

W03 - Housing and Minority Ethnic Groups – Theme: Diversity

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TRANSNATIONAL AND GENDERED RURALITIES – Immigrant experiences and practices in a glocal society

Even though from the 1970's and onwards we have been witnessing migration flows from urban areas to specific parts of the countryside among various groups of people, it is clear that migrants with a non-Swedish background “are missing” in many rural areas and that counterurbanization has been a “white movement”. Nevertheless there are regions and municipalities who have seen an increased in-flow of people with a non-Swedish background. These migration acts are both voluntary (for example for labour or love reasons) and forced (refugees).

This study is about immigrant households and their practices in a rural community in the North of Sweden. The aim is to investigate their everyday life from a biographical and gender perspective. Focus is set firstly on the social aspects of everyday life; however everyday life is understood in terms of local, regional and/or transnational aspects. Secondly, the immigrants' attachment to the local society is explored. Both these aspects need to be understood in a biographical perspective. The rural is lived and experienced locally but with important connections to the global and ties to earlier experiences and places. The study is developed within the framework of an ongoing project, “The world goes rural”, which explores the “new ruralities” by investigating the impact of migrants with a non-Swedish background on some rural areas in Sweden. The empirical analysis shows that rural life can be transnational and that the interaction of the global and the local contains tensions concerning for example attachment versus distancing.

Keywords: transnational practices, rural, households, gender, interaction

INTRODUCTION

How local is a “local society” that has a population consisting of people from all parts of the world? Maybe there is now a consensus about the effects of globalization, that involves an increased flow of people, goods and ideas, interdependence as well as intertwinement (see for example Jönsson et. al. 2001). This consensus has resulted in several studies on how globalization affects people in urban regions, and later on how transnationalism can help us to understand the practices and networks that develop during these processes. One way to study such processes is to start in a small society and to capture the networks, ideas and practices that develop from the intersection of this society and the households' immigrant backgrounds. In this study, the perspective for such an investigation is the perspective of immigrants.

The very “presence” of “globalization” has resulted in at least two meta-discourses concerning the meaning of this transformation for people in general. Smith (2005:236) summarizes this as “harbinger of global modernity” or a demon that is destroying local communities and manipulates them into global consumerism. Smith continues to state that what brings together these two perspectives is that they both reduce people to isolated units of consciousness while they should be treated as “situated subjects – i.e. as members of families, participants in religious or locality-based networks; occupants of classed, gendered and racialised bodies; located in particular nationalist projects, state formations and border crossings.” (Smith 2005:236). In this study the focus is on individuals and households. These are situated subjects, and their role as actors on different geographical levels is important, both in the immediate local sense, as affecting daily lives, and in a broader sense as their practices create new spaces and affect relational space. Since peoples’ practices have several directions, the spaces and places involved will be relational; compared and experienced in relation to each other.

Place is a concept that has changed its contents from a concern with localization and borders, fixed identities and a defined content, to approaches that pay attention to social relations, fluidity and which question the meaning of borders. This study is done within such a context as it tries to develop an understanding of the relation between the geographically “fixed” (roads, buildings) and geographically related (images, identities) and the practices and relations developed in an era of migration. More specifically, the aim is to investigate some aspects of everyday life among immigrants in two Swedish municipalities in a northern county.

Globalisation and transnationalism are social processes (Appadurai 1991) which involve interaction between people and places, and an understanding of these processes in relation to a specific place implies synthesizing rather than trying to separate the findings. Focus is set firstly on the social aspects of everyday life; everyday life is, however, understood in terms of local, regional and/or transnational aspects. Secondly, the immigrants’ attachment to local society is explored. Both these aspects need to be understood in a biographical perspective. The rural is lived and experienced locally but with important connections to the global and ties to earlier experiences and places.

A BIOGRAPHICAL AND TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH

One of the most cited definitions of transnationalism is the one developed by Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc, some American anthropologists. According to them transnationalism is a process where migrants’ daily activities, social, economic and political relations, create social spaces which exceed national borders (Basch et al 1994:22). This definition takes its point of departure in an actors perspective, where the migrants themselves and their activities are in focus (Eastmond and Åkesson 2007:11). Transnational social networks can be seen as both a medium and an outcome of human agency (Smith 2005).

