

BEYOND A SWEDISH HORIZON

*Young migrants in Sweden and their transnational prospects***Abstract**

This article examines the way in which young people of migrant descent in Sweden account for their future prospects and career plans. The article demonstrates how both their position as “migrants” in Sweden and their attachment to a transnational network has a significant impact on how young migrants express ideas and talk about future opportunities. The main conclusion is that from the perspective of young migrants, the transnational social network is a significant social reality to which they position themselves consciously. The network is also attributed a social capital that could extend the subjects’ horizon of action beyond the nation-state boundaries. In this sense, transnationality is a vivid dimension in the young migrants’ life prospects.

Keywords

Youth • transnationality • social capital • social networks • migration

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1 Introduction

Many researchers within the field of transnationalism have emphasised the importance of not treating human beings as solely national subjects while pointing to how, for instance, migrants communicate and organise their social life across national boundaries (Al-Ali & Koser 2002b; Bauböck & Faist 2010; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Vertovec & Cohen 1999; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). The critics of the transnational approach, on the other hand, (see Vertovec 2001, for an overview), even those who acknowledge transnational connections as a central dimension in migration, have doubts about at least the durability of transnational engagement over time and, above all, over generations in terms of, for instance, “homeland-relations” (cf. Waters 2011).

Inspired by this debate, we in this article examine how young people of migrant descent express transnational engagement of different kind. We suggest the use of the word “transnationality” when referring to the individuals’ engagement in forms of social relations and practices which expand or transgress national borders and which often, as a consequence, involve multiple border crossing affiliations. The object for our examination is whether transnationality is a significant “quality” or social dimension in the life-world of the young generation of migrants generating for instance conscious manoeuvres and monitoring. Our assumption is that migrant families in one way or other have a history and life-course that have transnational ingredients (Waters 2011). Since many families maintain ties and links with their country of origin, it

is likely that their children also have some experience of this. How this is expressed and what significance it may have is an empirical question.

However, an important condition for this assumption is that transnationality can be expressed in different forms. Obviously, human mobility is a significant expression of transnationality (Urry 2007) but also border-crossing institutions, practices of cultural reproduction, spaces for political engagement and people’s social identification with a distant community are significant expressions (cf. Gustafson 2004; Pries 1999a, 1999b; Vertovec 1999). The plurality of forms also underlines the need to study how and in what ways transnationality will be expressed.

Our exploration of (potential) transnationality is based on the conversations and interviews with more than 80 young people of migrant descent living in Sweden (most of them in Stockholm) between the ages of 17 and 23 years and their account of their future career prospects in education and work. Our point of departure is that individual career choices are not made solely by the individual himself/herself but are a mix of individuals having previous experiences of life-situations, education and social positions, as well as being embedded in a social environment filled with expectations and social interactions. We also assume that young people, in general, are influenced not only by their earlier experiences, but also by their family, kin and friends in their social network. Hence, future plans, identifications and social strategies are likely to mirror such affiliations and experiences. From this point

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of departure, we focus on how the young migrants account for their future prospects, as well as about the migration processes of their families.

The informants' accounts are treated as narratives of the significant realities in their lives concerned with, for instance, the family-situation and the affiliated "migrantship" in the Swedish society and with the future prospects and its realisation in the Swedish society and in other societies. Since transnationality is the main object here, the attachment to a potential transnational network is crucial in such narratives. Hence, the article will illuminate some aspects of how young people practise transnationality, and more specifically, the manner in which they talk about experiences, social expectations and socio-cultural values, and how they negotiate their positions within a transnational social network.

