars have acknowledged that there are many modes of being cosmopolitan and that members of the "working class" (understood as manual labourers) can be cosmopolitan as well (see e.g. Werbner 1999; Lamont and Aksartova 2002). Yet, the cosmopolitan formations they produce differ from the ones created by the elite. Likewise, whereas the intelligentsia, habitually working in high-status occupations in Finland (musicians, doctors, translators, secondary and academic teachers etc.) treated Europe and more generally the world as its playground (the most world-travelled migrant I talked to, a distinguished professor, had visited over 70 countries), the cosmopolitan practices of the manual labourers seemed to be more geographically bounded and their mobility to other foreign places marked by a certain sense of uneasiness. They were also more rarely in Poland, whereas the higher-class migrants went back as often as six times per year. But for them Poland was an obligatory stop on their route to elsewhere (to Lisbon, Spain, China, Bangkok, Egypt, Ethiopia to name a few), where they travelled for work, pleasure, or following their professional and kinship connections. They argued that "Europe is small". It was an idea which entailed a particular embodied attitude towards mobility: a mind-set which makes conceivable a spontaneous traversing of space and national borders, which does not demand deliberation and preparation. Their homes were an important site where this distinction was manifested. Alongside the goods which marked the migrants' more localized sense of belonging were the graphics with the hosts' names written in Chinese, foreign alcohol, pictures with people and landscapes from various places, maps and foreign national flags. One migrant, the aforementioned professor, collected hand-made carpets and Chinese sculpture. Many books were written in English. I was invited to consume tea brought from a recent travel to Tunisia and peanuts from Greece. All these goods implicitly or explicitly were part of the process of individualized hierarchical differentiation, local, transnational, global – if one can make such categorical distinction at all; constitutive for this process was the self-assertion of belonging to the wider social world. The same was true regarding their close relations? in Poland, people who would be misrepresented if to define them as those who "stayed put". They also travelled to foreign places, and by presenting migrants with the objectified markers of their mobility, made tacitly clear that

both parties assume a similar position in a transnational social hierarchy. Still it would be misleading to assume that, for the latter, the crossing of borders was always so effortless and easily conceivable. It may even be suggested that at times that kind of goods exchange acknowledged the non-migrants' access to the foreign spaces, as much as it concealed that for them the access was more difficult. Unsurprisingly, the least experienced in foreign travel were the kin of the "working-class" migrants, who in Poland occupied a mostly relatively similar position to the one that the migrants occupied in Finland.

The above indicates the visible class-based opportunities for more direct experiencing of the Other. But the consideration of class allows us to see also that there are limits to the cosmopolitan experience even among those who have the most resources and consider themselves the most open to the cultural diversity (implicitly considering themselves "travellers" rather than mere "tourists"). And although they were very much willing to cross the "ethnic" boundaries and express readiness to learn from foreign cultures, it is clear that there were also some cultural boundaries the crossing of which was not only inadvisable but also not really "cosmopolitan", in other words, there were some people who ascribed to an ethos which was not considered worth learning. Recognition of such individuals was based foremost on their practices of material consumption, considered to be the objectification of a particular embodied cultural habitus. More specifically the hierarchical differentiation and symbolic inferiorization regarded above all people acting "offensively" in public spaces, those who abused alcohol, used "vulgar" language and were "overimposing" sexually, and secondly, a critique expressed mainly by the intelligentsia but not only, those who disregarded the "intellectual" dimensions of life: did not read, focused almost exclusively on the "materialistic" aspects of life. Because such features were not necessarily recognized as related to the people's particular "ethnicity" or (occupational) "class" position, they could be applied as easily in relation to their Polish compatriots as to the Finns. This was important for the migrants' social integration, since the process was pervaded by a mixture of certain humility towards the Finnish "natives" who as the "hosts" were higher in the ethnic hierarchy, and a sense of symbolic superiority towards at least those who did not adhere to the bourgeois/intelligentsia ethos. Ironically, this hierarchy was reinforced by the claim made by some migrants that they knew more about Finland than some Finns did. They themselves deliberately mastered the knowledge of Finnish national culture and history through consumption of high-end Finnish books, newspapers, art, and also TV and audio media. Although it is hard to say whether this ethos had any normative power over Finns, it certainly did over some "working-class" Polish migrants, who in order to acquire more "legitimate" cultural capital decided for instance to engage in forms of material consumption unusual for them, like ordering from Poland or reading a book, or the purchase of alcohol such as wine, considered to be more "elite". These distinctions were pursued even despite the fact that migration to welfare-state Finland very quickly granted the manual workers with rather substantial material resources with which to negotiate their "class"' position. Through the purchase of new cars, TV-sets and furniture they could at least question the right to exclusive hegemony of the "cultured" others. All things considered, the above points to the constraints of