This study examines how immigrant households experience their everyday life and how they develop practices for their *local* as well as for their *translocal* social networks in a rural area in northern Sweden. In relation to this principal aim more specific questions will be elaborated on: What are the reasons for living in this rural community (maybe as the first destination for a refugee or as a chosen location) and how are reasons connected to experience of place? How can the social networks be described in terms of local/translocal aspects? How can the networks be understood in relation to biographic context (including questions concerning place of origin, religion and politics), gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background? The focus is set on the receiving locality and the migrants in this locality.

Earlier research has stressed the importance of regarding several factors when considering resources and strategies; personal and social resources, human and social capital, migrating under disparate circumstances, political, religious and cultural differences (Pries 2001, Smith & Guarnizo 1998).

Transnationalism and immigrants – a rural perspective?

Transnationalism can be seen as a constant feature of modern life (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). This can, in its broadest sense be described in terms of sharing the same TV-channels, being devoted to similar consumption patterns, maintaining social networks with mobile phones, skype and the internet. But it may also involve economic, political and religious activities.

The county of Jämtland and the municipality of Strömsund has been experiencing immigration of people with a non-Swedish background for several years now. The result of the integration process, which to some extent can be said to be institutionalized has been investigated and evaluated in a recent research project and reported on in several articles (Cvetkovic 2009, XXXX). RESULTAT

Nevertheless the way that municipal authorities in some remote areas in Sweden are now developing strategies for attract migrants with a non-Swedish background is a more recent phenomenon. One of the reasons for such strategies is the consciousness of the demographic situation, with an ageing population and a negative migration rate. Cvetkovic (2009) show how this strategy also involved an emphasis on integration and that there was a system built up to care for social integration.

Immigrants in rural areas – a temporary visit or a long term relation?

A study by Popola (2002) shows that immigrants who were initially strategically spread over the whole country, gravitated towards urban areas after some time. Reasons for this may be connected to the more diverse labour market in cities and to the wish for a minimum level of concentration of people with the same national background. To be able to maintain a social and cultural network within the group, to protect a norm system and a pattern of behaviour, a minimum group from any given culture is needed (Andersson 2001, McIsaac 2003).

In an earlier study from the region focused in this paper, the key persons interviewed also indicate that their intentions have been to choose refugees in groups of a minimum of individuals to be able to build up such a socio-cultural network. There exists a consciousness around such questions and an awareness of the contradictory aspects concerning advantages and disadvantages in being part of a smaller or bigger group (IM-gruppen I Uppsala AB 2007). On the one hand a bigger group may complicate the integration process; on the other hand if you arrive alone there is a reason for the migrant to choose another location after a short time. There are also indications of opposite relations, that the possibility of belonging to an immigrant group may be prosperous for integration.

Many rural areas in Sweden suffer from a negative demographic development, both in terms of births vs. deaths and migration balance. The reasons for leaving a rural area for an urban seem to be the same for immigrants as for borne Swedes; lack of employment, opportunities to study or lack of a social network. (Breton 2003, Abu-Laban et al 1999, Sherrell et al 2004, in: Cvetkovic 2008)

~~It has been shown that often is the decision to migrate more connected to the individual life situation and not on subsidy to cover the economic costs for moving. (Westholm 2004). Handlar om invandrare?~~