2 Departure

Our methodological point of departure is related to narratives as an entrance to the individual's social world. The individuals' statements and stories in interviews and conversations are accounts that narrate about a significant social world in the view of the informants. These narratives are in some way representing their social world. This is a way to disclose the meaning the individuals associate with their migrantship and their affiliation to a transnational network and what consequences these may have for their current situation. The accounts are, however, also a form of social positioning and an important aspect in the formation of a social identity (Denzin 2004; Somers 1994). In this aspect, the accounts become an entry into the social context of the wider social practices and the collective/public narratives of significance for the individual, but also how these are perceived from the position of the individual (Anthias 2002; Somers 1994). In other words, through an analysis of what people tell us about their "reality" and how they see themselves within it, we should be able to better understand the complexity of people's ideas and plans – in this case the young migrants' imaginations of their career and prospects. This will also be an opportunity to address broader questions related to, in this case, how identification processes and social networks fit into place for transnationality.

When examining young migrants' identification and development of future prospects, we need to take into consideration how these are embedded into multiple and intertwined social structures and processes producing specific social positions and identities (Anthias 2002). Here, transnationality is used as a certain quality of social relationship that is understood by analysing informants' narratives of their social world. The transnational approach on migration (cf. Al-Ali & Koser 2002a; Bauböck & Faist 2010; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, 1995; Vertovec & Cohen 1999; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002) is an important asset as the focus on border-crossing phenomena and practices allows us to study the impact these have on people's lives. Having ties to several social contexts and being involved in border-crossing practices are seen as important conditions that can have an impact on how these individuals identify themselves and how they consider their future opportunities.

There are different expectations and influences occurring in a social space where at least two national contexts are involved and where social relationships are crossing the borders of these countries. This acknowledgement reflects our ambition to combine the "positionality" perspective, as evident in the work of Floya Anthias (2012; also see Anthias 2002), where human agency and translocational positioning is clearly pronounced. In our attempt, we

will combine this positionality analysis with a transnational approach that situates career choices and prospects in forms that span across various national "social fields" (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992) or "social spaces" (Faist 2000).

This combination supports the view that recognises the importance of human agency in the creation and maintenance of social ties between people living in the home country, the country of residence and other countries (Basch *et al.* 1994, 1999; Faist 2000; Levitt & Waters 2002; Vertovec 1999), herein depicted as transnational social networks. For example, Bolette Moldenhawer (2001, 2005) has demonstrated how family position in the country of residence (Denmark) and in the country of origin (Pakistan) influenced young students' educational achievements and aspirations for a career. This underlies our assumption that access to and involvement in transnational networks means being exposed to social expectations, cultural values and norms produced in the "diasporic" situation of the migrants and the social, economic and political (national) systems in which these networks operate.

By examining the quality of the transnational affiliations, for instance, how social networks influence individuals' meaning-making, assert social control and assist individuals across national borders; how this situation is negotiated, interpreted and filled with meaning in relation to individual career prospects, etc., we should arrive at a better understanding of their situation as descendants of migrants. The standpoint taken here is that the debate on whether the children of migrants will be transnationally oriented (or not) would gain by the examination of how being embedded in a transnational network influences the social world of the individuals regardless of "physical mobility". Hence, transnationality would also affect relatively immobile individuals since diasporic affiliations and ties with kin in the country of origin do not presuppose (physical) mobility. If we, on the other hand, should view the "mobility" of people as the sole or most important indication of transnationality, almost all of the informants would be classified as "transnationals" since visits to the familial country of origin are very common. However, it needs to be underlined that transnationality, on the individual level, could take different forms over the life-course (Faist 2000; Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999), and in addition, it can be expressed differently due to differences in social class, ethnicity and gender as Anthias clearly points out in her contribution to this volume.

3 Context: being a young (trans-)migrant in Sweden

In general, youth with migrant background have weaker socio-economical position compared to youth with Swedish background. Moreover, the former have weaker educational performance and more difficulties gaining a foothold on the Swedish labour market (SCB 2004; HSV 2006, HSV & SCB 2010). Belonging to a migrant family in Sweden will also, in many cases, position the individual in a societal context where origin from a non-European (but also some "European") country, in particular, means being more often than natives subject to discrimination (Arai *et al.* 2000; Arai *et al.* 2008; Behtoui 2006; Bursell 2007; de los Reyes & Wingborg 2002; Ekberg 1997; Rooth & Ekberg 2003; cf. SOU 2005: 56, 2006: 79). This picture is also confirmed by the statistical analysis on educational and occupational performance of young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile and Somalia who migrated to Sweden at a young age (so-called first, fifth generation), conducted within this project (Behtoui 2011).