any cosmopolitan encounter, for as Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier (1987) argue, the hierarchy of difference is an inescapable feature of all social systems.

SHIFTING POWER BETWEEN PLACES AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR MATERIALLY MEDIATED SOCIAL RELATIONS

In this last section I would like to place more attention on the historical, national contingencies of the relationship to goods described above, or more specifically how the hierarchies and power ascribed to particular localities structured the material culture-mediated power play between the migrants, non-migrants and the Finns. This would also allow reading the story of Hanna and Tadeusz, told at the very beginning, in its proper temporal context. Because commodity consumption was one of the arenas most saliently subjected to political control and definition, moulded during the Cold War by the opposing communist and capitalist economic rationales, it serves as if not the best index of transformation, a barometer of changes which affected the migrants' most fundamental and intimate social relations, both those maintained across borders and those within the communities of reception.

The on-going shortages of consumer goods were probably the most commonly and most easily recognized feature of the communist system. In terms of consumption, communism was about endless queues, endless waiting, and exchange within the informal networks which allowed survival. Accordingly, it was during that period that the migrants experienced the most powerful transnational social distinction, mediated through Lego, Sprite, jeans, talking dolls, diapers, sweets etc. The distinction could be achieved even by the mere fact of being accompanied by a Finn: a person from the West who was seen through the aura of the power of the dollar, which "made even the poorest Finn a rich man". Henryk, a musician, told me with amusement about his first return visit after migration. It was 1986 and he was accompanied by his Finnish friend, Jukka. Because from the Polish perspective Henryk was living in Finland illegally, even though in 1986 he was not a Polish citizen any more, he decided to take Jukka as a "backup" in case the authorities wanted to "snatch" him. The two started with shopping spree at Pewex, a chain of shops selling Western goods for dollars, which an ordinary Pole could afford to consume only by looking at the window display. Jukka was "positively stunned" when he discovered that he could actually afford *all* of the alcohol in the display. The alcohol was purchased, and taking Henryk's father as a "designated driver", they set off on a car trip to show Jukka the country. In Krakow they decided to go to the most exquisite restaurant in town. They were told there were no tables left. Then Henryk's father suggested using Jukka as a "leverage card". The plain sentence "but there is a foreigner with us" paved their way into the restaurant.

It is worth mentioning that before 1989, when people in Poland started enjoying more or less similar material conditions, even the slightly "more" which would be meaningless from the Western perspective (a door knob, oranges), could be a source of meaningful

difference. Thanks to that, migrants could provide relatively little and still enjoy status elevation: they could be "nobody" in Finland but by default they were "somebody" in Poland. Although the non-migrants were not completely deprived of the means to reciprocate materially (in fact, many people I talked to came from well-connected urban families, which "lived and did not live in poverty"), and their suitcases when they came to Finland were also filled with various goods (vodka and spirits, sausages and toys among other things), their possibilities in this respect were limited: their money did not have significant purchasing power in Poland and practically none in the West, and the quality of what they brought was comparatively poor. Yet this is important, in that according to the popular Western imagination, the communist system denied people their individual freedoms and also denied them the possibility of negotiating their relationships through commodities (Fiske 1989: 36). In reality, commodity consumption not only offered them a powerful site for resisting the system which they found oppressive, but also bore some weight in the mediation within the transnational kinship.