Transnationalism and everyday life

In the book “Global families” (in Swedish: Globala familjer) several examples of transnational migration are presented, aiming at discussing the global character of many migrants everyday lives and the meaning of family and relationships. All cases that are discussed in this book focus each on one migratory background or ethnical belonging (for example Cape Verdians, Kosova Albanians or Somali.). Social support as part of a norm system is one way to tighten the social networks over continents within the group of Somali refugees. This system involves rights to social support as well as obligations to give support when needed. Relations to people and social systems in other parts of the world affect the way everyday life is lived and what social activities as performed. (Melander 2007). Absent families may on a distance be involved in the everyday decision-making in the receiving country, as in the case discussing the meaning of the relations to Congo for maintaining a positive picture of the self in times of setbacks involving for example racism and out sidedness (Eriksson Baaz 2007). That everyday life is going on several places simultaneously is rich illustrated in a story of how Nilta from Cap Verde are having strong relations to the family and relatives in the home country and how she manages this through the phone. “To handle her longing she buys a telephone card, call her mothers house and talk for an hour with everyone who happens to stay near the phone.” (Eastmond & Åkesson 2007:8) These stories together tell about a world that consists of close networks involving social as well as economic matters. Places are built up and transformed due to such relations and as we shall see, the transnational and the local will together create new localities and lead to negotiations concerning how to live local lives.

Place and transnationalism – a dynamic duo?

This paper will have as a point of departure two Swedish municipalities and how transnationalism is performed within the context of these societies. That means that there will be no focus on *one* immigrant group or *one* ethnical background, which is often the case. On the contrary the expectation is to be able to pay attention to different kinds of transnationalism practices, to identify a variety of relations within local society and a variety in place attachment. In using in-depth interviews it is possible to discuss both group and individual explanation as informants sometimes speak about themselves as group members and sometimes as individuals.

~~those relations who are not of that everyday life character, involving maybe political or economic aspects? Are they able to find in Jämtland?~~

Research and articles that involves rural aspects of immigrants, refugees or social networks have in some cases dealt with racism and in some cases with integration issues.
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This study is an attempt to contribute to the puzzle on questions arising as “the world goes rural.”¹

METHOD AND METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

The empirical study is based on XXX interviews in two municipalities in the county of Jämtland. Interviews have been made firstly with migrants from the Middle East, Ex-Soviet republics and Africa² and secondly with persons working with migration, integration or development issues on a municipal level. The empirical material presented here build upon the interviews with migrants.

The selection of interviewees was made with help from people engaged in migration issues in the municipality. It became clear that a “gate-keeper” was needed to get in contact with individuals who had arrived in Sweden as political refugees. Also in those cases where the reasons had to do with war, violence and insecurity in the home country a contact person was needed. This was to some extent a question of trust and also a question of being able to localize the immigrants. This means that the gate-keeper has an important role in more or less deciding whose voices will be heard and therefore a discussion concerning the goal of the study, its methodological aspects and the possibilities of conducting the interviews was taking place. This discussion resulted in an attempt to catch differences among the immigrants concerning biographical contexts, early intentions with living in the area and differences in “social foot-prints”, as assumed by the initiated key-persons that were interviewed and who acted as the gate-keepers.

¹ This study is developed within the frames of the ongoing project “The world goes rural”, which explores the “new ruralities” by investigating the impact of migrants with a non-Swedish background on some rural areas in Sweden. Project leader is Professor Gunnel Forsberg at the department of Human Geography, Stockholm University.

² The geographic level is here generalized to continent which has to do with the criteria of anonymity for the interviewees. The size of the municipalities as well as the amount of migrants from each country may make identification possible and it is therefore necessary to sacrifice the detailed description of origin.

Individuals were interviewed sometimes one at a time; sometimes wife and husband were interviewed together, sometimes with a kid present. Four of the interviews were made with help of an interpreter. The interpreter was in all cases a well-known person for the respondents, who had often helped the families, engaged by the local authorities when needed. In some cases the interpreter also was a friend of the family interviewed. This may have both positive and negative consequences; positive because a relationship may include trust and may help the interviewed persons to feel relaxed as the interpreter already know about most of the things discussed; negative as there may be things that are not easily discussed when a neighbor/friend is present. This problem also exists in the aspects of wife/husband/children. However, the present situation was such that it was impossible to ask a person to leave the room because of the size of the flat, serving of coffee and cakes (table is set for all persons involved) and aspects of trust (it may be that some people can think of the interview as an interrogation situation and that “I am now supposed to reveal things about my family as my husband/spouse is not attendant”). The interviews did not go deep into questions concerning the relations within the family, but more into the relation family – local society and the family’s social networks and the transnational character of these networks.