In the accounts of the young people in our study, it is obvious how the parents' social position in Sweden also influences the young peoples' future aspirations. Parents often did typical, manual labour-work in the low-paid service-sector or in the production industry. Others were entrepreneurs in either restaurant or service sector, or unemployed. These positions were clearly represented in the narratives of these young people, which emphasises the importance of social mobility and a desire to be more successful than their parents. When the informants made statements about their prospects and how they could meet different challenges they perceive, as a rule, they refer to parents' social position and the resources they have in relation to "objective" premises. Examples of this could be when informants gave their version of a demanding labour market, which asked for educational merits or discriminatory attitudes experienced by them (or their parents or friends) when looking for employment.

It is well known that migrants living in Sweden have frequent contacts with kin and friends in their family's country of origin (cf. [Olsson et al. 2007](#)) – a phenomenon facilitated, for instance, by modern technology and cheap airline tickets. A significant part of the migrants' reality is also a planning for a "return" to their country of origin ([Eastmond & Åkesson 2007](#); [Olsson 2010](#)). The informants in our study are no exceptions to this picture; a clear majority of them had experiences of visiting their family's country of origin or in other ways expressed an interest for this side of their background. Only a few of the young people that we met declared none or very limited contacts with their family's country of origin.

With reference to this picture of relatively close links, our interest is directed to the young peoples' own reflections on what it means to be from a migrant family with at least "potential" access to a transnational social network through the family's maintenance of links with kin or friends living in both the country of origin and Sweden. Hence, the issue here is not a matter of mapping or measuring the contacts – we already "know" that these contacts exist – rather the focus is to understand how such attachments are expressed in their narratives of future prospects, and how they will influence their social positioning.

The interviews, altogether, were conducted with 80 young people of migrant descent. The majority of the interviews were conducted as part of a longer fieldwork in an upper secondary school situated in one of the "multicultural" suburbs of Stockholm (see [Lundqvist 2010](#)). However, thirty interviews were conducted with youth who had recently started their post-upper secondary education at university, college or folk high school. Most of them were born in Sweden, but a few of them arrived in Sweden as children. In fieldwork situations, it turned out that the majority of these youth had a familial origin in Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) or Chile. "Ethnicity", in this sense was, however, not the issue in our study. On the contrary, an equally vulnerable position on the labour market was our approach to this study.

In exploring the interviews, we focused on topics like experiences and future prospects in education and work, i.e. their "career", and the relationship with their family and social network. In doing this, we noted, for instance, how the young people were formulating their ideas of educational social norms, common in the Swedish society, and the opportunities they perceived regarding the Swedish labour market ([Lundqvist 2010](#)). However, we also noted that experiences from visits to the family's country of origin were an important dimension in their accounts of, for instance, career opportunities. It was obvious that the informants were influenced by their attachment to the social network of their family and how they

consciously positioned themselves when talking about their kin and networks. Here, we particularly took notice of how the informants were outlining a potential context of their career, which crossed the national border of their country of residence (Sweden). This was not presented as an act to satisfy a taste for adventure, but as part of a reality, where expectations from different contexts crossed and merged in a coherent (but diversified) structure of opportunity.

A second observation was that the informants, to some extent, were compensating for their (prospected) limited chances in Sweden by actively positioning themselves in a context where the transnational networks were mediating options. Third, we observed that the informants monitored their reality by an orientation where the transnational affiliation was a resource for conversion of opportunities. The active positioning generated a mediation strategy where informants could converse the cultural and social capital between contexts, and for this purpose use the social network ([Lundqvist 2010](#)).