All this underwent vast changes after 1989. The introduction of a democratic and capitalist system in Poland affected the direction, content and meaning of what started to be consumed transnationally. Suddenly, goods sent from the West declined in providing distinction, and the economic position of the relatives in Poland sometimes exceeded that occupied by the migrants themselves: "we are beggars in comparison to them" said Hanna. The introduction of the capitalist system in particular reversed the privileged position of Finland, which nowadays seems to be less of a country of capitalist affluence (at least from the Polish perspective), and its belonging to "the West" is put to question. This perception is to a various degree shared transnationally, and among the non-migrants especially by those who had extensive experience of travel. Only a visit to the United States, for years constructed as the embodiment of a consumer culture, puts Finland into a more diversified context than the conventional "West" and "the rest." Except for the "uniquely" Finnish ones, gifts for kin are nowadays bought mainly in Poland. A relative difference in prices between the countries can still be enjoyed, but this is declining rapidly. In comparison with the past, there is thus less possibility of providing others with the instantaneously and unambiguously recognized, enduring sign of one's transnational mobility as distinction.

Still, although the post-1989 capitalist changes decreased the material power of migrants vis-à-vis those in Poland, they brought also a possibility for migrants to renegotiate the hierarchies of power underpinning their relationship with Finns. The aforementioned transnational shopping constitutive for the identity politics from the margins, and enacted in the face of the closeness of the Finnish market and the richness of the Polish one, was one such means. The bringing or encouraging of the Finns to come to Poland was another. Clearly, according to the migrants (and the non-migrants who hosted the Finns), one of the important consequences of the Finns' encounter with Poland was to be, it was hoped, a progressive cosmopolitan subjectivity; an appreciation and respect for the Polish material, historical and consumer culture. The understanding of the Polish Other was to include the acknowledgement of the false representations of his/her country of origin as

"backwards", pre-modern and poverty-stricken. The migrants said that "Poland would defend herself". Indeed, upon their visits the Finnish friends and kin were reported to be positively "surprised" or even "shocked" with the Polish commodity affluence and historical architecture. A less powerful tactic, but based on a similar principle, was to present the Finns with various Polish goods which were considered by the migrants either to be better than the "Finnish" or not available on from the Finnish market, in order to subsequently enjoy the positive reaction of the benefactors when the gift was consumed. These small tactics did not necessarily lead to the utter eradication of the (symbolic) power imbalance which tacitly pervaded the migrants' social relations in Finland, but at least helped to destabilize them even if only temporarily.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the end of 1970s, when Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood published their seminal volume "The World of Goods", the social sciences faced an increased interest in the topics of consumption and material culture. At present there is probably nobody in academia who would disagree with the statement that: "Man needs goods for communicating with others and for making sense of what is going around him." (Douglas and Isherwood 1980: 95). This paper, by focusing on material culture, attempted to at least partially uncover some of the complexities of the transnational/integration processes as they take place at the level of the everyday life, involving people whose experiences, outlooks and interactions are structured by the intimate connections to multiple places in Finland, Poland and beyond. The emerging transnational social formations are multilayered and are produced not only by the migrants, but also involve, sometimes very actively and intimately, the "native" populations of the receiving countries. The investigation of the mundane relations of the transnational actors with the material world shows that the division between transnationalism and integration, between what is aimed at the (re) creation of ties to the place of origin and what is driven by the wish to be included in the destination community, whether it takes place in Poland or in Finland, is strictly academic. The lived experience does not work through such fixed dichotomies. Transnationalism necessitates looking at the processes of integration, as much as the integration cannot be detached from the discussion of the connection to other places. The constant exchange, consumption and appropriation of goods across and within borders between variously positioned social actors is a reflection of such simultaneity: it is done to resist and to belong; it is a basis for creating both sameness and difference, transitionally and locally. But of course the process of constant (re)defining of our material landscape is not a matter of unbounded creativity, but is structured by particular historical, social and cultural forces. The way the people I studied were positioned in a social space affected what meanings they ascribed to things. It also affected their power to make others accept their definitions as legitimate, to make others recognize such definitions as "genuine", whether they would be a materialized form of "ethnic" difference or a sign of status distinction. Therefore the

same thing might have had totally different, sometimes contradictory meaning depending upon who was looking.