Methodological difficulties involve questions of trust, uncertainty and feelings of gratefulness towards the Swedish society; immigrants holding a refugee status may feel insecure and suspicious and that will prevent them from speaking in an open manner. Many interviewees are also eager to point out how good they have been treated since they arrived and how grateful they are to have got a chance to stay. The impression from several of the interviews conducted so far is that the immigrants are eager to confirm a positive view of everyday life and practices in the local society. Problems are not widely discussed, which may be a consequence of fear from me as an authority or as an avoidance of “revealing” problems within the group of people from the same origin. For one group of people, there also exist a “leader”, and it may be hard to speak open without consulting this leader as he is the spokesman for the group as well as the one guiding the group through religious/everyday life.

Introduction to the area

The county of Jämtland has been witnessing an increase of people with a non-Swedish background during the last years.

The municipalities in focus have both a progressive and planned strategy in receiving refugees and they have also been active in developing strategies aiming at attracting people with a non-Swedish background to move from the metropolitan/suburb areas in for example Stockholm and Gothenburg to the county.

Population	Year 07	Foreign born population 07	Population km2
Krokom	14 304	5,0 %	2,3 (2008)
Strömsund	12 679	6,1 %	1,19 (2008)
Population Jämtland county	126 937	5,4 %	
Sweden	9 182 927	13,4%	20,5

Table 1: *Population, rate of foreign born population and unemployment rate in the studied municipalities compared to the county and national figures.* Source: Swedish Statistics, SCB

Development of different integration projects has also been taking place. The aim was to increase the population in the municipalities and to improve the circumstances for people with a non-Swedish background living in the area. Among these projects are the projects “Mångfald”, “Mångfald 2” and more recently “Navigator”. The initial project “Mångfald” aimed at improving the contacts among women with a non-Swedish background and Swedish women; this project was the starting-point for projects and strategies involving both men and women, Swedes as well as immigrants. Unemployment, shortages in language and isolation were seen as the primarily obstacles for the integration of foreign-born women (Edström 2004) at this time. Today’s situation is also often focused around these issues.

IMMIGRANTS EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES FROM A RURALITY PERSPECTIVE

Most of the research involving migration, transnationalism and social relations have within the Swedish context been devoted to urban or metropolitan areas. There is a lack of studies focusing transnational ruralism. One reason for that is that immigrants in the Western societies to a large extent are living in the urban and metropolitan areas, another reason may be that researchers within the field to a great extent are “urban researchers” and as a following focus urban aspects – compared to “migration researchers” which may be interested in migrants no matter of degree of urbanism or ruralism. The outcome is that research on migration and immigrant issues to a large extent is synonymous with urban research.

Smith (2001) has however paid attention to practices that are localized at “one pole of translocality”. It may be in for example Mexican villages, Chinese factory towns or “even in the countryside”. Smiths’ arguments are familiar in the way they build upon a perspective saying that everything has its roots in the cities and metropolitan areas. It may be socio-economic opportunities, cultural or consumption practices, communication and travel. By this way of seeing the urban-rural relation it is easy to watch the rural as only mirroring the urban, with no power or explanatory power of its own, as a geographical dimension. The aim of the project “The world goes rural” is to go beyond

such normative urbanized explanations and to elaborate on “the rural power” and on how the rural as an environment affect the transnational or translocal practices and networks. Nevertheless Smith makes an important statement concerning “the taking place” of transnational practices. The historically mediated context (in which he includes geography) will force us to pay attention to the *emplacement* of mobile subjects. To conclude, the geographically mediated context, concerning for example urban vs. rural, forest vs. desert or village vs. suburb will make a necessary contribution to the context of transnationalism, and in this case to the investigation of immigrants’ experiences of transnationalism in a rural environment.

The empirical results will focus on the experience of refugees, but interviews with voluntary migrants will be used for mirroring the refugee experiences.

In Sweden every municipality will decide if they want to/have the possibility to receive refugees or not.