4 More than in Sweden

The informants in our study seemed to be aware of the value of higher education for social mobility, not only as a springboard for a career in the Swedish labour market, but also in many cases beyond the "Swedish market". This was made obvious when, for instance, the young people talked about the importance of being successful when compared with what their parents have accomplished in Sweden. The educational opportunities in Sweden are, in their opinion, favourable and are considered crucial in accomplishing these goals. The young informants also believed that their parents expected them to "deliver" by taking advantage of these opportunities.

Our interpretation of this high regard for education is that it reflects a mixture of both social norms where education is an asset – in the Swedish society, in general, but more significantly so in their family context. It also gives an indication of what prospects the informants would expect in relation to the Swedish labour market. They themselves expect to compete on a market where education is highly recognised, but also where migrants have a lower position than natives. Moreover, in the narratives we could see how advices and expectations from parents and people within their social network are mirrored in the form of pressures and explicit expectations. The high regard for an educational career is, however, also connected to social norms and expectations from the family's country of origin.

In the following dialogue, three girls with Bosnian background – Biljana, Elvira and Azita – discuss the relation between their Swedish reality and the expectations from the country of origin:

Elvira: They [the parents and relatives in Bosnia] think like this; you are in a foreign country and you will always be seen as a WOG ...[Swedish: *Svartskalle*]

Azita: Yes, as a WOG, in Sweden ...

Biljana: And in Sweden, you have the opportunity to study, and they say that "you are in Sweden and you have opportunities, but we here in Bosnia, we have no possibilities, and we really want to study and you have opportunities that you may not utilise".

Azita: So by this they give you bad conscience.

Biljana: And you just "okay, I'm going to study, leave me alone". And then they just "what occupation do you get?" I then answer something like "economist, broker, cleaner" / ... /

Later in the interview, when the girls take the viewpoint of their relatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), their perceptions of the value of educational opportunities are reformulated:

Elvira: I understand how they feel. We have the opportunities to study and education takes you further in life. My cousins who live in Slovenia they understand us from Sweden. They know what it's like because Slovenes see them as refugees as they are Bosnians. They do not see them as people because being refugees is a bad thing. Their way out is their education, their education become their way to get a position in society...

Biljana: They must prove that they can...

Elvira: And they want me to study here in Sweden because we don't pay anything, really, we will get everything for free, books, everything. There you have to pay everything yourself. So then they say like "why should you" – they mean me – "spoil your chances when you have the opportunity and everything? You get your education free and you get a good position in society ... and nobody can take away your education!"

/ ... /

Azita: The relatives gives you bad conscious and make you feel guilty – perhaps not deliberately but by their nagging and by pointing out that you are lucky to have escaped away from Bosnia. Then they make you feel guilty for being so lazy here.

The girls are accounting for a situation where educational opportunities are compared and contrasted. The evaluation of education in Sweden is made with an eye on the benchmarks and work hierarchies of BiH. Similar youth narratives were frequent in our study. The Chilean informants gave clear illustrations on how social expectations of a "European" education intervened in their evaluation on what would be a strategic choice of education since these could easily be coined into an employment in Chile. Informants often emphasised how important education would be in their family's country of origin. Several informed us about how their parents also pushed them towards choosing certain prestigious studies, like medicine or dentistry, since these would lead to occupations with a particularly high status in the country of origin. In this way, the informants in their narratives linked their career-aspirations in Sweden to the social contexts of the family's country of origin (Lundqvist 2010).