In an increasingly interconnected world, in which gradually more and more people are meeting across various ethnic, national, sexual and class differences, even more attention is being paid to material culture. The numerous studies of cosmopolitanism indicate that it is the material goods that play the leading role in mediating the contact with the Other, sometimes contributing to its facilitization in a progressive, sometimes trivializing, or even destructive manner, enabling the consumption but not a more profound understanding of the Other's difference. Such debates on cosmopolitanism are highly relevant to the discussion of transnationalism and integration. In the end, those concepts also entail questions of how people work across and negotiate cultural difference, both the ones encountered in the new places, and the ones which often emerge in relation to old places and "old" social networks in a consequence of transnational mobility. In the studied cases the "cosmopolitan" outlook was often explicitly indicated as one of the reasons to undertake the migration in the first place. Nonetheless, not everybody and not all of the social situations were considered to be worthy of more deep acquaintance. Their relation with the world of goods was an important basis to make such hierarchies. It is thus indicative that even the most successful combinations of transnationalism and integration involve limits in accepting the Other.

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POVZETEK

MATERIALIZIRANE TRANSNACIONALNE PRAKSE IN INTEGRACIJA: POLJSKA TRANSNACIONALNA MIGRACIJA IN SVET MATERIALNIH DOBRIN

Anna Matyska

Transnacionalizem in integracija sta medsebojno prepletena procesa, ki se pogosto vzajemno krepita. Ta članek predstavlja pogled na njuno istočasnost skozi prizmo potrošnje materialnih dobrin in mreže družbenih odnosov, v katere je ta potrošnja vstavljena. Pri svoji analizi se opiram na več-lokacijsko etnografsko raziskavo, ki sem jo opravila med poljskimi migranti na Finskem in njihovimi sorodniki na Poljskem. Članek se osredotoča na vsakodnevne in običajne prakse materialne potrošnje in izmenjave, v kateri so udeleženi poljski migranti na Finskem, njihovi ljubljeni na Poljskem in »domorodni« Finci. Pokažem, da so bile materialne dobrine, ki jih trošijo migranti, opredmetene manifestacije njihovih poskusov postati del kulturnega in družbenega okolja države destinacije, in posredujejo pogosto oplemenitene svetovljanske interakcije z Drugim. Istočasno so spolitizirane potrošniške dejavnosti, kot so transnacionalno nakupovanje in neprestano kodiranje in dekodiranje dobrin z različnim pomeni, pomagale migrantom doseči integracijo brez prisilne asimilacije. Potrošnja in prisvojitev dobrin sta torej dovolili migrantom, da se oblikujejo kot transnacionalni subjekti z bližnjo izkušnjo »poljske« kulture in drugačnosti »finske« kulture. Hkrati sta prispevali k transnacionalizaciji in kozmopolitizaciji subjektivnosti ne-migrantov in »domorodskih« Fincev, za katere je migrant služil kot posrednik posameznega Drugega. To je razkrilo tudi »etnično«/nacionalno bolj kompleksno formacijo transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov.

Zadnja dva dela članka sta usmerjena v konstrukcijo *jaza* skozi stvari in udejstvovanje migrantov v družbenih odnosih onkraj in znotraj nacionalnih meja, kot jih pogojujejo

hierarhije moči v povezavi z razrednim položajem in zgodovinsko lokacijo. Razpravljam o različnih transnacionalnih kozmopolitanskih formacijah, kot jih ustvarjajo družbene kategorije intelektualcev in »delovnega razreda«, in meje svetovljanskih izkušenj med obema kategorijama. Nakažem, da je takšna omejena »svetovljanskost« vplivala na migrantske modele simbolične vključenosti v finsko družbo. Nadalje so temeljite strukturne spremembe na Poljskem po zrušitvi komunizma podale nove materialne načine preoblikovanja družbenih hierarhij, ki prežemajo transnacionalni prostor in področja stika. V zaključku trdim, da je pogosto nemogoče razločevati med transnacionalnimi in integracijskimi procesi, in poudarim pomembnost preučevanja odnosov ljudi do stvari za razkrivanje te vrste sočasnosti.