“Quota refugees arrive straight into a municipality, where housing and enrolment in an introduction programme are prepared. The composition of the family of the quota refugees as well as their language, age, education, state of health, work experience etc. impact on the choice of municipality. It is the municipalities’ task to provide social and cultural information to refugees within the introduction programme. There is no obligation on municipalities to receive refugees.” (Swedish Migration Board Homepage)

The figures below show how the receiving of refugees has developed in numbers during the years 2000-2007. While Krokrom has a longer history of receiving refugees Strömsund has seen a strong increase during the last years.

	Population 2007	Rec. 00	Rec. 01	Rec. 02	Rec. 03	Rec. 04	Rec. 05	Rec. 06	Rec. 07
Berg	7 586							25	30
Bräcke	7 109				19	22	8	36	25
Härjedalen	10 699							23	25
Krokrom	14 303	32		21	25	16	28	42	24
Ragunda	5 747								13
Strömsund	12 679				8	18	2	80	53
Åre	10 127							4	18
Östersund	58 686	18	20	26	31	45	30	124	87
Total	126 937	50	20	47	83	101	68	334	275

Table 2: Population and receiving of refugees 2000-2007. Source: Swedish employment service agency

The municipalities that have been chosen for this study are not big, population figures between 12 000 and 14 500. The housing stock is mixed consisting of flats for rent, terraced houses, and houses and in the surroundings more farm-like buildings. Nevertheless the immigrants often live in the same area, in the same houses. To some degree it exists housing segregation also in these smaller societies, relating to **upplåtelseform** and the small stock. There are not so many areas with flats for rent.

Biographies and translocal practices

Because refugees have not chosen their place of destination, the biographic approach may not explain the actual place for living – but, biography may influence how individuals and households experience the place and how they look upon their future. As many of the interviewed have fled from a war zone, lived in camps and though experienced uncertainty and fear for health and life in a peripheral rural setting first and foremost is seen as “peace and quiet” in a positive sense. To have the possibility to take a walk in the streets, to let the children walk to school and having a flat of ones own can only be spoken of in positive terms. The sparsely populated municipality is described as strange in the beginning as no people are out in the streets, but after a while it is possible to get used to this. On the other hand, a woman who arrived to Sweden with her husband and two children, life in a small apartment is far from what she is used to. She feels confined, after a life in a big house accommodating many relatives, children and elderly generations, and access to a big garden, life in a flat with a limited part of the family is seen as finite.

Several of the interviews in this study were made with refugees, and it is apparent that the label “refugee” so far has no explanatory power on its own. While such a label refers to a group experience it is clear that backgrounds, the present strategies and future plans are very different – and should be regarded in relation to earlier living situations. For example, one of the interviewed women was working at an embassy just before the arrival in Sweden while another family had spent a month in an Eritrean prison. There is a methodological point to be made, which stress the meaning of biography; how different stages in an individuals life course are intersected. Neither is it possible to use the geographical context as such an explanatory power since place is experienced differently. It is evident that research on transnational practices and networks need to pay attention to the psychological aspects of the migration: from one country to another, from a camp to a flat in a small-town, from an urban to a rural area or from a rural to a different rural area.

An effect of the migrants’ transnational lives is also that many of the contacts with relatives and friends are now upheld with the phone and the Internet. Many migrants stress the importance of the technological advancements. This circumstance also leads to a life that is mostly going on within the home where for example the computer is, and not in other people’s homes or the streets which may have been the case in the home country. Thus biography also affects the character of the contacts. If the household has most of the family in one place in the home country, and if there are relatives from different generations, it is possible to have regular contacts and children may spend a lot of time on the Web. On the other hand, if there is only an elderly mother with no computer skills it is harder to keep in contact because phone calls may be too expensive. For many of the interviewees, contacts with the native country are more frequent than contacts within local society

As the immediate need for many people is a safe home, reflections on the nature environment and the surroundings is secondary. After some time and when the different seasons of the year are becoming familiar (climate, light etc.) the surroundings may be used for barbeques, fishing or hiking. This is an obvious difference compared to for

example European migrants from Germany or the Netherlands. For them the very reason for moving may be outdoor activities and practices directed to nature.

Continuity or change?