Comparisons of educational opportunities between countries, often followed by the estimation on the chances of obtaining a decent job, were frequently observed. Since friends and relatives had also migrated to other European countries, some of the informants were also considering prospects for education and work in these countries. One young man of Turkish origin refers to his family and other relatives in Turkey and also in other European countries when considering career prospects. Concerning work opportunities in the future, he saw possibilities through a network of kin and friends to the family in Sweden, Germany and The Netherlands. As an example, he mentioned visits to Germany where his uncle lived and where he stayed and worked for some months. We observed several similar cases among the informants with family from Chile. It is a rather common situation having kin and family members dispersed in other former exile-countries in Europe, America or Australia. Some of the informants referred to this as an opportunity to explore other possibilities than staying in Sweden or going to Chile. These kin were their entrances to social connections where employment opportunities could appear.

Thus, involvements in social networks distributed transnationally appear to influence the way in which informants account for aspirations and expectations about possibilities. From this, it is obvious how the families' investments in migration make it almost an obligation to use the educational opportunities when these are favourable. Furthermore, the narratives indicate that some of the youth expect investments in education to lead to a good salary. However, as evident in the statements above, the labour market where this formula could be implemented is not restricted to Sweden but includes the family's country of origin and other diasporic residences.

To sum up, the picture here supports an approach that relates career choices of young migrants to the perceived opportunity structure on the Swedish labour market and the parents' social position. Furthermore it also includes the possibilities of individuals' career choices through their transnational social networks. The narratives demonstrate that the horizon for the future life of these young people does not end at the Swedish national border, but rather follows different branches of social networks where social positions in, above all, the family's country of origin (but also other countries) is a vivid possibility.

5 Translating for success

The discussion in the previous section shows that in young migrants' imagination of future prospects migrantship matters. It also shows that the subjects have strategies in mind on how to overcome the negative consequences of this and that these are not necessarily nationally bound. Nevertheless, a strategy that involves a non-decisive living, studying and working across national borders, also needs an eye on how to implement and "translate" across boundaries.

An example of this is the three Bosnian girls who illuminated "translation possibilities" when saying that "... if someone in Bosnia asks what you are studying and you say economy, then it'll be like this 'Wow, that's great'." At the time of the interviews, all the three girls were studying economy with a social orientation in upper secondary school. In the interviews, they are clear on their point; a Swedish education in economy, which is not considered particularly prestigious in Sweden, will be a guarantee for a good position in BiH. Furthermore, some informants of Chilean families also accounted for favourable "exchange rates". For example, three of the informants who accompanied their family in an attempt to move back to Chile, did "return" to Sweden to complete their education with a "diploma from Europe". This is explained by the high valuation of European education (but also the cost of education) in Chile. The informants interpreted this as a door-opener for a successful career in Chile but also for a spectrum of opportunities in other European countries. Many, but not all, were of the opinion that an investment in education in Sweden will generate a more valuable symbolic capital in the country of origin (cf. Lundqvist 2007, 2010; Moldenhawer 2001, 2005; Smith 2002; Wolf 2002).

Education seems to be particularly instrumental for migrants in their social mobility aspirations. However, not all of our informants were confident about their educational goals and several had to lower their aspirations considerably. Nizrin, with Turkish background, exemplifies how one monitors this while meeting people who still have the common expectation of high aspirations:

When you go abroad, you know, the family and relatives ask: "What do you do?" Usually, people who work at a shoe-store or clothing-store as clerks, or in a kindergarten or a pre-school, they will try to make it sound better than what it actually is like. Those who are working in a pre-school they tell they are "teachers" ... They twist it a little bit, you know? Just to make it sound like this: "WOW!" ... for them in the home country.

Nizrin accounts for a flexibility in everyday transnational comparisons, which migrants and other travellers could easily (mis-)use. Similar examples are found in the Chilean context where a low prestigious profession at a bakery was modified to "owner of a bakery" and the internship on the editorial office at a magazine became the profession as a "journalist".

The informants in these cases reveal a situation where it becomes important to uphold the image of being successful when performing in the "other" country. This face-saving is instrumental in a strategy to monitor public expectations in a migration-context. The "translation" or manipulation for the purpose of "impression management" (Goffman 1959), in this case, is obviously important in front of their social network and family. The social norms and expectations in the family's country of origin have a significant place in this. These norms and expectations are mediated by the transnational social network. Having the transnational comparison accounted for above, we interpret this adaption to mean that expectations within the network function as a strategic act on behalf of the informants. Listening to the network and saving one's face is a way to keep options open. This interpretation may reflect a very instrumental image of strategies and the role attributed to the social network. The attempts to meet social expectations within the social network are, however, also a sign of how they position themselves as subjects in this context. Being "successful" is simply part of the game that is having aspirations of being part of a "community" and a way to receive attention and respect from this.

6 Suffering for the future

Most young migrants are embedded in a local national context and opportunity structure and embrace the norms and institutions of that place (Levitt 2009: 1239). The informants' references to discrimination and the need to "do better" than their parents illuminate how the local context has a strong influence on migrants' opportunities. When accounting for career prospects and attributing a role for the social network, not only do they indicate identification but also instrumental possibilities. Having contacts, access to information and other assets through the transnational network, also enables the conversion of "capital" between national contexts. Individuals with access to at least "strong" and influential networks have, in other words, a social capital that they could utilise when looking for career opportunities, for instance. This capital, for example, accumulates personal information and contacts about opportunities for education and work in different national contexts. The following dialogue, between two young men with Turkish background, takes place in a situation where they seem to perceive self-employment in the restaurant business as a future option. Within the Swedish context, this kind of work has a rather low status and is often associated with the common stereotypes of the typical immigrant as a "pizza baker" or "kebab-stand owner", which these young men are clearly aware of. Nevertheless, for them having your own restaurant or stand, even with the negative stereotypes, will be

an opportunity to make money – a surplus that their family usually invests in Turkey. This example is selected to show how individuals monitor the affiliation to different national contexts in their plans for the future:

Omed: My dad used to work every day for several years, /.../ he had his own restaurant.

Tahir: But you can see that the income is good. Go to Kulu [in Turkey] sometime, I promise, you'll see the result from this hard work ... / ... / And if you look at us Turks here, we live in the suburbs here, but if you, if you go there and see how the real life is there, then you see what you have invested in. Some invest only in a single country, that's why they buy this house for two-three million in Sweden. But if you go there, at least our family, we are investing in Sweden and Turkey.

Omed: There are those who have two, three houses there and then they live in an apartment here.

Tahir: You, you work really hard for some years, but the results they appear after two or three years, then the apartments, houses and cars are coming.

The dialogue between these two young men reflect how the family's occupational and labour investments made in Sweden, in their view could be geared towards the possibilities of making material investments in Turkey. It is noteworthy that these narratives should be analysed relationally. In their evaluation of the prospects of having a good life, the young men involve both countries. The mode in which they narrate their plans for the future, in terms of, choice of occupation (in this case self-employment) and investments, is reflecting a transnational affiliation. In connection with this, the young men also imply that such investments in property or other kinds of wealth in their parents' village would improve their status in their families and among friends. The value of such prestigious acts is understandable when observing the course in dialogue where it is apparent how Omed and Tahir accept a relatively low social position in Sweden. The implicit reference to a "Swedish life" in low-status suburbs and the comparatively subordinated position (in Sweden) that comes with this is contrasted with the possibilities they imagine in Turkey. They are willing to pay the price of subordination and hard labour in the restaurant business in order to earn money, which could be invested in a "real life" with nice houses in Turkey.

There are frequent accounts of how "immigrants" or "foreigners" become subordinated in the Swedish labour market, with a life in low-status suburbs as a natural outcome. Students in the upper secondary school, in particular, referred to discrimination in the Swedish labour market and how they were at risk for being excluded. This perception of limited opportunity structures in Sweden and the discrimination threat has an impact on how the young informants expressed their ideas on career strategies and aspirations. Moreover, this ethnic subordination appears to affect their identity and orientation outside Sweden. As we have seen, these social networks embrace other "diasporic residences", and this social capital could also extend to other national contexts.