In a study of Assyrians in Södertälje, Sweden, it is indicated that immigrants feel that they are taking over “the cold” Swedish social relations and that the young Assyrians who grow up in Sweden will be without the strong social relations and the extended family that characterized their parents lives (Rabo 2007:213).

Translocal lives – everyday practices on different geographical levels

Local social contacts often build upon a common background. The spontaneous answer to the question “Can you tell me about your social contacts in the municipality of Strömsund, do you have any friends?” may be: “Yes, there are other Afghan people here.” What first come into peoples minds are contacts with families with the same background, may it be Afghan, Arabic or Uzbek. If there are no people from the same country or with the same nationality, relations with other immigrants may be important. They share similar experiences, and meet at the Swedish classes. Some of the interviewed also say that it is good that they have no compatriots to speak to, as it will mean that they learn Swedish faster. Swedish may be the only language they have in common.

In many cases contacts with the home country or with relatives in other parts of the world are more frequent than contacts with Swedes in the local municipality. This may firstly be the case concerning the parents’ generation, but also children use the Internet for keeping up a relation to cousins, grandparents or other relatives.

A common background seems to be necessary to create feelings of understanding and trust – but the opposite also exist. A shared background may do not automatically include shared views of how to live life in a new context. Some of the interviews mean that this is affecting people’s practices. It may be so that you adopt to what you believe is the practice of the group – or that you avoid to get too closely involved with people sharing the same ethnic background to be able to break a path of your own. A migrant background is linking people but there are no easy one-way effects of these links.

The dimension of a shared background was also mentioned by some key informants in an evaluation of a project of integration character. In the organization of the project there was thought that most of the key persons should have a migrant background. It was assumed that this should create a better basis for understanding.

Neighbors holding a special position

Rural living is sometimes seen as a positive context for local contacts, neighbor relations and feelings of community. People who have settled down in rural areas mean that such contacts are harder to get in urban areas (Stenbacka 2001). Such relations have not been investigated in smaller municipalities in Sweden, but one existing idea is that Swedes do not involve with neighbors or other people if they are not introduced by friends or relatives.³ One woman interviewed describes the relations to neighbors in her home

³ This is an opinion that is shared by Swedes and in-migrants with a non-Swedish background.

country as very close and intensive. She was from start convinced that she also wanted it to be like that in her new living context so she took immediate contact with her neighbors and mean that they now have close relations. This involves helping each other if someone is away for a while, inviting each other for coffee or dinner.

Another example comes from another neighborhood, where a large group with a shared ethnicity is living. This group consists of people from all generations. This is also a neighborhood with flats for rent. Many of the native Swedes who live here are old and as their children have moved away to the central or Southern parts of the country the elderly are quite alone. This is by some immigrants seen as an unsuitable way to act towards older relatives; children should be around to help them. As a following, two of the interviewed men tell about how they are helping the elderly people living close to them. They carry their shopping bags, fix things if something is broken and their wives sometimes cook or bake for them. One of the interviewees also point out that attitudes may differ among the immigrants due to age. Older immigrants have witnessed several orders in society and may be more flexible than the younger ones. The opposite way is more often discussed and there is often presumed that younger people are more open to changes. It may also be easier to create relations to older Swedish people than to younger ones. A documented standpoint is that old people gain respect and they may also be less threatening. This puts age and generations in focus and may be an important input in discussions on integration issues.

Local networks assume involving the majority population, as well as an active role from the immigrants themselves, but local networks may also involve mostly people with the same or nearly the same background. For some immigrants the official contacts, with for example the municipality social service, the local employment agency or the integration unit, are their only contacts with Swedish-speaking people.

National networks and rural living

Many social relations are spatially distanced. These networks may involve new contacts with people sharing the same ethnicity but living in other parts of Sweden, or they involve contacts with people who you have had a longer relation to. It may be relatives or friends, people that you have grown up with or who you met during the migration process.