To sum up, the desire to work or study in a country other than Sweden, such as their parents' country of origin or a country where they have some kind of affiliation to a network of kin and friends can be interpreted as a (narration of) compensating strategy. It is obvious in the case of Omed and Tahir that local opportunity structures and the social positions following the shift between countries must be seen as mutually affecting each other – a phenomena which seem to fit with Anthias' (2002) concept of "translocal positioning".

Here, for example, this is expressed by the readiness to “suffer” in one of the countries to harvest in another. The affiliation with a transnational network, which could transmit the opportunity structure and the scale for status hierarchy, will enable such a transnational positioning-strategy as practised by these young people.

7 Looking for a better rate

From the previous sections, we could see how young people identify with a transnational network (consisting mostly of kin and friends) to which they, to some extent, attribute the role of mediator or bridge for a cross border opportunity structure. The alternatives for the prospects vary depending on the countries of their network. In our study we could, for instance, observe how a “return” to the family’s country of origin was a less attractive alternative for the informants from Turkey, while the informants of Bosnian or Chilean origin seem to be more interested in having a future in their family’s country of origin. On the other hand, as illuminated above, a “dual” residency is nevertheless both a possibility for the Turkish migrants, because the investments in Sweden could result in other kinds of social benefits in Turkey, and a necessity for the young people who wanted to keep a door open for a future in Sweden.

A further illustration of the bridging dimension is made by a young woman of Bosnian descent, Azita. In her case, an investment in a specific education is interpreted as a bridging strategy. Azita expressed an interest in educating herself within the tourism and economy sector in Sweden with the expectations that this would improve her chances to live in BiH. Her idea was, however, to have Swedish employment (and a Swedish salary) but work and live in BiH. Her narrative crystallises a strategy where the national markets are merged and where the cultural capital are maximised both economically and symbolically. Moreover, her strategy reveals a conversion of capital since she believes that her economy-education would be highly valued and useful in BiH even if the economic return is expected in Sweden. In other words, Azita tries to utilise her social connections both in Sweden and BiH to find a strategic occupational niche. Here, we observe a conversion strategy where the transnational bridging maximises the outcome of educational investments.

Some of the young people with Chilean background were also trying to utilise the transnational connection in a similar way: enrolling into educational institutions in Chile with Swedish grants and loans allowing them to explore the opportunities in the country of their families. One experience that they certainly learned was that European or North American education are prestigious in the Chilean society, which possibly encouraged them to think about less expensive educational careers in the Swedish system and a diploma which could be expected to cash in when seeking employment in Chile.

What these examples illuminate is that the young migrants not only need social or cultural capital such as good connections or education, but also opportunities to have a certain education or job “valued” in relation to the respective national context. Individuals express a need to change one form of capital to another, for instance, education (cultural capital) gained in one country for a high status occupation in the other (symbolic capital). Or they need to leave Sweden in order to fulfil their aspirations, since these are not feasible in the Swedish system. The network embodies the role of a resourceful social capital, which can handle the conversion of other forms of capital.

The young men with Turkish background in the previous section provided an example of how families’ investments in migration generated economic capital, then through another investment in Turkey could be re-valued and also converted into a more prestigious symbolic capital. Or, as expressed by several of the informants, educational career investments in Sweden could be converted into both an economic and a symbolic capital in their family’s country of origin by utilising the different scales for different occupation (as apparent in the example of the “economists” above). The “positive” dimension of this is that a combination of, for instance, financial investment in migration and cultural investment in education can be seen as being “inclusive” since the individuals who have access to a transnational network are not limited to a national context but could use the network in a strategy for social mobility in relation to both their family’s country of origin and Sweden (cf. [Moldenhawer 2005](#); [Similä 1994](#)). This positive side of being part of a transnational social network, however, should not overshadow what is also expressed; people from migrant families often live in conditions with limited opportunities and become dependent to some extent on having a strong and supporting social network.

From this exploration it is apparent how migration can implicate investments which, in Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993, 1999) terms, could lead to a series of conversions that goes in both directions: economic capital to cultural capital and further to symbolic capital, and vice versa, using the transnational social space. The concept “conversion”, as it is used here, refers to the potential to invest in, and use, one form of capital to acquire another more legitimate and profitable form of capital and social position ([Bourdieu 1993](#); [Broady 1990](#)).

8 Arrival

When analysing young migrants’ accounts of their situation and future prospects, it is obvious that we see a narrative from the view of a migrant family in Sweden. When focusing the significance their attachment to a transnational network has in this situation, our analysis supports the assumption that transnationality is an important dimension in the lives of the young generation ([Fouron & Glick Schiller 2002](#); [Levitt & Waters 2002](#); [Smith 2002](#); [Wolf 2002](#); cf. [Christou 2006](#); [King & Christou 2010](#)). The young people in our study frequently visited their familial country of origin and they seemed to position themselves in different ways as being part of their family’s country of origin. In other words, it seems that these young people in most cases are embedded in these transnational social relationships extending between the familial country of origin and their Swedish context. Being embedded in a social context that involves several national contexts also means to be exposed to a social complexity in terms of social norms, public expectations and scales of social hierarchies. In their accounts of their social reality, the young people expressed a conscious monitoring of these norms and values. Furthermore in the narratives of the young migrants, it could be observed that the transnational social network that included an access to different national contexts, is perceived as an asset and a social capital that the individuals relate to when considering their career opportunities.

Taken into account that these young people often take up a subordinate position as migrants in Sweden, the inclusion of the transnational context in their ideas of a future life is to some extent a compensation strategy. Hence, it seems that career investments related to their family’s country of origin to some

extent is encouraged by their subordination on the Swedish labour market and that this is an influential factor in their “diasporic life” (cf. Berg 1997; Eyrumlu 1992; Faist 2000, Fouron & Glick Schiller 2002; Olsson 2000b; Smith 2002). The informants’ positioning within a transnational social network is, in our interpretation, thus a demonstration of how the subjects internalised the social capital dimension of the network. The cross-bordering links with kin and friends is not only an identification source, but also a practice that could mediate valuable resources. For example, the network also functioned as an agent for conversion of different capital forms (e.g. cultural capital to symbolic capital).

The network then in some sense becomes a “market” where the value of a certain capital is established and converted. The access to this arena and capital market is based on social engagement and the readiness to invest. Furthermore, access to social networks spanning national borders provides social and cultural (information) capital relevant for the future strategies of the young people.

The positioning into this transnational context clearly influences the horizons of opportunities for these young people. The positioning has a translocational (Anthias 2002, 2012) as well as a transnational dimension. As Anthias points out, social locations are “products of particular constellations of social relations”, which locates individuals within a spatial and temporal context. The individual’s positionality is “the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation” (Anthias 2002: 502). From these narratives, we could see how contradictory and shifting social locations placed these young people in subordinated positions when performing in the Swedish context, and also their expectations to be in a relatively more favourable situation when performing in, for instance, the family’s country of origin.

Thomas Faist’s (2000) notion of “transnational social spaces” appears as an illustrative frame covering both the translocational and transnational dimension in young peoples’ narratives about future plans, aspirations and strategies. The concept of “transnational social spaces” also highlight an analysis where the network becomes the agent in mediating expectations and norms as well as in producing and converting capital that in some sense has the potential to affiliate “members”. In this sense, the context

for the narratives analysed herein is not the national, perhaps not even the multi-national or international, but the “transnational”. The cross border practices characteristic of the relations within the network seem to influence the identification, positioning and plans for these young people’s prospects and future careers. In this sense, transnationality is a vivid dimension in the young migrants’ life, extending their horizons of opportunity.

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