Some of the interviewed say that their friends living in the Southern parts of Sweden often ask if they are not going to move. Questions like “how can you manage up there?” or “how do you stand the climate?” are imposing that the normal way to act would be to move, to join the bigger population in another part of the country. The migrants national networks are thus working for making them leaving the municipality (also found in the evaluation made by IM-gruppen i Uppsala AB 2007:17f). This is a perspective that is also common among the Swedish-born population. While moving to the metropolitan areas of the country is the norm, a decision to stay or to move in the opposite direction needs an explanation.

One man tells about how he and another man regularly travel to Gothenburg for shopping groceries from a store with a range that widely exceeds the range in the local shops. They bring home the commodities not only to their own families but also to many others. He mentions that they have had plans to open some kind of business where they live, using these contacts in Gothenburg.

Networks on a national basis can be said to constitute a combination of social and economic factors. One man also give an example of a political dimension. When he is asked about what he speaks about with his friends in a Southern municipality he answers. "Local politics! We discuss the living conditions and compare or situations." National networks may be seen as something making rural living easier at the same times at people in other places encourages the immigrants in the peripheral regions to leave.

Everyday life and gender

Many of the migrants have a background in societies which gender relations are quite different from the Swedish. It may be about labour market experiences, responsibility for children and the home, rules about how to dress and which places are permitted for women. Other means that the relations in the home country were almost the same as in Sweden. The discussion concerning gender relations is filled with ambiguities. "We live the same life as other Swedes" is a common answer. When the discussion continues it is possible to reveal other thoughts concerning the roles of men and women. One woman, Fiona, who comes from a North African country and works as XXXX says that: "I feel sorry for the Swedish men. We have a different culture." Fiona was early engaged in a women's association and had to face some problematic situations as she was inviting the newly arrived women to meetings and seminars. She was called ugly names and looked upon as a real danger for other women. "I had to speak with the men to make them understand that a women's network is not dangerous. The purpose is not to be against the men." Such reactions are discussed also in other interviews and the explanation is that men who have lost control of their lives try to keep the very small amount of control they have, over the women. In a report on an integration project in the region it was reported that some men had tried to prevent their wives from going to meetings with the other women. In one case a contact person was accused of trying to cause a divorce and in relation to this a threat situation occurred (Edström 2005:16). Local contacts may though be prevented or avoided from a collective perspective.

Social control as a frame for everyday practice

In rural areas and in smaller municipalities social control is often described as positive because of children safety and for creating a feeling of visibility and that you are seen as an individual. Social control in its positive sense can mean that if you fall and break your leg you will not be lying there for days – someone will notice that your habits are broken and come looking for you. In its negative senses social control may prevent you from doing certain things like going out and have a bear (if you are a woman) or spending too much time on household chores (if you are a man) (Stenbacka 2001 respectively 2008). Though social control is a gendered practice. In this study the same results are found but adding ethnicity will give a different outcome. The immigrants also find social control as positive for example because you always know that the children are looked after and if

something has happened you will know about it. What is more diffuse expressed is the social control over grown up people, men and women who live in their own flats with their own families but with a bond to a group of people with the same ethnic background. In such cases it may be that how you raise your children, to what extent and when a woman is supposed to be outside the home may be a question for the group and not only for the family. Such relations may lead to adaptability with or without approval, retreating and trying to follow another way or considering moving.

There are ambiguous feelings considering the presence of compatriots. It may help to a feeling of safety and community but it may also prevent people from building up a life of ones own. Some of the interviewed mean that this is a bigger problem in smaller municipalities as the group is small and there is no room for difference. In a city the immigrant group may consist of so many people so that differences within it are always present. And because of the number of people it is harder to reach control. Yet another informant means that this problem may also exist in cities within certain groups. What may be the case is that even though you live in a big city the space used by the group is smaller and concentrated to a certain area which still makes the control possible. The question of control over especially women has been discussed in a study of Assyrians in Södertälje (Rabo 2007:218). Even though a family may have lived in many places and made new experiences moving into the bigger ethnic group may change their practices and make traditional values stand out again. Rabo refer for example of the pressure on girls to get married “within the family”.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is an attempt to investigate what kind of networks and practices individuals and households with a non-Swedish background develop, with a point of departure taken in the rural municipality in Northern Sweden where they live. In addition, it is possible to say something about how this municipality is connected to other areas in Sweden and other parts of the world. Practices are developed on different levels, local, national and transnational; we can talk about translocal practices, linking different localities with each other through linking people, ideas and commodities.

Institutional aspects on social networks

States and institutional channels are important actors and creators of the prerequisites for immigrants' agency and their everyday life. In this paper however, these dimensions are only discussed from the perspective of the immigrants themselves. I nevertheless stress the importance of paying attention to these levels to be able to reach a more comprehensive understanding of how mobility and translocal networks affect people's everyday life. Institutional channels and municipal practices will be explored more deeply further within this project. So far it is possible to announce that local actors are important because of their knowledge about the local labour market and their networks related to it. (see also IM-gruppen 2007, Edström 2004:25, 2005:7) They may also be important as they for some individuals are the only “Swedes” they meet (and they does not have to be born in Sweden, but having a longer experience and a more strong connection to the Swedish society.) This kind of network can help with practical issues but also be a base for social contacts when the surrounding society or community “fails”

in creating such contacts. In an evaluation of a project the networks built up within the projects can be seen as the “family” of the newly arrived, which is argued to be necessary for the individuals to grip the new living context (Edström 2005:10). This is also being reflected upon in a later evaluation of the project Mångfald 2, where one of the interviewed mean that Swedes mostly meet within their families, and that the migrants families are far away (IM-gruppen I Uppsala AB 2007:23)

Another aspect of institutional matters in a rural setting is that both the interviewed immigrants and key persons within integration projects stress that “there is always close to the local power in a rural small-town”. This is personified by the civil servants within integration projects, refugee assistants or local labor market assistants. There may be easier to find individual solutions as knowledge of the intersection of the local and the personal is wide.

Place and traditional versus innovative practices

When considering questions regarding traditional versus innovative practices it is necessary to also involve questions of perspective. From what point of departure are we speaking, whose perspective on traditions and innovations is applied? This study has as its point of departure the immigrants’ perspective and the result is that innovative and traditional practices exist parallel to each other. There is diversity in opinions concerning the mix of ideas and practices from “home” and the development of new ways to live. While some of the interviewees stress the importance of holding on to traditions seen as representing the mother country and the lived religion, other mean that a life in a new country and a new locality only can lead to change of practices. Results from this study tell about a daily oscillating between these (academic) concepts, translated into everyday life on an individual level it involves daily negotiations with oneself or the family but sometimes also with a group.

The interviewed people may have the same label in Swedish statistics, for example “refugee status”– but their biographical backgrounds are just as different as their DNA. This means that everyday life is lived and reflected upon in various ways and that the expectations and goals for the future also differ. This is for example expressed in the ongoing negotiations.

Attachment and distance

Social networks may involve attachment or distance to local society. Place of living is experienced and seen in relation to other places. A strong indication in the interviews is the importance of family and relatives. And for some of the interviewees the place of living is not really important. The most important may be security of the family – if the family is divided it is hard to get attached to the place of living.

Social relations and social contacts are spoken of mostly in relation to people sharing the same background and who has a migration history that is similar. “Public local actors” may be the only Swedish contacts that some individuals get for a very long time.

The meaning of place, and in this case a rural environment, gives implications both for the social and the physical aspects. One woman speaks about being able to knock on the door and walk in without making an appointment, which is the same kind of social relations that Swedish rural dwellers use to speak about, concerning positive aspects of rural or small-town living. The sparsely populated area and the surrounding forest, lakes and mountainous areas contribute to feelings of peace and quiet.

Living the life in a rural setting is reflected upon with the same words as Swedes are using. Peace and quiet, freedom and a stronger sense of community are common words (Stenbacka 2001). But the reasons for using the words are quite different. While peace and quiet from the Swedish point of view refer to the noise and tempo in bigger cities; the immigrants refer to violence, threats and traffic far beyond Swedish levels. Nevertheless it is interesting to notice the similarities and the common goal; to live in an environment that is good for the children and that makes life easier. The wish to be part of something that is not too big, but to have the possibility to be seen as an individual may be some kind of uniting goal in life.

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